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Oral history interview with Stanley H. Witmeyer, 1985 June 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Stanley Herbert Witmeyer on June 22, 1985. The interview took place in Rochester, New York, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: —1985. Interview with Stanley Witmeyer, Bob Brown, the interviewer.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —are just talking about—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: When I—when I was out—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what led to your career?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I'm one of eight children. My father was a minister.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was in Pennsylvania?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And this was in Pennsylvania. I was born in Palmyra, Pennsylvania, on February 14, Valentine's Day, in 1913.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Palmyra was in the western part of the state?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: That's near Harrisburg, five miles from Hershey. Okay. I left there at the age of nine, and we came to Rochester when my father had a new—um, a new venture here in town and more or less stayed most my life. But I uh—I've talked with my uncles and I've talked with my cousins to try to find out whether there was anything that I did in Pennsylvania up to the age nine that I didn't know about. Because so many things you forget, and so many things are natural and kind of routine. And my uncle told me that from a very early stage, I was always drawing with coal. Now, you know they heated homes with coal in those days. We didn't have—we had coal-oil lamp on the table to do our homework. We had no electricity. So, anything that I could put my hands on seemingly intrigued me. And he recalls I used to—my mother used to get mad about it, he told me, because I'd scribble all over the sidewalks and make drawings and then no one was there take it off, and people, she thought, would complain. By the time I got into the fourth grade, I—uh, I had a teacher who recommended that I follow through as much as a could with artistic pursuits. Now that meant nothing to me because I was—I was a normal kid and interested in sports and in music because my family was a musical family. [00:02:08] And that didn't occupy all of my time by any means, but—and my interest even. But then she in the fourth grade said that she thought I should pursue art and, in fact, was a great influence uh—by the time I got the sixth grade, she was a great influence to me. When I entered junior high school, she knew of an art teacher at this particular junior high school, and she said, "Now, I think you ought to see that man, and I think you ought to take art." Fortunately, they had a pretty good program.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was here in Rochester?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah, it was at Jefferson Junior High School. I went to Number 7 School, which is down on the Dewey Avenue section of the city. So I did. I pursued art with a fellow by the name of Mr. Maxwell, and I enjoyed it. I loved it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did they have you—set you to doing?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, they had us drawing, and they had us making more posters than maybe we should have, which was typical. And any time we had a campaign in Rochester, we were making posters for safety campaigns [laughs] and things of that kind. But we did some drawing, and we did some homework that kind of instilled in me the discipline of—the necessity of doing more than just, uh, doing it on a weekend or in the class that you happen to be attending. And I—I then went into building small, miniature stages, and I created kind of a film that would slide [laughs] through a screen in sequence. I'd build these out of boxes, and I would have peek holes for the [laughs] neighborhood kids to look in. I had a friend at that time who was interested in

motion pictures, and he used to rent pictures and had a little theater in his garage. [00:04:07] And then we started in the—making scenery for puppets and for neighborhood drama events on our own. And it seemed to me in looking back, that I was fortunate in the sense that I was allowed to do this, and I had no—no particular duties running errands or doing certain home chores for some reason. And maybe that would've been a good idea if had, but I had a lot of time to become and remain a kid.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your family was, uh, indulgent of your interest in art?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes, and I think so, although because—well, they never talked about it because at that time, there weren't too many people that I knew who were artists until I got into about the high school level. My dad, however, never said anything to discourage me, and my mother neither. Neither did they provide any materials—in those days, we had no money, and we'd take scrap materials of any kind and create things with it. Well, simultaneously while I was interested in this pursuit of art, I also was interested in athletics. And I was trackman, so to speak, and was quite successful in junior high school with track events, and won some junior high school letters for it. And about the time I was through junior high, our art teacher in the—in the junior high school, Mr. Maxwell said, "I'm going to take you on some tours of the high schools of Rochester because, you people are going to leave the junior high. You're going to have to then go to one of the high schools in the 10th grade." [00:06:01] He took us to a school called Tech High. It's Edison Tech, which is a vocational type of a school. I lived in the area of West High School and normally would've gone to West High. And I was so fascinated with what I saw at this Edison Tech in the art department and discovered the teacher was a graduate of the local art school, which at that time, I never even knew about. I knew the Memorial Art Gallery. My father used to take me to the museum and the gallery. Yes, he did. He took us to concerts and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you liked the art gallery, the museum?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, yes, and I sang. I sang boys soprano until I was 16 years old in the boys' choir at one of the churches in town, so I was active in, you might call, the arts in the sense of music and exposure to the visual arts. Deeply instilled in a religious background, very disciplined in that as you might expect. Well, I liked Tech High so well, and I liked the teacher and what he said, I enrolled at Tech High School. Well, the kids in the neighborhood wondered why I was going all the way over on the other side of the city to a school when I had one at West High and couldn’t understand it—could not understand this. Well, I had to convince them that the program seemed to suit me, and it did. It was an all-boys high school, no girls. I took 10th, 11th, and 12th grade of all the art I could get, which was almost a half a day every day, five days a week. Well, like a lot of students who are early in their development of art, there comes the time when you want to make a little money, so I took up sign painting. And I've met in my professional life many, many accomplished artists and teachers of art who also started by painting signs. [00:08:03] So I used to go door-to-door to restaurants and grocery stores, and I painted signs, and I made my spending money in high school that way. Now in the meantime, I played basketball, and I played a lot of basketball. And between art and basketball, it really dominated my life. So much so that uh—I got a little concerned about the junior year about my, uh—my other responsibilities and academic pursuits. And wasn't spending enough time in that. Well, it was getting pretty late and for some—for some sloppy habits some people develop in early education, I had difficulty in trying to make up for some of them without any tutors, okay. Now because of my basketball, I got a scholarship to Syracuse University, but where I went to high school, we had no foreign language, and Syracuse, I think, they probably still required—they require a foreign language for every entering student. Because I had a full tuition scholarship for my basketball, they said, "We're going to put you into the agricultural college," which was at Syracuse at that time. It's no longer existing. And because they do not require a foreign language, you can play freshman basketball and make up your foreign language and then in the second year, you can enter the art school. I had clear admission to the art school, and I had been screened and all of that, and I said, "Well, gee, that'll take me five years." I said—I just wasn't interested in that. And so, I remember this high school art teacher going to a local school—by that time, I knew there was a Mechanics Institute, and I had been there once when I was a senior in high school on a tour. [00:10:03] So I enrolled at Mechanics Institute—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which is now?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Which is now the Rochester Institute of Technology [RIT]. And I stayed there for their entire program.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, how long was that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Three years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Three years?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh that—in those days—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can we go back just a moment there?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The high school curriculum, can you describe that a bit? What was that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: It was a very, very excellent fundamental program. We had—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sophomore year, what would you start with?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: We started with drawing and homework, and drawing every week.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What? Drawing from nature or?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Nature and still life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Still life?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah. Nature and still life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Indeed.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And in charcoal much of the—charcoal and soft pencil, that's about it, oh, a pen and ink—in those three media, yeah. Never—we never painted—uh, we never painted very much. We used to—we had a design and color experience for—I think during my junior year, and we, again, painted a lot of posters [laughs], which was prevalent.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You'd do that right in the class?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes, right in the class, and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were your teachers—uh, had they graduated from art schools or?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: My teacher in high school was a graduate of what is now RIT, so he had a professional background. And this kind of a school until this day even, the kind of a teacher they have at Tech High today would—is a graduate of RIT's professional program. And the licensing of teachers in vocational schools is not the same as for art teachers who are in the public school system. And most of those people who were in the vocational field teaching take special examinations. And the reason I know that is I wrote these exams for the state for about three years. And it's—the requirements are somewhat different. [00:12:00] They expect at the end of four years that some of these boys might get into an apprenticeship kind of an experience and maybe worked their way up by going to evening school, and so forth, they might become quite successful. That's a tough row to hoe, but that was one of their—that's one of their hopes that some of these kids coming out of vocational schools might have enough to—in the mechanics and in electricity and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did you intend to do? Uh, did you intend to?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I had no idea. I never worried about that, and I never even thought of that until I became a senior in art school. And I think there's a blessing to that, very much so a blessing because you're keeping open, you're finding what talents, what directions you're seeking, you're finding, you're exploring, you're making mistakes—to be sure—lots of people would disagree that this would be a method that you ought to instill because most programs today in higher education, that is career programs are pretty well settled in the specialized courses to meet the demands of the society, you know? Well, I went to—after I went to RIT, I graduated. I played basketball or I was captain of the team. It was Depression, 1936. The first job I got was with the Rochester Telephone Company working for a firm, L.M. Berry Company, that's still in existence who's responsible for all the advertising in the Yellow Pages. And in those days for some reason, their printing plant or the printing plant that worked for them was located in Bradford, Pennsylvania. And another chap and I went to Bradford and after six weeks, we finished the job. [Laughs.] [00:14:06] And I just got back to Rochester, and I had a call from Eastman Kodak Company, and I said, "Oh, this will be great." You know, I had some ideas that Kodak would be a good place to be, and I found that they were not interested in art. They were interested in my athletic experience, so they hired me to play basketball for Eastman Kodak Company.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well what—did it have a team, a professional—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: They had a professional team, and we used to play professional clubs. And I stayed there for—I played half a winter until the early March, and I quit, and I went to Buffalo State College. And the reason I went to Buffalo State is I felt that—I did not have a degree. I had a certificate, and I thought perhaps—

