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Oral history interview with Francis Sumner Merritt, 1979 May 25-June 25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Francis Sumner Merritt on May 25 and June 25, 1979. The interview took place at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was transcribed as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MR. FRANCIS SUMNER MERRITT: Greetings! Welcome to Deer Isle, Maine.

MR. ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Francis Merritt in Deer Isle, Maine, on May 25, 1979, and Robert Brown the interviewer.

To begin, I'd like to ask you to maybe describe a bit where you grew up, what it was like, what was some of the leading influences, say, in your childhood, particularly those that might have led you into art.

MR. MERRITT: I've tried to think about that for myself from time to time as I have, you know, considered my problem, which means asking oneself what the origins of the direction one takes were and how come. And all I can think of is that as a kid, I probably wanted to be alone, somehow. I always felt that I needed some place to duck in. Although I can remember well living with other kids and enjoying other kids, depending upon the association with other kids, making it all right, as I remember, in a small town just north of Boston, in Reading.

MR. BROWN: Danvers, Massachusetts?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I was born in Danvers, but then lived in Reading pretty soon after that, and that's where I really grew up. But I was the third son in a family of four boys, however that may figure. But in any case, from this -

MR. BROWN: Was your family in the arts at all? Would they have been interested in it, do you think?

MR. MERRITT: No. No, my family was a, you know, poor, normal struggling family. My father was in the electrical supply business. My mother was a creative person. We think of, you know, her leadership in that sense in the family. She thought of the education for the kids, and she thought of humanitarianism for the kids. And she was, you know, very intellectually active, progressive, even radical.

MR. BROWN: In what way?

MR. MERRITT: Well, let's consider her own background as an only child in a sedate Quaker family, then being sent off to Friends school and to see the world, and then deciding for herself after all of that, you know, indoctrination, Quaker indoctrination, that she needed some sort of more demonstrative philosophy or religion for herself. And I don't know if it was after she met my father or before that she decided to become Anglican, Episcopalian, in the little church in Danvers, Massachusetts. It was an example of at least asserting her special personal motivation toward some kind of change and progress. Anyhow, she was very animated and opinionated, and a domineering but, you know, intelligent person.

MR. BROWN: Did you talk with her quite a lot? And what about?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, well, I guess so. I got talked at quite a lot, I remember that. But, yeah, we read together and always were encouraged about some kind of progress toward excellence and progress toward social conscience. But as for the art thing, she must have been alert enough to appraise my academic potential, whereas my older two brothers she urged to go to college, and helped them. And she must have known that I had another thing in mind, because I wasn't encouraged to get that busy about college, and yet I think that she also had reservations about *art* - [pronouncing "art" with an exaggerated New England accent] - as we say.

I did mention that I had found a way to withdraw about the art thing, and I drew a good deal as a kid. I don't remember any special early primary school encouragement or experience, I found, but I did find another kid who had the endowment of talent and who I guess even now is probably at work in Boston this very day as a designer artist. In any case, we used to draw from the Thornton Burgess books, the *Old Mother West Wind* series. And I was so full of admiration for his skill at copying those little critters.

And that's probably my first really real insight to the fact that drawing was a special thing, a kind of special

talent, because however much I wanted to match up with Donny Bowman [sp], I never quite made it. And then, to add insult to injury, he'd show me the paintings of schooners and ships that his grandfather had done - his grandfather was a kind of home-grown buckeye painter, or maybe a seafarer who had come to that after his encounter with the sea. And anyhow, I can see those paintings hanging on the wall of Donny's grandfolks' home there in Reading. Well, so I said, "I'll do it if I can."

I tucked in as much time as I could from a normal growing-up experience to draw, and used to collect stuff in folders and set up a little place apart in the house, got away from the other kids, the brothers, in a corner of a basement, maybe, or in the attic. And even then, I knew that's what I had in mind to do when I grew up, when I was going to be a big guy. But my father used to show the copies of the books and copies of the drawings to friends and other family, relatives, relations, but he always, I remember, worried about me not finishing something. And however much he - or however little he knew about, you know, the process, he did at least have a way of saying, "Well, you gotta finish these up a little bit more. You've got to clean them off a little bit more." So -

MR. BROWN: Did they tend to be sketchy?

MR. MERRITT: Well, yeah. I think I was aiming to maybe use the source material as some kind of excitement and reference, but I wanted to, if I could, do something a little bit of my own. Okay.

Then in school, you know, we had the normal restrictive public school, one-hour-a-week visiting art teacher who may have noticed that I had some extra interest in drawing, Ms. Lahaze [ph]. Yeah, I remember her quite well. She did encourage me. Donny Bowman and I got together on the thing, essentially. And uh -

MR. BROWN: What do you mean by that?

MR. MERRITT: Well, you know, he showed me how - he tried to help me with the problem of seeing and transcribing, and it came off so easily for him. He was a good kind of example for me.

MR. BROWN: Was this in high school by then, or later?

MR. MERRITT: Well, no, it was a pre-high school thing. Okay.

So with that kind of special interest that I was showing to the family and elementary school, somebody came along and said, "Well, gee whiz, why don't you send the boy to Boston, to the art museum there? They have classes for kids on Saturday, and it might be a good thing for the young fella."

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. MERRITT: So that came up, and we did indeed. My mother took me up to Boston.

MR. BROWN: Was that quite an exciting thing for you?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, right. Oh, right. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Were you interested in doing that yourself?

MR. MERRITT: Well, yeah, I was eager to do it. And I immediately found a home in that beautiful monument. For three or four years' worth, I, you know, came to know the museum and came to feel it was a great, important new world contact for me. I looked hard at things in the museum and worked, of course, at charcoal drawing.

MR. BROWN: Did you work with one teacher particularly, or several?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I worked with two teachers. I can't remember the lady's name, but I do remember Harold Zimmerman.

MR. BROWN: What did he teach; drawing? Because that's what he taught -

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, he was teaching drawing from the cast, charcoal drawing from the cast. And about the only thing I do remember that he ever said - the memory of what he said on one occasion has stuck with me, and I don't know why, either, because we were drawing from all those, you know, Greek casts. And he looked at a drawing once and said, "That looks quite Italian," for some reason or other. And I've always remembered that. I don't know why. Seems funny. It seems funny. But the lady's name, I don't remember.

MR. BROWN: Did you seem to do well there? I mean, did you get encouragement?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, I don't think I did all that well. Well, yeah, I had some fairly normal, maybe a little better than

that, eye-and-hand skills. I remember striving, at least, and attempting to record by, you know, accurate measurement and accurate tonal description and - yeah, trying to draw it like, draw it as accurately as possible under the condition of light and the condition of perspective. And I don't think anyone recognized any special talent or any exceptional skill in what I was doing. But I was fulfilled.

MR. BROWN: You took to this work pretty well?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was it fairly laborious, or was it enjoyable, or both?

MR. MERRITT: No, I took to it well. I thought that was great. I liked the idea of copying stuff, liked the idea of attempting to record. And I, at the time, was copying things from publication material. I never assigned myself any special task of arranging groupings, still-life material or from the life, as such. I would still think that some two-dimensional emphasis was my problem and process there. But I do remember that about this time, because I was enough interested and talking about wanting to extend my experience in art and maybe become an artist, that the folks said, "Well, the thing for you to do is get practical now and decide to follow it up. There's a cousin somewhere who is a commercial artist, and we'll go and see him, Ralph Woodfall [sp]."

MR. BROWN: Was he in Boston? Is that where you went?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, sure. So, you know, this became the application, the focus for any future. We went to see Woodfall, who was a busy, successful commercial artist making a lot of dough.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah, that underlied it.

MR. BROWN: That appealed to your father.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, sure. Oh sure, this was okay. This justified the whole thing.

Well, I didn't get too excited, as I recall, about that encounter, or even I didn't get any kind of inspiration about the commercial art business.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think you didn't? Was your cousin very enthusiastic about what he was doing?

MR. MERRITT: He was enthusiastic about what he was doing, yeah. He wasn't too enthusiastic about what he saw me doing. Maybe that was it, you see. It's still a pretty personalized concern, this art thing. And I think he probably wiped me out. At least he didn't say, "Young fellow, you've got, we'll put you on as an apprentice," or, "When you're ready, come back and see me." It may have had to do with what my dad thought of as an unfinished effort, you know? Although he couldn't offer any critique at all. He was interested enough and excited to think that I was interested, and could see a serious attempt and some progress toward skills, but he knew that something was missing, and so did Woodfall.

Well, okay, this is about high school time. Then I met a very interesting teacher who was encouraging, and got to do the poster work and got to be known as the artist in the class. Well, Bowman was still one class ahead of me in high school, so most of his stuff showed up in the high school publication. But that was great. I liked the thought of attaining that situation for myself on the next wave after Donny got out of it, and I did. So I became, yeah, one of the people who pointed to in the high school as having talent and having experience in the museum in Boston, and, you know, being able to strike likenesses and do your portrait for you and stuff like that.

So it was only natural that I got to thinking then in terms of art school. And the summer following high school graduation -

MR. BROWN: That was about when?

MR. MERRITT: That was 1930. Another kid and I enrolled at Vesper George School [Vesper George Art School, Boston, MA] for the summer session.

MR. BROWN: What was that like? What reputation did that have?

MR. MERRITT: Well, it had the reputation as a school of applied arts, kind of a popular, you know, "get to it" situation. At the time, Vesper George, the Museum School, and Mass Art [Massachusetts College of Art] were the three professional art schools in Boston. Vesper George probably was recommended to me by a fellow who I came to know who had been the photographer for Burton Holmes.

MR. BROWN: The traveler.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. He was the world traveler documentary photographer for Burton Holmes. His name was Julian Cochran [sp], and he lived on Harcourt Street, just around the corner from Vesper George in Boston. And his sister was one of the public school teachers in Reading, where we lived, and we knew Wynn [sp] Cochran, and she would often take us to visit Julian. He was an extraordinary fellow. I remember getting a lot of special lines from Julian. In Boston now, perhaps, there's still that old reconstruction of the Dutch house. Do you know what I'm talking about?

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, I do. It's in -

MR. MERRITT: It was in the Columbian Exposition or something and moved from there to Boston.

MR. BROWN: Yes. [Off mike] - in Jamaica or Riverway?

MR. MERRITT: Up in Fenway there, somewhere? Right. Julian Cochran occupied that house at the time I'm speaking of, and we used to go there and visit him. And it was a fascinating experience for me and our family, an extraordinary old house that we enjoyed seeing. And he was a real creative, oddball character. But from there he moved over to Harcourt Street and knew of Vesper George School. I probably knew of it as well from the museum experience and just general inquisitiveness about the art scene, and also because, I suppose, it was the only summer session in Boston. I don't suppose the Museum School or Mass Art operated a summer session at that time.

MR. BROWN: And you were anxious to get into something right away?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, right away, sure. So I went there and went through the routine of, you know, finding art supply problem and getting a real, my real first formal art emphasis. In high school we talked about design and had the problem of catching the hour-a-week lesson, but here we went every day, were associating with other young people who were proposing to get into art one way or another. Vesper George specialized mainly in instant art training, and I think they were preparing people for, you know, commercial art, perhaps, although I was looking beyond that at some of the life drawings that were posted up around the school. That may have been Bill Jewell's [sp] work, I'm not sure.

MR. BROWN: Bill Jewell [sp]. He was teaching there then?

MR. MERRITT: No, he wasn't teaching there then, but he may even have been a student. I'm not sure that we're accurate about this. But in any case, there was some -

MR. BROWN: But there was some evidence of serious, careful work.

MR. MERRITT: Right. There were some very classy, capable, competent life drawings framed around the place. That was exciting to me. And so we came through the four, five weeks, six-week session, whatever it was. I hadn't yet formed any intention about follow-up schooling. This was simply a kind of "try it" experience, try-it-out experience.

MR. BROWN: And you did figure drawing and what other modes?

MR. MERRITT: No, not at that time.

MR. BROWN: No.

MR. MERRITT: We were doing, you know, exercises and color waves and principles and elements.

