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Oral history interview with Robert Beverly Hale, 1968 Oct. 4-Nov. 1

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Transcript

Interview

FS FORREST SELVIG

RH: ROBERT HALE

FS This is an interview with Mr. Robert Beverly Hale in his apartment in New York City. The date is October 4, 1968. Mr. Hale, to start out, could we talk a bit about, oh, your life, your background, sort of the autobiographical details of your life? You were born here in New York?

RH: No, I was born in Boston but was brought down to New York when I was about a year old and have lived here ever since pretty much.

FS I see. And you told me earlier that you were descended from Edward Everett Hale.

RH: Edward Everett Hale was my grandfather.

FS Was your father by any chance a Unitarian minister?

RH: No, my father was an architect. His name was Edward Hale, Edward Dudley Hale. But he died in 1908.

FS And you, as I recall, went on to get a degree in architecture?

RH: I didn't get the degree. I went to Columbia Architecture School for about the equivalent of three years.

FS Your first interest apparently, at least in those days, was architecture?

RH: My first interest was science. I took about every scientific course Columbia had to offer before I went into architecture. Well, that's an exaggeration, but I took a great many.

FS I see. Your idea then was to be a scientist?

RH: No,not exactly. I had a very curious upbringing. My idea was to try to fill the gaps in my knowledge.

FS Well, would you call that curious, Mr. Hale? Or perhaps ideal maybe?

RH: My father died. And my mother married again, a man named John Luckman who was an architect. He was a very intelligent, very sensitive man, actually. It seemed to me he had great courage because he married my mother who had six children at the time. And he had a great deal to do with what you might call my intellectual life. He said that this is the twentieth century, and the twentieth century would be, he thought, the age of science. He advised me to study as much science as I could because he said possibly later on you'll never get into a laboratory again. I'm rather glad he did because it's made me feel rather at home in the twentieth century.

FS And so you went on to study science simply to broaden your understanding of this field?

RH: Yes, I had a very odd education. I used to go to Columbia. There were so many children that my mother really didn't know what was happening. She'd say, "What are you doing now?" I'd say, "I'm going to the university," and she'd say,"What university?" And I'd say, "Well, Columbia." And then she'd say, "Well, why don't you give it all up and come over to Europe with me?" And sometimes I would. But I suppose I started at Columbia in about 1916. I left Columbia in about 1931, as I remember. I puttered around. No, I never got anything of an A.B. degree.

FS But then this was punctuated by travels through Europe and living in Europe?

RH: I was one of those Americans who was in Paris a great deal during the '20's. And when I was there, naturally I met all the characters, that is characters in the arts really, the people associated with the '20's.

FS Who were some of the people that you associated with in Paris?

RH: Well, my greatest friend in Paris was Waldo Peirce, the artist. And Waldo in those days, as you probably know, was a very vital, exuberant, entertaining character. And he would always let me use a room he had at the top of his place whenever I went to Paris. Waldo knew absolutely everybody, and I sort of followed him around through the Latin Quarter so that eventually I met almost everybody. I'm not sure that they paid much attention to me because I was younger than most of them. But Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Joyce, Picasso, Matisse, and the whole crew. I'm not sure that I was old enough or wise enough to quite know what was happening. Joyce I knew particularly well, as a matter of fact, because he was a great friend of Peirce's.

FS And you met him at their house I assume?

RH: Yes.

FS But at this time you weren't thinking particularly of being an artist?

RH: Well, I never really have been an artist. I never went to the Art Students League until 1936. I had studied at Fontainebleau for one summer planning to carry on with architecture. But I found myself in the painting studios. I found architecture actually a little too tight for me, and found painting very sympathetic. Then I came back to America. Everybody came back to America. Everybody was broke.

FS This was during the Depression?

RH: It was 1931 or 1932 I would say I came back to America. I have a very beautiful little sister, half-sister, and she was offered a job in Hollywood as what they called a starlet. And I went out with her to Hollywood. But she found Hollywood a little too vulgar, and she came home. But I stayed there for a year.

FS Were you painting there, Mr. Hale?

RH: No, I was just doing whatever came to hand. I remember I worked on a movie script with Cyril Hume once. Well, life was amusing. I got to know the actors and the actresses and the people behind the movies. I lived there for a year.

FS But primarily you were involved with writing scripts?

RH: I've always been a little involved with writing. And I did some drawing there too as I remember. Then I came back to New York. And everybody was broke. Everybody in my family was broke. We all crowded into my mother's apartment. I don't know how many of us. It was a very small apartment, two rooms. But life was reasonably gay, you know.

FS Even in the Depression?

RH: Even in the Depression. And I promptly got a job as manager of an antique shop at $18 a week. This antique shop was owned by Stephen Hilbert, but it was called Norman Adams. Stephen was very anxious to keep the name alive during the Depression. So he kept the antique shop running when nobody came to buy anything. It was a beautiful place over on Sutton Place overlooking the river, you know. That was before the Drive had been put through. And I would sit in this antique shop waiting for customers. But very few came. I didn't know what to do. So I thought that possibly if I only knew how to draw I might be able to draw illustrations for the Saturday Evening Post. And it seemed to me that the way to draw figures was to learn human anatomy. So I used to study anatomy a great deal while at this antique shop. I had a lot of time. There was also a piano there which is now downstairs. It's a beautiful little Clemente piano. You probably noticed it.

FS I noticed it coming in.

RH: It was made in about 1812. I used to play the piano a great deal in those days. And I kept that up I suppose for four or five years. Well, it was rather lucky as it turned out because I learned about furniture. And in later times when I was at the Metropolitan Museum in the department of American art, frequently there'd be trouble in the American wing, and nobody there to run it. And as I was right next door to that office, I was often able to give them a hand there.

FS So you were studying anatomy at the same time you were running this antique shop?

RH: Yes. Then in about 1936, I believe it was, my mother's sister died. My mother of course was a Marquand. She was the aunt of John Marquand the writer, J.P. Marquand. My Aunt Molly died, and I think my mother came into $30,000. And so I didn't want to work in that antique shop anymore. I wanted to go to the Art Students League. So I went to the Art Students League for five years. And actually by that time, I was technically very adept. Shortly afterwards, the League made me an instructor there, and I have been one ever since. Even during the period when I worked for the Museum, I still taught at the League.

FS You very quickly came out of the anatomical part, however, didn't you?

RH: Oh, no, I'm still in it very deeply.

FS Certainly in your paintings . . . .

RH: Oh, well, this is thirty years after.

FS Well, we have you now teaching, well, really studying at the Art Students League.

RH: Yes, I studied at the Art Students League with George Bridgman to a certain extent, quite a lot with William McNulty, with his wife Ann Brockman. And finally I felt I had enough of the League. You know, the League gives no degrees or diplomas.

FS Yes, I know.

RH: You just stay there until you have enough of it. By that time, you're ready to be an artist if you can be. During that period, well, I suppose starting in 1941 actually, I started to write criticism for Art News so that I got very familiar with the contemporary scene, and also, of course, through the League with all the contemporary artists. And I taught for a year at the Parsons School, I remember, in about 1941. I must have started teaching at the League about a year after that. At that time, too, I got extremely interested in the history of costume, and I gave a few lectures on the history of costume, not at the League but out of town, usually to little art associations. I used to draw these figures full size on a great sheet of paper with the costumes on through the centuries.

FS You gave these talks to various museums?

RH: No, usually little art associations of New York. So there I was teaching at the League, actually teaching anatomy. You see, George Bridgman the anatomist died, and there was a sort of gap there. And they knew I had an interest in anatomy, which was true, and also a scientific bent, you see. So they wanted me to teach the anatomy which I've done ever since at the League. Well, there I was teaching along at the League and writing for Art News. And about that time Francis Taylor called me up out of the blue and asked me if I'd like to head up a new department of American art at the Metropolitan Museum. That was really quite a decision I had to make because I realized that if I did that, I would have to give up such wished as I had to be an artist, you know, but I did accept the job.

