Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert Douglas Hunter, 1973 Jan. 11-Feb. 25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Robert Douglas Hunter on January 11, 1972, January 25 and February 8, 1973. The interview took place in Boston, Massachusetts, 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: Right. [Laughs.] We're all right now. That's feedback.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, it is?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Can you hear just a little bit, anything?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, no, I see. Uh, well, I—[laughs]—isn't it curious when you have to say something like that unofficially, how it's—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is January 11, 1972, interview with Robert Douglas Hunter, Robert Brown the interviewer. I'd like to particularly follow the stream of your life, and therefore, begin if you can say something about your family, some of your earliest experiences, and then we'll get into some of the more mature things.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I was born in 1928 in Boston to George Irvin Hunter and Hazel Frances Hunter whose maiden name is Costa. My father's family owned quarries and ran quarries in Quincy—his grandparents and his grandfather's brother. The family, the Hunter family originally came over here from Scotland. My mother's maternal side of the family were Vose, and I believe I might have been 15th or 16th-generation Vose. And her father—her father's grandfather came over from Portugal and settled in Roxbury where he had three children: two girls, Gertrude, Mary, and my grandfather Franklin Costa. I think perhaps that's sufficient for that aspect of the background. I'm one of a twin. I have a twin brother, George Irvin Hunter Jr. who is presently director of field education at Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Mass. [00:02:05] And also, he's the coordinator between faculty, student body, and administration. Loves his work, I may say.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were very close then as boys, were you, as twins?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: We were close. We were totally different in temperament, but we were close because our family was very close. I've been interested in drawing and painting. It was a very natural thing. I drew and painted before I could write—I tried to. Of course, I did it badly, but I had a great deal of fun, and I received the kind of encouragement, which I believe is wise—namely, to go it at my own pace when I wanted to do it, and supplies were provided, but I was not given undue encouragement. I entered—let me see. I think I was about 12 years old when I entered the Museum School. That is, they had at that time—I believe still do—they had Saturday morning classes for the youngsters around the city who chose to attend at a very reasonable rate, I may add. One of the amusing things in retrospect that I recall, there was a student show the second year I was there, and I had labored over what I thought was an imaginative concept of a *Florentine Lady* as I would visualize her without actually doing the research. And among the works that were reproduced in the *Boston Record American*, a Sunday paper, somewhere around that time, was my picture, and it was described by the writer as having Picasso-like attributes. And I was damn flattered to have something like that at 12 years old reproduced in the newspaper, but I didn't know who the hell Picasso was. [00:04:00] So I went to the museum, and I found a couple of Picassos and I decided that if I had Picasso-like qualities in my work at that age, I better not—I better do something about it. And so high school, I—along with Ned Tarbell, I'm also a graduate of The English High School in Boston.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you continued going through high school to the Museum School classes?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No, I did not. I had the great pleasure of—well, we at English High had the great privilege of having a very fine art teacher there by the name of Carl Adams. I don't know that Mr. Adams is alive at this time or not, but he encouraged me. You know, we were not all that well off, and I had to work after school doing the *Christian Science Monitor*, and so it was still, even at that time, more or less on my own with the encouragement of Carl Adams and the endorsement—encouragement, I should say, in the sense of my family.

Those days were so very different than education today.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They did encourage you in these pursuits?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Most certainly yes, but they didn't overencourage, which is the thing that I'd like to really state quite gladly because I have seen particularly in today's world where mamas and papas have kids with a certain amount of talent, and they're trying to push them too fast too soon. I personally do not believe that child should be educated much before 15 in this specific area. I personally believe as fine a liberal arts background as possible is important to the training of an artist because he's not just a picture painter. He's got to be more than that if he's going to be—uh, do some—it seems to me to do something significant. It's not just teaching a lot of tricks or learning a lot of tricks, so. [00:06:04] Then from high school, I decided against the museum school because I didn't like what was going on over there. Karl Zerbe was in charge of the school, and I just thought it was, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You knew a bit of—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —it was going in a direction that instinctively I did not want to pursue.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you knew something about that?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I knew something—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were in on the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —mind you, a little bit about it. I could—I have eyes, and I can see, and I would see the student exhibitions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What sort of things were they doing then his students?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, they were rather fine abstractions in a way. By fine, I mean they were—the best of them were beautifully designed. But the element of representation, which I care so much about, was completely missing, or if it was utilized at all, it was so distorted that it struck me as being quite ugly. Now, this is an opinion not a fact as you know, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: At high school at English High and at the museum Saturday classes, you had been allowed to copy and to do representational work?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, to do representational work, yes, and most of it is from the imagination; that is, I should say, memory and imagination. You would create things trying to restate some aspect of the visual world, which is what representational painting is.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Who was your teacher at the museum? Were there—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes, I had two—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —several of them?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —teachers. Now, mind you, I was only 12 or 13, something like that, and I only spent two Saturdays or two years of Saturdays during their scholastic year. A Ms. Lord who is now—is—I don't know whether she's living or not, but a Ms. Cook, Gretchen Cook who presently is, I believe, in retirement and is a member of the Newton Art Association, a perfectly lovely lady. She has followed my career through the years, and it's nice to be able to see her from time to time, which I do when I put demonstrations on at the Newton Art Association. [00:08:00] Well, now, we're at high—the point in high school, where the hell are you going to school? Well, it was thought and perhaps well advised that artists don't—remember, this will be 1945. Artists don't make a living at it, so therefore, you do the next best thing, you go to a commercial art school. This thinking was prevalent at the time. You go to a commercial art school and become an illustrator. So I chose the Vesper George School of Art on the advice of many people. I went to that school, and they had a very workman-like attitude, and I completed my freshman course, at which point, I quite frankly decided that I better go and pursue this. The shooting war was over, but the actual war was on, and I knew perfectly well if I got into the service at that point, I would get the G.I. benefits at the end and probably have a ball. So I decided on the United States Marine Corps, and they accepted me. After my training in Parris Island, I was stationed in Washington, DC, at Eighth and I Street, Washington post. I was connected with the Marine Corps Institute, wrote a course in commercial art for them. The Marine Corps Institute is the equivalent—the marine's equivalent to ICS, International Correspondence Schools, but the marine does it naturally themselves.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. [Laughs.]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you like the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: This is utterly fascinating, utterly fascinating because I never tried anything like this before. I've taught as an amateur, but I certainly never wrote a course. But my freshman year at Vesper George taught me a tremendous amount because during that time, I met Harold F. Lindegreen who I considered one of the most important influences in my life at that time. He taught a course in design, a rather esoteric course, but I thought, a deeply meaningful one where he took design, graphic design, and transferred that—their principles into philosophical principles so that it expanded your mind, and you were not just simply making a picture, so to speak. [00:10:21] I hope that's clear.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were some of the things he would suggest though in terms of—uh, that could be expressed through design or the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, for instance, you can express through design a sense of aspiration. You can express through design a sense of anger. You can express through design qualities of human experience that are not just merely graphic—in other words, not just beautifully designed as an abstraction but also expressive of other aspects of human, um, feeling, human emotion, human intellect. Anyway, we're back in the marine corps days, and that was an awful lot of fun. I had a barrel of laughs. I enjoyed it, practically every minute of it, and I was stationed in Washington, DC, which in 1946 and [19]47—no, '45 and '46, I believe was I thought a perfect, delightful place to be. It was—I found it socially amusing. I—it was at that time that I met President Truman and—but aside from that—that's trivial. That's unimportant. The main thing is, *a,* I wrote the course, which I considered a privilege. The only reason I'm sure that I—as a corporal and as really a boy of 18—was allowed the privilege of doing it is simply because all of the older men were getting out and they just—they had to stick people some place it seemed. They knew I had an art background, of course, so, and they figured that's where I should be. [00:12:11] I also did all the direct-mail advertising for them. In other words, Col. Kendall who was the commandant or commander at the time—Col. Kendall and I would put our heads together and come up with, oh, a copy. And I'd have illustrative material, and this would be done on a multi-lit—multigraph process printing, which meant that myself as the coordinator had also to deal with the printer. So I, kind of, saw what the commercial art is all about in its infancy, so to speak. It gave me quite a broad view of what it must be like to be a commercial artist, and I found it exciting, and I found it very stimulating, but somehow, there was something a little bit missing for me. Well, I was discharged after serving slightly less than two years honorably, and I went back to the Vesper George School of Art and completed a course in illustration. Among the teachers there who were important to me as I see it were: Lloyd Cole who taught illustration who's living presently in Rockport; Fletcher Adams who is currently the director of the school and a good advertising man; Phillip Parsons who is presently living in Lexington. Geetali Taletsky [ph], Geetali Taletsky who lives in Lexington, and I met just two weeks ago, and doesn’t look a day older than he did 20 years ago who taught me anatomy, and he learned anatomy under Philip Hale. Fran Fay [ph] who is now dead who taught color and design and had quite a flair and opened my eyes to how you can do research in a museum and come up with something that you can apply to contemporary design. [00:14:17] That was more or less applied design. I was very much interested in designing fabrics at the time when I was in school. I was interested in designing wallpaper, so you see, my interest was not nearly representational. I didn’t know what I was going to do when I graduated from the Vesper George School, so I met Henry Hensche who runs the Cape School of Art. Henry at that time in his life used to hustle around and go to schools and put on painting demonstrations trying to get the kids down to his summer school. A friend of mine who now runs a restaurant in Provincetown, Salvatore Del Deo was a student at the Vesper George School about the same time I was. I've forgotten whether he was in my class or a year ahead of me. No, he was a year behind me because Sal was a year younger than I am, but he studied with Henry Hensche in 1948, and he was singing his praises. So when Henry came to the Vesper George School to demonstrate hustling up youngsters for the following summer of 1949, he had a very interested, interested audience, and Agostino Velletri, Edward Gioachino Giobbi, Fred Perry [ph], and Robert Douglas Hunter decided that they would go down to Provincetown and study for the summer. And anxious as I've always been to get things done quickly, I went down the 30th of May in 1949 and moved into Arnold's hardware store. [00:16:04] Arnold's hardware store was an old house that was floated over from the point where the community, the early Provincetown community used to be, and it was an old wooden frame structure. He had a hardware store downstairs and in the basement, and the top three, I believe, stories above the street level were rentable area for the summer people. As a summer person, I arrived the thirtieth of May, undid all my belongings—unpacked them, I should say, including all the money I had for the summer and put it into a nice, stout, chifforobe. And with five bucks, a T-shirt, sandals, and a pair of white ducks, I went up to see Henry Hensche to see what this is all—what it's going to be all about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He knew you were coming, did—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, Henry knew I was coming by all means. He yakked a little bit and then sold me some supplies, and I went back downtown only to discover that within probably 15 minutes after I left, the fire had started, and the place was completely gutted by the time I arrived back down. Well, Henry came down, and it

was the biggest fire in Provincetown's history, and I literally just hit it. Had I missed the bus and gone the following day, the scene would have been quite different obviously, but this is the way it happened. So Henry put me up for the night, and I got the bus back to Boston. Needless to say, I didn't have any—too much to worry about in terms of carrying anything at that stage. Fortunately, a combination of an insurance policy my parents had provided for me a little bit of cash, and Fletcher Adams who then was the director of the Vesper George School employed my services to paint the school, which I did for the month of June. I went back to Provincetown the month of July, around the Fourth of July and stayed through Labor Day. [00:18:12] These four men whose names I just mentioned earlier, we were students together. Of the four of us, to my knowledge, the only two who are moderately well known at this stage are Eddie Giobbi and myself. Eddie Giobbi's painting is—if I may use these words throughout the speech—either representational or nonrepresentational—highly nonrepresentational today. He's probably best known because Random House printed a cookbook two years ago on Italian cooking by Edward Gioachino Giobbi. He's a hell of a nice guy. He's married to a rich Southern girl and they—which is neither here nor there, but money always helps. They have three lovely children, and they live up in New York State along the Hudson not far from New York City. Well, now, getting back to what was it like to be a painter or an art student in those days. From the time I was born until this point in my life—and mind you I was, I guess, 19—I really had never met a bona fide painter. Illustrators, people who do watercolors, but I have never met somebody who was trained as a painter until I met Henry.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These illustrators were quite different, were they?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: The illustrators were quite different because their approach was trying to gear yourself to train the memory so that you can recall things—to train the memory and to design this—I'll go into that later, but there are certain ways of designing where you deal first with the abstract before you deal with the specific. I considered that very invaluable to me, extremely. Even today I consider it very invaluable [00:20:03]. But it isn't a painting. It's using your eyes. The—this—the idea of being able to see the totality of nature and see all of the parts related the whole visual experience is what I have never been exposed to before. It's a form of impressionist painting, and it hasn't so much to do with how you do it. It has to do with how you see it. And I'll say it again—this is very important. In the broadest sense of the word, impressionism is when the artist is able to see the totality of nature and see all of the parts related to the whole visual experience. All right. Now, getting back from that lofty sort of definition to the specifics of how, you've got to—you're like a child again. So it's instead of handling a paintbrush, you'd use a trowel. Because if you use a trowel and put the paint on the canvas, it means that you won't be dealing with details. It forces you to put down the big notes, the big note of nature. And this was the thing in a nutshell that Mr. Hensche gave to me and gave to many and is still giving.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, was this hard for you to resist trying to do the details?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, Lord, it was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you take it as this—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —hellish. I did not take to it like a duck to water at all. I had a feeling that this—there was something to this because of the results of others. But to be able to even begin to do it, well, I'd really just begun to do it by the end of that summer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did he want you to block in with the trowel, so to speak?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, we would—for subject matter?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, no. I mean what was the—what comes with the trowel use?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I'm using the trowel—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —for the palette knife?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —palette knife, right. For what purpose?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Because when light falls—we were working outdoors every day that it was decent—in other words, either gray daylight or sunny light. [00:22:08] We were working from roughly 9:00 to 12:00 and 2:00 to 5:00 because during that period of time, the light is relatively steady. We were working usually with objects like heads or even still life objects set up in such a manner that the—that you were looking into the light, so all the vertical planes were in shadow. Now, when you set things up that way, it means that it simplifies nature. Everything is either in light or in shadow, so what you've got train your eye to do is to see the shapes that read as light and the shapes that read as shadow rather than a tin can, a pot, and a jug. You see abstractions revealed by light or revealed by the fact they were in shadow. You see?