ROBERT F. BROWN: From RI—from Mechanics Institute—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you had that? Yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: First, yeah, Pratt Institute and Philadelphia Museum School, and all of those schools and Albright were all three-year professional programs—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you got—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —certificates.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —certificates? Yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: So I went to Buffalo, and I took all of the academic work for art teaching. I had all the art, but I didn't have the academic—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you enjoy that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I enjoyed it very much. Uh, I had a good time at Buffalo. I played basketball there, and I was captain of that basketball team [laughs]. But I also did a lot of artwork in Buffalo freelancing, which was—which really helped a great deal because I had no support from home. My father—my father just couldn't do it, so I was on my own, and I had two brothers who did much the same thing, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: At RIT, your art curriculum had been—what—gearing you to be a painter—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or to be a teacher or?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Advertising design, and it was called advertising and illustration. [00:16:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So it was an applied art program?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes, but I took painting for three years and drawing and that was all required.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that taught fairly conservatively or do you recall—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, oh yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were some of the teachers that you—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in painting?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Excellent people. Looking back in retrospect, loyal, dedicated, underpaid, excellent people. Clifford Ulp was the director—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How do you—could you spell his name?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: U-L-P. Clifford Ulp. A man who studied at Mechanics Institute and went on and studied at The Art Students League in New York. Alling Clements, one of the finest teachers any young student would want.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did she teach?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And he taught—Alling, A-L-L-I-N-G, Alling Clements taught freehand drawing, life drawing, and painting. In those days, it was a common thing for teachers in art schools to teach one, two, three, or even four courses. Today that's changed somewhat. I had a fellow by the name of Charles Horn, uh—Parsons School of Design, studied in Paris, taught design and painting, a fine man. A fellow by the name of Milton Bond, B-O-N-D, taught painting in color. He was a fellow who—who used to work with the Munsell color system, which is now at RIT. Uh—all—and John Wenrich one of the great architectural renderers in the country, a fellow who worked on Radio City in New York. Uh—the—and a fellow by the name of Mattson who used to teach, uh, pottery. Those were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mattson?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Those people are all gone and wonderful people, just wonderful people but highly, highly disciplined, a disciplined curriculum, no electives. [00:18:05] Every subject was prescribed for you. No life drawing in the freshman year because the director thought that that was exposing something for freshmen that they shouldn't be exposed to until the—until their second year. Mostly cast drawing from Greek cast.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], which the school had a great many—a number of at that time?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Tremendous number.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I enjoyed everything. I—I—I really did. I enjoyed—I enjoyed. It got little monotonous at times in terms of spending, say, two or three days on a cast with no other—no expressive things of any kind. Mostly it's out there, and you put it on paper, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much, and I had a good time in art school, no question about that. Uh, after I went to Buffalo State, I took a public school job in a town called Cuba, New York, which is about 70 miles south of Buffalo. And you must understand now it's 1939. There's a little anecdote here that I think I'll mention. It has nothing to with art, but it has to do with my athletics. When I was playing for Eastman Kodak, we played professional ball in Buffalo against the Buffalo Bisons. And in the front row on that Sunday night was the entire team of Niagara University. Uh, you remember I—about two or three months later, I was enrolled at Buffalo playing college ball, and there was quite a stir in the Buffalo papers about that. [Laughs.] And subsequently, I played two years of pro ball, one year for Buffalo and one year for Rochester Seagrams, which became the Royals in the National Basketball League. [00:20:08] But I went to Cuba, New York, and I became an art supervisor in a brand-new, centralized school. Found it exciting because the entire school was filled with young, progressive-minded people. And the town was small, and you got to know everyone, and so you had some control and even getting some artistic effects in the town, which would come through the students. And it worked out very well. I stayed there for four years and was responsible for art and taught art, kindergarten through high school for years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow, that was a big task—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Now, we're—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —wasn't it?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And I painted all the time. I—oh, I had been—