FS May I ask you why you felt you'd have to give up a desire to be an artist?

RH: Oh, well, because Francis made it very clear that it was an enormous job, and there would be very little extra time. In fact, he made me promise, so to speak, that I wouldn't exhibit myself while I was running the department, which was wise on his part. But as I look back now, I realize I was growing up with the abstract expressionist group, you know, and I probably would have been one if I'd kept on going. I was late as an artist. But things were going pretty well actually.

FS Well, when you say "things were going pretty well," you mean your work was becoming more and more accepted by people?

RH: Oh, I don't think the acceptance was so great, but you know, an artist never really creates his style until he's worked by himself a good deal and thought about it a lot. I was drawing and painting a good deal in those days by myself and working up ideas and conceptions and so on.

FS So in other words, they were going well in the sense that you were yourself developing as you wished to develop?

RH: Yes.

FS I see, but then you didn't really stop this when you started working for the Metropolitan?

RH: I had to stop what you might call all studio work. I went on teaching one class at the League and kept my hand in. I don't actually teach anatomy. I teach straightforward traditional drawing, that's what I teach. Anatomy, as you know, is but one of the elements of drawing. So I really teach them about life and line and mass and form and planes and perspective and anatomy, which is one of those elements, you might say. I still do that.

FS But you as an artist are not as traditional artist. You don't paint in traditional style.

RH: Well, my art career has been haphazard. Francis Taylor died, you see. And nobody seemed to remember that I promised that I wouldn't have any exhibitions. In 1959, I think, it occurred to me that I might have a little

fun in the art world. So during weekends, I began to paint again. And I was very familiar with the various styles of contemporary artists and what was going on, I created a sort of style of abstract expressionism and painted a number of pictures. And one afternoon when I was doing this, Katherine Ordway, who had a lot to do with the Stamford Museum, happened to drop in. She liked them. And she said they'd give me a show at the Stamford Museum. The trouble of putting on a show was too much for me because I was very busy. So I went to see George Staempfli of the Staempfli Gallery and I said George I can't have all these pictures framed and figure out the prices and all that sort of thing and send them all up to Stamford. Won't you do that for me? And George said that he'd not only do it but that he himself would give me a show in New York. So that year I remember I had a one-man show at Stamford and later a show at the Staempfli Gallery. that must have been 1959-1960 I guess.

FS I remember there was an article on you with photographs and so on in either Art News or Art in America about this time. It showed you painting on a terrace.

RH: Yes, I'll show you the photographs in the other room. There were a lot of publicity surrounding that show. And it stemmed I think from the fact that the opening was one of the most crowded openings that had ever been held. I think the reason was because I had had so many pupils during the years they were rather curious about what was going on. And the show was completely sold out.

FS What was this date again?

RH: I think the Stamford Show would be late 1959 and the Staempfli show would be in the spring of 1960 as I remember. FS;I see. Then this must have encouraged you to continue to paint even more.

RH: I suppose it did. But I've always had lots of other interests, you know. And I really didn't capitalize, you might say, on all of that. Because various things began to happen in my life. I believe the following year I went off to Europe for a vacation and so forth. I went to Greece where I met my present wife because I haven't remarried since that time. I mean I remarried shortly after that time. And there were great exhibitions to manage at the Met and there were books to be written and articles to be written and so forth.

FS So this made it very difficult to increase the time you had for painting?

RH: I've never had very much time to do anything much. I try to do too many things. You see, all during this time I had to keep up on the anatomy. Anatomy is a very difficult memory job, you see. And you have to keep the memory alive and fresh if you're teaching because students ask so many questions. And also because as I teach it I draw on the great board full scale all the muscles and all the bones and all the ligaments. And I have to be exact. So I have to give some time to that. And always have. It's something like the you have to practice.

FS Have to keep in practice. I see, I was going to make a little remark here that I didn't think that anatomy changed much over the years, but maybe.

RH: That's why it's a challenging thing to teach in these changing days, you know. It's a marvelous thing to teach traditional drawings because the rules have all been laid down. And they are known. And there can be no arguments with the students really. It's very easy to teach that compared to something that's going on today.

FS I'm sure that you find some students who question the need to be taught traditional drawing at all.

RH: Oh, certainly yes. Not only students. One day in East Hampton de Kooning came up to my little studio there and said that I was ruining any number of people by telling them about anatomy. But as a matter of fact, I'm not sure that he's right. This may be rationalization, but I believe that an artist has to know the technical tradition that has preceded him. And the more he knows about it the better off he is. As I see it, of course the tradition of European art technically speaking from the point of view of studio practice remained virtually intact until the 1860's and the 1870's when it was suddenly attacked by Impressionists. Not technically, the didn't do very much to the tradition except perhaps to change the light direction on individual forms they played a little with perspective. and of course they played a little with color. The Post-Impressionist followed them. They tore down a few more rules of the tradition you know. They subordinated the direction of form because they loved the canvas plane so much. But remember that all the people who did this were trained traditionally and they knew what the technical tradition of European painting was. And they used all the tricks and devices that the traditionalist had used. You might say that the Cubists followed them. And if you know the tradition you'll see that cubism employs the traditional devices fully. They were terribly aware of planes, of light on planes, and of the sort of geometric idea that is behind the tradition in any case. There couldn't have been any cubism if there hadn't been the tradition. It would be impossible. So it seems to me that, as everybody knows, all art comes out of the preceding traditions. And I think it's a help if artists know where they stand in the technical procession from the early days to the present. If they have the resources that the technical tradition gives to them I don't think its a hindrance at all. I think its an enormous help. I'm always a little impatient with artists who don't know how they achieve their effects and who just depend on emotion and luck to get their effects. I don't think any

good artist does. As a matter of fact, almost all the first rate contemporary artists I've known have been pretty darn well trained. And they know just where they stand not only in the historical tradition, but in the technical tradition. I'd like to separate the two. And I think one has to because it's been my experience that most art historians are quite ignorant of the technical tradition. Artists however usually have quite a good idea about the history of art. But I am again and again upset by the loose way that historians of art talk about the technical tradition. They don't know it. But you can't know it unless you have played with it and done it and actually had the feeling in your brush or pencil. It's a hard thing to learn. And a slow thing to learn.

FS When you speak of the technical traditions do you mean knowing how, for instance, the frescoes that are on view at the Metropolitan now, knowing how these were done?

RH: That's part of it. That's part of it. I think I really mean that you have to understand certain elements, something like the ones I mentioned a moment ago. You have to know the function of a line. You have to know why an artist draws a line. You have to know, for instance, that actually in the human figure there aren't any lines. You have to know that lines are drawn where places meet. You have to know that lines are drawn where one color meets another color. You have to be initiated into the mystery of planes. The conception of the trained artists as to planes and the art historian as to planes are absolutely different. The art historian doesn't know what in the world the artist means when he talks about planes. You have to understand well the artists' conception of mass. You have to know that he depends on mass to solve all kinds of technical problems, his problem of direction, his problem of shape, his problem of general shape and so on. You have to understand what perspective is. You have to understand how an illusion of reality may be ruined by the moving of the picture plane and all that sort of thing. And of course you have to understand human anatomy and the anatomy of animals because all these things fall under the traditions.

FS Mr. Hale, how is it possible then that the art historian who theoretically is meant to explain art, how is it that he knows so little about this very subject?