MR. BROWN: Was it much different from your Saturday classes at the museum?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Entirely different. Here I was using color for the first time, dealing with color theory, probably Munsell. I think Mr. George himself was there as color lecturer. I 'm sure he was, Vesper George. And, you know, we were assigned project work, maybe color wheels, and probably some linear perspective, elementary perspective lessons, and a kind of really controlled and formalized class program.

Well, I don't remember being all that excited about what we were getting or what we were doing there. I felt pretty good that I at least had come to participate in art school, the art school program, but hadn't projected much beyond that. And so as we wound up the summer, this same young guy with whom I went each day there from Reading to Boston - oh, yeah, Bob Spavin -

MR. BROWN: Spavin. S-p-a-v-i-n?

MR. MERRITT: S-p-a-v-i-n, yeah. He dropped out of the art race, oh, probably just about that time. But I remember scooting over to Gloucester and to Rockport with him. I remember going out to Dogtown.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, right. And I remember painting a sort of joint portrait with him, he my portrait and I his. And, uh, in any case, we arrived at the end of the summer when, through some car accident, some automobile accident which his father experienced, an insurance settlement turned up a brand-new Model A Ford convertible.

MR. BROWN: Pretty nice.

MR. MERRITT: It was some dig, I'll tell you. And Bob and I decided that we ought to take a ride in the thing. And out of this we cooked up a trip to California. So -

MR. BROWN: Wow. This was quite an ambitious jaunt.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. Both families - you know, we were about 17, I suppose, at the time. And my mother had been in California the summer before and was very enthusiastic about her visit there, and she, on a kind of wildcat encounter, bought some land. And she had friends there. Not relatives, I think, but friends with whom she had stayed. So she encouraged me about this California thing, thinking it might do something to, you know, help me resolve one thing or another. Up came the opportunity with Bob's new Model A, and so we bugged out and had a wonderful experience going there, with all the stopovers along the way.

MR. BROWN: Of course, you'd never been out of New England till then, probably, had you?

MR. MERRITT: No, not really. No. No, I was pretty a strictly hometown kid, you know. We had New Hampshire connections. And I'd never been to Maine by that time, incidentally.

MR. BROWN: So this was a major good experience.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Right. This was educational and venturesome. So, it was all set up for us. We got budgeted on it at the minimum. This was dead-center of the depression, if you please. And my brother - oh, after all, my brother was also in California. My next-older brother, Al Merritt, was there in San Francisco trying to grubstake it and survive. So, yeah, that tied in. We didn't know how long we were going to stay, but we at least took off.

And I don't remember any special art experience along the way, you know, just bypassed any opportunity to look at art or search it out. We were pretty excited about just the adventure. I, although, probably made some sketches along the way and I wrote a number of letters. I can remember that, trying to develop a journal in terms of recording experience in letters, and being thrilled about what we saw, yeah, in nature, and finally, arriving in San Francisco, spending a short time.

We split off there. Bob's family had some business connection there. We had hope that we were going to get jobs there. That was, I guess, kind of a vague horizon aim. And his folks had some business association in the textile manufacturing area. So we stayed with my brother Al for a month or so in San Francisco, looking around, getting acquainted with the city. I remember being impressed with the Golden Gate Park scene and the Fleischhacker Museum and the Palace of the Legion of Honor, and - oh, what's his name - Maybeck.

MR. BROWN: Maybeck Pavilion, yeah.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. And all of that. This was really exciting. I remember painting a portrait of myself, a self-portrait on the canvas curtain in the sort of fleabag hotel we were living in. And I may even still have that. I used to draw around the city some building-scapes, cityscapes, and sketched in general, but nothing came up. Well, I got a job at Loew's Orpheum Theater handling automobiles. In those days, that was a courtesy thing at the movie house.

MR. BROWN: You would park the car?

MR. MERRITT: Right on. Had a uniform with leggings and a cap and all of that, and I would park the car for the Loew's Orpheum Theater patrons. I liked the city. I loved walking all over San Francisco, and especially along the waterfront.

I just reminded that I forgot to indicate that in my earlier growing-up days as a kid, I sought out by myself a kind of nature rendezvous. I loved walking through the woods in Reading. I loved sneaking out, even late at night, to walk to my favorite field, and yeah, to retreat in the sunset there, to just moon about -

MR. BROWN: Have a reverie, a personal -

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, using the visual encounter always, eyeballing everything, but I think more significantly, somehow, more importantly, finding the solace or whatever it was, finding contemplation and all of that. I was reading a lot at the time. I was reading, oh, some of the old '30s and '20s American poets, John Sylvester Dreerack [sp] and Edgar Lee Masters and the Benet people, William Rose, I guess it is, and -

MR. BROWN: Stephen.

MR. MERRITT: Stephen Vincent. And, oh, yeah, getting very romantic about all that, trying to write poetry myself a little bit.

In any case, in San Francisco. Then we departed San Francisco, went to Los Angeles because Bob got a job through there, and I thought I might be cut in on that, but I wasn't. In any case, we lived in L.A. near the then, very near the L.A. Public Library, as I recall. And the most I could make of my experience there was to hound the library and to hang out at Pershing Square. And this was exciting because it was, again, a kind of Hyde Park scene with all these poor depression guys coming together and conducting a forum in Pershing Square. I was fascinated with that.

MR. BROWN: You mean they would discuss social issues of the day?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. Discussed everything. And I lived in the public library and took my real-life encounter at Pershing Square, and drew, sketched, yeah kept that. That was my private recreation.

Well, then I went to San Diego, where these friends of my mother were, where her land was.

MR. BROWN: What impression did that make, San Diego?

MR. MERRITT: San Diego at that time was a nice, respectable, small city-town, and I lived with the two lady friends of my mother's, who were very proper people and who were hoping that I'd make something of myself, in San Diego, at least, and beyond that if possible. And they tried to get me into the community college, and they introduced me around to young people. Well, I discovered for myself the San Diego Museum of - whatever it was called - Museum of Fine Arts, I guess, at that time. I enrolled in an evening life class there, which was my very first life class. And to be sure, I remember that vividly.

MR. BROWN: Because that was quite a new experience.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And I remember there a guy who was so handy with the - he was painting from the model and I was drawing in charcoal. I guess it was a free for all. I don't think there was any instruction. It seems to be, may have been at least this fellow was a monitor. He was a rather spectacular practitioner, and I admired what he was doing. And I loved the session and found that my old cast drawing experience, with recording of lights, half-tone and shadow and reflected light - you know, shadow edge and reflected light - was coming in very handy, not too much difference with this problem. So that was nice. In any case, that was my next kind of group or school situation.

Up to this point in the process of pursuing knowledge and experience in drawing and art as such, there hadn't been anything like an encounter with dynamics of designing or the heritage in art. I don't think, well, I know I looked at art history books and things which had been available from school libraries, I'm sure. In the L.A. library I pursued some casual art history survey but never really got connected with, you know, art in context as a cultural process, but so concerned about my own gratification or gratuitous acting in drawing and the like. That came first.

MR. BROWN: That's what really counted with you then, wasn't it?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, I wanted to get into something big about drawing and painting.

MR. BROWN: And in San Diego, you were at least able to be on your own and take this course.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. Okay, by now it's time to keep moving because our California visit's over and we're running out of money. And my dear hostess friends in San Diego have never had the experience of a young man in the house before, and it's a little awkward. And I left a girl back home, anyway. So we started our eastward journey out of San Diego across the southern route. We came out to California on the northern route, and decided to go home by a southern route.

MR. BROWN: Was this maybe in the autumn of 1930 or so?

MR. MERRITT: This was in the spring of 1931, April, probably, of '31. We left in early September of '30 and stayed all winter, and now returning home, and with some concern about where it's all ending, because we lived near enough in my family life and you know, general awareness of the hard economic times to have some

anxieties about the next step, especially in terms of any prospect of schooling. I guess my brother must be out of college by now, my older brother. Well, he graduated from Amherst in '30, so yeah, he's just out, probably teaching somewhere by now. My second brother's in California. He dropped out of Northeastern University, went to California. My younger brother is at home still. And I'm coming back home to try to adjust to the situation.

And in any case, after we get home, a lot of talk is devoted to job hunting, not schooling. It occurred to me to visit my friend Julian Cochran, the photographer, just to let him know what we had done in California, to swap travel yarns with him. And we knew even before this time that upstairs in this block where Julian lived was Charles J. Connick.

MR. BROWN: Yes, the stained-glass designer.

MR. MERRITT: Right. I had even looked in there, I guess, because Julian had done some photography work with Connick on some of the photo-recording of the glass. And in those days, I can remember his hand coloring, hand tinting the transparencies. He did a lot of recording of the glass stuff, both on the site, I think, and from the sketches and the like. So I knew that he was, yeah, working with Connick and associated there. So he suggested that there might be a job at Connick's and he took me up to meet Mr. Connick and all the other people there. And sure enough, they said, "Why not?" Holy Toledo! I remember writing in my diary at the time that out of Heaven or somewhere came this opportunity which was just about perfect for me. It was a job and related to what I wanted to do most, which was to make some art. And I guess I got on at about $12 a week.

I was an apprentice, and discovered that wonderful mini-world-culture there, that kind of international group of people, old English glassworkers and German people. I met, for example, a guy - two fellows that I had been rather interested in as I was at Vesper George the summer before, and had watched these people come in and out of Connick's into Harcourt Street. They were two very animated young, handsome fellows who worked there, and I came to meet them and find out and be associates of theirs. They were Harold and Ralph Nicholson, who were expatriate German folk, now here in Boston working in stained glass, both very well, you know, experienced and accomplished in the glass business. Ralph - Harold, rather, was one of the designers, and Ralph was one of the painters, so-called, in the process.

It was, anyhow, an introduction to me to the whole process, staged process of designing and fabricating glass. And Connick at the time was probably head man in the whole development of the revival of Gothic glass in America. Ralph Adams Cram kept him busy with projects like the St. John the Divine [New York, NY], Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the Princeton University Chapel, American Church in Paris - oh, dear - St. Vincent Ferrar in New York. The shop was booming, 40 people, probably. And this wonderful collection of younger and older people in this medieval guild set-up where there was a strict, you know, departmentalization of workers, from the high-toned designers to the painters and fabricators, to the glazers.

MR. BROWN: The glazers were the people who put it together.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, they assembled the glass for the final process, for the final installation.

MR. BROWN: And where did you fit in?

MR. MERRITT: I fitted in to the painting department as such, which meant that my job was to assemble the picture puzzle of the glass which had been cut. In other words, it had been cut according to the cartoon designation which came from the design shop and went to the glass cutters, who selected the colors indicated in the original sketch, cut the individual shapes, returned the cut sections to the painting department, where the sections were laid out and assembled in their complete puzzle arrangement on large plate-glass easels or large horizontal slabs of plate glass in a frame. They were stuck into position temporarily with beeswax at each juncture of the assembled pieces.

And then the painters - oh, I'm ahead of myself. It hasn't been assembled until the painters have overlaid each individual glass section on the cartoon and traced the detail from the cartoon, the details of features if it's a face, details of fingers if it's a hand, details of drapery and so forth, foliated ornamental borders and the like, all traced with vitrifiable iron oxide pigment. Then it's assembled on the -

MR. BROWN: On the glass.

MR. MERRITT: - plate glass easel and stuck into position. And then it's lifted up in to the light, at which point the transmitted light, you know, reveals all of the detail which had been previously applied in this black pigment, but because the color coordination now, the color qualification is so raw, it has to be toned, it has to be qualified more.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.]

This is accomplished by overlaying a whole matt application of water paint, iron oxide pigment, this time mixed in water and applied, masking out all the colors, applied as a wash over the whole surface and then wiped away, scratched away with stiff stencil brushes or pointed instruments, pointed implements, to allow the transmitted light to venture back through the glass, but this time with a kind of balanced control for the range of colors. For example, the bright rubies would hold more of this black pigment, the blues would be opened up more, more of the surface would be cleaned on the blues.

Okay, this is -

MR. BROWN: A very complicated process.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, second painting stage. And from that stage, the glass is laid horizontally again, the easel is laid horizontally again. All the glass which is stuck down with the beeswax is chipped off the plate glass, laid in trays like cookies, sent to the oven to be baked. Here the pigment is integrated with the glass. It's fired to the point of fusion with the glass surface, probably 1800 degrees. Well, 13(00) to 1800 degrees, I think.