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

ROBERT D. HUNTER: So this also tied in, in my thinking, in terms of trying to—well, trying to interrelate the abstract with the representational—that there is a relationship there, which is quite marked till you get away from that. See?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Now, a relationship that is quite marked, right. And also in my ponderings about, oh, the difficulty of the art—of the art of painting today, I thought there may have been a core truth there—that here we're dealing with both abstractions and representations at the same time. Because depending on how you set them up, it depends upon how it designs. You see, when you're working this way, your subjective aspect or the intuitive aspect of the artist at work is the way he sets something up. But as an impressionist, he becomes merely a recorder, and a recorder has to be nonselective in a way. [00:24:07] In other words—going back to that definition—you've got to be able to see the entirety and all the parts and relationship to the visual experience. You do not forsake one for another. You do not forsake the unity for a detail. The detail is only important when it becomes—when it enhances the unity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this device—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I'll get it—yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the objects was very effective, wasn't it? It forced you into thinking in terms of the overall design and placement to begin with?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Absolutely, absolutely, and now of course, I didn’t—what I'm talking about now isn't quite the way I'd interpreted it that time, I'm sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, were you—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Because I was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —confused at that time or—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, I was confused because I didn’t know how to use my eyes because I had been so prejudiced in my training because my training essentially at that point was trying to make a statement in line. Now line is just a convention, you see. That it describes where form turns, where—but on the other hand, this was an opportunity to put down—it seemed to me to be—intellectually I understood it you understand. It seemed to me to be a more powerful statement of putting down what the eyes see. Less convention involved as I saw it at that time, but it was—it's like the learning to paint is learning to see, and learning to see takes a long time, and you learn gradually. It's like scales falling from your eyes gradually. And the only way you can learn, I believe, is to study with a person who was awfully patient and good, knows his business.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How was Hensche as a teacher? [00:26:00]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: He was a fine teacher. He had—I would say—well, approach to genius for remembering where you were all the time, his Saturday criticisms, and at that time, the classes were large. There would be 30 to 40 students in the summertime, and we'd put our works up on a rack. Not only would he criticize in terms of the specific problems and the limitations and the successes about the individual work but also in relationship to who did it, which is a very difficult thing to do when you have that many students.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And at which stage that person was?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: At which stage that person is. No, I consider Henry a brilliant teacher, absolutely brilliant. I studied with him two summers, and you're probably interested to know what happened between the summers. I was employed by the Vesper George School of Art to be an assistant instructor, which kept me busy a couple of days a week. Because I had very limited taste, shall I say at that time, I was able to survive on that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: When you were in Provincetown, did you have colleagues beyond the Hensche pupils or—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of those—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It was a funny world. At that time, Henry had his funny little school as everyone called it who was not a member of it—who is not a member of it. Hans Hofmann was going strong. Larry Rivers was, I believe, studying with him at that time. Was that his name Larry Rivers?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: And my dear friend, yeah, the Indian girl, uh, Yeffe Kimball was studying with him, and she subsequently has become quite a well-known painter. There were other schools beside Hofmann, but he was the most—if you want to look at it objectively, the most important school at the time there. [00:28:05] He attracted perhaps the most vital students. Henry was apt to attract a certain number of old ladies and the very young, and for some damn reason, they all seemed poor. No one had any money in his—no one, absolutely no one, and I suppose that's all right, but it seemed like Hans had always a certain number of rich old ladies that would sort of flush the thing out of it and so they could do things in more style. We were just a bunch of goddam, grubby art students frankly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, what function did the Provincetown Art Association play for a student then?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Not one goddamn thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Nothing, absolute nothing. There was a lot of infighting going as to who was going to get control of the organization. There was—in Provincetown at the time, was a—could we stop this just for minute? I'll light up—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —a—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: As a—otherwise as a community, was it of interest to a young person, were there—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, very much an interest to young people. But getting back to is there—was there a kind of an interrelationship between artists and art students? No, it was very factional. Is that the word faction?

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

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes, factional. If you study with Henry, you had your loyalties there. If you studied with Hofmann, your loyalties were there, and if you studied with several other teachers, your loyalties were there. As far as the art community was concerned, now we're getting into something that's very important, more important than anything, and that's the economics. It was just about the time that I got to Provincetown as a student in '49 that I was beginning to become a significant summer community again. And the reason for it, the key figure would be Hans Hofmann because he was considered important. He had the old Frederick Waugh house. [00:30:01] I think Frederick Waugh would've turned in his grave if he knew that, but at any rate, he had the old—Fredrick Waugh was a marine painter by the way—Frederick Waugh house, a perfectly beautiful place on the west end of town. It was about that time that a number of galleries were getting started—namely, one of the more important ones was the Shore Studio gallery. Now, the Shore Studio gallery was started by a sometime painter, sometime etcher by the name of Don Witherstine and Don Witherstine had a—came at the right time and had a feeling for how to sell pictures. I know even in my own small way. I used to do watercolors when I was studying with Henry on the side because I'd bring them to Don, and he would be able to sell them unframed but matted for $75 each. And that was pretty good money for a starving art student if you were able to sell maybe eight during the summer. But on the more important sales, collectors were coming down. They are coming down into the well-known artists' studios. Now, any time you have collectors coming down and you have a whole bunch of people that are producing something to be sold, you'd find yourself in an area of competition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Certainly.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: So rather than a spirit of cooperation and of sharing in, let's say, ideas, there was more apt to be a sense of competition, which has been promoted by the fact that there was a lot of money being spent to work there. And it seems to me that that was the most significant factor—probably a more significant factor in keeping people split than anything to do with ideologies.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were there many Boston people down there?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No. Provincetown has never been known for Boston. Strictly—I wouldn’t say strictly New York but essentially New York. Greenwich Village transferred to its summer community in Provincetown. You've never—for instance, Bill Padway—Paxton, in the days of Charles W. Hawthorne, they were close friends, and Bill Paxton was a member of the Beachcombers Club and was very well thought of as a personality. [00:32:11] But I'm going back into the early '20s and late '10s after the First World War because it was a booming art community then. It was Charles Hawthorne who really founded this as an art community. It was Charles

Hawthorne and a few expatriates who couldn't stay in Europe during the First World War, found Provincetown to be a very charming community, and very much like some of the places they were so fond of in Europe. And there was this long story about the light being just right, and I don't know if that's true or not, but at any rate, it was an attractive, Portuguese fishing community. When he came in, again going back to Charles Hawthorne, he attracted large numbers of students who are New York-oriented. A lot of them were very rich girls, and they—that was the era of the boardinghouse, and they were really quite genteel, shall I say, his students. But he had I understand—I think I'm right to say—some summers as many as 200 students. There was a hell of a lot of students. It's at this time that John Frazier became his assistant. We're talking about Frazier before. Nothing to do with this recording, but when you and I met, we mentioned Frazier. And interesting enough, I just heard that my friend and contemporary Gagosian—we called him Bugsy—has just—and I don't know if this is rumor—has just been offered the post of director for Rhode Island School of Design. Now, that seems roundabout except to say that John Frazier died as director of the Rhode Island School of Design, so there is—although my interest lies in Boston, and Boston painting, essentially, I'm—I think I do have a few outside connections that amuse me and may someday be of some value to me and to the art group. [00:34:15] Now, getting back to Provincetown today—or not today but in my student's—student days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You went there several summers, didn't you?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I went there. I've been there. I started off in '49. I've been going every summer ever since without interruption. However, getting back to the broadest sense of what was it like in those days, it was still a Portuguese fishing community more so then than it presently is because the industry was better. There were still many native Portuguese ladies who have great charm and great dignity, and I've used them for models for instance. They don't speak English at all. The Portuguese population is Lithuanese on one hand and the islands on the other, and there, you have quite a marked difference in their attitude toward each other. As I understand it, the Lisbon Portuguese consider themselves of a finer caliber than the island of Portuguese. And I'm not always sure which one is which because I don't know enough about it. It is a fun place. It was a strong homosexual community, very gay, very, very gay. The—and the fascinating thing about the townspeople is it's all things to all men or many things to most men in the sense that they could—they can take this—even today as a small community that is multiplied by 25 times in the middle of the summer, and they can take it in stride. The police don't overreact for instance. The townspeople like the gay boys very much because after all they make some—sometimes, they make a lot better tenant than a sloppy married couple. [00:36:07] There seems to be an acceptance of human nature there that I have never found in any other community anywhere. I'm sure it exists, but I've never found it, and I think it's one of the things that attracts many of us to Provincetown. It's almost a symbol of acceptance of everything. Now, that is not to say that there aren't innumerable arrests through the summer from—everything from young kids on drugs to gay boys and lewd behavior. But this—all you have to do is pick up the *Provincetown Advocate*, and the history is in that. But I do say that it seems to me that it—it's a—it's a town that we all have a love-hate relationship with. I'm attracted to it primarily—I think if it wasn't for the beaches and the wonderful periods of being able to be alone away from everything and everyone or so it seems. I don't think I would go to Provincetown in the summertime. That's the special quality for me at 44 that it has that I find—well, I find it needful in the way I live my life today, you see.

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

ROBERT D. HUNTER: But—so Provincetown has never had anyone from Boston—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What is the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —who is important particularly in the community. I'm not important in the Provincetown community at all. I'm strictly an outsider, so to speak, even though I've been there that many years. Now—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —I started two years ago last summer. I had students down there, and they're renting studios over Sal's restaurant called Sal's Place. Of course, Sal Del Deo, my old friend, is the proprietor there. Maybe in the future, if my school, which is pretty loosely structured, continues on as a summer community there, a summer school there, that at last somebody from Boston may have some influence on the climate of the art community there. [00:38:14] But to date, no one has from Boston.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the sharing of ideas, you never found to be a—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I never could—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —something there?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, no. I shouldn't say that because the first couple of years, we used to hang out in one of the barrooms down on Commercial Street, and there would be people discussing art, and it got to me after