RH: Because it takes so long to learn. You know you can't learn these things in less than four or five years at an art school. It takes a long while to learn and you really don't know them unless they are in your subconscious and in your hand. It's very hard to understand it. That's one of the reasons that some of the restoration done at our museums is so badly done. Because the people who do it are not fully aware of what the technical traditions are. Very few of the curators understand these things either.

FS Many of these things are sort of touched on in chapters in art history books.

RH: Yes.

FS But the art historian does not actually practice.

RH: Of course. Of course. But you have to get the feel of it by practice. It's a subtle thing. These things are subtle and difficult. And you have to have the feel and you have a very strong feel like a first rate artist. As a matter of fact, I do believe that museums should always have a consulting artist before they touch a picture and try to clean it or anything. Because again and again I have seen the most disastrous results. I think the Met for instance should hire somebody like John Koch to superintend these things.

FS He would be an excellent choice for that.

RH: He'd be an excellent choice. Don't tell me for a moment that any restorer can paint with the same skill as John Koch does. He wouldn't be a restorer if he did. Koch understands these things. And several some people do. Any first-rate artist does as a matter of fact. But first rate artists aren't going to go into the restoring business.

FS Nor are they necessarily going to, well, I suppose they wouldn't be necessarily anxious in many cases to pass on their information to others.

RH: Oh, I wouldn't say they're that selfish.

FS It's a question of time I would think.

RH: Yes, it's time. That comes in from another experience. Very seldom does a first-rate artist want to write one of these how-to-do-it books. The how-to-do-it books on art are usually written by second-rate hacks. And it's too bad.

FS As you talk about this it makes me think that people who are going to be art historians or who are going to go into the museum field probably should have a great deal more exposure in actual practice in painting.

RH: Oh, I feel of course they have. But then the time element is always there. They're anxious to get their degree and get out. It's the way with architects. Architects should have a first-rate training in drawing and

painting. And then we'd have a little taste in some of our buildings perhaps. There isn't time, you know, when you have a lot of other things to learn. Because architects of course should be artists and occasionally are.

FS Yes, it has always seemed to me that some of the best architecture could be considered art.

RH: Oh, the best architects actually are artists. Charles Platt was an artist. And it seems to me that Frank Lloyd Wright was an artist. Just look at the things they drew and did, you know. They had great facility as artists. But the average architect doesn't really know what art is. A good way to find that out is to run down and look at the amateur exhibitions at the Century Club. They're full of the most dreadful efforts of the amateur artists. And most of them must happen to be architects.

FS I see. Are these people who are also members of the Century Club?

RH: Well, at the Century Club they have an amateur show which is of course confined to members. But fully 50 or 60 percent of those pictures are done by architects.

FS You know Hudson Walker I'm sure.

RH: Oh, yes.

FS Because I've never known whether Hudson painted or not. But I know he's very active down there.

RH: Oh, I'm sure Hudson has been to some art school some place but I don't know.

FS And he had his gallery too there at one time.

RH: Yes, Hudson is very sensitive to artistic trends and to artists one might say.

FS Well, may we go back a little bit. You mentioned you started out at Fontainbleau studying architecture. And then you went on into painting and you decided that you found this more interesting.

RH: More sympathetic.

FS I'd like to ask you why? Or can you say?

RH: Well, painting of course is looser. And you can do what you want. Architecture, particularly when you're starting out is a matter of quite a lot of discipline. You're under the control of other people and that didn't quite appeal to my temperament. But I shall always be grateful to the architectural school because it gave me a sense of mass, of form and space. All kinds of qualities that have helped me a great deal in the remainder of my life. Simply my architectural training at the Metropolitan Museum has been of enormous help to me in the setting up of exhibitions and so on.

FS Sure, I would think that the interest in anatomy and drawing ties in so closely to architecture.

RH: Oh, yes. The arts cross really.

FS But a person with an architectural interest would also be a person who would tend to like the works of painters that are more constructive. For instance, Poussin perhaps, would be more attractive to this person it seems to me. What do you think of this?

RH: I don't think you can tie it as closely as that. There are thousands of other qualities in life. I don't think you can tie it down that closely.

FS Mr. Hale, we have you now. I think we've gotten as far as your going to the Metropolitan and you had your two exhibitions but you found that this didn't push you into painting a great deal because you simply didn't have the time.

RH: Well, I don't think it's that. I think that of course having been at the Metropolitan for a number of years that, well, my interests weren't exactly focused on the idea that I myself was going, an artist and should paint pictures. I had many other interests by that time. My life was quite broad I suppose you might say.

FS And your work at the Metropolitan meant of course putting together exhibitions, doing research and all the various things that one does in an art museum?

RH: Yes, and running the department.

FS Yes, but at the same time clearly, I mean as I look at this painting here, it's a very definite personal statement that is not, you could say you've worked this out yourself.

RH: Well, I don't like that one much. But if you look at it you will see that it's derived from the abstract expressionist that of course it's full of dips and accidents, all I may say cautiously controlled. My show was more or less at the end of the abstract expressionist period. And I knew that I wasn't a professional artist because I hadn't had much time to work on it. And there was an element of fun in it really. And what I did was to use many of the abstract expressionist techniques but I put in a little subject matter. This picture I'm looking at is actually what goes on inside of a bear's head when he's coming out of hibernation. All of my pictures had a little touch of subject matter, rather esoteric subject matter. For that reason they're a touch different from the other, because most of them would rather cut off their right arm than present realistic images, as you know. In fact, one of them said that. I don't know which one it was. So that's what I did. And I must say it seemed to appeal to the public at the time.

FS Did you title things?

RH: Oh, yes. They have the most exotic titles. Every one of them. That was part of the business.

FS But then when you began painting, let's take this painting as an example, you certainly didn't have this in your mind as you started out?

RH: The actual technique in this painting is as follows. I made a great many on a smaller scale, this is a large one we're looking at, it's about four by five I would say. I made quite a number of smaller ones. I would put a little ink on and tip the paper this way and that and if I say an image appearing, or a suggestion of an image, I would then attack it with a brush and pull the image up a little. It's a combination of drip techniques and brush techniques. I've worked a great deal in my life with the Japanese Brush. It's a marvelous instrument for creating control of the hand, you know, the Japanese brush.

FS The sumi was it?

RH: Well Sumi imitation is what you do with ordinary watercolor. And it's quite hard really to control the composition in a drip painting, as you know. So occasionally I control it with the brush or put in an idea with the brush. It's interesting actually just a technical matter, a drip line never has a concave edge. So you could actually tell which was the drip lines and which were the brush lines. A drip line never has a concave outside edge. In doing this sort of thing of course I found out a great deal about the devices that Pollock and the others had used. I have a Pollock. Unfortunately it's out on loan now. But by looking at it I know exactly what he did. He threw a blob of ink on the paper. He grabbed a corner of the paper and gave it a sudden tug. And he got a very characteristic series of lines, which one can get that way. He then tipped it up a little and a little down to the right. And then he took, I would believe, a little bamboo pen and completed one line. And then it was. And a very handsome picture it is. I'm sorry it's not here. But the jerking of the paper when you put a blob of ink on it, jerking the paper this way and that if you worked on it for quite a while you get extraordinary and rather characteristic results that you can recognize. This one here is thrown up from a smaller one. Because these canvases, as you know, cost about fifty dollars and the cost of experimentation would come very high. So you do your experimentation with small ones. And if you get one you could throw it up to a large scale.

FS How do you throw it up though? Do you sketch it on the canvas first or do you ....

RH: No, these large ones I actually threw up with sort of magic lantern machine.

FS Oh, you do?

RH: Yes, oh, I've never told this to anybody especially George Staempfli. I could copy them I suppose. But again I might have a failure. And this was very accurate. So somewhere there's a smaller version of that. Probably in somebody's house.

FS You mean, in other words, you don't, certainly you keep the original one?

RH: No, I didn't keep them at all. I sold them all.