And, okay, removed from the oven, reassembled on the plate glass with the beeswax once more, installed in the light again to discover where the paint is fried, as it was called, where it's been overcooked in the fire, where it's necessary for additional refinement of the color and better balancing of the light, the color in the light.

Knocked down again, sent through the oven for the second firing. From there, removed to the glazer, who with his strip glazing, stripped lead, cane leads assembles the glass in its final state into sections which finally then are installed in a temporary situation for the last refining, the last retouching or whatever's necessary, the last critique. And I can remember Charles J. Connick directing me on a scaffolding, working with hydrofluoric acid, to lighten up an area here and there, to wash away some of the fried-on pigment.

MR. BROWN: You could do that with the acid.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, to apply here and there gold stain, which was the only actual color application, the only actual color applied to the surface of the glass.

That was exciting. I felt, you know, part of a process, part of a very important tradition.

MR. BROWN: What was his temperament like. Do you recall?

MR. MERRITT: His temperament, no, was very volatile, very romantic nature.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MR. MERRITT: Well, he could rise and fall in attitude. He'd get very excited and could become terribly annoyed and then could, could attain a great sense of joy and excitement and satisfaction. Yeah, a strange but apparently very talented man. I never saw him lay his hand to a piece of the process, interestingly enough. He was writing his book then, *Adventures in Light and Glass* [*Adventures in Light and Color*. New York, Random House: 1937]. In fact, we tipped in at that time the colored illustrations, had to retouch them with color. But he was a kind of genius nut. Extremely, apparently, enterprising. Knew how to sell his products. Knew how to go on the road and deal with clients, talked to vestrymen in church programs, and talked with public - oh, you know -

MR. BROWN: College presidents.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, yeah, and could deal well with Mr. Cram. He also was a very good people's person in terms of his own staff, his own workers, knew that there was more than a time-clock situation. For example, he would move in a piano, perhaps, or at another time we'd all take a break and listen to a poet. I've forgotten the Canadian poet who came in to talk with us. He encouraged individual eccentricities in people. He liked the idea of artists. Yeah.

The office situation, I remember, ran like clockwork. The people in there were on their desk, at their desk doing their work very well, running the payroll and handling the correspondence, and the shipping process was a big factor, as I recall. But a very interesting encounter for me as a young guy, and just about right as it met with my romantic notions about the world of art. And some of the people in the shop were painters on the side. Henry Tordzig [sp], one of the designers, was a very good painter. And Ralph Nicholson was a splendid painter. He later got into the WPA art program, did some important mural stuff.

MR. BROWN: He was one of the German -

MR. MERRITT: Right. Did one of the murals for the Worcester postal annex, which I think was one of the most handsome solutions in the whole New England scene at the time.

So I talked with, you know, these people. Henry Tordzig [sp] and I set up a life drawing session down in a second-story room on Dartmouth Street over S.S. Pierce, in that building, the old S.S. Pierce building, and we ran a life class once a week, and probably eight or 10 people showed up. And that was very interesting to me.

Well, my nice girlfriend whom I mentioned earlier is pretty much in all of this scene with me. In fact, she's right around the corner at Vesper George School, which made it great.

MR. BROWN: You had met her there first?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Well, my present wife, Priscilla, I had met long before that, back in high school in Reading, you see. And she kids us all by saying that she went to art school because I was working at Connick's, but she had a lot of special ambition and tremendous energy and a good ground-level, practical intention. And she had some talents, too. At Vesper George she was in, I think, the special fashion illustration work.

And as I am in Connick's and as I am wondering what kind of progress I'm going to make in the firm, in the shop after a couple of years, I remember my mother intervening again here. She's been interested to have me in this project.

MR. BROWN: You mean at Connick's?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, because of the association with Mr. Cochran, with Julian Cochran and all of that, but she's anxious to see a little more progress in my development and career thing. And also, she had an uncanny awareness of the, of well, what now would be called health hazard. The first thing you were aware of when you stepped into the Connick studio was this kind of sweet, pungent smell, and I'll always identify it from here on. It was the beeswax, the smell of cooking beeswax, always a pot of beeswax on a little gas stove in there for that process that was done, that part of the process.

That, and I also mentioned to you I was working with the acid bit. And also, a good deal of the work in the stained glass depends upon, you know, a darkened material for the maximum effect of the transmitted light. And a lot of these people are end-for-end cigarette smokers. And suddenly it occurs to my mother that this isn't a very healthful situation, especially because my second brother has had a bout with TB, and we're suddenly becoming conscious of -

MR. BROWN: So she's pretty sensitive about things.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. So she may have said, "Well, why don't you try something else for a change?" And as I've been in this project with Tordzig [sp] in the life class, I'm really more and more interested in painting, and thinking that this is really what I'm after. So Priscilla, at Vesper George, for some reason or other makes a transfer to Mass College of Art, and thereupon encourages me that, yeah, I ought to come over there and check it out.

So I did, and talked with Otis Philbrick, whom you may know, dear old Otis. I remember him well, a lovely man. And I showed him some drawings and what all, and he encouraged me. I thought that was great, took his suggestion that I get registered right away.

MR. BROWN: When was this, in '31 still, or '32?

MR. MERRITT: This was probably '33 by this time, oh, good grief, I guess, '32, '33. And it wasn't all that hard. I, you know, imagined that it would involve some kind of transcripts and formal registration procedures and that I'd get bogged down in Psychology and English Lit, and maybe Mathematics, at which I shuddered, but instead of that, it was a cinch to enroll there as a special student.

MR. BROWN: Which means what, you were part time?

MR. MERRITT: That meant that all I had to do was paint. A full-time student, but no extras. And that put me in Mr. Philbrick's section and in a section with wonderful old - oh, dear - you know -

MR. BROWN: Ernest Major.

MR. MERRITT: No. Well, yeah, Major also, but - oh, this is terrible, this is terrible. My head teacher at the time, who did the murals up at the State House.

MR. BROWN: Oh, Richard Andrew.

MR. MERRITT: Richard Andrew! Not Andrews. I think it was Richard Andrew.

MR. BROWN: Andrew, yes.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, wonderful Dicky Andrew. Oh, great. So -

MR. BROWN: And he was your principal teacher.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. That's right. And I worked there for a couple of years.

MR. BROWN: What was he like, Andrew, to work with?

MR. MERRITT: Well, Dicky was - well, if you're thinking of a characterization of an artist, he would least of all fulfill that.

MR. BROWN: Why? You mean, he seemed very different? He didn't seem terribly committed?

MR. MERRITT: He had more of a mechanical instinct, I thought, it seems to me. He was very animated in his talk and he was very technical. He never romanticized much, although he had people whom he admired. He had, you know, references in European art, oh, yeah, which he was bringing up from time to time. He always spoke with enthusiasm about that. But he was just a busy little fella. He used to show up in Army fatigues and corduroy coat, and he was very businesslike, not the disciplinarian, exactly, but he kept a kind of taut ship in the section there, I remember. I wish I could describe him better because he was admired by all the young people. He talked. He loved to buttonhole you, so much so that sometimes you missed some opportunity for work, but he was an enthusiast about - well, I'm trying to remember his references especially. He talked a good deal about Chavannes, Puvis [Pierre Puvis de Chavannes], He talked a lot about, well - oh, gosh, who were some of the other people.

MR. BROWN: You mean American muralists?

MR. MERRITT: No. No, not yet. Talked about Alfred and Alfrey Stevin [sp]. He talked about Monticelli. Well, he talked about Sargent, I guess, and Sargent murals. But mostly it was a kind of workaday approach.

[Audio Break.]

MR. BROWN: This session, this is May 25, 1979, in Deer Isle, Maine. We were talking about Massachusetts School of Art.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, okay. I had by this time pretty well discovered that I was into a painting aim and I think I ought to mention that I was filed with idealism anyhow as a result of the stimulation of the Connick experience as a result of latent teenage discovery of life and all of that.

I forgot to mention that, you know, we grew up with a kind of strong Christian emphasis in the family. I had been brought into the church situation actively, Episcopal Church in Reading, Massachusetts, where my family was sort of a mainstay. So that all was very important to my development. It all led into a kind of idealistic view of the whole world at the time there. And about this time also I discovered Walt Whitman, let's say, and I picked up on the readings, getting excited about professional arts, beginning to be aware of painters in Boston like Edmund Tarbell.

MR. BROWN: You would go to their exhibitions?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yes. Remember the old Boston Art Club at the corner of Newbury and Dartmouth Streets. That was the sort of place to always focus on. And went to Beulah [sp] to the gallery changes on Newbury, remember discussing the work with the teachers at Mass Art. Oh, who else. Willie Paxton. What was his wife's name? Elizabeth, was it?

MR. BROWN: Elizabeth Paxton.

MR. MERRITT: Yes. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: You'd get to meet these people? Tony Stallard?

MR. MERRITT: No, no they were professional people that you just admired.

MR. BROWN: Did you admire them?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: Did they become models for you?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: What do you think it was in their work that you liked?

MR. MERRITT: We looked at them and studied them and admired them. You know, we're still in the beaux-arts tradition, hadn't even a hint of the developing contemporary world, funny enough. We were protected somehow in Boston.

MR. BROWN: Were you struck by their paintings? Were you excited by them?

MR. MERRITT: Yes, oh, to be sure. Tarbell I would search out, just looking at him thoroughly and exploring his methods and his quality of the result there. Yeah, yeah. Admired him especially. John Sharmon was a good painter. I ought to mention him. He was one of the teachers at Mass Art, a rather obscure him. Do you know him?

MR. BROWN: Sharman? S-h-a-r?

MR. MERRITT: S-h-a-r-m-o-n or m-e-n, it seems to me. He was a sort of interior fellow, but had a very special quality of, well, post-Cubism, I suppose, in a modified way.

MR. BROWN: So he was more modern than most.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, seemed to have advanced a point or two there. And I was aware of that. But good old Dicky Andrew was, you know, still dominant in the scene for us. And he was a great anatomist, anyway. I liked that. And I took to it like a duck to water, this first attempt to work all day at painting. And I think I brought something to the situation, also. I was encouraged by Andrew and also by Otis Philbrick. Leo O'Donnell was there at the time also.

MR. BROWN: What did he do?

MR. MERRITT: He was a drawing teacher, and he was a very facile draftsman. By the way, he lived in that old Dutch house at that time.

MR. BROWN: I see. This house in Brookline, yeah.

MR. MERRITT: And whether he ever achieved much on his own, I can't remember. He exhibited probably at the guild or somewhere. But I remember his drawings as having a special hand, a very accomplished kind of secure drawing.

MR. BROWN: When you were there, you were thinking you wanted to be a painter?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: A lot of people at that school, Massachusetts School of Art, went toward teaching.

MR. MERRITT: No. No. No intention in that direction. In fact, I felt delighted that I didn't have to get involved with the rest of it. This was a special arrangement.

MR. BROWN: That's right, you were a special arrangement, a special student.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. All I had to do was show up at the studio and begin to search out the painting problem. We worked with Major, Ernest L. Major. And I remember he was a very colorful character. He was a motivator.

MR. BROWN: Was he a good teacher?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, he was a great kind of showman. He loved pyrotechnics. He would do, you know, a lot of eccentric play-acting. But it was exciting, interesting. The first time I'd had that sort of exposure, I guess. And he had a protege, you know, Greene. What was his name, Elmer Greene. He was succeeding at portrait painting in Boston. And I remember meeting him. And at least Major was referring to 19th century French cabinet painters, and he appreciated, you know, the Degas idiom, and he talked to us about - oh, who are those other people, Shasalier [sp] and - who is the other very wispy -

MR. BROWN: Monticelli?

MR. MERRITT: No.

MR. BROWN: Moreau?

MR. MERRITT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: A traditional painter in France?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, a strong - [inaudible] - extension effect. Oh, gosh. Well, I won't remember it.

MR. BROWN: But you would then go to a library and look at reproductions of these things?

MR. MERRITT: Right. And by the way, Major always kept a bulletin board pin-up, which was good. Yeah, he kept kind of a running survey going on his bulletin board for us.

MR. BROWN: Of exhibitions?