three or four of these. Really, it got awfully profound. I thought to myself, My, my this—how envious I am of so-and-so, they seem to know so much. And then I suddenly discovered that the speaker didn't bother getting up in the morning to paint. He talked all of his ideas out in the barroom, and there was an awful lot of that going on. It was at this point that I met, what seemed to me, a strange, little old man whose name is R.H. Ives Gammell, and he rented a studio that is attached to the Cape School of Art from Henry Hensche. He was doing a decoration in Providence or for Providence at the time and asked me among other students if I would pose for him, and naturally, I said yes—I needed the bread. It was at that time that he asked some probing questions such as, "Who are your favorite artists?" And I got embarrassed because I think I could come up with Rembrandt and Michelangelo and Raphael, but if you went much further than that, I'd be a little bit hard-pressed, shall I say. And he stuck pins into me all summer long when I was posing for him. And so completes my second summer in Provincetown having studied full time with Henry and believing even today that I am—well I know today, I am what I am for many reasons and through many people including Henry Hensche. [00:40:18] Then the following winter, I got a job as the art director, art supervisor for the town of Nahant. This took two days a week, and it was a wonderful challenge because, mind you, I've had no college education at all. I haven't even taken courses in college, none whatsoever, and it gave me a wonderful opportunity to experiment with developing curriculum on that level. I went to the Massachusetts Board of Education, and they literally had nothing, nothing. Well, my problem as I saw it, was to evolve a curriculum from grades one through grades eight that had the some kind of a growth structure to it. And it also meant I had to—the two days I was there, I had to teach classes back-to-back with no break whatsoever. It was pretty tiring, but it was exciting. I subsequently realized, the reason that I was the one employed rather than the other applicants who were there at the time was because, *a*, I was the only male, and I looked as though I might be able to handle myself because the eighth graders had run rampant the previous two years and chaos reigned. Well, needless to say, it took me two months to develop the kind of condition where learning could go on, and I did this one day. I think I did a pretty good job. At any rate, one day when I thought I had the eighth grade under control, and I had brought in some birds with the idea of showing the students how nature uses complementary colors and analogous colors, why and how we can reapply this to designing fabric. [00:42:21] And there was silence, and my back was turned to the board, I heard, "Shut your goddamn mouth." I turned around, and it was a little boy with a very red face and little girls tittering around him. I slowly walked up to him and grabbed him by the necktie and lifted him out of his seat and say, "You shut your goddamn little mouth, punk, and sit down!" and I had no trouble with that class since. But it seems to me when you're dealing with children, they've got to have your respect somehow or other or you just can't teach. It was a fun thing, but you know how tiring those things can be too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But the curriculum did become—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well the curriculum I experimented with for two years, so I have in my own records that curriculum. I have it in my own records, and I'm not saying it's perfect, but I'm saying at least it was an attempt at that time to bring some kind of order into that area of education. But that's all documented in notes, and I don't want to dwell too long on that the material.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you did come away from that employment feeling you've done a pretty—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I came away—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —good job.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —because I quit, and I felt that I did a very decent job, and they on the whole, particularly the superintendent seem very much pleased. The teachers were all very cooperative. I had no problem with the teachers at all because I was with it in terms of relating the stuff to social sciences and so forth. I wasn't in there teaching a separate discipline, but teaching a discipline that interrelated certainly into the social sciences and into—also into wood making and the other—[00:44:06]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —vocational.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —vocational, yes, the vocational work as well.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this time during the winters, would you be painting in all your free time?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, mind you, I'd be doing two days a week there then I met through my dear friend, T.W.J. Valson who has set up a lot of things for me. I met, uh, little Mr. Fred Oliver of the Oliver Brothers who was getting near 80, and his nephew ran the mechanical past downstairs of the restoration firm. He was looking for some younger person to train as a retoucher and cleaner, and a I was the person he's chosen. I worked with him, learned from him for a period of seven or eight years always on a part-time basis, a day a week, sometimes two days a week. And that, of course, not only provided with money, but also it helped, I hope, to develop a side of my training as a painter that was invaluable.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm. How did it help your painting?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It helped me realize what some other painters' mistakes were—why paint cracks, why supports do not last, what you should work on in this climate, and what you ought not work on in this particular climate. That patience is the most—is the secret of the Old Masters, patience. We want to get things done fast today. The Old Masters would allow sufficient drying time between the stages of their painting, and that was one of the chief secrets of the Old Masters. I think that was a damn good thing to learn frankly. Then, now, getting back to the period so that I'm somewhat chronological here, uh—[00:46:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the 1950s.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It's in the—we're in the 1950s. I was then studying with Mr. Gammell. However it started, however this works out. [Laughs.] I'm going to use that. However it works out, I started studying with Ives in 1950 and studied with him for five full years, which meant I left Henry in the summers as his student and became Ives' winter student—in other words a Boston student—and Ives' summer student in Provincetown where he, out of his own resources, provided me with a studio and provided me with the R.H. Ives Gammell training. So it was five years times 12 months. Now, there'd have to be a day given to Vesper George because I spent two years on the two-day job in Nahant, then I came back to the Vesper George faculty, and I have been on that faculty ever since, teaching either one day a week or two days a week. Presently, it's one day a week. So my training with Ives during the winter, it probably would result in about three days a week with actual studying underneath him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you said he first asked you, which artist you admired. From there, how did it lead to your becoming his student then? And what—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, a very good point.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —did his training consist?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: A stroke of luck for me. Richard F. Lack who is also a student of Ives Gammell who is, I believe, something like three days older than I am or three days younger and presently is a practicing artist, painter working in Minnetonka, Minnesota, as an atelier of young men in Milwaukee. At that time in 1950, he was drafted or—either drafted or he signed up for the army and was on his way to Korea. [00:48:01] And Ives had an extra student—a studio available in Provincetown, which he rents from Henry Hensche—you see, curious interrelationships here—which he rents from Henry. He called me up, I suppose in February or March and said, "Bob, I've got a studio there that's free. If you want to study with me, you can for the summer. Maybe I can teach you something." I asked him to give me three days to think it over, called him back, but I called Henry first. Because of my loyalties, I felt I owed him, and he said, "Bob, it will be a marvelous opportunity," so therefore, I started studying with Mr. Gammell and accepted his offer, generous offer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you describe the—his way of teaching?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes, I can, but I don’t think I'd want to right now. But I certainly would like to get it recorded. But I think there in this concentration in order to give you material that wouldn't be a lot of bullshit also, I think I better do that at a separate time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But while you were attending—while you were studying with Gammell for five years, were you doing—most of your painting was done while you were studying with him, did you just paint on your own with [inaudible]?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No, no. I was provided—he provided me with a studio in Boston in the same building we're recording this thing in, a small studio. And an artist who is, to my knowledge, not painting now by the name of Robert Homer Cumming, and I—see Dick Lack was in the wars at the this point. Bob Cumming and I shared the studio, and he would come in and criticize us. He provided us with models both nude and portrait, and as I say, he's a very generous man. He put his money where his mouth is. [00:50:04] He's a very strict teacher, and there's one way, as far as he's concerned as a teacher, and it's his way. Naturally, we do not always agree, but I respect him tremendously because he's a man of considerable means who didn't have to do this. But he believed there was a need for it, and he was willing to put his life literally into this and his painting too. And there are a hell of a lot of kids that have gone through the portals of the R.H. Ives Gammell studios and some lasting two days, some lasting two months, and by the time they leave, they're a better man for it. This is my view in terms of how—he's not only valuable to people like myself who've learned a great deal and our painters. But for people who thought they were going to be painters and realized when they were confronted by a person of his strength, his intellectual integrity, and the seriousness with which he considered the role of the painter, they realized it wasn't for them. And, therefore, I'm sure they're happier men and women for it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were happy being with him then were you—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I was, yeah. I liked—I always liked the little old guy frankly. I rather liked him. He—sometime, I'll have to tell you something of insight into his personality because it's—he can be annoying. He can be awfully annoying. He's not always right, but when he researches something out and takes the time to ponder, he usually comes up with some—a lot of wisdom that spewed from his mouth. But his first reactions in a kind of emergency situation, in my opinion, are almost always completely wrong—completely wrong. [00:52:02] His instincts that—well, they're apt to be negative too, I may add. If you have an idea and you present it to him, he either rejects it. Usually, the first step is he rejects it, and I'll say, "Can I speak to you later about it?" "Well, all right." Then the second time he begins to pick holes at it, and this is good because then you can construct something better. And the third time, you're apt to find out that it's his idea. [They laugh.] No, he's a very intense person who is—had a very bitter, bitter professional life. He has not been really embittered by it, not truly, not deeply, only superficially. He's a man with many barricades around him, many protections, and thank—and yet, on the other hand, the paradox is with all those protections that he has, he's a man who is able to give a tremendous amount too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Through him, did you meet some of his friends, some of his—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, now—getting on to that end of it through Mr. Gammell—Mr. Gammell is a person who is from a not-snobbish-social point of view, but a what-makes-a-city-tick point of view. He' s quite well-known. He hasn't exhibited paintings seriously for nearly 20 years even though he's painting today. I mean today, today, this very day, he's up there painting upstairs believe it or not. He's 80 years old. For a man of 80, he is prodigious. That's one of the things getting back to what impressed me—remember I had talked about drinking beer and creating work and really not getting up in the morning to produce. The thing that inspired me about this, what I then found, this funny little old man—what I then thought was mind you, because—uh. Well, I mean, for instance he would say to me, "Somebody had put some soapsuds in the birdbath." Well, that's an awful thing to do I realize, but it just struck me so funny, I burst with laughter because he asked me. [00:54:07] He said, "Bob Hunter, did you put soapsuds in the birdbath?" Well, I know it's not a nice thing, but it's something rather amusing to have this little guy ask me that, and I just—I just broke up. Well, the thing that impressed me about him then was we—he had a reputation for being this rich guy from Boston. But this rich guy from Boston was up painting at 8:30 in the morning every morning. I was impressed. He wasn't talking about it, as I saw it then. Well, that is true now, although of course naturally, he has limits on his energy. It's true now. For instance, Liz, my wife, and I are going to have dinner with him this evening. I think we're about the only people he has in his home, just about. He has a few old friends, but he's essentially a very private person. He will have Liz and myself, and I know because we always do, we'll have a perfectly marvelous time with superb conversation. And then we will take our leave and go to symphony, and he, I'm quite sure, will be quite happy—have had a nice evening you see, have had a nice evening. But did I meet many people socially through Mr. Gammell?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, or in Provincetown, I mean—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, Lord, no. In Provincetown—he was a recluse.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —Provincetown.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: He was a recluse in Provincetown.

ROBERT F. BROWN: — one year—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: He was an absolute recluse.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But he had—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: When I knew him—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —you know his associates, Frazier and—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —right, he had Frazier and Ed, Edwin Dickinson and others who are not as well-known as those two, and they were quite close when they were young, but they were not close at the time I knew Mr. Gammell. He was considered, and he truly was a bit of a recluse. He would have a nodding acquaintance with many people in town, but no one was ever invited to his studio nor did he accept invitations. [00:56:06] This was a place of retreat. He did not need it in—at that stage of life, he did not need that kind of, and it's—his personally is such. He's—I'm sure that Jung would be able to express—explain that a lot better than Bob Hunter. But, at any rate, he seems to be a, uh, person who needs a lot of privacy in his life. He hasn't a got a touch of the extrovert in him at all. The speaker, perhaps that cannot be said about.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you've had finally five years training with Gammell.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where—you felt at that point you were pretty well schooled?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, you have to have a cutout point somewhere. The chicken has to leave the nest at some time. And my particular talent I think was probably—who knows? I don't know, but I felt that my particular talent—we're all—we all have different talents in painting—was nurtured as much as it could be by that training after five years. Mind you, all through the years, I've had criticisms. I'll have Mr. Gammell in my studio today. I mean, any time now if I have something that I'm a little uncertain about when I'm composing a picture or something that I'm unsure of in terms of the rendering of a passage, and I'll ask him to come in, and he's flawless in his criticisms. He always puts his finger on the wrongest thing. He's—I found him to be an excellent teacher, and I still find him an excellent critic. So we have a continuing relationship in terms of my development, hopeful development anyway and—but my so-called training from the—in the ordinary sense of the word was five years. In other words, four years at Vesper George. [00:58:02] I didn't explain to you earlier that I—three of course at Vesper George, but I took a postgrad course over that extra year to do several things, study anatomy more, go to the museum of fine arts and make copies of certain paintings and study under James Wingate Parr who was an absolutely fabulous watercolorist at the time. So that's why I say, I started at Vesper George, studied four years there, two summers at the Cape School of Art run by Henry Hensche, and five full years—meaning five times 12 months—with R.H. Ives Gammell, and that was the intensive part of my—as I'm calling it now, my formal education.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. At that point, what were you ready to do and what were you doing in fact?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: At that point, I was exhibiting pictures and winning prizes. I have—I just—I have the most—I have had the most extraordinary luck. I chose to go in a direction that was completely unfashionable. I'm 44 now, which is not old nor is it young today—well, anyway, how did you get started after the five years with Ives, which is very important.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you changed direction then.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I had—I had certain little—uh, my little, oh, things I could rely on like I was a bona fide teacher according to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in a trade school, the Vesper George School of Art. There was a little security there. It meant it only took a day or I had a day there, and I had a day restoration because I proved to be valuable from the Oliver's point of view. And then I started the—once I started winning prizes, I was invited by art associations to put on painting demonstrations—in other words, the impressionist point of view. [01:00:09] I set up a still life, and I showed them how I lay it in, not only how but all of the other things that go into it too, so it's a constant stream of verbiage as well as the paint being slapped down. So it's not just mere entertainment. It's education, and I've been very successful at doing that. I've traveled in places like Texas, and I've also traveled as a juror to large shows in the—out West. This is in my more recent years of course. Things have a way of nibbling and growing and shaking up, and at first, they seem like you're going in divergent directions and then as you grow older, these divergent directions don't seem so divergent anymore.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where were you exhibiting in the early part of—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —part of your career?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —the Boston Arts Festival. I'd remember selling a picture of one of my earlier works to Tab Beale [ph] whose last known address to me is One Federal Street, Boston, who bought one—a kitchen arrangement, as small still life. The second year that I ever exhibited with the Jordan Marsh Company's annual show of New England artists, which is the only show that's been going for 43 years without interruption. I won a prize on a painting called *American* the second year—it's a still life—which meant it received the largest number of popular votes. I continued to do this at Jordan Marsh annually for 13 years, always by popular vote. The show in—throughout most of its years since it's been an—not an invited show—oh, let's get back to Jordan Marsh. That's a very salient—Jordan Marsh is very important to me in my life so far, terribly important. Because, *a*, I won a prize then there would be the luncheon at Locke-Ober's and the meeting of people. I was pretty isolated otherwise. Each year, I submitted with the exception of one year when one of my earlier students won the first prize. Until like five years ago, I won all the prizes. It got embarrassing, and painters would say, "Well, I don't think you should submit," and I would say, "The hell, why not? I mean why shouldn't I submit just because I won a prize?" The prize isn't being given by an individual; it's being given by the public. You know, they vote on this show what is your favorite picture. And I'll run the risk of developing a reputation for appealing to public taste because I suspect that it's far more reliable than some of the alleged educated taste of today. So that's why it's important to me, and somehow, as luck had it, I kept winning them because success breeds success—the old story. And so more people were going to Jordan Marsh to see the Robert Douglas Hunter, to see the Robert Douglas Hunter. I hope this is not going to come across like vanity because, believe me, I'm just lucky. I'm not