FS But with your system then, I don't know if other people are doing it, do other people do this, what you're doing?

RH: You mean throwing things up with lanterns?

FS Yes.

RH: Oh, its greatly done by mural painters and it was done in the old days a great deal. I simply did it, I was pressed for time and I did it for that reason more than any other reason. I don't know, you can do it that way, or if you wish you could just copy the other one. It doesn't much matter.

FS But again it's a traditional technique. I mean a traditional system of using the blowing up with the magic lantern?

RH: Yes, oh, yes. I don't think that this particular method would please the ordinary abstract expressionist because they were very proud of their direct painting. I can't see that that's of any value whatsoever really, but they feel that way.

FS This is what they call action painting. In other words right directly on the canvas.

RH: Yes, well the small ones are action painting. But these large ones are not. They're thrown up with the lantern.

FS So in other words, you have action painting here. Action drawing, whatever you want to call it, in the smaller version. But then ....

RH: This is a reproduction of a smaller one.

FS Sure.

RH: But nobody liked the big ones very much. The small ones people liked very much. I must say that you somehow lose some of the vitality feel of the thing by throwing them up. And I think people were subconsciously aware of that. Though there are a number of these that have been sold and are around. I'm afraid the ones in my house are the worst. I sold practically everything and have done very little painting since. And now I'm left with the dregs.

FS Well, you're painting now aren't you?

RH: No, I'm not. I'm now writing a very complex political satire for children of about twelve . That's been occupying me. I shouldn't be doing that. I should be writing how-to-draw books because I could make a lot of money on those. But all this summer I've been writing a sort of sophisticated children's book which I probably won't even be able to see.

FS What is the satire about?

RH: The satire is a satire of the present scene in the United States of America. And it also has quite a little poetry in it. I've written quite a little poetry. I've published quite a number of poems in the New Yorker magazine through the years.

FS I've read your poetry in the New Yorker.

RH: You have to be a little careful because there's another Robert Hale who ....

FS Well, I was going to say I didn't know it was yours.

RH: Robert Hale who is a congressman from Maine. And he writes too. So I've had all the credit for al the poems he's written and for the ones I've written myself. But they did tell me the other day that one of my poems was spoken at the convention in Chicago by a reporter over television.

FS Of course, I'm interested to know is which side quoted your poetry.

RH: Well, I found out which one it was. It's a very short little poem. It would fit either side. I'll quote it to you. It's called The Moon. And it goes some say it's made of silver. I say it's made of cheese. For I am an American. And say what I damn please. That's all the poem was. It was picked up by Oscar Williams and put in an anthology once. I'm planning to put it at the very end of this book I'm writing now.

FS Is this by any chance a satire of the Democratic Convention.

RH: No, it's rather a broad general satire on the general situation of the last three or four years. It's hopefully cast in a sort of Alice in Wonderland vein. As I'm not a professional fiction writer although I have dabbled in it and written a little. I really don't know what will happen to it. I'm doing it for Doubleday actually. But they haven't seen it yet. They may get a rather severe shock when they do. But they did approach me and say that they were upset by their children's books, that they wanted a really contemporary children's book that all their children's books seemed to be about English curates and muffins and all that sort of Victorian feel, and would I try to do something contemporary for them. And the idea intrigued me and I worked at it all this summer. And I suppose I'll finish it in about three months, I don't know.

FS Well, I'm sure that you with your children have had the experience of reading books to them and finding that

so many things that are available are so terribly boring.

RH: Oh, they're terrible. So terrible.

FS They're stupid. I have the same problem. I certainly would welcome the arrival of some good children's books.

RH: Well, this, as I say, is for children pretty old. They have to be old enough to understand Alice in Wonderland. And I think you probably have to be about ten years old to understand that, I don't know. I don't know much about children before. I know a lot about children from zero to four.

FS I think we're pretty much in the same boat. Mine are zero to three. So this will be essentially a situation as it exists today in this country?

RH: Yes.

FS I was talking the other day to Ben Shahn about the world and how it's changed and so on. And the impression I get from talking to him is that he feels that he's been a warrior for a great cause for many, many years but he still sees endless battles ahead.

RH: Well, of course there are endless battles ahead. Just the way there are endless battles behind. I do think though that at this moment we're in a period of quite extraordinary political change. Of course if there hadn't been any atom bomb we'd be enjoying the Third World War now, you know. And all those frustrations are all pent up and they're coming out in various ways. But it does seem to me that certainly the younger people are impatient with the ordinary political setups as we know them. That is, with Communism and with Democracy, and of course with Fascism. And they're seeking for something else even Socialism. I haven't really heard of any splendid constructive suggestions yet though.

FS No.

RH: I've read my Marcuse and others but I really don't quite know what they want and they don't know either as far as I can see.

FS But I find it extraordinary, Mr. Hale, that this seems to exist all over the world.

RH: Yes, yes, that does amaze me. Even in China, say. It is a very broad movement. It's an impatience with the general setup, an impatience with the decisions of age. Impatience I think particularly with the hypocrisy of age.

FS I have a feeling that youth has always been impatient with what has been called hypocrisy, or what perhaps now at my age I would call accommodation, but in time accepted it as it itself crew older. But now there seems to be something else that's making one take a stand. May I try one of these.

RH: They have no nicotine at all. You won't like them.

FS I won't like them?

RH: No, they have excellent flavor but the nicotine is bred out of them.

FS Splendid, thank you. What is the position of an artist today?

RH: In today's society?

FS Yes, I mean now in this period of social change, which I agree with you, I'm convinced it is.

RH: Well, that's such a difficult question. Why don't we see if we can get a cup of tea. I'll see if my wife is back.

FS You know, I can do this any time it's convenient for you, Mr. Hale, I could come back again.

RH: OH, no, sit around. I believe my older sister from Texas is turning up in about twenty minutes. But let's stay until then and maybe later.

FS Well, that's very nice of you.

RH: But let me go down and see if I can rustle up a cup of tea.

FS All right, I'll turn this off.

RH: Yes.

FS Mr. Hale, we were talking a bit about politics and about the relationship of the artist to our society at this point, do you want to elaborate further on that?

RH: Well, that is a broad subject. There are special facets that you might question me on.

FS Well, for instance, I was wondering. Clearly you feel involved in the political situation at this point and practically everyone else I've talked to has felt this way too. But what can the artist do, as an artists, to make a positive contribution to a solution to our problems?

RH: Well, I would think only the evident things. He can protest, he can vote, he can demonstrate if he wishes. Do things that artists have always done on political things. Let me turn this off.

FS Sure. [INTERRUPTION]

FS Let me just identify this. This is an interview with Mr. Robert Beverly Hale in his apartment in New York. The date is November 1, 1968. And the interviewer is Forrest Selvig. This is the second interview with Mr. Hale. Well, let me see, Mr. Hale. I don't remember exactly where we left off on our last talk. But I remember that we were talking about your work at the Metropolitan, how you got involved with the Metropolitan. And then your exhibitions and your teaching at the Art Students League. You were talking abut Isabel Bishop just a few minutes ago. And about Ralston Crawford. And I wonder if we could talk a bit about them.

RH: Well, I know I'm afraid the work of Isabel Bishop a great deal better than that of Ralston Crawford. But I don't know that I could add very much to what you know. I admire her work very much and always feel she was rather associated artistically with Reggie Marsh, whom I also knew very well. I don't believe in saying I know people of course partly because of my life. I met a whole lot of them, but what does that mean exactly?

FS Yes, but I was thinking that perhaps you might tell us some stories about their early years and their development here in New York.