MR. MERRITT: Right. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you spend much time going to exhibitions in those days?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah Yeah. We would get to the Boston Art Club shows and the Coppage [sp] gallery and -

MR. BROWN: Were there any that particularly stood out that you remember at that time? Any more important to you?

MR. MERRITT: I probably was looking at, what was the name, Margaret Brown?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. MERRITT: And Tarbell, the Paxtons. Oh, and a great Boston muralist. Who's the guy I'm thinking of?

MR. BROWN: Not Sargent?

MR. MERRITT: A large-scale painter. No. Oh, dear heaven. A figurative painter. Oh, Robert, this is terrible. This is terrible.

MR. BROWN: Well, I can't think. Could it have been Kenny Procks [sp]? There were a lot of people who were in and out.

MR. MERRITT: Not Kenny Procks, no. No, give me somebody around the -

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. MERRITT: No, no. Let's get up to the '30s. Oh, see here. See here. This is a scandal. Very important.

[Break from recording.]

MR. MERRITT: Here, we've found him. R.H. Ives Gammell, of course. Sure.

MR. BROWN: And was he exhibiting a bit then?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He was prominent.

MR. BROWN: So how long were you there at the school of art?

MR. MERRITT: Well, a couple years there. Right. And by this time we had moved to Lynn, Massachusetts, which is my father's family's place. And this brought me into contact with the sea. I lived on the border of the sea there, at Winthrop Shore Drive, and used that as a very important encounter. Spent a lot of time alone on the beach and loved it there.

MR. BROWN: Were you painting much of the time?

MR. MERRITT: Well, this meant then painting, yeah, at school and then doing field painting, getting out and painting from the landscape, trying to get people. I was interested in painting figures in, you know, essentially a life painting program at Mass Art. And I'm not sure where I was laying my - where I was finding my foundations in painting, listening to Andrew, admiring Otis Philbrick's cleverness and facility, absorbing the Boston tradition.

MR. BROWN: I mean, this was exciting to you at that time.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Very exciting. Fulfilling. I was becoming an artist, I thought.

Oh, my associates there too ought to be remembered, to be sure, because we're still in a cluster, at least three of us who were at Mass Art together. This is Hollis Holbrook, who then lived in Natuck [Massachusetts] and who's

just recently retired from the Department of Art staff at the University of Florida after 25 years or so, and still a remarkably vigorous, searching painter. I admire him very much. He's an amazing character. And Bill Holst, William Holst, who is in New Hampshire at this point and has just retired also as head of Art Department at Colby-Sawyer College in New London, New Hampshire. Both active painters now, both very influential in my own development. We were close and grew up together, as it were.

MR. BROWN: What would you do? Would you talk about art together or go out painting together?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. We would go painting together. We'd discuss art together. I subsequently got into a lithography exploration and research with Bill Holst. And, you know, we depended upon each other's opinion about painting, about art in general, have done so over the years, although sporadically, but have kept the lines open all along. And I've watched their progress and they mine.

MR. BROWN: Were your families supportive at this time?

MR. MERRITT: No. No. I remember difficulty in that respect as, you know, the question of stability and security and economics, plain sense was considered. We weren't making it very well together. I was getting restless about that kind of - you know, being that kind of burden.

MR. BROWN: What did you do to make income at this point?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I worked in the summer on a couple of occasions at a camp with my brother, who was directing a project in New Hampshire. And I guess I didn't really come across much in terms of work during the year. I was, you know, out of it, carried away with my own concerns. But about this time, I learned that Alexander Yakovlev was coming to Boston to the Museum School.

MR. BROWN: This was about when, 1934?

MR. MERRITT: Nineteen thirty-four, I suppose, yeah.

MR. BROWN: And you had heard, knew of him?

MR. MERRITT: Yes.

MR. BROWN: How would you have known of him?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I'd seen his drawings reproduced. He did, you know, that "Citroen" [ph] exhibition.

MR. BROWN: In Central Asia?

MR. MERRITT: Central Asia. And I remember seeing some reproductions of those drawings. And anyhow, his reputation preceded him there. It looked like a new point of elevation for me in progress towards a sounder drawing, at least. So I made application at the Museum School and got a kind of scholarship, got a partial aid arrangement there for the year, whichever it was, 1934 or '35.

MR. BROWN: You arranged that you could study with him?

MR. MERRITT: Well, to be - yeah, I got into his session there. I don't think it was any special arrangement, except that there was some subsidy. I showed a small portfolio and talked myself into it.

MR. BROWN: But you did study with him, then.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was he like as a teacher?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I remember him distinctly. I remember being absolutely charmed. He was such a graceful person. Well, you know, the foreign connection was intriguing. The particular personality was very very charming. The demonstrations of the work was captivating. He used that method of teaching. I remember his command of English was limited, so he would demonstrate for us. This was a kind of treachery for a lot of us.

MR. BROWN: Treachery.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, in terms of its well, dominance as an influence. It looked as though we ought to be doing it this way, he put it over so strongly with this, so successfully in his demonstrating it. Everybody began to mimic him and try to do the same thing. So -

MR. BROWN: Did you retain your enthusiasm for his work?

MR. MERRITT: Yes, I did. I did. I used to collect his work when I could in reproduction, and yeah, I admired him enormously. I made a real contact with his personality.

MR. BROWN: In what way?

MR. MERRITT: Well, in that I was ready and, you know, open to most anything he would suggest because I admired him enormously. For me it was the next stage of development in form representation, in the definition of space. The painting experience at Mass Art was really, you know, a kind of local problem. This seemed to cover, well, the Italian tradition and to extend it some into a very special technical achievement.

MR. BROWN: So at the School of Art, then, it seemed to be a rather provincial, limited outlook when you look back on it.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, yeah. I think I began to discover that, began to -

MR. BROWN: And yet this man was sort of a flash in the pan himself, wasn't he, Yakovlev?

MR. MERRITT: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Precocious, and -

MR. MERRITT: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: Interesting subject matter, and -

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, right.

MR. BROWN: - that's probably to get attention.

MR. MERRITT: Right. Right. Yeah. But for its time and place, you know, it was a kind of striking demonstration. And I bought it.

MR. BROWN: Was the Museum School much different in terms of the students and the general atmosphere from the School of Art?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, sure. We always knew that it was the best school in Boston.

MR. BROWN: Oh, it had that reputation?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: As the best school.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. And whether this was just a habit of thinking, but its association with the museum and its kind of patrician connection and intention was, I think, considered to be the most important school influence, professional art school influence. There was not any demeaning of the emphasis in the teacher training thing or applied arts. It was a straight-on - [inaudible] -

MR. BROWN: There wasn't any dilution.

MR. MERRITT: I see.

MR. BROWN: Well, how long? Then you were there only a year?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Right. Right. Then by this time, my friend Holbrook had gone down to Yale from Mass Art. He had finished his work there. And so I went to visit him.

MR. BROWN: He went to Yale, what, for further education?

MR. MERRITT: That's right. Yeah. He picked up for his graduate work there. And I remember going to visit him. And incidentally, I remember meeting Bill Cummings there for the first time, standing on a stepladder. He was getting ready for some big bash, the Art School bash, and that was my first meeting with him.

MR. BROWN: With him, whom you later got to work with a lot on your painting, right?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, right. Right.

MR. BROWN: Did you go to Yale?

MR. MERRITT: Yes, I did.

MR. BROWN: When was this, in '35 or so?

MR. MERRITT: Thirty-five and '36, right.

MR. BROWN: You still had been living with your family.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. So by this time, Priscilla had finished her work at Mass Art and was set up with her commercial art project up on Park Street.

MR. BROWN: In Boston.

MR. MERRITT: At the old Tickler [sp] house I mentioned. And she was very encouraging about the Yale move, helped me financially to make that move.

MR. BROWN: But you weren't married yet, were you?

MR. MERRITT: No. No. We were talking about. In any case, at Yale we were working with, what's his name, Renier, the sculptor, and Louie York.

MR. BROWN: He was a muralist, right?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. And - oh, dear. Oh, dear. The other fellow -

MR. BROWN: Did you like the work? Was it more intense than at the Museum School?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, it was more intense, more professional, I would suppose. By that time, Yale had been successively a Prix de Rome winner five years, it seems to me, for five years, and that was a kind of big thing.

MR. BROWN: You mean it was a conservative place then. It was very straight.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We're still not hearing anything about School of Paris people. All right. All right.

MR. BROWN: Sure. Or hardly even post-Impressionism, I guess. Cezanne, did you look at his works, for example?

MR. MERRITT: Well, yes, I did. Yeah. Old Edward Cassius Taylor was lecturing at that time, and he brought us pretty well up to date.

MR. BROWN: You mean at Yale.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, yeah, the strong Italian Renaissance, the early Italian emphasis. And I'm trying to think of that muralist from Texas who was -

MR. BROWN: Who was a teacher there?

MR. MERRITT: Was the teacher there. He worked with the World's Fair project in Texas, did some big mural stuff, you know. Absolutely boudoir ornamentalist.

MR. BROWN: So with people like that around, I think, you were still enthusiastic?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I was enthusiastic. Well, I guess not all that, because I dropped out later, before the year was over. I pulled out. And I don't know - well, the particular reason was that I got called into this animal portraiture thing.

MR. BROWN: What was that?

MR. MERRITT: Well, at the Christmas of the year that I was at Yale, my cousin's girlfriend wondered what to give Bob Rigley [ph] for a present, and she remembered that he had an English setter that he loved, and she thought it would be a neat idea if we tried to do a portrait of the dog for Bob's Christmas thing, and we did. And it went over big! And that gave us an idea, especially Priscilla, who was very alert about these things. And she said, "Good grief! We've got something going here now, if we can get organized. If it's that successful with your cousin, there must be an awful lot of other dog lovers who would fall for something like this. And it was a clever achievement. So anyhow, she made a plan to set up a project at the Eastern Dog Show in February of that year.

MR. BROWN: Where is that, in Boston?

MR. MERRITT: In Boston, at the old Mechanics Building. And that meant that if we hustled around and did some samples and brought them to the dog show, that we might find some gullible takers.

MR. BROWN: These were to be oil paintings?

MR. MERRITT: No, these were chalk drawings, pastel drawings. And sure enough, it worked fine. I can't remember where we got our samples turned up, but I probably had half a dozen drawings which were presentable. We, Priss got together and found out how to rent space and did all the advance planning for me, and I came up from New Haven and put on a little show.

MR. BROWN: You mean you drew from a dog there in public?

MR. MERRITT: No, I brought my things in and laid them up against some paneling that we had installed, and then we waited for people to admire them. And there were enough people to indicate that we could start up a small business.

Yeah, by this time I was getting some contact with the real world. It looked as though we were finding a solution to making art and surviving it. Prissy had herself established in a studio on Park Street which could be a kind of headquarters for our little project.

MR. BROWN: So you quit school, huh?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You quit school at the end of that first term or so, around that time?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, March, February, in the middle of the second term.

MR. BROWN: So what did you do? Did you begin hunting for customers?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. In fact, I didn't have to hunt too much. They began addressing cards to "Dog Picture Painter," 9 Park Street, Boston, Mass. And then, of course, we learned that there was a whole circuit, whole dog-show circuit, whole other world there. And that meant we could go from Boston to Springfield to New York and find a lot of others.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing it?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. We were excited about it. It was a real organization plan, and it meant that you, you know, you were selling something, but you were working with satisfied customers, also.

MR. BROWN: Were there any especially important ones?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, sure. Sure. You mean people or dogs or both? [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: People, or people who - yeah, or dogs - but people, say, who came back and any experiences that stand out.

MR. MERRITT: Well, let's imagine Champion Gamecock [sp] Duke of Wales as a very handsome subject for painting. He was a greyhound, belonged to George B. West in Boston. And, oh, the people who owned Wamsutta Mills in New Bedford.

MR. BROWN: [Inaudible.]

MR. MERRITT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: But you did work for those people?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

MR. BROWN: So you would go to their houses and do the portrait of the animal?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Right. Right. Go to the houses, go to the kennel. I'll never forget visiting the Wamsutta kennels. That was the New Bedford project. And arriving at a time when 50 Irish setters were just being fed. That was quite a - yeah, quite a sensational aural experience anyhow, hearing them slurp up all that dog chow.