ROBERT F. BROWN: By then you were painting, yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, I had been exhibiting in Rochester and Buffalo and Olean. And I sold some work, which is in a private—which is in private collections. But I did quite a bit of painting and watercolor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were they mainly, landscapes?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, yeah, landscapes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You'd go out?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, I did everything on the spot. I wouldn't have thought of painting in the studio in those days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. Well now, you won—uh, at RIT, you own a scholarship to the Charles Woodbury school. Did you go to that back in?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was in Ogunquit, Maine, I suppose?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: That's exactly right. And uh, several students were selected by the director of the school for a free tuition experience up on the coast for a week. We lived in a tent, and we cooked our own meals [laughs]. The fellow that I went with—yeah, we went up there. It was for a week only. Charles Woodbury was the great marine painter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How was he as a teacher?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Excellent guy, excellent.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he fair—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: He wrote a book, and, oh, this man was well-respected. Most of the faculty at RIT at one time or another spent a number of summers with this man up on the coast. [00:22:06] Clifford Ulp particularly, the director, spent most of his vacation, which is only about two weeks every summer, and rented a cottage and took his family up there. Yeah. Charles Woodbury, oh, he was well-regarded in those days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. He's very well known then?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he—as a teacher was he uh?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I thought he was wonderful.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would he come around there—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, he would—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —correct or—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —[cross talk]?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: He would be on top of you almost all the time. The class was small. We only had about—I don't think there were more than 10 or 12 people, and we were the youngest, I mean we were students practically, and the rest were polished people, so we thought. But he—uh, he would get you—one of the things that Charles Woodbury—I discovered that made me a little restless—is I came out of an art school that was, remember, disciplined. Uh, we had no experience and never discussed, uh, people like van Gogh and Cezanne. In our history of art, which was excellent from the historical point of view, they never, never really got into the period of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What, the post?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: They got—they were—absolutely and Charles Woodbury, while he was a traditional painter he, like Robert Hendri, got you to see the quality of what paint will do so that you developed a little more of not the duplicating kind of thing that comes from a traditional program. Uh, we started having respect for the brush and the paint and got a little acquainted with the brush will do certain things, don't fight it, and make it do something else. [00:24:05] And Charles Woodbury opened our eyes—at least my eyes—to that there's another way of looking at things and there's another way of doing things. And that opened up a whole new horizon from the tight kind of English, traditional method of painting watercolors, which was prevalent in those days. And out of that, you became more spontaneous and more reactive in your feelings about what you're doing, even to the place where you dared move a tree or eliminated the tree. And well, not that this was something that was taught, it was the kind of a discipline and the kind a movement that came from everything that's out there, you're going to draw like the still life and the plaster cast and the figure—the figure that was frozen. Now, technically in those days, art schools were superb technically. They really were, and technique, of course, predominated the scene rather than what you were saying. And then we had that change, you know, where it was more important what you say than the way in which you say it, for the way in which you say, it's technique and that—you'll get—you'll catch up with that, you know? Well, that's—that was kind of a trend as you well know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And well, after—about 1943, my wife and I had a child. I got married in 1940 to a high school sweetheart who I had gone with for 10 years. And I decided I would go to graduate school now, and I got a scholarship at Syracuse University for my tuition. And while the war was on, I gambled, and I finished one semester at Syracuse successfully and interestingly, and a lot of hard work, and loved it, and then I was drafted into the army, engineers. [00:26:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were going on to art school—what—so you could secure a position later? Is that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, the reason I was getting a master's degree, as you know this—the certification in New York State was that you had to—you had to get 30 hours above your undergraduate degree or a master's degree within a 10-year period. Well, I had had some contacts with colleges and friends who were in colleges, not only RIT, but Buffalo State and then it ventured on to more. I discovered that maybe it would be a fine idea to get that master's and get it over with and then I would be—I could concentrate a little more on my career.

And I could move up if that was my desire, which was not my desire at that time. I was very happy in Cuba, very, very happy, and had a relaxed life and an interesting life with the community. Well, after being drafted at Syracuse at the end of the first semester, I went into the engineers, I became—eventually in the in the army, I was with the 30th Battalion, a mapping battalion that is. So we mapped the entire campaign in the Pacific. When the war ended—our maps were coming off our presses when the bomb was dropped for—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And we knew the day—oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is related to your talents and training then doing mapping?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, I wanted to get into camouflage, and by the time I got to Camp Upton on Long Island, they pulled my card out of circulation, and I played basketball for them for three months [laughs] and because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were a man for that—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —because I played—well, I'll tell you what I did. I painted three murals. I painted. I made portraits sketches of these men who would come in for three days and then they were shipped out. [00:28:03] I would make about seven of these portraits a night, and that's the only way I could get any money because my card, being pulled out of the computer system or whatever they had, that sent men on to their destination, I wasn't even—they [laughs] didn't know I existed because my card was not in the files. And I was not on payroll.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. That was one—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: So, I'd make a—yeah, I made a lot. And then these men I—these men would send these home to their wives or sweethearts, these sketches, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you enjoy the army by and large or was it a—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, I was lucky.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —annoying [cross talk]?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Let me say—I'd tell you what was annoying was the lack of creativity of course in that—there was a system that the army used, because I became a first sergeant of personnel for the battalion, and I was in charge of all of the personnel and headquarters in Hawaii, and we mapped—we mapped the entire campaign. We had 900 men, printing presses and all in a 32-million underground plant, underground. We worked there. We worked there in three different shifts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these were to provide maps for all of the entire—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: The maps for the invasions of the islands and for the mainland, yes, yes indeed. That was the, that was their—this battalion actually came from Africa, and I was with a platoon, a field platoon that joined up with them in Hawaii. And because we were not needed, thank goodness, to go out on some of the invasions as a platoon, we were absorbed by the battalion. And I became then the first sergeant of the battalion because I was the first sergeant of the platoon, administrative work only. Well, I'll tell you, I made about 35 watercolors in two years and sold more work in Hawaii in those two years than I ever sold in America. [00:30:00] I was in—uh, I've been in the Honolulu Academy of Fine Arts exhibiting. I've been in the—another gallery there. My experience—and I—very active in the museum, the gallery there, a charming place. I had my own Jeep, and I was with a group of painters and illustrators that were working for the *Saturday Evening Post* and all the big magazines.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you got to know quite a few professionals?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I wrote article—I wrote an article for the *Design* magazine on the entire group while we were over there with reproductions of their paintings and all. It was about as fine an experience as you could wish for in the sense that we were in Hawaii all the time. [Laughs.] And other than the fact that I was—you get a little tired of that after a while, I would never complain. I would—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you—were there some fairly well-known illustrators and painters?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Harry Kane. Harry Kane was a brilliant illustrator for the *Saturday Evening Post*. You know, I ought to have that article here because I can name all of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You wrote that for—what—*Design* magazine?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: *Design* magazine, Felix Payne [ph] was the editor. I don't know whether you ever heard of him or not. It was published in Columbus, *Design* magazine's still on the market, and it's published each month. I wrote that article from Hawaii and had to have it censored, you know, all the photographs censored because we had a very strict rules on—I got chased many times in Hawaii from the MPs across water or water dikes and everything else. I was down painting around Pearl Harbor one day—and I knew I wasn't supposed to be in there because the big ships were in there, and I had the guns and all. [Laughs.] And we weren't—we were off base. [00:31:59] But we—somehow or other, we knew how to get in and get out without getting caught, but that was no real big issue, really.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You studied with, uh, you mentioned there was a man named Ben Norris at the—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Ben Norris to me—I don't know whether he's still alive. Ben Norris, to me, was one of the most inspirational watercolorist that I had ever met. His work was typical Hawaii with the mist and all, and I just was thrilled with it. And he was a good teacher, and we did on—we did this on another friend and I, we—after the war was over, we enrolled in the university and we were down there—let's see, one, two—two nights a week and I think most of Saturday. But most of the Saturday because we wanted to be there all day. Oh for—we were there for a half a year I think, yeah, a semester. That was a great experience, and I almost took a position—I almost stayed in Hawaii. I was offered a couple of opportunities, but I was married, and I had not seen my wife a number of years and child, and that kind of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Now when I came back from the army, I came back just in time to re-enroll in Syracuse University to finish my last semester, which I received an MFA there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —in design.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In design.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who were your—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, I had—and I took—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —teachers there?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Uh, [Frederic Montague] Monty Charman.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was English-born, isn't he? He's still alive?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah?