promoting myself at all. I chose not to; I don't have to. Well, then as things went on, Jordan Marsh Company, the officials all got to know me quite well. It was quite a laugh that Hunter was again at the luncheon, and one thing led to another, and I've always been interested in balance. Well, I won't get on to that. They seem to think I was a fairly balanced guy, and they would come to me and ask my opinion on the jurors they should get. [01:04:00] At first, it was quite simple but then it get—it got more—in fact, that's where I was this morning. That's where I was this morning. I'll finish off with that story. Through the years, they've come to me for advice, and it's not public knowledge naturally. I'm sort of their advisor. I don't tell them what to do. I merely say, "Now, if you have such and such—" I know people in the art world. I know people in all sides of the fence today in the art world. I have respect for people as human beings who believe in things that are artistically not to my—not in my groove, let's say, my own personal interest. But it's far more important that I've discovered in living that—because sometimes your friends could be your worst enemies. It's far more important to have, um—to know good people who have broad points of view and who you can rely upon. I've done a lot of, in my own funny little way, trying to make the acquaintance of people I consider reliable and wise. Whether I agree with their backgrounds or anything else who I think are wise, who seem to be fair, who seem to have—even though they do not emotionally respond to something, at least they have a cool understanding of it's-probably-just-as-well-it-exists sort of thing. It's on this level that I've been able to help them recently but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the jurying system though was—it became increasingly—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, now, that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —difficult?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It became difficult because it used to be two-jury at one time in its life, and I can't give the years off the top of my head. But, for a period of 10 or 12 years, we had the two-jury system, which is this: [01:06:04] There's a modern jury and a traditional jury, and the artist can submit to either one jury or the other jury trying to get a balanced show. As the years went on, the words and the special meaning of the words lost their significance, and we kept it going for a long time. I can't discuss the festival, but I would very much wish to discuss the festival in detail some time because I think it's very significant, very significant in terms of the history of painting, American painting or it may be, I mean. You can't say—hell, it was only about 50 years ago, but it may be significant. But steeling specifically in the Jordan show and the two-jury system, so therefore, they usually came to The Guild of Boston Artists to recommend people for the traditional jury—they, management—during this period of time. This was before I was influential at all there. Then they would accept the Guild's because the Guild has standards, you know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you in the Guild then?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I was—at that point, I was not a member of the Guild. I had just been rejected the first time around. And the, uh—and how they chose the modern jury, I have no way of knowing, Jordan Marsh. I have no way of knowing because at the time I couldn't care less. I just didn't want to have anything to do with the bastards.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, there were real hard feelings.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Hard feeling, hostility, extreme hostility at that time. And the only way to be judged would be to judge separately, and this was accepted as a way of getting a show that was balanced and it worked—no. You know, it worked better than any other system is all I can say, that we could device. We went into this in great depth during the art festival days when we're trying to force this on the art festival management. But I don't want to get on to art festival now. [01:08:00] So getting back to Jordan's, then time goes on and people die and people change jobs, and Rosemary Phelan, who ran it as the art director for many years was employed by Jordan's, changed her job and then they ran into—we ran into—I've got my eye on the [inaudible]. We ran into a real problem because the Jordan people two years after Rosemary felt that the two-jury system was not right, and "Bob Hunter, what can we do about it?" I knew because no one was accepting this anymore, we could no longer use this as a device to really keep ourselves alive. That's what we were doing—keeping ourselves alive, and the only goddamn window we had in Boston at that time aside from The Guild of Boston Artists was this annual show. We, the traditionalists, the representational painters were rejected—were rejected by the press systemically. We were rejected from museums, we were rejected from—now, this sounds paranoid, but it isn't. It's true, and I can give you the evidence. I've got it in my own records. It is not paranoid. Naturally, it makes you angry when you're rejected continually, so it was important to us, and I'm the only one of my generation now that represents this. It's important to us that this—somehow, this one area be kept open and not go under and be run by the modernists. You see, that's what we were trying to avoid.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you're the only one of your generation.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: The only one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean the others were—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Living—I mean living and involved today, Living and involved.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In great many just quit, more or less—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, they—no, they didn't. You don't quite see what I mean. I'm not being clear, I'm sorry. I mean I'm the only one who's still involved in trying to, at my age, pass on a tradition and do all of the goddamn politicking—let's be real—and all of the being at the right place at the right time, trying to keep the finger on the nerve, and all that bit. [01:10:11] The rest of them—I'm not being critical of my contemporaries. I won't even mention their names, but people who know more, as much if not more than I do, who have not broken their ass in anything and so we all have our own temperaments. But that's what I meant when I said I'm the only one of my generation who is trying in Boston as a practitioner to try to keep these channels open so that a tradition can be nurtured and grown, allowed to grow, and change, hopefully change, and this has to be done. You cannot do this without it being institutionalized somehow in its presentation. Let's use the Jordan Marsh Company as the institution that is our show how—showroom. It's the conveyor between the artist and the public, the vehicle. Well, anyway, I was down there this morning, and this I'd like to really terminate our—this interview on this because I know you're busy and you know I'm tired. [Laughs.] A little girl by the name of Mary Marcus has been appointed this year to run the Jordan show. She called me up three days ago and said, "Mr. Hunter, can you—?" And by the way, some of the executives are no longer there too, you know. Bob Hoy is the president. He's the only one I know there now, and he is on vacation right now. And she—you know these things happen in the strangest way. You wouldn't believe how decisions are made in institutions including our own museum of fine arts—incredible. I've always thought men deliberated long before they made up their mind, but they're apt now to give it to the latest little chick who comes into the office to make a decision, Jesus Christ, I mean. [01:12:10] Well, anyway, she did call me, and I said, "Well, now, I'll be of any help I possibly can Ms. Marcus, but I don't want to talk about this over the telephone. It's far too important a matter." "Oh," she goes, "but Mr. Hunter you're so busy, and I just thought if you could give me three names that we could consider." I'm glad she said, you—she didn't say pick the jury. Three names that we —I'll give a star and a [inaudible] to that—three names that we can consider. And so I've been trying to get—pin this girl down, so I could meet her somewhere with Bob Hoy, then I find Hoy is on vacation, so I've got to deal with some chick I don't even know. The girl who had this job two years prior had only—only had it for two years. So I finally got them to agree to get in one office, and I would take the time to come down there because this is important, and they just don't see things on this level at all, and there's no reason why they should I suppose. Really I should be—I shouldn't be critical of them, but it—it's amazing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, it can't be the same thing with the store—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No, of course not. Of course, you're quite right. I shouldn't get upset but—so at any rate, I went down there, and I came up with the three names that I consider to be a balanced jury, which I knew the men as individuals, I knew what their heart was like, I have great respect for them. And they thought it would be a nice idea if we could have a woman in this. I said, "For Chrissakes, this is not a woman's lib issue! Don't you see that?" and they settled back a little bit right. I had to get angry with them. I'd hate to, but in order to make a point, I had to get angry, "This is not a woman's lib issue. [01:14:02] This is running an art show in a very sensitive community. You people have run this show for 43 years. You're the only institution in Boston that has done it with—there has been no break in the chain. You have the respect of the art community. You want to keep that respect because you do this, as I know perfectly well, as a publicity device to get people into your store. Well, we have it because we need to have a show. Now, if everyone is satisfied—if no one is going to be satisfied until everyone is satisfied, and the key to having a good show is to having a good jury. Now, you have long been critical of not having better representation of the more avant-garde. Well, for heaven's sakes, why don't you get an outstanding practitioner who will, to the best of our ability, have the respect of the avant-garde, and then you'll get them submitting—the better ones submitting work perhaps." And that's why suggested György Kepes. You know who he is. He's a prominent man, eminently successful and well known. I said, "Now, you may not be able to get him. He's a hell of a busy man, and he's got to be a fundraiser as he sells—tells me. He call himself a whore or he feels like it sometimes. And we will have—I suggest you have Dwight Shepler who is a gentleman, and he's the president of The Guild of Boston Artists, and he has a standing in the community. And if you would please ask Larry Sisson who now lives, Laurence Sisson, in Boston and is a very successful painter and very well-known, and you might call him kind of middle-of-the-roader from all points of view. It's hard to—you know you just know it or you don't." [01:16:00] Well, I think I left the office this morning, and it took me about an hour and a half to do it because I tried the gentle approach first. It doesn't always work. I got the feeling that they thought this big, fat Hunter—I'm not fat but fatheaded Hunter with a great ego thinks he's coming in and run the Jordan show to satisfy his own ego, and I wanted to impress upon them the fact that such was not the case. This was tearing me apart. And that's it. That's it for the day, I think.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is January 25, 1973. Just say anything.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Anything at all? All right, how's that?

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mr. Hunter, I know you've thought out quite a lot the—your method of painting. You have—it has been written about, you have—are able to, as I understand it, articulate this some—in some detail. Perhaps we could begin by wherever you would like to begin in discussing your method of working, your painting method.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, um, I think one of the most important things I learned in my training, I mean, was to work sight-size. The sight-size method of painting has been written up in *American Artist Magazine,* and the issue is December 1970, and it describes very clearly, very succinctly. And if I may quote from that, it perhaps would save time. This was written by a friend of mine, a fellow artist Richard Goetz for the *American Artist,* and it was a composite of many tapes he took of me in Provincetown the previous summer where I have a summer studio. And I used the sight-size method there as I do here in Boston. He said, "Bob, will you first give a brief explanation of the sight-size painting?" [01:18:05] My answer, "Basically, it is a method of viewing the model and your painting simultaneously from a selected position so that both images appear the same size. The artist is afforded a much clearer comparison of the subject to the painting, which eliminates transposing the visual image to a different size on the canvas as he paints. This allows the painting to be whether it be a still life—" I'm sorry it is my fault. "This allows the painting to be life size or under life size, because the size is determined by the relative position of the model, the easel, and the place you stand when viewing the subject, which I refer to as the 'viewing point'. If you want your painting to be life size, the canvas is placed next to the subject; if it is to be under life size, the easel is moved nearer to the viewing point. That distance determines how much under life size the painting is to be. For example, if the artist wishes to paint a portrait bust two-thirds life size, the viewing point would be about 14 feet away [with the easel placed] approximately midway between the viewing point and the model. From the viewing point, the painting would appear to be the same size as the subject. If the canvas is brought nearer to the viewing point, the image on the canvas becomes smaller." Now, the question was asked, "What determines the distance you stand from the model?" "That depends on the size of the study; the larger it is, the farther back I stand. The artist should be far enough away to see clearly at a glance all that he plans to include in the painting. I do not want to be so close as to have to turn my head from side to side to see all of the subject, nor do I want to be so far back that I see more than the subject." [01:20:09] Now, the odd question was—is this going along right, Bob?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, I thought to ask on that. Did you arrive at these distances empirically or—and then suddenly, just one day measured to see just what they were so that you could more or less teach this way or maybe explain it exactly to people?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I was taught this method by Ives Gammell, and I have worked with it for the last 20 years. Most of the work I do is based on the sight-size method of seeing. For instance if I'm painting a landscape where the trees are rather small, I try to get the easel set up in such a way that I can transpose the look of nature on to the canvas. So naturally, the trees in the great distance with the canvas close to me, the image would be quite small. Does that help explain it?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: But he goes on to ask me, "What is an average distance you stand from the still life or portrait model?" My answer is "From 12 to 16 foot. This point is where all the observation of the model must be made. You must not look at the model when you are at the canvas. Observe the model and mix your paint at the viewing point, then walk up to the canvas, retaining in your memory what you had—what you wish to execute. Apply the paint and then walk back to the viewing point for your next observation. Now, I would like to go back to where we were talking about sight-size, life-size, and how far back you stand. Sight-size does not mean your canvas must be life-size. If you will take your easel with the canvas on it and draw it up, say, halfway between where you are standing and nature, you can make it sight-size, but if you want to make it—but it also will make it under life-size. [01:22:08] The closer the easel comes or the canvas comes to you, the smaller will be the image. In other words, if you now had your canvas midway between yourself and nature, or the setup, and you were to take and mark off parallels, you would suddenly see that the sight size of the setup is considerably under life-size. If the canvas were so close that it was at your arm’s length, then you would find that the shapes are very small. How small is determined by how close the canvas comes to you." I have a diagram in this article by the way that explains this in terms of diagram, which is another way of expressing it graphically.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Have you found that this method is—that you're very much at ease in it, or did you have any initial difficulties with it?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, my God, I had initial difficulties. It took me weeks before I got used to the system. It