RH: It always seems to me that what the Archives of American Art should do is go to the Art Students League and interview the superintendent who is now 83 years old. His name is Richard Burkite. He's known every artist since about 1905 when he first turned up at the League. He has better memory than I have. I've always tried to remember personal incidents more than anything else. My memory is more or less emotional. I remember for instance things like the fact that Reggie Marsh once told me that he had a terrible time giving up cigarettes. But he finally did. And then the war broke out and he had to go to war. So he got this great troopship and he was looking over the side of the troopship and he saw getting aboard the man who had taken away his first wife. That was too much for him. So he went right down his cabin and smoked a whole package of cigarettes. That's the type of thing I remember. Isabel Bishop, I really remember more about her house in Riverdale and the incredibly charming dinner parties she's given up there.

FS Mr. Hale, over the years, with the association with the art world in New York could you say that New York remains as vital and as potent and creative a center as it was before? Is it becoming more so? Do you have any observations to make on this?

RH: Oh, well, I have just the usual ones. Of course when I was growing up, Paris was supposed to be the center. My idea and everybody else's idea was to get over to Paris. Of course after the Second World War New York become the actual center. It's very interesting to me observing this through the Art Students League when I first went to the League the League was quite French in character. In imitation of the Beaux-Arts. And there were many French phrases current there and a great feeling of France at the League. Still are, you know. They have their Concours. But the young ones who go there now hardly know that France exists.

FS And they probably don't feel any, do they feel any great necessity to go to France anymore?

RH: No, none at all. But it was an utter necessity when I was young.

FS Have there been a great many European students coming here?

RH: Oh, yes, oh, yes. That's been very marked. Especially English. Quite a number of English students I notice. But the League of course has students from all over the world. Which makes it a fascinating place.

FS I wonder whether this has increased any since the war?

RH: I can only see it's my own observation but I would think very greatly.

FS I sse, because of the preeminence of American painting in the recent years?

RH: Yes, again an interview with the director of the League, Stewart Klonis, I don't know whether you have that?

FS No.

RH: Would seem to me to be terribly valuable.

FS I don't know whether this has been done either. It may have been done. But I can suggest this and see what, I would think that it's likely that it has already been done.

RH: Stewart has a superb factual memory and mind. Stewart Klonis you know is the Art Students League.

FS Oh, he is.

RH: I could explain why but ....

FS Go ahead and explain why.

RH: Well, oh, Stewart became the actual president of the League way back I would think in about 1933 and he served as president until well after the Second World War. Of course the president of the League means that he was selected president by the membership and that he served without salary. But naturally he had the controlling voice at the League. Then after the year, as you probably know, the League became very crowded. All the GIs came back and the League from a smallish art school of five or six hundred people became a school of maybe two thousand. And it was seen that the League needed a paid director. Stewart was offered the job and took it. So he directs the League but between you and me he naturally still holds the political reins. He's the one really that holds the place together it seems to me. I'm worried about what will happen when Stewart leaves because of course he's getting close to seventy. But he's an incredible character in that he's not only a first-rat artist, but he has a superb business sense. And of course that combination is very hard to find. He started off in Wall Street, you know, and came to the League and he keeps it on an even keel both artistically and financially.

FS In a way he's sort of like Phil Adams at the Morgan Library.

RH: He's something the same, except that Phil Adams deals with a different board of trustees. The marvelous thing about the Art Students League is it is run by artists for artists, you know. And the one great rule there is that everybody who makes any money from the League cannot sit on the board of control. Like myself for instance. The voice of policy.

FS I see, teachers and so on?

RH: Yes, Stewart of course is an exception because he's the director and he has to be present at the board meetings.

FS I see, but he perhaps doesn't have a voice in it?

RH: Well, they listen very carefully to what he has to say.

FS That's a very good board they have, I'd say then.

RH: Well, they have to. Because as I say, through proxies he practically controls the voting membership.

FS Now when you say that they elected a head, the membership elected a head, what does a membership consist of?

RH: The membership of the League, I don't quite know the figure, it's probably about 8,000 people. Are simply people who have been through the League and consented to be members of the Art Students League by paying a small fee.

FS These are alumni in other words?

RH: Yes, they're alumni. Most people don't know it, but of course the League is not run by art students. It's run by the alumni of the League. Once a year they have a meeting at the Hotel Sheraton. To me they're the greatest meetings I've ever seen. Everybody there is an artist and hell invariably breaks loose. And from among themselves they elect a board of control to run the League for the ensuing year. That's the way the League is run.

FS I see, it started out like this too.

RH: Well, the League started almost a hundred years ago, you know. People think tis a mild revolt from the National Academy. But I believe the classes at the National Academy closed down last year and the students got together and hired a teacher and established the Art Students League.

FS So that perhaps when it started out the teachers were hired by the students?

RH: They still are so to speak.

FS But now it's the alumni really?

RH: Well, there are always students on the board of control. Through the constitution there have to be. I don't remember exactly how many.

FS Well, this is something that other larger seats of learning have just recently come to, shall we say.

RH: Yes, we've thought of that after these riots break out. The League is terribly sensitive to the needs and wants of its students. And also of course the League is terribly sensitive to contemporary movements in art.

FS Yes.

RH: And that's the reason why the curriculum is so broad you know. The instructors range from the most conservatives old dodo they could find to the youngest and wildest painter they can find. And there's everybody in between. And all the styles and movements of the last hundred years, you might say, are represented in the curriculum of the League. Which I think is its great strenght. And which Klonis vigorously upholds.

FS It's quite a change though from the National Academy.

RH: Oh, well, the Academy of course is run by academicians and the teaching is all traditional.

FS That's a very interesting thing.

RH: But the League to me is a fascinating school. It's a terribly vigorous and lively place as you probably know.

FS I certainly do.

RH: And the strange thing about it is that it never has any money, you know. It has no endowment to speak of. Its expenses are paid solely by tuition. The tuition is kept very low. It seems to me that it's something like a university of the middle ages because they supply nothing but instructors and a place for the students to study. They don't take care of their health, they haven't any physical education instructors, no psychiatrists and so on. So it's very economically run. Also of course there's enormous freedom there. The underlying assumption of the League is that you don't come there unless you want to work. There are no marks given and no degrees.

FS This is very interesting because in so many art schools now there is this great push to work out some way to give their students an A.B. so that they can teach. In order to do that English courses.

RH: So they train a great many other teachers to teach other teachers.

FS Yes.

RH: One of the reasons I like to teach at the League is that I've taught at many other places and the League seems to be interested in turning out artists rather than people who teach other teachers. Of course it's also dedicated to the fine arts. And there aren't too many schools that are dedicated to fine acts solely.

FS What happens, you come in and, what I want to say is, how are people accepted.

RH: At the League?

FS Yes.

RH: Anybody who comes in and registers is accepted at the Art Students League. Because the theory being that they don't know what town you come from. Which seems to me an excellent idea.

FS And then they can just continue until ....

RH: Then they pick out an instructor. They're usually mystified when they come because the girls in the office are instructed to tell them nothing, the theory being that they'll never be good artists unless they can make their own decisions. And they soon learn really that to be an artist you're tremendously on your own, that you don't get anywhere except through you won efforts, and you own work. It's an entirely personal matter. The strange thing about the League is that in all the years I've taught there I've never had a disciplinary problem. Of course the reason is that there's no friction of any sort between students and instructors because the instructors aren't going to give any marks and if a student doesn't want to work in the classroom he just sits outside. I don't think you could run this system for anything except maybe a creative writing school.

FS But generally I presume it's true that all the students are very serious? RB:It is much more agreeable to teach at the League than at any school I've ever taught at because your students of course are terribly interested in what they're doing or they just wouldn't be there. Teaching in colleges I think is just terrible. Everybody is so interested in the dreadful mark they're going to get. They're all trying to get out of doing work and all the rest of it. It's a bore.