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.] Was this satisfying to you? I mean, it was kind of fun doing this work?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. I kept looking for, you know, the odd opportunity, and I knew at the scale I was

offering to work and the economic scale that it was still a hit-and-run process. I was clever at drawing and got an effect readily, but I wanted to get more involved with that.

[END TAPE 1. BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.]

[NOTE: The beginning of tape 2 is out of sequence and may have been recorded at this spot on the tape unintentionally (from the reel). The material recorded has been put in the correct sequence in this transcript. There is a one-minute break on the tape, after which the subject matter from end of Tape 1 resumes.]

MR. MERRITT: In the second brochure was included a large portrait of the two Burkhart [sp] daughters, Elise and Ursula Burkhart [sp], in their riding habits. And then there were other - well, there were other horse portraits, but also some illustrational material, some animal figurative painting which I had done for myself. And they were a little distressed at that.

MR. BROWN: Why do you think they were?

MR. MERRITT: Well, because they were billing me as a specialist and, I guess, depending upon that in a sense. And all of a sudden I started just breaking the -

MR. BROWN: About that time, were you starting to do some more teaching or anything?

MR. MERRITT: All right. Then in our dog-show association we, yeah, met Bert Poland [sp], whose wife was a science teacher at Abbott Academy [Andover, MA], and she was in a position to know that an opening existed there in the art department. And I was invited for the interview and thereupon took up my first institutional teaching assignment, which was in a very respectable girls' private school.

So this was an assignment and requirement of teaching for three days a week. We were living in Linfield at that time, in a nice little farmhouse there, and I was painting actively, teaching a group session at Winchester, painting in the Linfield area, a lot of landscape stuff, and then going to Andover three days a week. And part of that job was to supervise the small gallery at the place, the John Esther Art Gallery, which was a really charming little 19th-century gallery space. We shaped it up well and I organized a succession of shows there over the three years that I was on that job.

MR. BROWN: Had you ever done that sort of thing before?

MR. MERRITT: Not really, no.

MR. BROWN: Did you rely on contacts with artists?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. I talked with Charlie Sawyer at Addison, and I relied upon contacts with artists. I'm trying to remember some - well, a father, for example, Henry Strader [sp] was the father of one of my students, and Strader [sp] us a show. And I had a show with Robert Brackman. Brackman was right on top at that time. I remember Charlie Sawyer being rather impressed with all of that, indeed. And then I - did mention to you? - the Institute of American Sporting Art, which was a venture developing out of New York. Because of my own interest in that, I went to Carl Zerler [sp], who was attempting to establish this program, and he rounded up a couple dozen representative sporting paintings, including some significant work. I remember Young and - who else of importance there. But otherwise -

MR. BROWN: What was the reception in Andover; I mean, the people?

MR. MERRITT: Well, it was essentially for the student -

MR. BROWN: Did people - did it make an impression?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. The visitors to Addison were apprised of the little gallery down the street and we took off some of their people. And, oh, yeah, it was a very lively new development at the school, at least. And I remember the instance of meeting with the board of trustees to discuss the further program and improvements and refurbishing the gallery.

MR. BROWN: What did they do? Did they feel it was a good thing to do?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah, they thought it was a splendid idea and wondered why the gallery had been neglected for so long. I don't know what they had been using it for in the just previous years. But anyhow -

MR. BROWN: How did your teaching go? I mean, what was your approach to teaching?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I was popping off with Le Corbusier and Mies [van der Rohe] and Bauhaus and Yale

combined.

MR. BROWN: Really? Things you'd been reading about, you were then -

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: - adjusting it for the students?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. We were extending the experience beyond drawing and painting. We were doing little architectural projects and a little bit of primitive sculpture.

MR. BROWN: Primitive sculpture? You mean a certain kind of brutal style, you're talking about?

MR. MERRITT: Well, at least sculpture with limited means.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. We got in a bunch of red brick and we brought in some apple wood and that sort of thing. But this was an elective program in a strong liberal arts prep school, pre-college training program, and very, you know, nice young people. But it had been a tradition to have a nice studio facility at the top of the main building there.

MR. BROWN: It had been a tradition, you mean, to have the art studio?

MR. MERRITT: That's right. That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did you find it fairly stimulating being there for a time?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I enjoyed the position, anyway. I remember a funny juxtaposition of events. While I'm still keeping up my dog show contacts and my commercial art, and teaching, I went over to Suffolk Downs to take a day of observation and sketching at the track and did eight to 10 drawings there. And Priscilla saw them and said, "Oh, they look good, we ought to see if we can sell these to the *Boston Herald*, for example." And we did. So they did on their Rotogravure section, the Sunday issue, a page of the drawings. And it mentioned something about Francis Merritt, the artist, who spends considerable time at the racetrack. Well, it wasn't so, exactly, either. This was my first visit, I think, to the race track. And the news turned up at Abbott Academy and a few eyebrows were raised over that, but they were also pleased, you know, to find that the material was being published.

So I'm putting some paintings together, in any case, and my friend Holbrook by this time is in New Hampshire, where his wife, Vivian Nicholas, a Yale graduate, is teaching at Colby Junior College. And Hollis is there, painting, and you know, we track each other down. And I make a visit or two there, and he arranges for a kind of trio exhibit of his work and Bill Holst's and mine at the local library, New London, New Hampshire.

MR. BROWN: Bill Holst was up there too?

MR. MERRITT: Yes. Well, Holst at that time was in Cambridge. He lived in Cambridge. He was probably working for his father, who was in the printing business.

MR. BROWN: But you got an entree to Colby Junior College now?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. We had this exhibit at the library. We met the head of the department at that time, Melanie Martha Mueller [sp], a wonderful old Swiss gal who was perfect in that little rural setting, a European. In any case, we met her.

In the next interval, Holbrook is applying at Florida and gets a job there, and so has to leave New London and wants to know if I would be interested in that job. And Miss Mueller, whom I had met, was very interested to have me come, so I reluctantly pulled out of the Abbott Association. I liked the people very much and I liked the Boston connection and the Addison connection. And -

MR. BROWN: It was a fairly prominent place to be in the Boston region.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yes, that is right. That is right.

MR. BROWN: But you decided to go up to New Hampshire, which was rather out of the way.

MR. MERRITT: Well, yeah, yeah. To be sure. It was a terribly abrupt break in our routine of things. But I always told myself that opportunity was, you know, just around the corner, that I should keep moving. And that kind of

future appeal has always existed, it still does, for me. I'm still arriving. And I want, yeah, to move with whatever -

MR. BROWN: So what did you have to do up there? Was it quite an abrupt move for your wife?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Oh, yeah. She was wretched about it. That meant that she had to pull out of her Boston career, sacrifice all of that, had to leave the hometown, which was a wrench. And you know, we were pretty ingrained Bostonites. We visited New Hampshire the first time in March, which was the lackluster season, and it was, oh, terribly discouraging for her. But anyhow she, you know, went with me and we settled in there and had four well and wonderful years of growth and experience in New Hampshire.

MR. BROWN: How did that come about, when it was so unpropitious a beginning?

MR. MERRITT: Well, it came about in that there was a tonic effect at least in the place itself. It was a lovely hill-town, a small college community, and although not all that exciting academically, it was a lovely balance of rural life and, you know, pseudo-academic life.

MR. BROWN: And that was okay with you even though it was a rather -

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I adored the country. I began to use that country, also, as an inspiration in painting. And I was, you know, busy enough, thoroughly busy with the program. I was challenged by the association of this old gal. She was real tough. She was my boss. And we worked it out together, just barely. In any case, it was good experience and excellent training for me, I felt. There was time to do some of my own work. I began to paint there, and this is when I began to exhibit nationally. I submitted a painting to the Corcoran [Gallery of Art, Washington, DC] and it was accepted. The college people sent us down to Washington for the, you know, varnishing day and opening thing, and we felt pretty neat about that. That was a nice recognition, nice and -

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MR. MERRITT: - yeah, unusual.

MR. BROWN: Because that was a very prominent show in those days.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. That's right.

MR. BROWN: You were at the Carnegie [Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA], too, right?

MR. MERRITT: Right. Next year, along in there, we submitted to that "Directions in American Painting" show and it was accepted for that. So this was all kind of, yeah, combined discipline of the institution and the requirement of meeting that obligation to people, and the other aspect of pursuing my private painting. And at that time we - this was just during the war, you see.

MR. BROWN: This was the early '40s by now.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, yeah, we went there in '40. And we had an opportunity to live in a rather unusual house, a very handsome property, which was, well, a summer property, but which in the course of the progress of the war and the restrictions had not been used, and it became available to us. And this opened up a great studio situation for me, and it opened up also an opportunity to exploit a summer school idea.

MR. BROWN: It was a big enough house.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, had plenty of space, lovely barn space, and it opened up a chance to install a printing studio and experiment with Bill Holst in lithography. So that was a very full project. And in the course of the life there, I did paintings which were, you know, sent to Chicago, to the national watercolor show. And I must have - oh, I had a show at the Stewart Gallery in Boston.

MR. BROWN: Which was a fairly prominent gallery at that time?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, at that time, right. At that time. Good grief; when was that?

MR. BROWN: What sort of a gallery was that? Contemporary?

MR. MERRITT: Well, that was on Stewart Street, maybe a successor to Grace Horne. I can't remember if they were -

MR. BROWN: It was a fairly contemporary thing?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Right. Right.

MR. BROWN: So your work at that time had a look of contemporaneity? Were you moving into -

MR. MERRITT: Well, it was regional - yeah, it was American regional painting at that time. You know, we were looking at Curry and Vinton and -

MR. BROWN: Oh, so yours had some of those qualities?

MR. MERRITT: I think so. I think so, yeah. And who else? Well, this all overlaid with the Yale tradition, the beaux-arts form development. Yeah, always thought about the seriousness of picture organization and design format, something beyond the just plain Boston painting, something beyond, yeah, the provincial -

MR. BROWN: You mean the Yale experience was enlarging?

MR. MERRITT: Yes. Oh, indeed.

MR. BROWN: Had been?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, indeed. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Brought me into contact with, you know, the whole tradition of painting much more than Boston. In Boston, I was discovering my talents and the local example, but at Yale I began to see -

MR. BROWN: And now at Colby Junior College, you're coming into your own. You're developing your own idiom.

MR. MERRITT: Yes. Yes. And I'm being encouraged by local exhibition acceptance and national exhibition acceptance, and having the opportunity to work in a remote place, quietly, although becoming involved in the formation of the New Hampshire Art Association. I was one of the founders of that project. And trying to encourage, yeah, interchange, inter-institutional exhibition program, very active in that, with St. Paul School and some of the other private schools in New Hampshire. Painting now, just before the war, doing some, kind of, statement paintings or commentary painting. I remember quite a number of paintings which were protest paintings.

MR. BROWN: Oh, they were? Of what? Social conditions that you saw, or the rise of Fascism?

MR. MERRITT: Of military-industrial tyranny.

MR. BROWN: Were your politics getting more "leftish" at that time?

MR. MERRITT: I, I don't know. I don't think I ever consciously adopted a platform. I went to a couple of John Reed Society meetings in New Haven, I remember. But I never was forcefully, you know, motivated - these were sort of private protests, private statements about the way I felt, I guess in anticipation of my own possible involvement which did come up anyhow, as I got drafted. But I remember going to a gallery in New York, oh, gee -

MR. BROWN: And what did they -

MR. MERRITT: Well, a prints gallery, and talking with the man, and he said he couldn't handle the stuff, it wouldn't be appropriate at this time, at this point.

MR. BROWN: Some of these were prints?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You were doing quite a lot of lithographs at that time.

MR. MERRITT: Yes, lithographs, right, and mono-prints. Oh, wow. A very prominent print gallery.

MR. BROWN: Not the Newman?

MR. MERRITT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Kennedy?

MR. MERRITT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: [Unintelligible.]

MR. MERRITT: No. No.

MR. BROWN: Well, it will come. But you were exhibiting, then, quite a lot.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: When were you drafted, then?

MR. MERRITT: I was drafted in 1944.

MR. BROWN: Fairly near the end of the war.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. Yeah, I had about two years in the thing. Yeah. We were drafted in May of 1944, left New Hampshire at that time, and did my stint at Devens and got into Fort Belvoir, engineer training.