seemed terribly awkward. I was walking around more than I was painting, which pleases me now at 44 to realize the painting is not a sedentary job. You keep moving back and forth all the time, but aside from it being good for your waistline, I suddenly realized that it develops your ability to remember, to recall shapes and forms. One, because you have as you're walking up from your viewing point to the surface of the canvas—and by the way, most of my work is not only sigh size but life size most of it. When you're walking up, you've got to retain in your memory that what you want to do. And then when you walk back, you get away completely. There's a moment when you're away from the canvas completely, and when you come back to your viewing point, what you do is then look for the next, what I call back straggler, and I'll explain that a little more clearly in another illustration. [01:24:06] You look for the thing that's least correct—nature be your guide. And then you look at how you've interpreted nature quickly back and forth, and your eye will tell you not your mind, your eye will tell you that which is the least correct, and that is the thing that you go after at nine in the morning, that is the thing that you go after at 12 afternoon. Each time you come back to your canvas, you're looking for the thing that is the least correct, and you try to make it better. You never try to finish it. Now, back to this little business of back straggle. I like to this of it as nature is set up—now, I'm referring particularly to the still life. Nature is set up in such a manner that I call it a—my subjective or the subjective aspect of painting. I come in in the morning, and I want to start a new canvas. I don't predetermine what I'm going to use. I have jugs and pots and drapes and—as you could see in the studio this afternoon all over the place—and somehow, I will go to a particular object, which probably is something I haven't used for a long time, and think that maybe this would work. And then I'll go to another and one thing leads to another. And then all of a sudden, a color scheme comes to mind, and I go after draperies, and I'm trying to develop an abstraction. I'm trying not to think pot, bottle, copper, brass but to think of these shapes as being relative—I mean not relative—think of these shapes as being abstraction, a series of abstractions that must interrelate, very important. That's the only conscious effort I'm trying to make in this subjective aspect of painting. [01:26:03]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But this is a part—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It's a nonintellectual aspect. It's intuitive, and it's also the result of many, many years of experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But it's apart from—what—whether the object happens to be a part or both—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: If you look at my—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or a particular kind of food.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Right. If you look at my paintings, you will find that they never tell a story. They're pure—at best, they're decorations, and a decoration is something that was intended to be framed and to enhance the quality of a room.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the quality which depends on harmonies and—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, yes, oh, as it varies—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —positions?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —in sundry rules that come after the fact. But what I'm trying to stress right now is I don't have a series of formula in my mind when I'm setting it up. I do this intuitively.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you suppose this—does this depend on your moods the kind of—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Obviously.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that you're thinking of?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: For instance, if I'm working—if I had worked three still lifes with essentially a red-yellow-blue-color-dominant theme, and I'm bored with it. I'm going to try something in the gray range or perhaps in an orange-violet-green triad. So there are all kinds of factors, but the main thing is still life I find, from my point view, allows me complete and utter freedom. I don't have to satisfy anybody but myself. Sometimes I don't satisfy myself, you understand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This sounds very much like the way an abstractionist would talk about balance and harmony or disharmony or whichever affects the color [ph]?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, you see, any good representational painting must have a strong abstract design to it, and it can be beautifully rendered, but it does not have an abstract, strong abstract design that suggests harmony or suggests something expressive in an ordered way so that a sense of order is more important than harmony. Harmony is a word that is used, and I think it's badly used. What the artist is doing is what the artist

has done through all time. [01:28:00] He is trying to illustrate or to state a sense of order, that's all. That order maybe chaotic or that order maybe very sublime, but it must be order. In the order then you entered into the abstract designing elements, the placements of shapes so that they interrelate and create a sense of rightness. But I believe I—maybe I'm completely wrong, but it seems to me I've divided in my own mind that it's in the setup that I'm in the artist, the subjective person shall I say. I hate the word artist because we're painters really. But it's when I'm trying to set something up, and when I finally say, "This is—I think this is it," then I am no longer subjective because that means that that nature in front of me from my viewing point, my single viewing point suggests the very things we're talking about to me. Now, I have a strong feeling that if they suggest that to me, then I would like to have this—this is not masturbation. I would like very much to be able to express that which I feel so that others who are sensitive at the same kind of thing I'm sensitive to will be able to observe it in a given form—namely a painting. I found the best way to do that in my opinion—again I'm always bringing that up. It sounds so damned dogmatic. In my opinion, the best way to do that is then to become an objective viewer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And hence sight-size—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: And hence, the sight-size method where everything you're doing is you're looking for trouble. And, now getting back, I like to think then of nature as being a field of sheep, and I as a shepherd must move that field of sheep from nature on to my canvas. [01:30:06] I've been told that a good shepherd always goes after the back-straggling sheep. So naturally, if I have a white canvas I'm working on and I'm going after a back-straggling sheep, I'm going after the dark notes that—the dark abstractions that make up nature or the brilliantly colored ones. So, gradually, the white canvas when it's—and you just—you don’t make your back-straggling sheep the lead sheep. You just bring them into the fold. Hence, you don’t finish as you go along. You just simply bring it into the fold. So you put a blob down and suggest to the degree perhaps an iron pot, but it's just a blob, but it's better than no blob at all, you see?

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

ROBERT D. HUNTER: And then you go after the next back-straggling sheep, and by the end of the day, you're beginning to get these sheep. These sheep, although they have not really reached the field, they're all together, and there's no one lead sheep nor is there a back straggler.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because it's not really, at this point, a question of arrangement of the back stragglers and all, but it's also you're beginning to block out the dots and the minor portions of the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: By the one is through a canvas—I don’t want to get in sometimes these—well you call it an analogy but a—what is it called?

ROBERT F. BROWN: An analogy.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: An analogy can be misleading. But actually what the painter does—you noticed I used the word paint—the painter does because what I'm talking about is not Bob Hunter any more than there are dozens of other painters. By the time he's through the end of the mind, there should be no canvas left nor should any one part of the canvas be more finished than another part.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But dominances will come at me, the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: If there's something dominant in nature, then that will be expressed on the canvas, yes. [01:32:05]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But not more finished than anything else?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Absolutely not more finished because you're dealing with an abstraction, see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how do you move towards finishing?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, now, this comes—herein comes the method I've explained to a degree the mechanics of. Now, it's awfully difficult to explain how you paint—[laughs]—how you paint a picture. I could show you, but it's how to do it, but may I try anyway?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: After the first day, you're tired; that is, your eye is tired. The next day you work on it. You treat it as though it's a new canvas in the sense that you know you haven't gotten the sheep from the field of nature on to the field of the canvas, but you know you're on the way, so you're still looking for back-straggling sheep. Normally, on a moderately—oh, let's say the 16x20- to 20x24-inch canvas, I will find for the first three days working on it, I repaint the entire thing because I'm not at a state where I have to get down to the specific rendering of an area. I'm still just trying to make it better. After the fourth day, I come in, and I'll realize a

passage is a back straggler. In order to make that—bring that passage into the fold, it means that I, instead, start rendering the entire—re-rendering the entire canvas, will take that passage, which probably will include part of a path, a bit of a background, a bit of flora, and maybe an orange. Perhaps 1/16th the area of the entire canvas and try and make it better—try to make it better, which just really means bringing that back-straggling sheep into the fold. Then the next day, it'll be another passage; the day after that, it'll be another passage. Then, of course, it's not quite as easy as it sounds because you might run, as I often do, to great, big wicker-ware bottles where you actually have to take a day and weave it. [01:34:11] And once you've woven it in paint, you always stated at it, and your eye will see it the next day. You scumble over it and redo it as a painter does rather than the weaver and then you end up with this combination of the right kind of texture, which is not overstated.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you describe your scumbling method, how—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, yes, I can—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —something down?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I'll be glad to. Because in painter's terminology today, scumbling can mean, many, many things. Specifically what I mean is this. When I scumble, when I use the word scumble, what I mean is I use dry paint thinly, in other words, very little fluid or vehicle in the paint, but I don't put the paint down thickly. I put it down thinly, and I'll scumble over the area I want to re-render. Now, in scumbling, in this particular manner, it means that the paint because of the character of the paint being thick but put on thinly, that which is underneath goes through. So when you work into that, you're working into wet paint, but you really haven't lost the drawing. That is a matter of preparation—scumbling over the areas that have to be done. Now mind you, I'm talking about the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth days.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And will you maintain your—some evidence of your scumbling in the—by the time you're through?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: The only way I can put it is the very last day that I'm working on the canvas, I will find that I'm still scumbling to prepare the area that is the back straggler. Now theoretically, if you work this way, one morning you'll come in, and you'll find it's done because you can't make it any better. In practice, after painting as many years as I have, I usually find that I know when I finished it before I put my brushes down. But I cannot emphasize enough the absolute necessity. [01:36:02] If you're going to retain a unity of effect, which all fine painting has, and you call them one or the other regardless of the school. Within the frame of the western painting, all fine painting has unity of effect, and there is no one element that must jump out and dominate that unity. Everything must be subordinate to a sense of unity. Now that is not to say that one passage will not be more dominating because in painting, as in life, as in everything else, you have somebody that stayed center then you have subordinating characters around because this is not a repeat pattern. But when I'm talking about unity of effect, I'm talking about something that has to do with seeing. What I'm describing to you is what is broadly called the impressionist point of view. Now, the impressionist point of view is this. The impressionist painter is so moved by the look of nature that he wishes to suggest what he feels about the look and put it on canvas so that somebody else sensitive to what he feels—assuming now he does it effectively—will get the same reaction that he did from nature. This is the whole—the fundamental reason for being as an impressionist painter. Now, on the other hand, you have what I call the opposite point of view, which is the academic point of view. On the one hand, the impressionist is moved by what he sees, he's governed by his eyes. The academician is moved by what he knows about form. They are two points of view both equally valid, and the two points of view have married in terms of working the method by very, very few artists. But, of course, the most outstanding example in the latter part of the 19th century was Degas, Edward Degas. But I'm only dealing now with the impressionist point of view. [01:38:02] I am dealing not one bit at the moment—in talk that is—with the academic point of view. And the reason I'm doing this is because my particular method—it seems to suit my temperament—is fundamentally an impressionist point of view, which is based upon what the eyes sees rather than what mind knows.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In other words, while you're in the act of painting, you're an observer. And is that why you said earlier that really a good deal of your creating in fact isn't just assembling and setting up—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Absolutely, very well put.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Whereas when you come to the act of painting, you are merely carrying through in your hands and your eyes?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: That's right, and I may add that, uh, the true impressionist spirt if you are moved by it requires an extraordinary kind of concentration because what the eye sees fleetingly—in other words recall when we're talking about the impressionist painter, the impressionist painter must have a naïve eye. You recall I said something about you're not dealing with pots, bottles, brass, you're dealing with abstractions. You're like a

man from Mars who's been deployed to come down here and make a painting statement of Earth, and you just have never been here before. You don't know that the grass is green and the sky is blue. You have not been brainwashed at all. You have to observe relative shapes, units, colors, et cetera. and put it down objectively. Then you get into your little spacecraft, and the scientist on Mars will say. "Aha, that is what they call a rock or that is what they call a green field, oh, that's what a human being looks like." This what is meant by the impressionist having the naïve eye. For instance when I'm out landscaping, I will frequently turn my back from the landscape, and literally put my head through my lens, and observe nature upside down to give me the fresh look, the fresh look to be able to see this thing as an abstraction instead of a field and a tree or a mountain or whatever it may be. [01:40:17] We have been so brainwashed in our education of what things are that we cease to see them as they appear to be. See, I'm dealing with appearances as an impressionist painter not with reality. I am merely dealing with appearances. Of course, I suppose from, well, a philosophical point of view or a religious point of view that this is the outward, invisible sign of an infinite spiritual grace. But you can't—my point is you've got to deal with appearances because they—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The expression of one of substance, of the appearances now of substance—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Nature is revealed. All right, substance in terms of solidity?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, solidity or inner structure or perhaps this leads to the academic side—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes, you're quite right. For instance, any painter including me has had something of an academic background. I teach anatomy for instance, which is—well, nothing can be much more academic in terms of a painter's craft than the very difficult business of teaching, of learning anatomy. In fact, I find every year—I've taught this course for nearly 20 years—I have to review it. I have to review it myself. It's a course that is based on Richer's *Nouvelle Anatomie Artistique,* which was translated some time ago. By the way, Robert Beverly Hale has done a superb book on a fairly recent translation of Richer's notes, a very scholarly thing, a superb handbook for any art student. [01:42:02] I think it's Watson-Guptill publication, but I'm not sure. But the author is Robert Beverly Hale who is part of that famous Hale family that includes Philip Hale —I believe they were second cousins or something like that—and, of course, includes Nancy Hale, the author who is among the younger branches of the Hale family who are doing things in an intellectual area. Well, Mr. Hale teaches anatomy at the Art Students League, and he did this superb translation. And I'm not taking credit, mind you, from a translation I used, because R.H. Ives Gammell did a—he realized that Richer was a superb teacher. He taught—oh, where—in France at the academy perhaps, I'm weak on that. But he also taught on medical school, so he had his feet in both camps. So his stuff is good, and at the same time, it has artistic—its artistic application because of the stylization of form. But there's a particular way of learning it that makes it easier, and this is the thing that I think I've evolved in my teaching methods over the years