FS There's nothing that makes these people attend classes or anything? They can come and go as they wish?

RH: One of the strange things about the League is that it has no holidays except Christmas and Easter, maybe Thanksgiving. They it will have no holiday you know, if some election is coming up. Because if holidays come the students get angry if the school is closed. Which again you see, is different from other schools.

FS I see. It sounds like a tremendously free and ....

RH: Also you pay by the month on the assumption that artists are not very well off.

FS Which is a very valid assumption. It sounds like a place that would be very fertile and full of creativity.

RH: I think really the great thing about the League is I would believe it's the largest art school in the country. The result is that there are enormous masses of students. They're interested in art of course and they all get together and they all talk. And in a way it's a sort of Left Bank, you know, for young people.

FS It's similar, isn't it, to a kind of apprentice relationship?

RH: Yes, it's very similar to that. Some students will come there and enter the class of a certain teacher and stay there for five years. It's very close to the apprentice system.

FS There's no time when they're supposed to leave or anything?

RH: No, but believe me if you've been through it you certainly know when it's time to leave. You realize that they can give you no more. You're on your own. It's very clear. It's a revelation that suddenly comes. I went for five years and when I was in the fifth year I suddenly realized that they had nothing more to give me. I have to find out for myself.

FS I'd like to ask you one other question which has nothing to do with the Art Students League. In interviewing other artists so often I have heard them say that they felt that the museums make an effort to influence the development of contemporary art. What do you think of this, Mr. Hale? Would you say so? As both an artist and a museum man it should be.

RH: Well, of course I can only speak for the Metropolitan Museum. It seems to me of course they may not consciously influence this through their buying programs. Certainly the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum are so totally ignorant of the currents of contemporary art that I would say that they are utterly unable to influence it. If perhaps I influenced it by the buying there might be something to it. But we bought so broadly at the Met that it would be difficult to tell you what the influences were. I suppose of course that a place like the Museum of Modern Art when they give an enormous show to some individual contemporary artist they can be thought of as an influence.

FS In other words, this man has received the accolade?

RH: Yes, and naturally we've had great American shows at the Met. But almost invariably we've had juries, broad juries who pick people out, and that must be an influence. But the trustees always wanted us to lean over backwards and make the juries very broad. In fact one time we had a terrible fight there when Taylor was there. Taylor and I had a great fight with the trustees because the trustees were so broad that they wanted to have both advanced and conventional juries all the way throughout the country where this great big show was put on. And we set up national juries in various sections of the country. Taylor and I thought that was a little silly and cumbersome. But the trustees forced us to do it.

FS What kind of a show resulted?

RH: Well, a normal large retrospective of the past few years was what it was. And we did, we set up two sets of juries in five sections of the country.

FS When was that?

RH: That would be back in 1950 or 1951. It was a painting show. When I first came to the Met we put on a series of great national shows taking in, I think the first one was oils and the second one was prints and watercolors and the last one was sculpture, as I remember. That would be in the very early 5-s.

FS I see. And when did the Met really begin buying or expanding its contemporary art?

RH: Well, I can say precisely because it was when I got there. They'd been doing a little buying before, you know, at sort of sporadic intervals. There was one time when they gave Julian Force the power of buying. So she bought a number of pictures which I thought were rather second rate. I suppose she got the best ones for the Whitney. There was a little flurry about it in the forties sometime.

FS But there was a period, and this was when you came, when it really went into contemporary art?

RH: Contemporary American. Not contemporary European. Contemporary American. As I think I explained before on this last tape, that was due to the fact that they had the Hurd funds there that were left for the purchase of contemporary American art and they had not been spent when I got there for years.

FS This is George Hurd?

RH: George Hurd and his brother.

FS Oh, yes, I've been terribly impressed by the Fresco show incidentally.

RH: Oh, I'd love to see it. I haven't seen it yet.

FS It's really glorious. I wonder whether any of this speaks to contemporary artists and whether it influences them in any way? I'm not aware of this.

RH: Well, that's another hard question to answer. You never know of course who the painters of tomorrow are. The show is certainly interesting to the students and they're talking about it. They may get ideas from it, you know. But of course when you talk about contemporary artists, again that's a very broad spectrum, you know, terribly broad. I'm afraid when people talk about art they talk about it in the sense of the group they come from, you know.

FS Yes.

RH: It's terribly true of the vociferous avant garde group of this town. In fact what has always amazed me is the deep separation between artists during the days of the abstract expressionists they seemed to be utterly divided from the conservative artists. Certainly they never went to each other's funerals I can assure you. And they hardly knew the name of the other group.

FS Well, wasn't this particularly true however of the abstract expressionists more so then, well, perhaps we've never had a movement as overwhelming as that one was.

RH: I don't believe we ever had.

FS And this included not only the artists themselves but writers, museum people, a great commitment all over, all across the board.

RH: Yes, a great division.

FS They divided themselves from everybody else certainly but won the day and ruled for a good long time.

RH: Well, of course it did, again in the minds of the avant garde. but the others went blithely along ignoring it. This has interested me deeply psychologically you might say because I have to know both groups, you see. Well as I was saying, I might give a dinner party here to a group of prominent conservative artists and they'd never heard of Kline and Pollock and the others, you know. Whereas I would have that set and they would never have heard of Leon Kroll or Isabel Bishop. They were very divided. It seemed to the preposterous but that's the way people are I think.

FS It's a little harder for me to see how the established traditional artists would not have heard of the newer ones because they had such a big press, Art News and so on.

RH: Well, they didn't like to read Art News undoubtedly or allow it to come into the house. The bulletins from the Modern Museum were also disturbing. They lived in an ivory tower. The National Academy is still going up there carrying on its own business and ignoring the rest of the world, having their little shows that nobody comes to giving out their prizes.

FS The National Academy certainly.

RH: And then everybody is ignoring the National Academy. Even the avant garde then don't know it exists.

FS Well, I think that most people don't know it exists.

RH: Well, the avant garde don't quite know what it is ....

FS Not I mean just the ordinary interested person doesn't know much about the National Academy. It's not written about anywhere.

RH: I was talking to a conservative young painter the other night who was in tears because he had not been admitted to the National Academy and he had been trying in every possible way to get into the National Academy. He's not so young either. I think he's getting well into his fifties. And it means a great deal to him. So some people take it very seriously.

FS But in the art world today it doesn't seem very important role.

RH: I would say it doesn't. Although you will find that all the best of the conservative painters are in it pretty much. I'm sure, I don't know whether Andy Wyeth is in it but I assure he is.

FS I would certainly think so.

RH: I don't know whether he is or not. And others.

FS Has there been any effort to make it less conservative?

RH: There seems to be very little.

FS Years ago I knew Umberto Romano who I think was president of it for a while and he was terribly interested in having an exhibition of things out of their collection.

RH: Well, they have a very fine collection because of course they've been going on for years and everybody who joins it has to give them a picture. You know, and I believe a portrait as well, a portrait if he can paint it.

FS Yes.

RH: Right now at this moment, I suppose this is highly confidential, they're trying very hard to sell a Thomas Eakins they have. They're not trying hard, they're just trying to see who will pay the most for it. It's that one of the Two Wrestlers. Because they need money. I think for their school actually.

FS It's interesting to think of their school in relation to the Art Students League. RB:Well, it is fascinating yes. But I don't think it's so bad because I do feel that artists should have an understanding of what the tradition is, you see. I know I paint rather wildly myself but when it comes to teaching I like to start off with the traditional fundamentals.

FS But in the Art Students League I'm sure that they're urged to go up I'm sure that you especially would urge the students to go up to the Metropolitan to see the exhibitions.

RH: Oh, of course, yes.

FS And other teachers would as well.