ROBERT F. BROWN: He's an English-born?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes, he was, and he was actually a textile designer. When he came to the United States, he was a textile designer in New York City, and I almost got into that field.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, sure. I really did a lot of work in textile design with him. Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But formerly, you'd been doing rather expressive things with—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —watercolors.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —the watercolors mostly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you were doing rather technical things—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in Syracuse?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And I took an illustration course with Hibberd Kline, a very brilliant, respected illustrator. [00:34:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hibberd Kline.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Hibberd.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hibberd?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah, Hibberd Kline and Monty Charman were really about the two that I concentrated with because I took four courses from Monty Charman. I took one from Hibbard Klein. Oh, I took a poster course that was recommended, uh—which some woman—I forgot her name, but that was a semester course. And I had to take some academic work and I—there—uh, when I was at Syracuse, I also was freelancing. I did work for the University Club and for one agency and UFO—USO. I used to—I used to draw portraits on Saturdays in some of these centers, and they gave you a little money but not much, but I needed money, you know? Now, let me—let me say this, that when I was overseas, about ready to come home, I had an offer—I naturally was planning to go back to Cuba, New York. I had an offer from State University College at Buffalo to join them. When I came back to Rochester, I was going to go to Buffalo for my interview with the president, and the job would have been mine, that I knew. On the way to the bus depot, I said, "Gee, I've got an hour and a half, I think I'll stop in and see who's in the art school."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Rochester?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah, in Rochester. And I—because we were only about two blocks from where the bus took off. And when I went in this particular morning, Clifford Ulp was sitting there with his secretary, and he said, "My gosh, Stanley." He says, "We've been looking for you. How are you?" and I said, "I'm fine." And he said, "Well, come on and sit down." He said, "What are you doing?" "Oh," I said, "I'm on my way to Buffalo. I've been offered a job. [00:36:00] I'm going to join the college. I'm delighted." "Oh, gee," he said, "we've been trying to reach you because we have an opening here, and we thought you'd like to join us." Now, that's tearing, you know, when you hear that on—well, I said, "Well, I—that just surprises me." He said, "Do you have about 10-15 minutes?" He said, "I'm going to call the president, and I'm sure he'll want to talk to you." Hello. Hello, Bob [side conversation].

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] You had this choice in the same day whether to go to Buffalo?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I was in Buffalo—I—oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mr. Ulp was going to call—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah, and I was going to see the president. Is it on now?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Okay. The president of RIT?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: The president of RIT offered me a job. Now, I had two positions coming out of the army. One in Rochester, which was now Rochester Institute of Technology and an enterprising place. And of course, a place where I went to school and respected highly with teachers and the director that were [laughs] part of my experience as a student. Well, I went to Buffalo and I came back home. And my wife, uh, was from Rochester, but she wanted to be out of this and said whatever I want to do. Well, to make a long story short, I preferred joining a professional art school in preference to an art education program, which was dominant in Buffalo, and a good one, and a good one. So I joined RIT as an instructor in 1946 after finishing that last semester in the summer at Syracuse. Okay.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, why did you not want to go to an art education school rather than in an art school or—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: You know really, I have a lot of respect for art education. I think there's a—it's—I have some of my best friends in that business, and incidentally, I had been offered positions in art education more than I even wish to mention. I preferred professional art because that was my background and even though I had taught in Cuba. [00:38:06] And I guess it's because of my interest there and some of the things we accomplished in that town that brought it to the attention of the people in Buffalo. Because I used to lecture in

methods courses at Buffalo State when I was teaching in Cuba on certain things that probably should be done that might be a little revolutionary, I suppose, or at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Methods of teaching?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah. Methods of teaching, yeah. Uh, I brought in sound machines of the environment so that students would express things from the environment in which they lived. And brought it to the experience rather than my exposing them to a choicefully set exercise of some kind. So we freed the whole thing up, and of course, you know how spontaneous children are, they just react to this in a very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do these sounds—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —said—oh very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you have a record player or something going?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, no. You know [laughs] what we did, it's not music. It was sounds of the environment where I felt that you have five senses. We depend on—by habit, we depend on one or two only, and I said you can create by hearing sounds, waterfalls, trains, and we had sounds of all of these things that made up the environment of the village. And we would have the students kind of close their eyes and hear the sounds, and then create just from sounds. That's a new experience. If you've never tried it, it's really quite—and it's nothing new today. I mean, there are a lot of people that recognize some of these important experiences. Not as an end—not as a means—it's a means to an end of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But then when you lectured at Buffalo, that was—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I had—oh, I had a lot of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —innovative?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, sure. Well, I was—I taught freehand drawing. [00:40:03] We taught a course called lettering and layout in those days, and I taught watercolor painting. And I taught illustration, and in 1952, I became the director of the school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mr. Ulp retired?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: He had retired. Now, there's an interesting little anecdote. About 1948, Buffalo State again offered me a position up there. This time, I was going to take it because they were offering me some rank and we had no rank system. And not that the rank really meant maybe that much, but I was offered a good salary, and it looked good for my future and for the family—the family's welfare. And so, I had a contract, it was a coincidence that came about the time I was offered a contract to return to RIT. And I signed it in front of my wife, and I said, "We're going to accept this position." I signed the contract of Buffalo State, and I had the one at RIT, and I said, "I would—I'm not going to mail this first thing in the morning. I'm going to talk to Mr. Ulp." "Oh," she said, "why do that?" She said, "You know you're going to take the position anyway, Stan. Why don't you just drop the letter in the mailbox on the way to school?" "No," I said, "I think I'll wait." So I went up, and I went in to see Mr. Ulp, and I said, "You know, I can't sign RIT's contract. I'm going to Buffalo State." He said, "Have you talked to the president?" I said, "I don't go over anyone's head." [Laughs.] And I went to see the president, and he said, "Well, Stan, I hate to tell you—and I'm happy to tell you this, but you're going to have to keep it to yourself and then you can make a decision." He said, "Mr. Ulp is going to retire in 1952. I know it's only '48, it's some time off, but we—Mr. Ulp and I have talked about this, and we have selected you as a candidate for that job. [00:42:06] Would you take it?" And I says, "I'll take it." [Laughs.] And then—and I knew then for four years before that I was going to be the director. And as a consequence then, I was on a lot of the committees that decided to bring RIT or the School for American Craftsmen to RIT. I was on the key committees that made these decisions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was the president at RIT?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Mark Ellingson was the president of RIT for about 42 years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He's a very dominating, important figure?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful man, just about—you know wonderful. Well, I became the director in 1952 of the School of Art and Design. Yeah.