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you discuss this artistic application of this—this kind of substance that is—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I'm afraid we're getting a little off the course because I'd like to get back into the impressionist painting there. And I'd like to come back to that but perhaps not now because it seems to me that I have not quite explained the impressionist point of view as clearly as I'd like to, and I really do, but I'll try anyway. So, I am saying that the emphasis on my own work, which was the original question I think that we're leading into, is that I'm governed by what my eyes sees, and I'm naturally governed by what my mind knows also. And getting back to substance, which is your question, when a painter is moved by what he sees, the way he sees what he sees is because light plays across form, and it's either in shadow, the absence of light, or in light. [01:44:13] And if you can develop the subtle nuances of the interrelationship of the total look of nature, which means you're either putting something down in light or in shadow, and you then realize through your eyes that there's very little halftone in nature. And if you can do this superbly well, then you will effect something that has a marvelous sense of substance in terms of the usual meaning of the word "substance." It will look solid, it will go round, or it'll have edges or it will be blurred. Does that help answer the question?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, and what—halftones you emit?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, the trouble it most people when they're painting, they put too many halftones in the work because there aren't that many halftones. By halftones, I mean the transition between light and shadow. They put too many tones. For instance, let me put it this way—this is the rule of thumb. The first place, mind you, I'm talking about working outdoors in natural light, be it sunshine or gray day. And I'm also talking about working in a studio with a north light where the sun does not come in, and only one light source is used on form be it a portrait or be it a still life, so there's only one light source. This is very important in terms of how this works. Under those circumstances, there's remarkably little halftone. The form is seen—the various forms are seen in either light or shadow or cast shadow and highlight. So the very source of light playing across the object gives you this business of either being in light or in shadow. [01:46:00] If you are in a room with fluorescent lighting, there are no shadows at all, and that's why most painters don't like working under any kind of artificial light but particularly fluorescent light because there simply are no shadows. Everything's in light. So an awful lot

of the solidity that comes about in the impressionist painter's work comes about as a result of the light source he uses. Now, an impressionist painter can paint Fourth of July fireworks, a great dark night as Whistler did, but the canvas he's working on must be in a strong light. Now, I'm introducing something quite different. One of the rule of thumbs in painting if you're going to do something pretty good is you must have a strong light on the canvas. If you don't have a strong light on the canvas, the painting is going to look a hell of a lot better than it actually is, and you bring it into a strong light, and you see how weak it is. If you have a strong light on your canvas, even though you maybe painting nature in a penumbra of light, if you have a strong light on the canvas, you can bring the canvas into a shaded area, and it'll hold up beautifully.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why is this? When you're painting in shadow or painting in—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Because if you're painting in shadow and or let's say a half light as the canvas is in a half light, it's going to look better than if you're painting it in a strong light. For instance, you can't make it any better in half light. Let's say you're done with the painting, anybody, any artist who does that if he then brings it into a strong studio light, it won't look well made. I know this for a fact. Students of mine over the years have come to my studio for criticisms, and I'll say to them—I want them to paint in a strong light, and they say, "Yes, yes, yes." Well, they think they are, but when they bring it into my studio, they gasp at how awful it looks.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In other words, the flaws that don't—simply don't show up in poor light, which are very obvious. [01:48:00]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: They're very apparent under strong light. But, on the other hand, if you painted in a strong light, you can hang it in a dull light, and it'll still look good if it looks good under strong light. Now if I may say so, I've been using this word "impressionist" very liberally. Most people in today's world consider the impressionists, a group of 19th-century plein air artists, the Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir, and many others, but they are among the leaders. I'm using it as an overriding, fundamental drive that goes through the entire history of Western painting from Giotto on. And I could name for instance, Titian as being a essentially an impressionist, as a colorist. I can call the Velasquez definitely impressionistically motivated. Certainly, Vermeer the Dutchman knew damn little about form, really. You can tell that in the bad drawing in some of his figures. Ah, but he knew how to use his eyes to see the way daylight coming in a window in streams across a room, our girl, our kitchen maid, our rugs in the foreground in a penumbra of light. He was dealing with sensitive—a very sensitive interpretation of the look of nature. Chardin, the Frenchman, was essentially impressionistically-motivated. So I'm not just talking about a little experience that happened in the 19th century when the French impressionists had the great fortune of having all these new colors—being able to have them in tubes—therefore, being able easily to go out of doors and paint from the look of nature, which is among the first time it was done certainly with the colors. It wasn't too much earlier than that, that all painting of landscape was done at the studio from drawings—cony [ph] drawings, watercolor drawings, and renderings, but they're studio landscapes. [01:50:04]

ROBERT F. BROWN: The uh—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Like the Dutch 17th-century great landscape painters, they're studio painters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you find that in your role as an observer, as an impressionist or your rather passiveness isn't putting restraints on your desire to manipulate, to improvise on your own, to—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Every method has its weakness, and I'm going to come back and stress again to you that the—what I call subjective aspect of my job is to arrange nature. I'm really dealing primarily now when I'm talking to the still life problem because it's the thing I probably care more about than anything else. I allow nature to manipulate me in a sense, and yet on the other hand, I'm manipulating nature when I'm working and trying to get an arrangement that works. When I know it works in nature, then my whole purpose is to try and recreate that effect on a picture plane so that somebody or some others who are sensitive to that, which I find meaningful in nature, will be meaningful to them. Now, usually, it results in my work in a strong sense of harmony. Now, we're talking about me Bob Hunter—a strong sense of harmony usually. I think an interesting color sense, and usually I play an awful lot with various, subtle shades of gray and, relatively speaking, small areas of brilliant color. But your question again? I guess, I haven't really covered it quite.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Is there a sense of restraint or almost sometimes the frustration in being the recorder of what you observe? [01:52:03]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yeah, the frustration is that you wonder when you got through the goddamn thing why it took you so long. That's the frustration.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It's the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The act—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —the daily process of painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Is that frustration?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Very frustrating, oh yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But don't you feel you're moving towards something?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I know that through experience, you see. I know it through experience that I'm going to get started, and it's fun, and I'm going to go through—as my wife says, "Bob, you've got a case of the uglies." I'm going to go through a case of the uglies before I spend the last three days or so pulling it together and I still wonder. Having painted for quite a few years, I really wonder if I've done something that's quite good—and some of them I think are quite good—that it has an element of simplicity to it in the final statement. There's a quality of simplicity. It looks like it was easy to do. If it doesn't look like it was easy to do, then I know I haven't done a good job. But look at *Madam X*, Sargent's *Madam X*, he had 90 sittings on that, and yet, it looked like it was dashed in. Almost all fine things look like they were easy, and there is not one fine thing that ever was easy. I'm sure of that historically. Even with a brilliant talent like John Sargent's, he struggled many, many hours in his studio trying to get just what he wanted. But, of course, what he wanted and what little old Bob Hunter wants are totally different things, but I do pretty much get what I want.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and there is this affirmative, positive thing you're moving toward, and that is, as you've said, earlier, to try to recreate for someone else the feeling you have of this aspect or another, the nature.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: That's right, exactly. But in my case, with the *Tabletop Still Life*, nature arranged by Hunter, you see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you typically care for still life as you said? [01:54:01]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, they don't talk back for one thing, and it means you can be the manipulator. I mean you're the stage manager, and you can always replace a dead orange.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And if you're painting in the outdoors, you can't quite manipulate something.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, if I'm painting indoors—let's be practical, I'm also earning my living at this—I can paint six hours a day on the same arrangement. Now, that's oversimplification. I usually have three things going at once. I get up to a certain point in the painting, and I've got to decide whether it's going to be keen for blue sky day or gray sky day because the color of the light coming into the studio is totally different. And then if I get the wrong kind of day, I can't work on it that day, I've got to work on something else until I'd get the right kind of light, you see?

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

ROBERT D. HUNTER: But with the limitation of—for instance, December, this past December and November were a nightmare for painters. It was so dark. It was a dark time of the season, and we had dreadful work. That's really hard. We were all frustrated by that or—that is, those of us who rely upon the natural light. But, on the whole, we don't run into that too much in our climate. We have pretty decent weather around New England. I'm wondering how the English painters, the 18th-century English painters ever did all they did with what I've heard about the climate of England. Except they do have those long twilights, so perhaps they've worked awfully long in certain seasons.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you said that you—in a way, the completion is when someone else can share your experience.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: That's right. This is—communication is very important. Again, that the artist as a person as I see it—oh, I don't know who it was in this, but somebody could've been in it. Some artist said that art is nature seen through a temperament, which I think is a pretty good definition. I go along with that quite away. [01:56:01] But I also will say this, that any artist—an artist from my point of view is not a creator. There is just one creator. An artist is a person who reflects upon some aspect of either the scene or the imagined world, some aspect that is meaningful and he—and he is so motivated, so moved by it that you'll go through all the shit that you have to go through in order to create something if you want to use this on a lower level of creation. Because it' s meaningful to him, and he doesn't always know why, and perhaps he dare not analyze why. But in almost all cases, the one thing that forms of art be they music, in my opinion, or by they painting or drawing if it's really fine, it has a sense of order to it—an expression of order.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But art's mode of expression or particularly painting's mode of expression has always been most meaningful to you?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, it's a very strange thing. I suppose when you're involved in the field. Yes, I've always wanted to be a painter ever since I was—well, before I could write but—and I've made all kinds of mistakes in my early training in a sense through no fault of my own, through circumstances that extended beyond me. I'm sure I've wasted a lot of time, and I probably will, and I probably will in the future, but I'm a painter yeah by nature, a painter. And yet, for instance, I am moved today by very few paintings that I see. I think the Vermeer for instance in the Washington, the National Gallery in Washington, *The Plumed Hat*, you know that small one? It's probably the most delicious, beautiful, moving work that I've seen in America, and yet, there are many paintings I like and admire and respect. [01:58:05] But to be moved personally by a painting, I don't seem to be able to be as moved by—maybe there isn't enough good stuff around. But I can go to a symphony and be moved by music

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you suppose though in the painting—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —in a different way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —it's because you increasingly define your own observation and your own kind of work, do you think?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I'm sure it has a lot to do with that because you do—you have to apply what little intelligence you have to what you're doing if you're going to be a teacher. And I'm just as interested in teaching as I am in painting. I'm terribly interested in my own way as to what I think has happened to painting in the last 50 years, which is damn close to tragedy. I'm more and more convinced the reason for the tragedy is the art school system of education, which is a watered-down version of what was happening in the French Academy when the French Academy itself was weakening. As you know, the French impressionists were touted by the writers and critics of the time. They were the underdog, and all of a sudden, in the first 50 years of this decade—of this century, as far as Western painting is concerned, they were given top —but not only top billing—billing but all of the remarkable work that was done in the French Academy just prior to their time and after their time —witness Gerome and Jean-Paul Laurens, and Boulanger, and a whole group of people who were just staggering in terms of the kind of thing that they did. They're great decorations and so forth, which the impressionist didn't care for, but even if they did, they didn't have the skill to do it—wouldn't have the skill to do it. And to ignore this tremendously fundamentally important aspect of the history of a painting tradition, which in a sense found its culmination in mid-19th century French painting, and to ignore that for 50 years while you tout a perfectly fine group of painters with tremendous limitations is sheer foolhardiness. [02:00:18] And it's a tremendous, great misfortune in the lives of young people. I mean when I was young and when people 10 years older than I were young, they couldn't get a decent education, a balanced education. We won't go into modernism because that's a bore.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were these limitations that impressionists had? An inability you said—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: An inability to be able—they didn't—well, the corps de [inaudible] taught people how to train their memories. These people didn't have any of that kind of training at all. It had to be there in order for them to do it. Now, there's nothing wrong with that, but that is a limitation. It had to be there, and if this can be witnessed if you use your eyes and look at any of the French impressionist renderings of figures including Mr. Renoir, and you'll see that they didn't know a goddamn thing about form or knew very little about form. Degas remember is a singular person and has nothing to do with this at all. He's essentially an academically trained painter who grafted on to his personal tradition and discoveries that the French impressionist made when they went outdoors, but he essentially is an academician.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now when you say that Renoir, he doesn't know inform or can't draw form.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, after you do your—use your eyes and see the figures he paints, it's tremendously limited. All right, you compare any Renoir to a Bucaro, and the articulation of an angle of a Bucharo is a thing of not only great beauty but deep understanding of form. The articulation of hand by Renoir is at best sort of puffy and lacking in structure. [02:02:00] And the little, black eye buttons that come out from the little ladies in his portraits are so incredibly bad. Again, this is my opinion.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The eyes, yeah.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yeah, the eyes are all you see in the damn thing. Everything else is in fuzz.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, yet, there is sort of a lyricism, an overall effect in his work?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I am not saying that Renoir is not an artist. I merely say he did not know very much about form. Of course, Renoir was an artist—a tremendously overrated artist in our time is what I'm saying.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In your own working method, you mentioned memory is involved is when you step away from nature to apply the paint to the canvas.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: There is that split. In other words, the canvas isn't at my arm's length. This—it's one way I've had of disciplining myself to walk back and forth and get that fresh eye. That's as important as anything.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But also to carry the memory too.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, you have to carry the memory, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, and so—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: But this is—I'm sorry, but that's a relatively easy thing to do. When I'm talking about the training the memory, you take a person like Charles Hoffbauer—can you turn this off a minute because I'd like to have—