MR. BROWN: Did your family come with you there?

MR. MERRITT: They went home to Mother in Reading. There were two boys by that time, and I was less than happy about -

Want me to close that? [Referring to voices of people nearby.]

MR. BROWN: What did you do in the engineers? Was there anything appropriate to your training?

MR. MERRITT: Not at all. No. No. They sent me to electrical school, if you please. My brother-in-law had the most apt appraisal of that. He said, "Perfect! You're so wiry."

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. MERRITT: In any case, I discovered that remaining obscure was about the only way to survive that experience. I hated it, to be sure, the whole idea, to begin with, and then, of course, the resentment, you know, having been pulled away. I was old. They were scraping the barrel for me, anyhow. I was 31 or 32 by that time. But out of it developed an unusual opportunity and experience, as I finished the basic training bit and tried to get my "spec" number as an artist brought into it. Instead, I was sent to the Arctic.

I was called in with two other guys, after the basic training, and told that there was a very special assignment for us three guys, a very top-secret bit. We looked at each other - I was a private. In fact, I was assigned as the corporal "pro tem" to get these two guys on the road. And we were given some tickets to Chicago without knowing where we were going, and from Chicago we were sent to Winnipeg, and we were almost sure we were going to Alaska. That was a big theater at that time. But finally, we found ourselves at Churchill on Hudson Bay, or La Pa [ph], before Churchill. We knew we were going to a post on Southampton Island at the top of Hudson Bay, just inside the Straits, to what was called an outpost defense garrison at the Hudson Straits.

Well, when I left home, telling Priss that we were on the march to some point and that I would let her know as soon as I could, I had thought I was going up to Camp Meade. You know how you can get rumbles about those little numbers that turn up on the forms. But I finally was able to get word out of Winnipeg that little numbers made big differences and that we weren't going to Fort Meade for intelligence work at all, but we were someplace in the bloody North Pole, that I'd have to wait until I knew more.

In any case, this was a remarkable experience at a small island post which was set up for about 500 people but was never manned by more than 100. There were about 80 men at the time I was there. It was essentially a weather forecasting area. They apparently, you know, turned out the weather forecast for Normandy invasion. And it was a housekeeping job, terribly lonely and remote, more concern about weather, severe weather, than any other kind of problem. If you were to pinpoint the map, it would be the safest place in the world in terms of combat. So we had that much to be grateful for, but otherwise, it was a very lonely place.

MR. BROWN: And what did you do there?

MR. MERRITT: Well, then this, yeah, this turned up a chance to develop some art for myself and for the camp. I had a good opportunity because I worked all night in the power plant because I was an electrical specialist, and then I had daytimes to draw. And I drew faces of GIs and did the sketch books for myself, some painting, a lot of reading, but then found a chance to influence a young officer there, Frank Mann, who was a young shave-tail lieutenant. And I got him going on an interest in art, and later got him interested in pottery. And he subsequently became a very good potter when he got back to Vermont. Although I haven't heard from him for a long time, I knew at one point he was moving along very well. He went to SAC and got involved.

MR. BROWN: School for American Crafts.

MR. MERRITT: Right. The opportunity to see that landscape and to experience that weather thing was, yeah, a remarkable kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: It was very bleak and -

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah, entirely bleak. Just open tundra with, yeah, nothing growing except in the short summer interval of six weeks, when the most brilliant little flower growth would pop up shortly. And I made very interesting contact with Eskimo populations. There were three tribes on the island, and this was a remarkable chance for me to - [This interview session ends midsentence].

[Audio Break.]

MR. MERRITT: We're trying to pick-up right?

MR. BROWN: This is a second session of interviewing with Francis Merritt in Boston, Massachusetts.

And this was June 25, 1979. And we've been talking about your career into World War II. Could you give some description of your coming out of - you're in military service - right? - in Canada?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And how you got back into civilian life following the war.

MR. MERRITT: Coming back from the service in 1945 posed the problem of realigning and adjustment with my family and whatever prospect of survival we could plan for the year. I had been invited to return to the job in New Hampshire. You remember I told you I was teaching at Colby Junior College in New Hampshire, and from there I went into the service. And that situation was still available to me, but I decided that I wanted to try something else by that time.

In any case, while we were pondering all of this, we resumed association with the Days, Fairfield Pope Day and his wife Frances Day, for whom I had done work with the animal portraiture business. They were dog fans. We became great friends before the war. I had visited their place in Short Hills, New Jersey, to do some work for them and other members of their families and friends. So as I returned home from the service in February, we talked to them and projected together a plan for the fall and summer in Short Hill, where they said they would cook up some portrait work for me; first of all, their own two children, and then along through the rather extended Day family we lined up eight or 10 portraits as a commission prospect. With our younger son and a couple of cats and a dog, we took off for Short Hill, were ensconced very happily in a stable at Pleasant Days, which was the Day estate, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was this 1946?

MR. MERRITT: It was 1946, right. And we lived in the carriage house and stable there and set up a studio and did portraits of both Fairfield Day and Frances Day and their two kids.

MR. BROWN: Were you able to get into that work fairly easily?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I had done some portraiture around Boston anyhow before that, and whatever's become of all that stuff, I don't know. I'd be curious to know if any of it still prevails. I've got some photo record of the work that we did at the time there. And spent six or eight weeks there, it seems to me. We were pretty broke, as I recall, waiting for the time we could turn over a completed portrait and get some money. And as that opportunity did develop, instead of getting paid, whoever it was whose kids we had done were so excited about the paintings, they said, "Well, oh, we'll have the other kids done now." So that delayed the payoff. And I remember-

MR. BROWN: This was before you went to Short Hills.

MR. MERRITT: No, this was at Short Hills, while we're doing the work here. And I remember leaving a very pretty terrace party there one time with my wife to go down to Union, New Jersey, to get on the telephone and call back home for some emergency handout. We were just absolutely strapped while we were waiting around for all this big bonanza from the portrait trade in Short Hills. It finally came through, but I remember our friends back home bailed us out temporarily.

MR. BROWN: These were pretty hard times, then. Were you reasonably happy doing this portrait work?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, sure, sure. I enjoyed it.

MR. BROWN: What did you enjoy about it, would you say, doing portraits?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I guess I felt the confidence in my own hand-and-eye skills. You know, the doubt that I grew up with, drawing something - [inaudible] - my training had been in that direction in Boston, sure, making it, that was it.

MR. BROWN: Your particular teachers at the Museum School and elsewhere.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, Major and Dicky Andrew and all of them were dealing in beaux-arts. Painting from nature. Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you have a fairly easy way with your patrons, the Days?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah, that was no hardship.

MR. BROWN: Would you like to go - Was it difficult pleasing them?

MR. MERRITT: Not really, no. I can remember visiting with the Days, when one of the daughters, probably an adolescent at that time, was the subject. And she normally wore the glasses, but for the portrait it was decided that we'd do it without glasses. But as they reviewed the product at the end of the sittings, the father had to get the girl's glasses and hold them up in front of the portrait to make it come off for him. He said, yeah, he thought it was great -

MR. BROWN: [Laughs.]

MR. MERRITT: Well - I think that the idea of portraiture, for me, was a process of doing something pleasing and flattering, I guess, typical commercial portrait attitude, and hoping that somewhere along the way there might be a little art in it.

In any case, we got through that summer rather pleasantly and with a level of satisfaction, and then returned to New Hampshire. Another portrait commission developed out of the Colby Junior College Alumni Association. They wanted the official portrait of the president of the college, and I was assigned to that. These, well, these were all developments, I guess, which were made possible because people knew that I could do it, and I needed the income, so it was a combination of some mutual assistance there.

But while I was then wondering what would be coming next, we learned that an associate, a friend of ours, was taking sabbatical from Cranbrook [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan] in Michigan. He asked me if I'd be interested to fill in for him there.

MR. BROWN: You didn't have a commitment at Colby Junior College.

MR. MERRITT: No, no. I had decided against that.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I suppose I'd been out and around by that time a little bit, and it looked like there was a limitation on possibilities in art in New Hampshire at that time, which was a very rural and remote situation. Opportunities other than teaching didn't seem to exist, and I still had ambitions as a painter. You know, I had sent to Corcoran, had been accepted, I had sent to Carnegie from there, and I had hit the "International Water Color Show," and oh, I guess, that "Artists for Victory" thing at the Metropolitan Museum. It had all happened before the war, and I was encouraged to think that there might be a way of surviving as a painter. But in the meantime, I had two kids, and the problem of, yeah, some kind of income, securing some kind of income. So as the Michigan thing developed and I knew the Cranbrook situation was an important center, I decided to accept that teaching situation there. So we -

[Taping pauses for ringing telephone.]

MR. BROWN: Then you heard about the Cranbrook.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. Clifford West, Bud West, was a painter who taught at one of the Cranbrook divisions, came to Cranbrook, the World's Fair, and he did a life drawing session at the Art Academy.

MR. BROWN: At the which?

MR. MERRITT: At the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

MR. BROWN: The Academy, yeah.

MR. MERRITT: And he wanted to take a year off and go to Guatemala. So we had known Bud through the fact

that he had come to New Hampshire and met a girl at Colby and married her and had spent some time with us there. I was, you know, pleased to feel that he had considered me for the project. And we interviewed with Margaret Olga [ph], the headmistress of the school, in New York. She thought it was fine, and we picked up our family of two youngsters and a couple of dogs and cats and made off to Michigan.

MR. BROWN: When was this?

MR. MERRITT: This was in 1946, was it not? Let's see, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Late '46, in the fall of '46?

MR. MERRITT: That would be in the fall of '46, yeah.

So part of the assignment there was to teach one day a week at Flint, Michigan, an adult group at the Flint Institute of Arts, the Friday section there. And the whole opening up of the new encounter with people we had heard about at Cranbrook and the Midwestern scene was very exciting for me.

MR. BROWN: What way do you suppose they were exciting? What about the Midwestern scene?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I'll never forget the first visit to the Detroit Institute [of Arts], for example, where we saw throngs of people moving in and out of the building, even at night. This was unheard of in Boston, you see, at an art museum. Well, the place just wasn't that public. It just looked like a lot more animation, a lot more public activity around the art museum than we knew from Boston.

MR. BROWN: This pleased you, did it? This pleased you?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, right. Oh, right. Sure.

MR. BROWN: Because you had always found the Boston Museum a bit remote and stuffy?

MR. MERRITT: That's right. That was right. And these were something like football crowds you'd see in Detroit.

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.]

And then the Cranbrook situation itself had been established about 15 years or so by that time, and we had known of the Saarinens and Carl Milles. It was then the chance to become acquainted, I suppose, for our first time with the living interaction and integration of architecture and the arts, the handsome Cranbrook layout, the gardens and buildings and the collections and Academy. Very impressive for us.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know some of the people there very well?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We got to know all of Cranbrook very well. Some of our friends from that time on were made there at that time. We knew Wallace Mitchell until his death a couple of years ago as a special personal friend.

MR. BROWN: What was he like?

MR. MERRITT: He was the last - the president of the Academy, but at the time we arrived there, he was head of the - well, no, not the Sepeshy - Zoltan Sepeshy was head of the painting section. Wally Mitchell was one of the painting instructors. And Marianne Strengell, the fiber lady, who had come along with the Milleses from Scandinavia, was by that time making a prominent place for herself in the fabric scene in America. And Charley Eames was there, and Harry Weese.

MR. BROWN: You were now in the Painting Department?

MR. MERRITT: No, I was the teacher at Kingswood Cranbrook, which is the secondary girls' school in the Cranbrook complex. There were five units.

MR. BROWN: I see, whereas these other people were for the most part -

MR. MERRITT: They were at the Academy.

MR. BROWN: - involved with the more advanced students.

MR. MERRITT: Well, yeah, that is right, advanced students and personnel at the Academy. Sepeshy we met and came to know. Part of the reason for our invitation there, I suppose, was our association with Marshall Fredericks. Do you know who he is?

MR. BROWN: I've heard of him, yes.

MR. MERRITT: He's a very successful commercial sculptor, one of Milles's protégés. Worked with Carl Milles after he finished at Cranbrook. Marshall is Danish by descent. We had known Marshall's -

MR. BROWN: You had known him before you went there?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, he has been with us in New Hampshire on visits from time to time, and he and Bud West were very close friends. So I suspect that together they rather promoted my assignment there.