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ROBERT F. BROWN: —the school decided to take on the School for American Craftsmen, did you have—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: About 1948.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you go to investigate—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Just '49.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it—it was at Alfred, New York?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I'm going to—I'm going to give a little story here that I think this has not been documented anywhere on how the school came to RIT. You must understand that we had a very successful art school at RIT that was respected nationally, and in this part of the country, it was a fine—really, a fine school. Competent in every respect. We had our own crafts program because we had a teacher-training program at that time affiliated with the University of Rochester where they took their academic work, and they took their art at RIT. And so, we had crafts, and we had a woman who was very well-respected in the field of ceramics, a graduate of Ohio State. Lulu Scott [Backus] was her name, and we had good—excellent equipment but yet in a small manner. Okay. Now in 1948, it happened that—or thereabouts. Maybe it was '49 but '48 or '49, we had a provost by the name of Leo Smith, vice president who was in Albany for a state meeting. Mark Ellingson, our president at that time, was in New York City attending some kind of a professional meeting. And someone told Leo Smith in Albany had he heard that the School for American Craftsmen, which was located in Alfred, New York, was about ready to leave. [00:02:01] He said, "Maybe RIT being the kind of an institute you are, you might be interested, but I thought maybe you'd like to know." And he said, "The key woman to this is Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb who lives in New York." And Leo listened intently and then after he had this information, he ran to the phone and he called Mark Ellingson immediately in New York City and told Mark Ellingson the story. He said, "Why don't you call if you're interested, Mark. It might be worthwhile calling Mrs. Webb while you're in New York," which he did, and that consequently had—they had meetings. Now then, they brought—they brought these meetings to RIT to where representatives of the institute and outside consultants sat around a table with Harold Brennan and Mrs. Webb, and we heard their story. We had not seen the school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What are their—what was their story? Why were they?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: You know that story is never going to be completely known, except I can say this. My daughter was in Alfred. She was a student in Alfred, not in the art school. And I got acquainted with the president. And I'm sorry to say I can't—I'd give you his name but I—okay, you can look it up. It was in 1949, '50. His story—the president of Alfred told me this. There were many reasons, obvious reasons, and I'll give you what some one of them are. One of them—one of the conflicts was that Alfred University had a school of ceramics, which is a state school. They have an art school, which is not a state school. And they had a going, successful ceramics program, well-respected, well-regarded. [00:04:01] The School for American Craftsmen had a two-year program and a two-summer program at that time. To get a certificate from the School for American Craftsmen was two full years plus two full summers. Okay. Now the School for American Craftsmen was allowed and encouraged for their students to take academic work at Alfred University on an elective basis. It was a certificate program and not a degree program, and it was highly specialized. A student would specialize entirely in his major, and along with the ceramics, they had wood and they had metal, and they had weaving. And they had an installation over a barn and in odds and ends of buildings. Yet, I went down to see that eventually, and I was very much impressed with what I saw. And I was impressed with the quality and the high level of work. The quality of teaching was outstanding. Now, the other factor that brought on some questions about whether they're going to remain is that Alfred being a four-year institution with a master's program in ceramics and in the arts probably could not quite agree that this is as important as it seems. There's a conflict, and there were some jealousies that came up between the two even to the place that there was a great difference in salary structure between those two schools. And exhibits—the quality of work of the School for American Craftsmen was much different in terms of its dynamite and its substantialism and creativity. Probably rivalled somewhat the objectives that the school of ceramics had for their students. [00:06:05] The other factor that Mr. Brennan used to talk about is for students who need to be inspired with concerts and opera and the theater, and many galleries, and on the stream of events, Alfred indeed was out of the way. And anything that they brought—anything that they wanted culturally to expose their students to had to be brought in, and so budget requirements between what the college—who makes the decision and who comes in, how much money do you have in budgets. And in those days, money was tight, and they had a very low budget. So as a result, I believe that they—Mrs. Webb and Harold probably together along with maybe some of the trustees, they decided maybe it time to move to a more understanding climate. Now then, RIT came on the scene.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you began having meetings with them?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Now, we had meetings with them to decide whether we thought that this would enrich our program, whether we thought we could do it financially, what impact it would have on the city, what impact on industry, was it needed, and all kinds of questions and discussions were involved.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what impact it would have on the school of applied art too?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: All right. Now, that school came in 1950, and the blockbuster that happened was something I shall never forget. They came, commuted every day, Harold and some of the faculty, to put up an exhibition in our exhibition hall. Now, we had quite a conservative environment for the showing of art. [00:08:00] It was adequate. It was physically good, other than the lighting was very poor. The drama of putting on an exciting show was not—never present. Traditionally hung even though a lot of the exhibits we had, ourselves, were excellent, brought in from out of town, and so forth. They came in and absolutely revamped that exhibition hall with lighting and drama and color, and did it in such a way that Rochester never saw anything like it, in my opinion. And we had an opening, and it was a very successful opening. Right away, there were some conflicts, I must admit, between some of our administrators and the school. Well, you see the school was new, and they were wanting to move quickly into—uh, they had a building that was converted, an old mansion, and it was very successful. It worked. Limited student body but then for the nature of what they were doing, that was—that was part of the course anyway, because they're not overwhelmed with students today. So there was—there was now a new enterprise on campus that had a spirit of design and function that was altogether different than the conservatism of an approach that was used in the art school. Like, their drawing was an open-ended kind of an experience taught by Fred Meyer who was on our faculty now, and one of our senior faculty members and an excellent man, nationally-known. I remember Mr. Ulp would say to our faculty, "I'm not so sure they like us," and that wasn't true but he—and he didn't say this bitterly because Mr. Ulp was one of the most gracious individuals that you'd ever want to meet. [00:10:10] Nevertheless, it was there, and the bang came when Mr. Ulp recommended that we drop our ceramic program. This then would mean that we were going to lose one or two people on our staff.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the School for American Craftsmen would take up the slack?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And that's there's no need for having any—we didn't—we had a little, teacher training program that wasn't amounting to much, and he said, "The duplication is silly." He said, "We won't to have a painting program in our school. We will not teach a formal course in design. We will not have advertising or graphic design," or whatever, but you—one of the things though that we could not have was an industrial design program at that time because they felt that was a conflict with the objectives of some of the crafts. So we never got into—we never got into that until later on.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you did the so-called fine arts and—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And advertising and interior design and teacher training. That's what we did. And we had no difficulty getting students. In fact, when we left the campus downtown, we had all the freshman that they can take now. We were at capacity there, and we were at capacity when we moved practically except for some cases, that's not quite true, but—now the School for American Craftsmen came into Rochester and made an immediate impact. And among their staff, they had some brilliant guys like Frans Wildenhain who was the only man in the eastern part of the country that I think—well, that's not true. He—I was going to say, he's the only one that I knew of that was a graduate of the Bauhaus school. [00:12:02] But then there was Gropius at Harvard and there was—Moholy-Nagy still was around, but later on, he was about the only one left. And he and Hobart Cowles ran this ceramics department top-flight. And they had a sculptural approach, so they had a balance between making pots. They also made wall friezes and things that were practically an architectural environment.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They didn't brush up against your ceramics people?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: We dropped our ceramics program. Despite of that, we dropped it, rightfully so, rightfully so that—at that time, I said, "Well, if we're going to drop ceramics, I'm going to ask that Wildenhain teach sculpture for our students," which we never had. And I won that slight battle of having Wildenhain teach for our second-year students ceramic sculpture, and Henry Gernhardt who was head of the ceramics department at Syracuse University was the clay man. He had to get the clay ready for Wildenhain [laughs] and was a student here at that time. Well, of course, the School for American Craftsmen at that time made a tremendous impact on—in higher education from coast-to-coast. One of the reasons it became such an influential place is because of the faculty and because of its program where there was nothing in the east to rival it, and all of the odds that Brennan would've had in trying to get support and the validation of it— because in the traditional sense, they did things that the traditional art school wasn't doing. For instance, they did not have what they call—they did have not have period—a foundation program. [00:14:01] A student coming to that school had to decide what they were going to major in, and if they changed that major, it almost was like starting all over again. That—that program still prevails much the same today as it did then in that sense. As a result, they got a lot of mature students, and if they weren't mature, they would not stay more than a year. And many of them were already college graduates, older people, uh—serious about what they wanted to do, willing to pay the price for the discipline that's involved and long hours, and motivated of course. The school flourished, and Harold and I were on platforms together for years and out promoting both schools, attending conventions and meetings all throughout the east. I got very well-acquainted with—and I suddenly discovered a deep sense of respect for the