[END OF TRACK AAA_hunter73_8674_m.]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: You like to hear the strength of my voice for the day.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this is the third session. This is February 8, 1973. Today, I'd like to ask if you can talk somewhat about your own teaching and particularly the, what you call an, educational experience I believe that you're carrying on currently with a group of students.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I've been teaching at the Vesper George School of Art for either one or two days a week for roughly 22 years. For the last three academic years, I've been teaching at the Worcester Art Museum. And I admit this is a somewhat limited experience, but it is—and it has been extended over a lengthy—a long period of time. I conclude from my—in my view, there is no way to teach painting in an institution be it college, university, or an art school. My wife said, "It's about time you did something about it." A year ago this past September—and there are two students, young artists at the time by the name of Ernest Principato and David Lowery who came to me in Provincetown two summers ago and said they didn’t know what the hell they were going to do. They've been through their art school training, but they realized they didn’t even—hadn't even really begun with their training. I suggested that they look into the Art Students League, and they had already done that. And in fact, one of these boys had studied on full year at the Art Students League with Kinstler and I've forgotten who else, somebody by the name of Brown. He thought it was the best thing he's come across in his education, but he sensed that it wasn't quite right because the best instructors at the Art Students League had overcrowded classes, and they would only come in perhaps once or twice a week for criticism. [00:02:09] They allowed the essential flow of information to come through a monitor, and the monitor more often than not was just a perennial student who stayed around forever. And so he didn’t like that too well, and I suggested he read *Twilight of Painting*, a book that was written by Ives Gammell, my teacher, published in 1942, and if he dug it at all, understood it at all, to come back, and we'll discuss it further. They both read it, and they both understood it, and they said, "But Mr. Gammell is so old." Of course, he's not old. He's only old chronologically. He's not really old. Both these boys stood in awe of him and just couldn’t sort of bring themselves to knock on his door or give him a call. Because the backgrounds of many of the youngsters we're dealing with today are such that—well for want of a better word, they have rather limited backgrounds, and they don't know how to do things, how things are done in this world. So, by the good grace of my wife, I said, "Okay, guys, if you'd like to study with me, you can, and this is strictly an educational experiment. I have a double studio at 30 Exeter [ph] Street. My wife is perfectly willing to have the living room, all the furniture removed Monday through Friday, commercial carpeting put down, and it is then a working studio. You work there, I'll work in my studio, and you start off with cast drawing please." And then I proceeded to try to show them how to use their eyes, which is the important thing. I'd stayed away from the academic point of view at the beginning—in other words, what the mind knows about form. Because these kids were getting older and my experience has been the eye is educable up until around the mid-20s to be able to see shapes or interrelationship of shapes accurately. [00:04:08] And after—certainly after 30, it's almost impossible to get a person to see things much better in this point of view if until that point, they've had no training whatsoever. Now if they're 30 years old, and they've had a training, I'm not suggesting that their eyes cannot be further trained. What I'm suggesting is they must be trained well before 30 if they're ever going to be trained at all. And so, naturally, I used a cast—what could be simpler—with a single light source, and they put the cast up, and they worked sight-size, which I've discussed before at another tape, so I won't go into that. You also have an article written by—for the *American Artist Magazine* by Richard Goetz—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, which you—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —in the 1970 issue, December issue I believe, '70—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, you've discussed that—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —of *American Artist Magazine*—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. What were these casts? Are they very simple casts in the beginning, or what' s the nature of them?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, the nature of the cast, they're the Greco-Roman cast, casts of a rather fine piece of sculpture. But the whole point is simply that the cast doesn't move around whereas a head does, and if you can't do a cast, then you can't possibly do a head. So we set it up in a single light source working sight-size and then of course they were struggling. My role as the teacher is to go in from time to time and show them where perhaps they are making bad judgments—in other words taking scales from their eyes. That happens to be my procedure. I rarely ever work on a student's work, and that is not to say that I don't believe the teacher should work on the student's work. The only time I ever do it is when the student is so goofed up, he doesn't know what the hell you're talking about, really doesn't know, doesn't understand, dense, completely dense, then you have to sometimes show him. I find that in my teaching, I rarely have to show the student. You can speak to him more or less in an intellectual level and get him to use his own eyes more effectively. [00:06:07] You want stop it for a minute?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Now, these students as I say arrived, these two, in September. Now, I'll give you kind—try to give you an overall picture of the personalities involved and how they came. A young man by the name of Richard Cohen wrote me from Columbus, Ohio, because Robert Vose had written him to the effect that Bob Hunter, myself, met Maxfield Parrish before he died, and this boy was extremely interested in learning all he could about Maxfield Parrish. So I suggested that he fly up and spend a couple of days with my wife and myself, and I could show him Parrishes that were at the Vose Gallery, and I could discuss with him about Maxfield Parrish, the very little I knew about him, and what it was like to meet him, and some of his working methods. But, in the meantime, I realized, he called himself in his letter a young artist of 19. Now that—this is interesting you know 19 years old, and he hasn't been brainwashed from any—by any of the art schools, so he might possibly be a candidate for the R.H. Ives Gammell atelier or studio as we call it, director Robert Douglas Hunter. And so I said to Richard when we walked to go to the museum, I said, "You know really what you need is training." He said, "Yeah?" and I said, "Yes, what you really need is training," and he said, "Yeah." I go, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If it meets the approval of your family, I'll give you a chance to work in that studio there studying under me because you already told me that the art schools that you're familiar with are doing things that you do not want to do. They're pushing the students in directions that apparently isn't compatible to your own needs as you see it. [00:08:06] Well, you've seen what is going on with these two students, do you want to be a part of that scene?" and he said, "Great, gee." So, I said, "The rule is this. You don't pay me anything. Any time you want to leave regardless of the provocation, you can. If I see the progress isn't what it should be, I'll invite you to leave. However, before any decision-making is done as to whether you're coming or not, I insist upon seeing your father." So the father flew up in a few days and allowed as though this might be a good experiment. And so Richard came a year ago—well, actually, a year and one month ago at—from the time of this recording. Richard is doing beautifully well. He has a decorative, innate decorative sense. He, probably if he becomes the painter, will be an imaginative painter. Something quite different than the natural bent of David Lowery and Ernest Principato. Well, like a cat on a hot tin roof, you couldn't get the guy to concentrate, and it took an awful lot of work to get him settled down, but presently he's doing very well. Now, the next student came along. His name is Thomas Dunlay, and Tom went three years at the Mass College of Art and suddenly said, "Oh, hell, this is not for me at all," and apparently, through the grapevine heard that some guy by the name of Hunter was taking on a few private students. He knocked on my door last May, and he said, you know, "Can I—can you help me?" I said, "I don't know whether I can help you or not. First place, you've got to get yourself a studio." [00:10:00] And he, in the most—in the best sense of the word, is an extremely aggressive young guy and found himself a studio in this building, which he's sharing with the student of Robert Cormier who is a contemporary of mine and also who studied with Ives Gammell. So I had Tom Dunlay, Ernest Principato, David Lowery, and Richard Cohen. The fourth—fifth person comes from West Virginia, and he was trained as an architectural draftsman and always wanted to paint. He wrote Richards Lack who was again a contemporary of mine asking if he perhaps wouldn't take him in his atelier in Milwaukee—what is there in Minnetonka anyways? Is it Milwaukee?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Minnesota or Minneapolis.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Minneapolis, Minneapolis Minnesota. Richard wrote back and said, "In view of the fact that you are 27 or [2]8 years old, and you've had so little experience, I would advise you to get into commercial art." He didn't like that too well, so he—I was one of the persons on his list he wrote to, and I was deeply impressed

by the character of his letter writing, and he's married. So I wrote him, and I said. "I don't know what to say except I can't say no. However, if you come, you must leave your wife behind and come on the basis of spending two months here to see what it's all about and make sure you can get a two-month leave of absence from your job. If you'll do that, then you're welcome in our place for two months," which he did. And after the two-month period, was even more convinced he should continue on with it, so he and his wife moved up from West Virginia, living in Arlington now, and he has a studio and is sharing it with Richard Cohen. [00:12:00] They're—I'm having—I think I mentioned this before—what I call a coming out party in May whereby these gentlemen's work will be on display in my studio. And I intend to invite, hopefully they'll come, a certain number of people I know in the press, a certain number of people I know who are interested in the idea of education and new ideas and new approaches even though it might seem like a rehash. And I'll be inviting, hopefully, some people who are socially prominent in the city of Boston that have big mouths and can spread the word.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So I see you—in other words, you're thinking of this as a way of furthering their awareness of what you're doing, or is it primarily a way of—the students.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: The reason for the—what I call the coming out party is this. I hear the [phone rings] telephone.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, there are a number of reasons for having this party. One is to make people aware of the fact that something is going on that's different. I mean people who, I believe, should be interested in this. But a far more important reason for doing this is to, uh, introduce these kids, and they're not kids, these students, to a lifestyle, if you want to use that word, to a bunch of people who are—well, there's no reason why the students should be in awe of them, but they're apt to be if you know what I mean. So they can meet them as painters. They're not just my students—that's not the scene at all—but they're young painters who are still in training. But be able to meet people from other walks of life who are, in their own ways, doing well to extend their horizons, so to speak, as human beings to get out of the student ghetto, to get—extend their perceptions of their—extend their experience with people so that their perceptions can grow in terms of their own general material. [00:14:18] That's really the main reason for doing it. And, I may say, I'm not paying the bill. There are six people involved in this including myself. I'm going to divide the bill by six, so they're paying their own way, their own freight. I'm just organizing it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And these students already though aren't in the student ghetto, are they? They're already—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: What I meant by student ghetto, they're apt to mix only with each other and with the same kind, the likes thereof.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you introduce them through the months though to various other people also?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: From time to time, I do. I'll have, for instance, Harris Carl Linger is coming in here on Saturday. He's the director of the Parish of the Admiral, and Harris is interested in what I'm doing. Naturally, I'll bring him down to meet the students, and various people happen to be friends of mine and whose opinion I respect, I'll bring them down and introduce them to these students to see what's going on. I don't care whether they approve or not; I just want them to know there's a real thing going on here. It's not just a lot of talk.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But, now, you have indicated that in one student's case perhaps in the future, he'll be doing what you called imaginative.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this true of most of them? They are not going to come out of your program as far, as you can see at this point, as versions of you?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, my God, that'd be the worst thing possible—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what is—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —I went through that scene before. I hope my teaching is broad enough so that it will bring them out. So that the background and training will be sufficiently broad, so whatever kernel of talents that they have can be nurtured from the training. [00:16:08] If they turn out little Robert Douglas Hunters, both they and I have been a failure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what is there in the training you give them that attracted them to you? What would you say in general these—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I'd say, in general, I'm one of the few people that does it frankly, and I think—they think

that I make sense. Most of the people they've run into in the art area, art world, practitioners or teachers or a combination thereof, in their judgment be it right or wrong, is they can poke holes in their arguments, and I challenge them to poke holes in mine. And they tried, thank God, and occasionally, I make a mistake, and I let them know it. I admit it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do they usually argue about with you?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Logistics in terms of what should be done at a certain time, procedures. I've been through this business of, as I say, the training that I've been giving them during the first phase has been primarily impressionistic, which means trying to get them to use their eyes more effectively to always see the big unit that they're working from and see all of the parts related to the whole visual experience. That's easy to understand intellectually, but just what is the first thing to do, the second thing, the third thing, and what is the last thing to do is always open to, well, a certain amount of debate perhaps. Trying to decide the thing that is the least correct about a picture and work on that, and avoid the things that are better until the things that were better become less effective because what you've just worked on is all that much better. See?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: This is usually the area that there's a certain amount of debate on. And then I won't go into the technical things because that involves, oh, the use of paint, the use of canvas, whether you a prefer a panel or not and depending upon the subject and—I mean that's just craft—[00:18:12]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you also find that the student wants to finish up the best parts and neglect the other?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh yes, I think that's human nature, always to love the thing that you've done the best. And what I try to do is to get them to be objective. This is not that kind of a loving experience. This is an experience of taking a bunch of sheep that exist in nature and move them from the field of nature on to the field of a two-dimensional plane. All right, they paint landscape, they draw from the cast, they do still lifes, they work from the figure, and they paint portraits. Some of them because of their natural bent are experimenting now with decorative problems, imaginative painting in other words.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean the more abstract forms, or what do you mean—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, of course, all representational art is abstract, and that's the very basis of it, or it's not good art. What I mean by that is they will take panels and perhaps use a religious theme or a mythological theme or perhaps, oh, a theme to do with—that's based upon a visual statement—that is a visual statement based upon the findings of modern psychology and try to give a pictorial form to that. That's what I meant by imaginative painting. In other words—and particularly Richard, Richard Cohen is—has gotten—I mean he's motivated by this, so my job is to try to give them the language in which to express themselves. That's all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see. When they're to the point of doing imaginative things, they're absorbing something in the academic point of view, aren't they, as you described in the previous—[00:20:11]