MR. BROWN: What was your [inaudible] - Your duties, what were they like?

MR. MERRITT: This was head of department of art at this girls' school, which meant teaching "art" - [exaggerating the accent] - as we say in Maine. It was drawing and painting and supervising the Division of Ceramics, which was the only extension. And my experience at Bradford Academy and at Colby Junior College and my acquaintance with Pat - and Phillips -

MR. BROWN: Oh, Pat Morgan?

MR. MERRITT: Pat Morgan and Phillips and the Phillips concept and the secondary school of art concept there, with the museum, was very valuable background for me.

MR. BROWN: Did you then apply there at Kingswood?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You were able to instruct, to a point, but you also took the children over to the museum.

MR. MERRITT: That is right. Yeah. Yeah. We tried to round out the experience with the studio encounter and then an acquaintance through real exposure, or exposure to real work at the museums in Detroit and at Cranbrook and, well, the secondary school of art history approach.

MR. BROWN: You were there for, what, about -

MR. MERRITT: I was there for that one year.

MR. BROWN: Just that one year.

MR. MERRITT: Right.

MR. BROWN: Did you develop - Could you characterize some of the people you met during that year?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. I could characterize Wally Mitchell -

MR. BROWN: He was?

MR. MERRITT: He's the painting instructor at Cranbrook, a very sensitive, hyper-sensitive and quite creative painter, rather precious as a painter, I think, realizing his position there at Cranbrook, which was a special place, to be sure. It was a particular influence in the American art-school scene at that time. Very important.

MR. BROWN: Was it partly avant-garde? Not really, was it?

MR. MERRITT: Well, avant-garde restrained through the Scandinavian discipline and influence from Eliel Saarinen. But a particular solution for people in the arts; that is, combining all the very fine facilities and kind of high-class attitude, and especially the connection, or the proposed connection with design, design as such, the new, post-war reconstruction attitude in designing and industrial design and environmental designing. Here would be, you know, Alexander Girard as a connection and Eames and, again, the adopted Scandinavian disciplines in design, which were -

MR. BROWN: Craft design?

MR. MERRITT: Well, which were -

MR. BROWN: How would you characterize it?

MR. MERRITT: - post-Bauhaus, I suppose, but for Americans.

MR. BROWN: But there was an integration of the so-called "fine arts" with the applied arts.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah. Right.

MR. BROWN: And it was called design. Is that right?

MR. MERRITT: I suppose, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Sepeshy as a dominant influence in the painting was - well, was a kind of incongruous element there, perhaps. But he was very strong as a personality. Zoltan was Hungarian, an extremely voluble character who was a good teacher, over-indulgence in the romantic sense, I suppose, in figurative and narrative painting, but found himself with that extraordinary skill and discipline in tempera techniques, specifically tempera painting. Fantastic technical emphasis there.

MR. BROWN: Did you become close to him or -

MR. MERRITT: No.

MR. BROWN: - did you get to know him very well?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah, I got to know him well. I got to know him well. Although I encountered the tempera condition at Yale, which was strong, I never adopted it for myself, but I appreciated the requirement of orderliness and special materials discipline it called for and I used to eyeball Sepeshy's work, and he at that point was making his way, too, in the American scene. He was being collected and being publicized. And it was, I guess, a combination of his own achievement, which was remarkable, as a painter and his association with this important academy. Zoltan held rein there for, well, I suppose, 10 years. I guess I'm not sure about that. But he was undisputed. And Wally Mitchell adopted tempera techniques, but he had far broader design concept than Sepeshy had. He was, well - he was an abstractionist, essentially, had great delicacy and great refinement of taste and his way of - Sepeshy was gangbusting with story and picture-making, put together with his astonishing technical process, and Wally was far more restrained with the technique and dealt exclusively in the schematic with spatial relationship of paintings.

MR. BROWN: Was Mitchell more unto himself?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was Sepeshy more combative, or -

MR. MERRITT: I think so. Oh, yes. Yes. Sepeshy was very emotional and often defensive.

MR. BROWN: Why would he have been defensive?

MR. MERRITT: Well, it's hard to say. I guess I think - I don't know, unless it was just a matter of temperament, a kind of paranoia, as I recall. And yet at meetings where I would often see him, he felt it necessary to project himself and would tend to dominate the situation. He was a kind of strong character.

MR. BROWN: Trying to dominate to what purpose, do you suppose?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I guess we always thought it was an ego purpose. But he was colorful. He was warm-hearted and, well, romantic is I guess the end -

MR. BROWN: And some of the other people there. Was Milles still on the scene?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Carl Milles was, oh, strong there.

MR. BROWN: What he was he like?

MR. MERRITT: Well, Carl was sort of a minor deity, I guess, in the situation. He was always extremely busy engaged with his big commission work. That was a fabulous studio there, and a lovely house, of course. But he also, I think, laid on heavy his neoclassical - again, romantic classical sculpture concept.

MR. BROWN: Something comparable to Sepeshy's - [inaudible]?

MR. MERRITT: I would think so, yes. I haven't actually ever aligned it that way before, but a little more lyrical, I would guess, than Sepeshy. Milles sculpture dealt with the mythology, Scandinavian mythology. He wasn't making statements, especially. Sepeshy would attempt to make statements in painting occasionally. In landscape painting he would, you know, deal maybe with the industrial wasteland scene and tickle it up to a gnat's heel in his particular tempera techniques. I think he was aiming toward displaying his technique - as well as displaying his technique, making a kind of comment or a commentary about that scene. Carl was entirely romantic. He was a very colorful old guy, but like the poor man's George Washington, to me.

And I'll never forget one special meeting with him. Fredericks, for whom - with whom he had worked, with whom Milles had worked, introduced us to Carl Milles, and it was in a funny way because back in New Hampshire before he had come to Michigan, Marshall had played one night with us at a ouiji board, and he was enchanted with that thing, thought it was great fun. When we got to Michigan, he said, "I told Milles about the ouiji board." Carl Milles was a spiritualist and sort of an occultist. And he said, "He wants to see it, wants to see you and the ouiji board." I said, "For Pete's sake, Marshall, this is only a game. This is fun. What do you think?" He said, "Oh, he's very serious about it."

So we took the ouiji board and went to Carl's house. We were introduced formally and taken through the house where he had his fantastic collection.

MR. BROWN: Of what?

MR. MERRITT: Well, his -

MR. BROWN: Of his work?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, his sculptures, fragments, sweet fragments, all beautifully installed on tall pedestals, with special spotlights, in a very serene atmosphere. And in the corner of this room was a card table which he had set up for the ouiji board. We sat for an hour with him and his companion, Veda Klein (ph), and we attempted to reach his ancestors, his departed family, through the ouiji board contacts. We didn't know what to make of him, exactly. Marshall was there and everything was very solemn and serious. Carl was trying to talk to his departed sister. We just went through the experience over the course of the evening. You know, that was the main reason for our being there. And finally he thanked us very much and we departed.

MR. BROWN: Was that his behavior when you would meet him at school, too? Would he be rather abstracted or distracted?

MR. MERRITT: No. I don't remember Carl as having much humor, exactly, but he had lots of enthusiasm and lots of imagination concerning his work. He was always delighted to relate the sources of the mythical - the mythology sources of his work and tell you where he was going with the project and how it came about. And I never saw him in action as a teacher. We knew Pete Schiwetz, who was his latest protege, his assistant, Berthold Schiwetz. He was a young guy from Texas, about as Texas as you can imagine. They seemed like strange bedfellows, but Pete gladly followed through with Carl to the end, even to the point of getting a Rome fellowship, on Carl's recommendation, and writing a definitive catalogue or at least a memorial catalogue of some of the Milles' work, and so on. So Tex was easy to contact, and we knew Milles mostly through Tex.

MR. BROWN: You described Milles earlier as sort of a minor deity around there. Does that mean that the school's expectations of him were different? Was he sort of like an artist in residence, a prestigious figure that was -

MR. MERRITT: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: - to lend prestige to the school.

MR. MERRITT: That is something like it, yeah. He was there in residence and there as an artist accomplishing his work, his commissioned work. I think it was felt, oh, the same kind of respect and regard that was directed to Eliel Saarinen, who was the president of the Academy at the time but also involved with his architectural practice. It was a good example of that kind of realistic - of contact with the realistic development of each person's profession and work. They were artists at work, and people there were privileged to know them in that association, whereas Maija Grotell, the pottery teacher, was such a modest, unassuming, devoted technician in her specialty that she was a real teacher. She was generous and was very - [inaudible word] - from the time she gave to the students, the information, transfer of knowledge. I think it was a quite different kind of -

MR. BROWN: Did you work with her at all?

MR. MERRITT: No, no.

MR. BROWN: But you had some awareness of what she was doing.

MR. MERRITT: Well, yeah, I only knew Maija on occasion, yes.

MR. BROWN: She was rather reclusive, wasn't she?

MR. MERRITT: Yes, she was. She was very solitary, very modest, and yet she was a fine ceramist and made a great success of that while in this country.

MR. BROWN: Do you assess her one of the more influential potters of that time?

MR. MERRITT: Right. Yeah. Yeah. The post-war American pottery scene was influenced considerably by Maija Grotell.

MR. BROWN: In what way, would you say?

MR. MERRITT: Well, by the example of her art, her particular - her own work, which was strong in character, original, unique in its design, rich in particularly its glaze, or its glaze techniques and glaze application, glaze technology. She was a forerunner in, at that time, all the national exhibition programs in ceramics, a prize winner. But beyond that, the very special attachment that she made with the student group and individuals in the student group with the kind of loving relationship that existed. She made a great place for herself in the hearts of her students. Yeah, I think she will, yeah - I know she will be long remembered.

MR. BROWN: On the other hand, Eliel Saarinen wasn't teaching regularly. Why was it? Because he had administrative duties, is that correct? [inaudible]

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Eero was teaching at the time.

MR. BROWN: What was he like as a teacher?

MR. MERRITT: He was a good teacher, I think. I guess, I - Not having worked with him, I'm not sure, but we know through the accounts of people and other students. Ted Buterosky [ph] was an associate in the department. He was a designer, so-called. Eero was the instructor in architecture and architectural theory. He was outgoing and strong and confident and knowledgeable, yeah, one - [inaudible] - representatives in contemporary architecture a la Scandinavia.

MR. BROWN: Eliel was quite different from his son?

MR. MERRITT: Oh, I guess, yes. Again, I didn't know Eliel, only through one or two meetings, whereas I had social contact with Eero over the time we were there and for the next five years we knew Eero and knew Lilly, his wife at that time, were, you know, very much attracted to both of them, liked Eero considerably. I think he had a respect for what we were doing, also. At the end of my time at Michigan four years later, Eero was urgent that I try to remain there and attempted to make some overtures on my behalf in a couple of situations, but by that time we'd made contact with Maine and decided that we were going back anyway. But I remember Eero with great respect and affection.

MR. BROWN: He, you said, respected your work, which was working mainly with the younger students, wasn't it?

MR. MERRITT: Well, well no. That reference was to my later work at the Art Institute in Flint, where I was designing - I was both administrator and technician. I organized and designed all the exhibition programs at the place.

MR. BROWN: What was the Art Institute at Flint? What was it, what was it like?

MR. MERRITT: It was a development out of some attempt in this industrial town by a few of the civic leaders to, I suppose, lay on some culture in the scene there. It probably started out as an art association, an art club, and then gained momentum and was organized officially as Flint Institute of Arts, which indicated that it was a community art center, grew up like topsy, first, I think, in some expedient accommodation, and then "Spen" Bishop, R. Spencer Bishop, who was the husband - [inaudible] - sponsor at Haystack, Mary Bishop acquired an old church structure for the institute as its locale, its headquarters.

The old building was redesigned - that was before my time, but redesigned as a gallery situation and an activities site for a class program in drawing, painting, sculpture, all the crafts. Dick Freeman, whom I succeeded, Richard B. Freeman was director of the place as I was coming up from Cranbrook to teach on Friday afternoons. I went there to teach and taught a life-drawing section on Friday, painting and drawing section. And Dick Freeman had come - well, where? In fall, I guess - I've forgotten his previous assignment. Oh, he was in Cincinnati, I think, the museum there, before he came to Flint.