school and closeness that I had not had when they joined the institute. The sad part of it is—and no, it's not sad. I'm going to say the thing that's happened though that you must understand is the School for American Craftsmen today is not the school it was in 1950, through the '50s and early '60s. The reason it isn't is because there are many, many universities and professional schools across this country, too many to be sure, who are all also in the business of the high level of craftsmanship and professionalism. And the competition is great today, and we would have less students who would, let's say, come across the country to study ceramics at Rochester when they probably could get some good ceramics on the West Coast. [00:16:08] Or likewise, students from Boston don't necessarily have to come as far as Rochester if they're thinking in terms of competent schools. That has replaced exclusiveness. The other thought that ought to be projected here is that the School for Craftsmen was responsible, to a great extent, for early development of the crafts and higher education on the level that they practice. And many of the people in the field today who are teachers of crafts and leaders of the crafts are graduates of the School for American Craftsmen. And I would give credit and should give credit to the school was—the man that made that school and of course Mrs. Webb and her generosity and her support, and her perseverance and hard labor and work— give credit for the greatness of that school to Harold Brennan. And he has to be recognized as *the* man who brought that school into being that still lives on the high quality of performance much the same as it always has been. And yes, there's been some expansion. Yes, there's been some new additions in glass and in forging, and in metalwork. There—the problem today with the School for American Craftsmen, if there is a problem, is the difficulty in getting quality students to the number that they need to function, and that's no secret. I think many schools have that same particular—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Enrollment problem now.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Like for instance, they have a very difficult time getting men in weaving and textile design, very much so. [00:18:07] One of the things that some people ought to realize who are interested in this kind of discussion is that the high school art that we knew has changed considerably. And even to the place where they've threatened and, indeed, have cut art out of some programs. Much the same as when I started my career in 1939, '40, we were coming out of a Depression. It was difficult to find jobs. Art wasn't thought to be very important. It isn't thought to be very important by a number of people today. And it surprises me the little progress that we really have made in the significance of the [laughs] fullness of education. But anyway, I think that—I think that high schools do not teach metalwork as metal should be taught if it's taught at all. So a student doesn't have the experience of metal coming from a high school into a specialized program starting as a freshman in higher education. They do not have any significant, meaningful wood experience except for the brightness of some programs in industrial arts. The art people do not have that. That's limited. You do not have—you have some work in textile design of a kind with silkscreen possibly or stenciling of some kind. You certainly don't have any glass. So, I would say that RIT wouldn't even have five people majoring in glass and if they had, that would be quite—maybe that would more than you could expect. But this is also true today in the fine arts. It's true in painting. It's true in printmaking. [00:20:01] And I would say we have one of the finest printmaking facilities you would find in higher education with some of the finest people. Probably, it survives because of electives. And so, some students who like to take illustration might take printmaking or—and painting as an elective. But for majors that are in that program, it's diminished. Now, the frightful thing is that some presidents and boards of trustees, some administrators look at the number of students who fill a studio, and they're looking for space. And they're beginning to say, "Hey, look, what do those people when they get out?" And if there's no job there, and we know that there's no job there, there are no objectives for those decisions, should we continue? But never realizing that that might be true also with some of the crafts. And they saw there's—at RIT, easygoing right now. You just—everything's fine, and they're not cutting throats or they're not going in there, but this is happening though.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And RIT they've left alone so far?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: So far. There's still a threat for fine arts. Yes, there is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was Brennan's touch that made the school such a success in your opinion?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: First he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: He worked very closely with you. You two work well together, I gather?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: We disagreed a great deal. We're the best of friends. To this day, we're friends. We see each other occasionally, and we write to each other. I—to this day, will disagree on some philosophical things on education, very much so. And I think in—and actually it's not being stubborn to the place where they're saying, "Oh, everything was great back there." No, everything was not great back there. The students today are wonderful. Today, they're wonderful, they really are. I'm not teaching anymore. I have a studio at RIT, and I'm active at RIT on committees yet, and I do a lot of evaluating for artwork for RIT and friends of RIT. [00:22:09] And I'm very much involved with—many of the faculty that I hired are still there, great friends. And I'm a good friend of Bob Johnston. He's got a big job in his hands and they—they're running an efficient place. They got a

good, big budget, and they're making it work with care and with hard work. I'll tell you what differences I would have between those two schools is I believe that not all students are able to make up their mind as an immature, high school student. They may be interested in general in the arts in the broadest sense. To ask a student and all students to make up their mind on their specialized area is now a common thing among both schools. I think that uh—that's too bad. The thing that I always disagreed with the School for American Craftsmen but respecting—respecting their objectives, which they met, is the sense of specializing immediately throughout the four years. Now—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You think that was left over from European apprentice approach? Because a number of the instructors had been—apprentices in Europe?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: They don't talk about that so much anymore, but that was predominant in their philosophy when they came to RIT because they came with a two-year program and two summers. They had their own graduation. They did not mingle in with the institute in their final graduation area. Of course, that's changed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Initially, they were kind of parallel with your school and then eventually, administratively they came under one dean.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is that right with your school?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Harold Brennan when he—when we reorganized, Harold Brennan became what we called divisional director, chairman. [00:24:06] He continued to be—as he did when he was dean, he continued to be the director of the School for American Craftsmen, I the director of the School of Art and Design. We then had a dean organization. He became the dean of the college, director of the School for American Craftsman, and I became the associate dean, director of the School of Art and Design. I never agreed on that. I thought that there should be a dean of the college and two directors, one of each school, because to act as a dean or an associate dean, you're always have your department in mind, always. And well, we worked it out fine because of the temperament of both of us, and it worked, but I didn't think that was the best setup. And that's the setup they still have today.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You had wear two hats in a way?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: That's exactly right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You to be neutral or be more—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah, there was a lot of fun over this. A faculty would come in to the dean, and he would say, "Will you put your dean hat on today? [Laughs.] And I'd like to talk to you as the dean and not the director of the School for American Craftsmen." But it worked, and it was a fine, fun place to work, a lot of excitement creatively, which is something that has left the scene somewhat from higher education. It's the matter of letting a kid dream a little and letting him find himself a little. Of course coming to grips that he wants to make a decision on where his talents ought to be directed eventually. I had always felt that students who take a major for four years, and let's say here's a person who takes a major in wood, just using that as an example, for four years. They wouldn't be able to take painting for four years, but they could take wood for four years. [00:26:02] The design that's taught to that wood student is now a general design unrelated to his goals. That becomes in itself a very difficult thing to handle with some students because they look at anything they do in terms of how does it apply immediately to furniture design. And that's unfortunate because your imagination is really limited now. The exploration of finding how principles or structure of design works in any—any kind of field as an educated person is important.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now that you had in the earlier days, is that correct?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah. Now, they have a general design program. Now, what you've got to understand without any criticism is the students that come from School for American Craftsmen because of their high school experiences—it's very much limited for a high percentage of the students who come so they don't draw well. They don't know—they don't know anything about the importance of design.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So they try to rectify that?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And it's tough to deal with them until you win them over. Now when you win them over, they're great. And I taught this—I taught for my last five years at RIT a design course for all freshmen integrated with a course called creative sources, which was really an unusual course. But the school—once you win that School for American-Craftsmen student over they're just terrific as human beings, so there's no problem.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were certain foundation courses eventually that were taught throughout the school, throughout the—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: They now have in common some drawing and design for all students regardless of what college, except the concentration and depth of design and drawing is not the same as it would be for the School of Art and Design. [00:28:04] The School of Art and Design has—their first year is entirely made up two- and three-dimensional design and drawing, and painting that integrates with drawing. The School for American Craftsmen has some design, some drawing, they start their major, so they're in it immediately. Now, of course you know historically, it wouldn't be difficult for you to see that when a student wants to do something badly enough and is not allowed to do it, he loses interest. Now, Carnegie Tech had a fine printing school at one time. These schools of printing like the one at RIT are really for educating the executive person to the field. But the reality of it is that they need to know what a press is and how it operates and all of the business that makes up printing, so the students take these experiences. So, they did at Carnegie also, but Carnegie approached it from an intellectual point of view, the book approach and then you touched these presses, and you get your hands with the ink starting in your third year. They lost their program. RIT's is get them wet right away and some—it's like teaching art by the book and not allowing them to do anything for the first two years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You always felt that that's the better way?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I think for the professions, it's an important way, absolutely, absolutely. We have a lot of people talk wonderful art. I'd rather talk of—I know a lot of people are very effective in talking about the arts and paintings—I prefer to talk in-depth about painting with a painter. The language is the same. The experience is the same.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And also, get your hands wet?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Get your hands wet.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As you learned with Charles Woodbury himself. [00:30:01]