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes, you're absolutely right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —when you talked about the academic and—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Because I've been stressing—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what you know, the intellectual approach.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: What I've been stressing so far is the need to improve their eye to see nature—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The impressionists, you say.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —which is broadly speaking, impressionism, and you're quite right. Naturally, they have to get into academic. Well, one of the foundations of academic art is a thorough understanding of anatomy, and I have a way of teaching—I hope I have a way of teaching through the use of the Richer *Nouvelle Anatomie Artistique,* a book that has just recently been translated into English by Robert Beverly Hale. Richer was a superb teacher of artistic anatomy as well as medical anatomy in Paris roughly around the turn of the century, Sharpe [ph] before that. I have a course that I like to think I invented, which calls for the training of the memory—and this is basic anatomy—to be able to draw the silhouette of a figure, a male figure, front, back, and side, no articulation at all. And then gradually to learn the skeletal construction and how it relates to the silhouette and also the superficial anatomy, musculature anatomy. All these boys have been through that. So, therefore, when they've got a gal up there or a guy up there, who because they are a person and not an academic formula, they'll be able to see underneath the particular person and understand what's going on and this gives their drawing a bite and a sense of style. [00:22:01] Now that's just one area that is academic. Now, there are many

others. There are all kinds of ways that is in—part of the lure of the painter in terms of how to develop a pictorial concept through a series of abstractions, and then how to go from the abstraction and bring it back into the real world again without losing the abstraction. And that's something so complicated to talk about. Well, it's a visual art, we can't talk about it, you've got to show them. They've got to experiment, and it's—it is not clear-cut, that's all. This is not a precise method. There are all kinds of things that get into it that have to do with, for instance. the temperament and personality of the youngster, you see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The visual—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: So they're all taught in different ways.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, working though, uh, or do an abstraction to working—at this stage, the preliminary stage in most cases, right?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then bringing that back into a final project, which is more on the what?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, can I give you a hypothetical example?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, good.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: It might be helpful. Let us say that one of these boys is interested in, oh, doing the law, the 10 Commandments, representing that for a synagogue or a church. He is given a particular space in which he must work by the architect, and let us say it's going to be painted on canvas and mounted in an area. So there are certain known things, *a*, the space that he's going to work in, and far more important, its relationship to the entire architectonic area that it's going to dwell in. So this predetermines to a big degree the character of the decoration. [00:24:04] So you start with these known things and then you're given—let's say they're given the theme the law, then depending upon the curious theology of the church or synagogue, this also determines to a degree how you're going to represent it. These are all predetermined things. And then they work from that point and try to do something that is architectonic. I don’t need to explain what that is I'm sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In other words, there is a program laid before them?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: That's right. Predetermined before they even get a third down on this job.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is the way you preferred to work too, you've said, is with your work, you like to have the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, I like the freedom of doing what I want to do, but I also mentioned earlier to you in these little still lifes that I do that it's rather fun to be able to go into somebody's home and see where they want to hang it. See what kind of an interior it is so that hopefully, I'll be able to do something that relates to the rest of the room. Oh yes, I feel very strongly about that, but because most of my work is on speculation, I have no way of knowing where the paintings are hanging. Hopefully, they're hanging where they belong, but I have no reliable guarantee they do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think a painting can exist unto itself? It seems to be indicated by the vogue in the last 20 years or so for completely neutral, white, peppermint white rather empty walls in the midst of which is placed a painting?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, I have no way of being a judge of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or begin—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —relatively—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to place—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: —contemporary interiors that house paintings. But museums are one thing; private homes are usually quite another. If you've got a white wall, you can put almost anything on it, and it's going to look interesting. [00:26:00] I don't know what—how I can go further, pursue that any further except to say that unfortunately in our time, many of my contemporaries are painting pictures that are 10x10 or 12x12, and they're intended for museum walls. Because they're—the only institution large enough to display these things effectively would be a museum like the Guggenheim or the Whitney or even some of our galleries here in Boston, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which I think is tragic to limit yourself only to sell to museums if they'll buy. It's not the only kind of interior we exist in, thank God. In fact, most people can't exist in a museum. As far as I can see, the museum is repository of the works that are considered fine and have gone in the past.

And the idea of displaying contemporary work in a museum except for exhibit repels me. We discussed that I think before too when I gave you the reason why I feel as I do about this. Yes, I think a museum should display contemporary work and preferably if whoever does the selection of a contemporary work is sufficiently broad, so he includes all things that are going on contemporaneously, which it also means maybe some of my work will get in there too, and some of my student's work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you think your work isn't in one of the—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Probably not good enough.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —large museums?.

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Probably not good enough. Oh, I could to say—

ROBERT F. BROWN: I'm merely wondering what's another [ph]—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No, I am in museums but as you know, representational painting, I'm 44 and until, oh, six years or so ago, those of us chose to work in this thing were ignored systematically by all the museums and by the press. [00:28:00] I think that it was a very healthy thing for us to be ignored because it meant that we went on, we knew what the hell we were doing and why, and we didn't need the support of some goddamn museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was a good fast, you might say or—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yeah, 40 years of fasting. I mean, now, I'm reflecting about Ives. He's had 40 years in the wilderness, and he's a strong man

ROBERT F. BROWN: It must have given him and given you the feeling that the world of critics, the world of museums is rather narrow? And there are so many critics, there are so many museums and—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: The world of museums is not narrow. The world within the worlds of museums is not narrow when you're dealing with people who are scholars in a given department. But when you're talking about the administration of museums and the 20th-century tastemakers who are both museums and critics then you're dealing with a pack of fools, by and large, idiots. They don't know their ass from—was is it a [inaudible] or whatever—hole in the ground, I guess. They know nothing. They're waiting to be told.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, in other words, you reckon if the representational artists that enough impressive tellers, they could easily sway museum administrators into giving the representational artists a fair crack—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at display museum?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, I'm quite sure of it. Let's face it. Now, don't get me wrong. Because most representational painting that's been going on for the last 40 years should be buried. It just isn't art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What is the effect—many representational painters are in clubs and organizations, what do you suppose the effect of that has been upon their work—[00:30:01]—have the effect you just described that many should be buried or much of the work—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Most are in clubs and organizations and art associations and so forth. I've been through the scene. I'm a director of the American Artists Professional League. I'm one of the directors of the Council of American Artists Societies. I'm the vice president of The Guild of Boston Artists. For many years, I used to be the program chairman for the Copley Society. So, on the strength of that, I would say that it's a goddamn waste of time by and large, in terms of the people you're dealing with and the quality of their work with the exception of a handful. And the exciting part of it is it gives one, as a painter, the opportunity to work with people in an administrative way, which is very exciting because you're dealing with yet another abstraction as an artist. And it's just coldheaded work—coolheaded work if you're going to be effective, and you've got to play by the rules, and I like it from that point of view.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Are these rules ones that you think perpetuate sometimes?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: I'm talking about the rules of parliamentary procedure, that I'm referring to a strictly coolheaded scene so that you get cut through the emotionalism that almost every artist seems to display. And when you got a whole bunch of them together in one room, it's like one fantastic electric short circuit. It means an artist who does organizational work effectively, you've got to cool down the emotion. I find that aspect of it—at least the little that I've come in contact with—extremely interesting and very valuable. Because I now realize that organizations can only be effective when they are ran well. [00:32:04] And there—within the framework of

my experience, there aren't too many artists, and I'm talking about damn good ones too who have it in their nature to be able to be full objective in organizational work. I suppose there are very few people who can do it, but certainly, this has been my view anyways at dealing with artists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, some of these groups you're involved with have been going for many, many years and —which is highly unusual, particularly for artists who are rather independent minded or—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, most of the organizations that I've been involved with in the last 25 or so years have been basically, what I call for want of a better word, representational artists. They've had to have band together because if they didn't band together, they would've been mowed on long ago. Some of them had been motivated by a strange movement that popped up, I believe, in either of the '30s or '40s called Sanity in Art, which was completely wrongheaded. Others were motivated by the Dondero reports of communism in the arts and always the communist were the extremely left painters. That's a lot of bullshit. So that—and a lot of clouds that have hung over the organizations, a lot of bad-headed motivation and tremendous amount of wasted energy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, why are—the Sanity in Art and the Dondero investigations, how do they affect the representational artists? You're saying this caused them to band together?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't make that clear at all. No Sanity in Art was, come on, let's get rid of the modern crap, to put it in essence, and let's go back to nature. [00:34:01] All right. There's a core of truth to it, but it was utterly distorted in the way it was applied in these representational organizations. Well, it's the old case of your friends being your worst enemies, and the idea was the wrongheaded to begin with. And so were the conclusions, in my opinion, of much of the Dondero reports or—yeah, reports in terms of looking for pinkos everywhere, and needless to say most of pinkos were modern artists. And like that scene, you don't need. It just—it does no good to art. Art is—transcends politics. It transcends common religion. It transcends everything. It's something else again. And you don't base a criteria or quality upon a man's political background.

ROBERT F. BROWN: At one time though, these organizations here in Boston is you've—you've been involved—

ROBERT D. HUNTER: No, I'm talking now about national organizations. Bostonians have always been more sensible than that, thank God.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see. There was never any witch hunt among them or anything?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh no, only in terms of the chapters of national organizations. I'll never forget one time, I had a postmaster, something I got screwed into. It came from the American Artists Professional League. We've met I believe at Jordan [Hall]? No, it wasn't Jordan Hall. No, it was the Dorothy Quincy Suite. Oh, this is roughly 10 years ago, and I was the president of Massachusetts chapter of the American Artists Professional League. And Wheeler Williams, the president came down to New York with Frank Wright who was vice president, and they were very much informants in this Dondero thing. And we had—let's look at that organization rah-rah, America it's a very right-winged—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The John Birch Society?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Well, not John Birch. It was—I'm sure the organization is filled with Birches but it wasn't that. [00:36:02] It's still going. American—you must know it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It was something of freedom lobby or something of the sort?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Oh, they have meetings. They have rallies here in Boston every year. Well, a whole bunch of those people were there, and they tried to swing the essence of the meeting, which was discussing the Boston Arts Festival, which is yet another subject into a what's wrong with America and let's get rid of the commies and all that. Well, I'm oversimplifying, but you know what I mean. Wrongheaded crap, nothing whatsoever to do with the art of painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And do these executives of the American Artists Professional League—how did they stand on this sort of thing?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Definitely leaning toward the right in the direction of America, America, rah-rah-rah. That's what I'm just trying to tell you is the organizations I've been involved in have had a lot of wrongheaded policies. When it came to trying to fix some kind of criteria that eventually will be accepted as what a profession is all about. Because I consider the art of painting a profession, and until it returns to a position where it's precisely that, a profession, then we'll always be floundering, going in—I mean we, I'm talking about artists in general wherever. So we always would be going around in circles like what's his name? Don Gilde [ph].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that—do you think that some artist like to flounder or let's say like only short-life organizations? They don't like to be involved in one for any length of time?

ROBERT D. HUNTER: Most of us, like most people, are not terribly intrigued by organizations, unless they can get something out of it. What I mean by that is if they're going to sell a few paintings then they'll pay their dues. [00:38:01] If they don’t sell the paintings, they'll drop out. Let's be real, most artists and most people are not interested in the dynamics that go behind the functioning of an organization. They couldn’t care less. It's not—I'm not blaming them, mind you. I'm not being critical. I think this is the way it is. That's all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]