MR. BROWN: I see. He was an academic, trained museum person.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, right. Right, he had worked with Reese Adams - or, oh, what's the man's name?

MR. BROWN: Phil Adams? Philip?

MR. MERRITT: Philip Adams at Cincinnati, right. And I'm trying to remember who he succeeded. But this would be listed in the progress of the Art Institute in its movement, in its beginning.

MR. BROWN: But when you got there, they were still really - the teaching program was just getting underway.

MR. MERRITT: Well, it had been probably established for four or five years' worth. Dick had been there three at that time, and there were studios for each of these things, you know, rather adequate studios, with kilns, firing, all of that. A kind of miniature Cranbrook scene. And they had their eye on that scene, too, being that close to the situation, and using it as an example, if not an ideal.

And Dick then was administrator. He had far more training and experience as a museum administrator than I, and he got a call from San Francisco, from Grace Morley, I think went there as assistant to her, and locally developed, was at Cranbrook, at Flint. And I was proposed as the successor to Dick Freeman. And, you know, it's a new kind of opportunity. I remember my couple years experience at running a little gallery at Abbott Academy, the John Esther Art Gallery, which I enjoyed very much. I had teaching experience - that is, experience in certain aspects of art education, studio teaching, so it tied in a little bit. But I was far from qualified as a, you know, administrator, a museum institute administrator, and had some personal misgivings about it, but was also attracted to the opportunity and so I accepted.

MR. BROWN: Would you be given some guidance when you got there, or -

MR. MERRITT: No. No. Came in pretty cold.

MR. BROWN: - was the attraction the free rein you might have?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Came in pretty cold. There was a board of trustees overseeing the situation. There were staff people whom I met in the teaching, the other leaders of the other studio sections whom I met, and there was a local community professional arts organization which I had joined for that year that I was at Cranbrook, because I was a part-timer at Cranbrook and invited to join the Flint artist market group. So we had made contact with the community, at least, and liked the people, thought it would be an interesting new adventure, and put it to them that if they were game, we were.

So, after the Cranbrook year sabbatical was over, we picked up from New Hampshire and moved to Flint.

MR. BROWN: When was this? What year?

MR. MERRITT: This was 1947.

MR. BROWN: So you hadn't really been at Cranbrook very long before you were in Flint.

MR. MERRITT: No, one year. That's right. Just on that stand-in. And the New Hampshire job at Colby was still available to me. I might have returned there, but again, by this time we had discovered the Midwest. I liked the quality of energy that prevailed there, thought that things were happening, and it gave much more challenge for me than there was back in New England at that point. In fact, during the Cranbrook year I probably sold three or four paintings, which was encouraging. I had found some exhibiting opportunity in Detroit and at Cranbrook and at Flint, had made contact with the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters. So it seemed pretty "up and doing" to us country folk from New England.

MR. BROWN: Did you really feel like country folk, after all you -

MR. MERRITT: Well, until we would talk with people there who referred with a kind of reverence - [inaudible] - "back East."

MR. BROWN: In the Cranbrook context you might have felt that, I suppose, "country folk."

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, yeah, although they, at least, were interested enough to, you know, explore with you your own attitude, your own reasons for your art expression and development. It was the beginning of an era. I can remember, if you can imagine it, Robert, sitting on the floor for the first time with people, sitting on pillows on the floor, of all things.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Unheard of.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yeah. This was something new. And talking about life. I can remember Lilly Saarinen asking what I thought about life. Well, merciful heavens! So we were, we were coming into a new experience. The Flint situation was real, real rough and ready. That was an industrial town, which was an entirely new encounter for us also as suburban/rural New Englanders. You know, the dynasty of General Motors and all of that razzmatazz. We got to know the president of GM, Rick Curtis, were invited to cocktail parties with that element. And as we came into the Art Institute scene as, you know, administrator there, we found that we were a kind of automatic ticket to the social world of this busy town, which was a fascinating human adventure.

So, all told, it was a pretty heady thing. We knew all the while that Flint was just up the line from Cranbrook. It was, for them, in the provinces. But in the meantime, we had our association at Cranbrook and used it a good

deal as an important kind of relationship with the Flint situation, occasionally borrowed materials from Cranbrook, occasionally borrowed staff from Cranbrook. We took teachers. I assigned teachers from Cranbrook, graduate people from Cranbrook as teachers in ceramics and in weaving. So we had a kind of active interchange there with Cranbrook, and then with Detroit. We met Bill Wolfendon [sp], of course, as a result of the Michigan museum circuit organization, which, to which I belonged at the time. We rotated art, meeting places from Detroit to Cranbrook, from Ann Arbor, to Lansing. It was, that was a very interesting development of things.

MR. BROWN: That was what, to exchange ideas, or more substantial things, as well?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah, just talk of problems, general problems, to promote circuit exhibition potential, to review educational details, institutional educational matters. Gene Slusser [ph] at Ann Arbor, and at Lansing - oh, dear, I've forgotten the person there. But I suppose we had quarterly meetings, anyway, maybe monthly meetings. But we started talking about Eero's interest in my remaining in Michigan. He was interested in the success that I was having with the exhibition program in Flint.

MR. BROWN: Which consisted of what?

MR. MERRITT: Well, which consisted of planning shows, from science-based to art to sociology. In other words, although it was an art institute, we attempted to get on this current of designing and environmental awareness there and I'm referring to shows like an automobile design historical survey show to which we would put in a great deal of effort; a show on furs, if you please. A show -

MR. BROWN: You mean fine furs, or on animals and finished products?

MR. MERRITT: The history of fur trade, application of furs, and design in fur.

MR. BROWN: He thought - Eero Saarinen thought this was a very good thing, huh?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. The way we handled it, the way we installed the material, I think, appealed to him. We - I enjoyed very much that part of the work, designing the presentations. We did an interesting thing with the automobile show by moving automobiles into the place, one historic car and a couple of foreign automobiles. This was just almost concurrent with the Museum of Modern Art automobile design survey. That was probably 1949 or something. And they had given a bad look at American design. At that time, Buick was coming out with the portals in the front fender, for example. As a result of the - [inaudible] - of emphasis, I had a hard time with General Motors to get cooperation because they were a little offended by the bad press. And I learned also that there was a terrific kind of secret, back-room involvement in the design hierarchy there, and any leaks concerning design were very worrisome to the people.

But in any case, we put a lot of time and effort into installing a kind of exposition as well as an exhibition. Eero was consulted on that show and helped me. I designed for Cranbrook a show at the time relating to a mural which Bud West had done for one of the banks in Detroit from Flint. We had assigned our local photo guild to document the process in this mural from the beginning over a period of a year or so. We photographed all the preparations and the actual execution of the mural, and they did an expert montage there of photos into big blow-ups. And then we borrowed the cartoons, the original cartoons, and we erected a kind of prospective system which would attempt to produce the effect of the location of the mural at the bank at our institute. So, projects like that, Eero was interested in seeing how it was designed, as a design venture.

MR. BROWN: And you were doing most of this designing.

MR. MERRITT: Right. Right. Put a lot of time into it, yeah.

MR. BROWN: This was something you had really not done much of before, isn't it?

MR. MERRITT: Well, only a little bit, at Abbott. But that was rather straightforward installation of paintings, in relation, but this was more along the line of design techniques.

MR. BROWN: It seems this was a pretty fertile time for you, wasn't it?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You were learning new things, expanding your repertory, so to speak.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. Meantime, you know, I had the responsibility of managing the place, keeping the school going, building enrollment of the classes, and then also scheduling painting exhibitions, both the national and regional and local.

MR. BROWN: You could get national exhibitions to Flint?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. We would buy, if we could afford it, some circuit material. For example, we brought Joe Albers there. We brought Edward Jacobson there, had some show of him - [unintelligible] -, Container Corporation. We borrowed material from the Chicago Art Institute on special theme exhibitions.

MR. BROWN: This was done fairly easily in those days, wasn't it?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I guess so. I can remember Dan Rich [sp] chewing me out for the wrong packing of one of his Gainsboroughs.

MR. BROWN: Today these are quite priceless things that were lent.

MR. MERRITT: That's right. In any case, it was a very active and well-used community program.

MR. BROWN: How deep into the community would that extend?

MR. MERRITT: It extended to the entire community.

MR. BROWN: Most of these people in the community were factory workers, weren't they?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: It extended to them as well?

MR. MERRITT: You bet. In fact, right here - which I'll show you - because I took this to Wisconsin a couple weeks ago, knowing that some representatives of industries would be at a meeting there - is a complimentary union talk of UAW-CIO.

MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm, which was 1951.

MR. MERRITT: [Inaudible] - 1951, in respect for the gratefulness for the work that we're doing with union kids, children of union families in our Saturday children's classes at the Flint Institute of Art. It was a mob scene every Saturday.

MR. BROWN: What sort of things were you doing for them?

MR. MERRITT: Well, you know, we had clay classes and drawing and painting classes and gallery tools.

MR. BROWN: But the union men themselves thought this was a very good thing.

MR. MERRITT: Oh, yes. And the unions were touched for some support, annual support. This was important, you see. We had the Macy [sp] spark plug people, GM people.

MR. BROWN: Well the unions were looking for self-improvement for their members, too?

MR. MERRITT: Right. Right. Yeah. And we carried union representation on the board. Along with the assignment at the institute, I was automatic art supervisor for the public schools in Flint, for the first couple years anyway, and that brought me in touch with that element of the community and my work and association had great variety. I can remember, for example, in the morning trying to walk across the busy main street carrying a cloud - [tape ends midsentence].

[END TAPE 2, SIDE B.]

[NOTE: These last two sentences above are a repeat of what was recorded at the very beginning of this Tape 2. It appears that the first 13 paragraphs on this Tape 2 should be placed right here following the end of this tape, up through the indication of one-minute of "blank" time on the tape.

All the material following that "blank" space appears to be from earlier in the interview, when the artist was discussing his time at Cranbrook before moving to Haystack. At the end of this Tape 2, Mr. Merritt is just beginning to talk about his time at Haystack.]

MR. MERRITT: [Begins midsentence] - automatic art supervisor for the public schools of Flint, for the first couple of years anyway. And that brought me in touch with that element of the community.

And my work and association had great variety. I can remember, for example, in the morning trying to walk across the busy main street carrying a cloud. That is a C-L-O-U-D, cloud, which we had produced at the then-segregated black school, elementary school, for some kind of pageantry. It had to be transported from one side of the street to the other, a big, wire armature for a papier-mâché cloud. And working with these youngsters on that in the morning, and then at night going to dinner at C.S. Mott's.

MR. BROWN: Oh, the great GM stockholder?

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah. Right. And it was a rough-and-ready encounter with the grassroots element. I used to have to go out in the neighboring towns to talk about the Institute and talk about art. It was a kind of field-work thing, which was very interesting.

MR. BROWN: But among the workers, you didn't find a hostility, then, you found an interest in the workshops?

MR. MERRITT: Well, we had a delicate management-labor interval there. Not long before I had arrived there, they had had their big strike, the big GM strike. There was a great deal of bitterness still prevailing, and many of our board people, of course, as management people, were very sensitive to that situation. And on our staff at the time were Steve Dimitroff and Lucille Bloch - not Lucille, the musician maybe, you know - oh, good heaven - Lucienne Bloch.

MR. BROWN: Lucienne Bloch.

MR. MERRITT: They were the two young guys who had worked with [Diego] Rivera on the Rockefeller Center murals. They were radicals. They were outspoken in the community. And they were on our institute staff, and there were times when it was a very pointed kind of awareness that was an element in our midst. And I had to take a position from time to time. I defended them as my professional staff, my very important creative motivators, while at the same time I knew that they were making it tough for me. But, oh, they were prominent in my early experience there.

MR. BROWN: And yet on your board, you also had union people.

MR. MERRITT: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Would they have sided more with the radicals?

MR. MERRITT: Well, I would suppose if there was any climax or crisis of decision there. But in any case, it was what we thought was a balanced - well, at least a token representation.

MR. BROWN: I see.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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