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Absolutely, oh, absolutely. Yeah. Or, I'll tell you another thing that we that we believe at RIT—Harold Brennan and I thoroughly believed this. You don’t get anywhere by painting a little here, a little there. You've got to really get into depth sometimes too. You've got to get—you really got to get your feet into it, admire it, rub your nose in it and everything else. The thing that I believe that is going to change the characterization of professional study in this country is the belief by some people that professional teachers are not as important as a lot of us think they are. I think a real competent, professional individual is the key. I think the school, any school is only as good as its faculty, please believe that, and that's true. And if you—to get good faculty, you better be in touch all over the country and know where they are so that when you have a loss or when you need someone, you don’t sit in an office and put out a flyer. You've got to know where they are, and you've got to recognize it and go after them. It's a selling job. That I believe is leaving the scene somewhat nationally. And I think one of the reasons for it—and there's no prejudice among this—I think that this is true in all higher education—belong to the fraternity now. I think if I was starting out today, I would get my doctorate because I think that's the pass you need to get into the fraternity. For most administrators in art schools and universities, art departments now are EdD or PhD people. And unfortunately, we do not have a degree beyond the master of fine arts, which is still the terminal degree, see?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And that would be the requirement of any school, an MFA or its equivalent for teaching. If you've had a genius down around the corner from where you live who's is just a genius in art and was just a—and he didn’t have a degree, I doubt whether—I doubt whether some colleges, many colleges would hire him. [00:32:08]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But don’t they lose out in the long lot—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: You're darn right they—on the way, on the way we've lost out. The transition has been made much now though because most kids—most kids who go to higher education in the arts regardless, they come out with a degree anyway. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But even if you up—inflate the degree that's needed, you've still got to be extremely careful in selecting, don’t you?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: You know, you don’t need a degree honestly. This is true too. If you were a graduate in an art school and you came into me, I'm running an agency. I'll ask you where you studied. I won't—listen you've got it or you haven't. You're not going to get it because of your degree, not at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But there's pressure for the schools to have people with degrees, is it?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah. Well, see it's the accepted thing now because you have evaluating teams. And one of the fine things that's happening in higher education in the arts though is the fulfilment of a better academic surrounding where you take courses in general studies, general education.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As part of the presentation process?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I think it's good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That reached you people in the late '50s or so, didn't it?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well, even when I was there, I had to take two academic subjects. I had to do that, but we didn't have a full program. We got into that when we got into the A.A.S. degree in 1950, and when we got into—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The associate?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Then we got into the baccalaureate then we were accredited with the national association, and we were accredited of course by east—by middle states and all. We had—and it was—we fought at the outset. Brennan and I did a little fighting about the number of courses that our students were to take because we felt it took away from a lot of the important studio work that was being done. [00:34:01] And there was some compromising, and it worked out. It worked itself out. And there have been some great, great improvements in the educational structure. I still think, however, that what remains in education to be solved is the fragmentation of it all. Our students in—our students don't hardly know photography students who are next door. They don't know the engineering students and people in business. They're isolated. They're still isolated, it's too much. And it's tough for—it's very difficult for a student in the arts to take certain courses in photography, or photography students—well, they take an art course because it's prescribed. But the elective system is tight because it's tough to find enough space, it's tough to—it's complicated. So it's a little too much fragmentation in the arts there or in any field than in higher education.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Are you glad you went on with the administrative track, or do you sometimes wish you had gone to be a painter or an illustrator?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: No, I—I love my career. I had a very fruitful career. No regrets. I almost would do it all over again. But I did come to the place where after helping to build the school and planning this is new—uh, this new campus where there was about two and a half million dollars' worth of art incidentally, some of the finest art and some of the finest names. But much of that credit has to go to Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb and Mark Ellingson, a two-man team that decided that this was important without even having to consult us.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean to have art around? Yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Uh—I left my post in 1972—[197]3, [197]4, [197]5—[19]73. [00:36:02] Yeah, '73, I resigned from my post as an associate dean and requested that my career started with five, six years of teaching before I became an administrator, and I would like to end that way. And I had the privilege of selecting anything I wanted to teach. Now that was the wrong thing because, obviously, I can't teach everything by any means, if it anything at all. [Laughs.] But I selected teaching freshmen in a course that I started years ago called creative sources. And had 150 freshmen with no assistance grading and everything, including 15 deaf students, and did that for five years, and had the time of my life. And it was the hardest work I ever did, but it was enjoyable. The reason I left my post and the only reason I left my post is not under—I could have stayed there, no problem in that. I left because my job was no more building—a curriculum that we had been working on for years had matured. And I became the dean in charge of faculty improvement, budgets and had to run the budget for the college, and interviewing and being in charge of candidates who were applying for admissions. And that became routine, and I lost the zip, and I lost—I thought the—I thought that would really be unfortunate if I have to do that for five more years. So, I resigned five years before I retired and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you went off ended your career—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Teaching.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Teaching?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And—I'll tell you why—I'll tell you, after all students are—students are the only reason that we are existing in that kind of an enterprise—students. [00:38:08] And I have students who see me and write to me, and I go to occasions where the students are back, and it's the greatest thrill in the world. And that's maybe what it's all about anyway, you know, so, but I did. I had a—and when I went back teaching, it

wasn't easy for a year. Not at all. It was not easy, and I took a lot of my time and—but no regrets. [Laughs.] Now, I—there are few things, Bob, that might be—or you have some questions before I mention this?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, no. Well then, I wanted to ask this briefly though, sorry. People you brought to the school, you brought Fred Meyer in in the 1950s?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Oh, I can mention some great guys, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Maybe you could mention a few people.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Okay, sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you've mentioned Mrs. Webb, what was she like—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: She was on the board.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —because you dealt with her? You didn't directly because you know—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Mr.—are we on?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Mr. Brennan dealt directly with Mrs. Webb, but I had conferences with Mrs. Webb because she was very much interested in certain things that I had been proposing for change. And I was rather—I was probably a little—I think looking back, uh, maybe I did things too fast. I cut—I hurt feelings, particularly among those who were my blessed teachers and who had two or three years to go to retire. Uh, I felt that students paid so much money to come to an institute, we owe everything to the student, and it's not right to play anything that might be a favoritism or put up with something that you really didn't believe in. So I made some changes. I threw out all the casts, which was really a tough thing to do in view of the fact that the men who taught drawing was one of the best teachers I ever had. [00:40:08] I fired and hired—none of the old-timers, but I had to—I had to request certain people leave. Now, the great guys who really helped to make that school were Fred Meyer—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: ROBERT F. BROWN: Hey.