RH: Oh, I'm sure. The strange thing about the League is that almost all young people are strangely conservative at heart when they first show up at the League and they join the conservative clauses. But bit by bit they become sophisticated I think largely through talking to the other students. And they find out about the whole history of art and especially the history of the last fifty years and they begin to experiment and move on. But largely they start out in the conservative classes. They always seem to have a historical sense that way.

FS They perhaps feel more at home with it too.

RH: Well, in the beginning, you know, they're really fairly simple-minded when they turn up, most of them. They're young and they don't know how the art world is put together or they don't really know much about what art is. They have a feeling that it's the representative of so-called reality. That seems to be what they try to learn first. Since I teach that, why I get a great many of the new ones, the beginners, and try to start them on their way. But I try to point out to them that there are other places to go besides the traditional.

FS I wonder, probably the National Academy has brought on a much more traditional basis.

RH: Well, as I said to you a moment ago. There are quite a number of people in the National Academy who feel that the Armory Show was a personal affront and shouldn't have taken place and that there hasn't bee any art

since then. And that they're the only ones that are carrying it on. As a matter of fact, we have several instructors at the League who feel that way.

FS That's so long ago. So incredibly long ago.

RH: Well, it seems just like the other day to me. I went to it. I went to it. I don't know whether I told you last time, Marcel Duchamp turned up in New York shortly afterwards. He was a great friend of my mother's and stepfather's and he used to be at our house all the time. I remember being so influenced by the Armory Show myself that I cam back and painted about forty abstract pictures when I was only about 12 or 13 years old. I was talking to my wife about it yesterday, I'd say now that they had a great Hans Hofmann quality to them. I wonder what's happening to them.

FS Yes, that was a great show, apparently a great liberating influence in this country. Let's see, that was put together by, who was it, an American artist?

RH: Davies,w asn't it. To a great extent?

FS Yes, Arthur B. Davies.

RH: Milton Brown could tell you all about that.

FS They reconstituted it a couple of years ago. I have the catalogue of it.

RH: Yes, I went to that too.

FS Unfortunately I didn't see it. I was out of the country. But I did get the catalogue. It was fascinating to think of its coming back again and have a chance to revive what had happened.

RH: It must have been fifty years afterwards I would think.

FS Probably no, it would be 1963 by then?

RH: Yes, it was about then.

FS Do you recall whether this was uniformly condemned by all of the art critics here in New York at the time?

RH: I would say it was to a great extent. I know there were always people who understood what was going on. Of course I was a little too young to be really aware of what was happening. But that again is in all the books. Milton Brown's book of course I think is splendid from the Armory Show to the Depression. He puts in many quotations from the critics as I remember. And naturally Theodore Roosevelt.

FS And Theodore Roosevelt.

RH: Yes.

FS What about New York during the Second World War? Were you at the League then?

RH: Yes, I was.

FS And the emigre or refugee artists who were apparently such a seminal influence on the development of American contemporary art, were any of these involved at the League?

RH: Yes, of course Goerge Grosz was there. Hans Hofmann was there I think a little earlier. Zadkine was there. I can't seem to remember others.

FS Grosz became an American citizen, unless I'm mistaken and stayed on here after the war.

RH: Oh, yes, he did.

FS But did this have a great influence on the students at the Art Students League? Did it suddenly change the ambience?

RH: Oh, I shouldn't say so too much. It seems to me he was just regarded as one of the instructors. But there were some of those that worked there that I suppose will be traced out later by the art professors. It seems to me that Grosz's spirit actually underwent a great change when he came over here. He didn't face America with the enthusiasm, say, of Hans Hofmann and others. Zadkine certainly came over with the full knowledge that he was going back as soon as the war was over. I don't know how much influence there was. I think the great value of those men was that they opened up the student's minds a bit. I'm sure they were a great help.

FS They certainly informally, other artists, other American artists, they had a great influence on these refugee artists.

RH: Oh, yes, many of them, but there had been influence earlier of Europeans. I feel that the influence of Pascin, for instance, in this country never has been fully detailed. But certainly people like Alex Brook and Kuniyoshi and others took a great deal from Pascin. That feathery business that was so prevalent in the early 30's was all out of Pascin, feathery edge business you know. But as you know, an artist picks up an influence here, there, and the other place. So it's hard to say.

FS It's interesting that you've mentioned Pascin's influence because I have not heard this mentioned much at all.

RH: Well, you could trace it down among your friends and all these people. I can see it clearly in Brook's work.

FS Pascin himself was, let's see, lived here for many years. Then he was down in Havana.

RH: He was what?

FS He was in Havana too. He started living there.

RH: In Nevada, did you say.

FS Havana.

RH: Oh, Havana, yes he was.

FS He's a most incredible artists. Great delicacy.

RH: Oh, enormous.

FS Do you remember the Josefowitz Collection here? Sameul Josefowitz. He had a great many Pascins. He went back to Lausanne, Switzerland. He was here for a long time. And I think some of them were on loan at the Metropolitan.

RH: Oh, yes.

FS I can't remember but it was the largest collection of Pascin's that I've seen. But still Pascin has not had apparently the strong influence that some of these others had. For instance ....

RH: Well, Hans Hofmann of course is famous. It seems to me Gorky though had a great influence. Because of course he taught too. Gorky's work really fascinates me. There's an excellent new book out which you may have seen. It shows very clearly the development of Gorky and the sudden moment when he really became himself after having been Picasso, Cezanne, and Gaugin and others you know.

FS I must look into that.

RH: No, I'm sorry, I just picked it up at a dinner party, I don't know who's published. It's beautifully illustrated. He painted the most perfect Cezannes I've ever seen in my life.

FS Right.

RH: But as an illustration of how an artist becomes an individual and creates a strong style out of the elements he finds in others the book is terribly revealing.

FS Did you know him?

RH: Well, my sister studied with him. Oh, I'd met him of course, he taught at the Grand Central School here.

FS What was that really?

RH: Well people have sort of forgotten hat. But in the early 30's there was a considerable school on top of the Grand Central Station somewhere and it had quite an influence. It seems to have been forgotten.

FS This is in the early 30's and Gorky was teaching there?

RH: I think so yes. Let me see, yes, I would say about 1934 or 1935 probably.

FS Was there anyone else besides Gorky teaching?

RH: I think not. I don't know enough about it though. The trouble is I really knew very little about the art world in the 30's. My interests were all in other directions. My knowledge of the art world actually all crystallized when I got on the board of control of the Art Students League and became the vice-president. And then I began to understand the ins and outs of art associations and dealers and museums to a certain extent. But prior to that I was a complete innocent.

FS Certainly it is a world that is full of many little things that do not at first appear to the eye in many respects.

RH: Well, it's an incredibly fascinating world. I suppose people outside of the art world hardly know it exists. But it cuts across all kinds of barriers. It's a vast group of people in New York stretching over the United States who all seem to know each other. They probably create an appreciation of art. It's actually full of politics and excitement and friendship and so on. It's quite something.

FS Another thing that has come up a great deal in my discussions with artists is the important particularly in New York and in gallery shows, the new voice, the new discoveries and so on. Generally when this is referred to people are negative about it. They feel it's a bad thing and they feel that it's overemphasized a great deal.

RH: Well, of course especially with conservative artists.

FS Yes.

RH: But this is almost a philosophical question. Naturally I think an artist who is vitally alive feels that his job is a creative job and not a repetition of cliches. And he feels out on the cutting edge, you know, and he has to do something about it. Of course it's a little dangerous to confuse creativity with novelty. The two worlds are very different. So you have to keep your head in these matters if you can. Novelty is I think is a work you can apply a little more to fashions in clothes. But everybody knows, I think that the pop artists have been very aware of the fact that perhaps if they could move a little the way the fashion world moves, why it might be not only exciting but profitable.