[Tape stops, Restarts.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: We were talking about some of the—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I'm going to mention—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —people that you hired.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —that one of the cares that I had was to build a faculty to help to instill a change in programming, and to believe in it and not to have one man tell them what they ought to do. Now remember, art schools and higher institutions were run pretty much out of the front office. President decided the budget almost and told you what you were going to get. At one time didn't come from consensus of opinions of faculty, not even the deans, at one time. So, Harold Brennan and I did pretty much what we thought was the best for the educational program and considering the faculty, and what you need to do is when you make a change, you better have your faculty believe in it rather than to try to sell them a bill of goods and change what they believe. So, I had a job of really scouting across this country and spending hours with other deans in other schools that we respected across the country, and literally worked on some people for a number of years before I was successful in getting them to come to Rochester. Among these people—I wanted to just say—there was a Fred Meyer who already had been with the School for American Craftsmen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As a design teacher?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: No, he can teach anything. This man—this man is a man of film. He writes plays. He's a painter. He's an illustrator. He's a sculptor. He just had a successful—about six successful show in Midtown galleries in New York. You know, I'm smiling slightly because you have in this city of Rochester some very talented people that aren't even known, and his success is in New York and other places, and not in Rochester. [00:02:11] Okay, well let's go on from there. I brought Norman Bate from Pratt Institute to RIT to teach figure drawing and illustration, and indeed, he was the best man that we ever had. And he taught printmaking and won honors galore as a printmaker. He now has passed away, but he is a man who really helped to build that school. We had a man by the name of Hans Barschel from Germany who was a successful man with a pharmaceutical

advertising, the *Saturday Evening Post,* and these exclusive accounts out of New York, Eastman Kodak Company's accounts out of New York. And he came to Rochester to design for one of our printing firms, wanting to leave the city and all its demands, and an excellent graphic designer, an excellent man. One—I consider one of the best designers of that day and well-known. He joined our faculty and stayed with us until he retired and he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: These were all men you brought in after you became director in '52?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: That's correct. We had a Don—a Don Robertson who came from the University of Illinois who taught painting and became the director of the Albright Art School in Buffalo, and lost him. Judd Williams who is still with us taught at the University of Illinois, who was a printmaker and a painter and a sculptor, and he's still with us. I brought a fellow by the name of Phil Bornarth who was an exceedingly good painter and illustrator, teaching painting, in charge of our fine arts program. [00:04:07] He's still with us. And I smile a little because when you know that you have some depth there with experienced people who are devoted to their teaching, it gives you a lot of satisfaction to know that you know them and they're doing a fine—they're continuing doing a fine job. When I when I left my post—well, actually we grew beyond. What I was going to say, I—we had about 18 on our faculty, and I believe the faculty today among part-time faculty might actually number about 45 or 46. The enrollment—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A great deal of depth and breadth of scope?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it—when you were first hiring in the '50s, there were many fewer candidates then, weren't there? Didn't it therefore become quite difficult by the late '60s when whole platoons of students were coming out looking for positions? Wasn't it more difficult to select from among them or—you did mention earlier you kept a network of friendships around the country, so you knew where good people were.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: For teaching I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: For teaching?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —Mr. Brennan and I prided ourselves in the following. He used to say, "If I lose a man tomorrow, I know two men that I'm going to approach immediately."

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: And I caught the spirit of that remark early in my career and followed that along, and indeed, it paid dividends. It paid dividends. And of course, RIT today is known across the country, indeed it is. And the people in graphic design at RIT are probably regarded as maybe some of the top people in the country. And they now have a computer—graphic computer program that's may be one of the first in the master's program. [00:06:04] How it's going to work out, I'm not sure, but they have put a lot of money, a lot of time, and have a competent faculty, and have a lot of students. The school is—the school prides itself, that is the art school—it prides itself in the high placement record. But this really isn't something that ought to be waved with on a platform because I think any good school should be able to make some claims on that because the—as long as the economic situation is good, there is a need, you know? The thing that I find that's wonderful is the girls are having so much success now, and they're—you know Bob, there are a couple things I wanted to mention about—I'm not going to take a lot of time in this though, but I think it should be recorded.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Please do.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Mr. Ulp did some revolutionary things in higher education at the time he was there. He—and we had a lot of laughable things. Like we had two homerun—two homerooms in the morning. You'd go to a homeroom, and they take the attendance then you go to the class from there, and they take the attendance again. Why? I don't know, but this was part of the way in which they did things.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is when you were in school?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: That's when I was in in school. And another thing that they did is even when I was an instructor, we did it—Mr. Ulp and his secretary would type up some of nice, soothing sayings of the spirit. And we would write one of these comments on the blackboard in the homeroom every morning, so you'd have something on the blackboard to look at. Like, "Have a happy day," which is a very crude example. We'd have these all typed and we'd have—we'd write them on the board. But he did something that caused quite a bit of stir in the east among Pratt Institute, Cornell, Philadelphia College of Art, and Albright, and Syracuse. [00:08:07] He had what we called—what he called the art scales. He with a fellow by the name of W. W. Charters who, indeed, was one of the most respected curriculum men in the country, who was an advisor at RIT devised the

thought that can you put in one room examples of work, the best, next best, average, below average, I mean, four examples. Fill a room with every discipline like design, drawing, illustration, every course you teach. Those were called the art scales. They spend lots of time on this so that they thought a student would—should be able to make a self-analysis of his progress by going into this room and holding his drawing up like this, and to look at each one and determine where he stands in that scale.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Now they spent a lot of money on this. They—a lot of publications wrote articles on this, and of course, it petered out, and for many good reasons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, because—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Because you have a standard of saying, my work had to look like that and I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was [cross talk] I mean—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that could have been possibly been universal—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: One of the amusing things, it's a funny thing. We had the director of the Metropolitan Gallery there lecturing one day, and he was taken into the scales room. One of our instructors went in with him, and later on the instructor said, "Do you know what he said to me? He said, he thought the one in the bottom was better than the one at the top," you see. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. And then—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Ulp would stick [inaudible] so that's just—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Now, there's another interesting thing that Mr. Ulp prided himself in, and it worked up to a point. He had Eastman Kodak Company take pictures, motion pictures, 16-mm, and a model, let's say, carrying a vase on her shoulders. [00:10:11] And she would walk six steps or dance six steps and then it would repeat and it would repeat, and would repeat, and would repeat. In figure drawing and memory class, we'd have a motion picture screen, and the instructor would put the—flash the motion picture, and you'd find the—these action people dancing and doing all kind—even animals. They walk up—they do a certain thing then it would repeat itself and repeat, and you'd make quick sketches. Well, the thing—that was very popular in black and white, and we spent a lot of money. I have some of those old films that I've saved. But because they're on 16-mm, they need to be—if we're going to preserve them, we need to put them on—

ROBERT F. BROWN: These are ones that Mr. Ulp made?

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Eastman Kodak made them for—

ROBERT F. BROWN: For—yeah. Oh.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: —the institute. Now drawing from a flat image on a two-dimensional surface, a two-dimensional picture is different than having a line model as you can then—as you can—so. But those were revolutionary things that took place as we weren't able to have life drawing in the first year because it was not proper for freshmen, see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Okay.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: I think that probably in this sense of our discussion, we might have—do you have any other questions?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, no, not at the—

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Do you think I covered?

ROBERT F. BROWN: I think so.

STANLEY H. WITMEYER: Do you?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. Uh—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]