FS It certainly has been both I would say.

RH: But it does surprise me, I was very surprised really by the enormous change in the personalities of artists from the abstract group to the pop artists who are very different people, as you probably know. They were very different. I was, as I said, reading David Smith's book last night. And I don't know if anybody has ever talked about it, but it seems to me that Ernest Hemingway had an enormous influence on the personalities and outlook of the abstract expressionists.

FS That's interesting.

RH: David Smith's style of course is practically pure Hemingway. You know, he believed in prowling around with the workmen. He thinks that the workmen are all God's people. And there's nothing like getting drunk and having a good bottle of red whine and all that sort of Hemingway nonsense. That was very strong in Jackson Pollock and the others. The Pop artists, the ones I've met have been very elegant gentlemen and many of them have a college education, you know.

FS That's true. Well, weren't many of the social protest people also this kind of person?

RH: You mean the Hemingway type?

FS Yes, they were tied up with labor movements and the depression and so on.

RH: Yes, but it seems to me really that they were a little more consciously intellectual than the abstract expressionists, not to say that the abstract expressionists weren't intellectual in many senses of the word. But they liked so much to associate themselves with the manly working type that their language was different.

FS Many of them also came through the WPA.

RH: Yes, oh, many of them came up through the WPA, yes. But for instance, David Smith was a highly intellectual and sensitive character, of course, yet you wouldn't know it unless you saw him and knew him for quite a little while because he would affect great democratic attitudes, you know, the way Pollock did.

FS And yet they did form an exclusive group which ....

RH: Yes, they invented their own style of life, you know, a very strong one too. And almost their own English speech. They themselves created a style of their own. But I've always felt that Hemingway was there in the background in some way.

FS That's very interesting. I hadn't thought of that. But I can see what you mean. I wonder why they would have felt it necessary to do this? Or did they feel it was necessary because it was something that just happened and developed?

RH: Oh, well, that was the style of the young people of the time. It of course came out of the First World War to a great extent. It was an American style. It was a thoroughly American style thing I believe. I'm talking of the style of life of course.

FS Yes, but now the pop art people are far more, shall we say, the Brooks Brothers types, or more Madison Avenue perhaps.

RH: Well, I think intellectually that they're not ashamed of perhaps quoting Wittegenstein and things of that sort. They're not ashamed of being educated. They're not ashamed of having good manners. You know, Pollock would have been terribly ashamed if anybody said he had good manners, were good.

FS And I take it no one ever did.

RH: I don't believe anybody ever did. Oh, but he was really essentially very gracious.

FS I was thinking of the pop artists that I know. I know Andy Warhol a bit. And certainly I've never been successful in having any intellectual conversations with him.

RH: Well, you could with Rauschenberg and others, and you could with Ellsworth Kelly, and that group and so on. They're very distinguished young men, as you know.

FS What is happening now? What do you see coming out of all this?

RH: Well, if I could see that I'd be a millionaire. Of course I can't see it. It's lying dormant in the minds of a group of young people but I don't know what it is.

FS I was talking to one painter this morning who was telling me that he felt that the end of painting was very close at hand, the end of ....

RH: Oh, putting things on canvas you mean?

FS Exactly yes, and that he though there was much more liklihood that things were going to develop into a collaboration with engineers and scientists.

RH: Well, that of course will be one direction. But it seems to me that the convenience of having a flat surface and putting something on it is not going to disappear. It also seems to me that the creation of the illusion of the third dimensions on a flat surface will probably not disappear. That would be like saying that camera will disappear. Well, I don't believe it will at all. So I think we'll have that around for a long while. You see, it's awfully hard to file away large constructions. You could file away flat surfaces.

RH: That's true. RS:A dealer can have many flat surfaces in his gallery but he can't get too many of these large complex scientific statements in his gallery. Paper will be around for a long while I think. The books I believe are just about on the point of disappearing. And we'll have something very convenient no bigger than this little box of matches here that will contain all of Shakespeare.

FS So it might be something like, well, microfilm, is a step forward in that.

RH: Yes, but there will be something beyond that in no time. I'm sure it's already in the laboratories of the Xerox Corporation. There's no doubt. These books are terrible. Over there on my desk I have a great anatomy book I have to refer to. The desk is so small I have to put it on the floor and I can hardly pick it up and put it on my lap it's so bulky, you know. Well, that's ridiculous. It's also ridiculous that this house, I mean, is so bulky. And eventually those things will disappear.

FS It will be part of a completely new design. It takes a while. Well, we're certainly living in very revolutionary times. The whole world will be changing rapidly, more rapidly possibly.

RH: More rapidly every moment. With an acceleration beyond belief. It will be extremely hard to control the whole thing and keep it within rational limits. It is already. This very tape recorder, this very tape will probably by destroyed by an atomic fire which of course will result from fire in this fashion.

FS Well this is not a very optimistic outlook that you give us.

RH: It's not. Well, as I said, I was trained scientifically. And so I'm fairly dispassionate in my outlook.

FS We have all the means. We have the tools. We have the technology. But we certainly haven't learned. We haven't developed the human science really. The humanities perhaps is a better word for moral control of our own actions.

RH: I have a cousin, Buckminister Fuller, who of course talks about this a great deal better than I can.

FS He's your cousin?

RH: Yes, well, once removed, you know. He comes down through Margaret Fuller, you know. Which I though was fascinating, well, I said before I think, I'm a cousin of John Marquand the writer. His mother was a Fuller. Bucky would be a cousin of John's I believe. Bucky has been incredibly sweet to me and I'm terribly fond of him. RS:He's certainly done fantastic things. That great dome up in Montreal is magnificent and beautiful.

RH: Yes, that was very handsome. But the curious thing is that Fuller in no sense feels that he's an artist. And what aesthetic atmosphere rises out of his constructions seems to be of little concern to him actually. He's very fond of artists but he has no pretention of being an artist.

FS But that was a particularly beautiful thing and worked awfully well for its uses.

RH: Fuller is an immense complex personality. The personality is so strong I think that people find it very difficult to judge him because they're dazzled by this unique and extraordinary personality. I would say at times that his ideas that just through the process of luck some of them are really pretty good, you know. He's an absolutely intellectual fountain, you know. I don't know if you've run into him.

FS No, I haven't. I've read of course a lot of his statements.

RH: Well, he has this style of writing which is not too terribly clear really but it is very much his own. But his talking is always better because he has the uncanny ability to judge the comprehension of his audience and so you can always understand him when you talk to him.

FS He built one of his domes in the backyard of the Walker Art Center I think back in the early 40's or right shortly after the war. And this caused a great deal of interest there.

RH: And he had one at the Museum of Art, and also a beautiful tower there which seems to be held up by nothing at all. And the tower was really an aesthetic experience, a beautiful thing. And it has influenced quite a number of sculptors.

FS Of course this reminds me of that famous statement of Frank Lloyd Wright that when architecture is finally really appreciated there'll be no need for paintings and sculpture.

RH: Well, human beings are very wondrous and it's very hard to contain them in simple minded statements of that type.

FS Well, there seems to be a development, however, to this, to environmental sculpture more and more.

RH: Oh, well, this is a popular thing at present. It takes a lot of room though, as I say. It's clumsy.

FS But architecture could be seen as a kind of environmental sculpture if it's treated right.

RH: It could. If handled correctly it could. IT's a pity you aren't coming to dinner tonight. We have Tom Messer coming from the Guggenheim Museum.

FS Yes, I know him.

RH: And Livingstone Biddle, who has just taken over the Art Center here.

FS Is Livingston Biddle any relation to Jimmy Biddle?

RH: I'm sure that all the Biddles are all nicely related.

FS I think we've sort of reached a good point to .... [END OF INTERVIEW]