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Oral history interview with Stanton Macdonald-Wright, 1964 Apr. 13-Sept. 16

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Transcript

Interview

BH: BETTY HOAG
SM: STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT

BH: Mr. Wright was, from 1935 to 1940, Regional Director of the Federal Arts Project in Southern California, and also Regional Advisor for seven western states. Besides his work for the Federal Arts Project, Mr. Wright is much better known as the "Dean of Calif. Painters," as Time Magazine has called him. He was born July 8th of 1890, in Charlottesville, Virginia, and came to Santa Monica quite early -- when you were a little boy, is that correct?

SM: Ten years old, yes.

BH: And you went through public schools here?

SM: I went to public school for about three months, when I first came out here: I went to a Catholic school; it was the only school here that was fit to go to at that time. Remember, this was practically a Mexican town at that time.

BH: Did you go to Santa Monica High School?

SM: Yes. It was out at 10th Street and (I believe) Santa Monica Blvd. I believe, I don't know. I mentioned it on this "Stairway to the Stars" [A television program] the other day, and they said that that's where it was. I had forgotten about it. And I went to the Academy of the Holy Names here for a time; very nice sisters. I'm not a Catholic myself.

BH: Did you have an art education from them at all, or . . . ?

SM: Oh, no.

BH: There probably was no one here to teach it at that time, was there?

SM: There was nobody here, at that time, but I had been studying art for five years when I came out here, and my father got people to come down from Los angeles to teach me. So they used to come down a couple of times a week and I studied at that time. Of course, when the sisters wanted anything drawn up at the school they always got me to do it.

BH: Was this posters and things of that kind?

SM: Yes. It was very strange: In an exhibition I had in Los Angeles in 1955 (that was nine years ago), there was one picture exhibited that I did when I was 13 years old, from Third and Olive [Streets]. I have that picture somewhere here now. But I think it was the first oil painting I ever made. The way I got it: when my mother died, I found it among her effects. Heh!

BH: Was that in the Rose Freed Gallery, in New York, where they had it exhibited?

SM: No. It was here. At the Los Angeles [County] Museum.

BH: In your retrospective show?

SM: No. That was . . . [Wright rummages around his book shelf] I don't know where . . . Some of these catalogues show . . . . Now, do you want me to answer these questions which are propounded to me here?

BH: Yes. Or I can just keep asking you questions. However you want to do it.

SM: Yes, please do. That's better still.

BH: I asked you if you graduated from Santa Monica Hich School because I knew they gave you the award for "Outstanding Student from Santa Monica."

SM: No. I explained that to them before, because I had never graduated from there. I only went a few months, as I say, and then I was sent to boarding school here; I went to Harvard School; I went to Yale School [both

private military academies in L.A.]. Then I finally got out of all of them and went to Paris when I was very young, you see.

BH: Where did you study in Paris?

SM: Well, I studied art at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts, and I studied at the Academie Colorossi, and I studied at the Grande Chaumine, , and I particularly studied in the Louvre, and where the masterpieces were. I'd rather take from the original source than hear them talked about.

BH: Which paintings did you like best? Which ones do you think influenced your own work the most, I should say?

SM: You mean what pictures?

BH: Yes. What paintings?

SM: Well, I . . . I . . . I think that I was brought up . . . or brought myself up to do that . . . on Michelangelo. To me he was one of the greatest draftsmen who ever lived. And of course, to me, sculpture ended with him. There has been no great sculpture since Michelangelo. In spite of all the junk that one gathers now and puts together with a welding-torch, Michelangelo still, I think, is a great sculptor! Heh, heh.

BH: His wonderful three-dimension affected your painting, because you were searching for this always.

SM: Yes. I was always interested in things of that kind, of course. Russell [Morgan] was another example who makes me not especially interested in the Archives of American Art (which I think there is very little of, to begin with!). Russell, who was probably one of the three or four greatest painters that this country ever produced, and probably ever will produce . . . .

BH: This was Morgan Russell?

SM: Morgan Russell, yes. He came over here totally in oblivion: they never mentioned him anywhere. They don't do anything about it. He was one of the great painters of our time, and much greater than the French painters, and recognized as such by the French. But the Americans, when they write . . . . For instance, Morgan Russell and I founded the only school of painting which was ever founded by an American which is ever utilized in your French and European archives . . . .

BH: Synchromism?

SM: Synchromism, yes. There [indicates the book-shelf] is a whole row of books. Every one of them has articles on Synchromism in them.

BH: My goodness!

SM: All of them. You see, that's all European stuff. And that's only a few of them that I have there. But when they write history of American art, even here, neither one of us is ever mentioned in them!

BH: Well, Thomas Craven did, in his Men of Art.

SM: Yes, that was only due to one thing: I taught Tom Benton [Thomas Benton]. He had given up painting when he came back here [to America]. And Tom Craven was a great friend of his, and he couldn't get out of it. And Tom is one of the sweetest people, and to me, one of the finest painters in the country. Now, he doesn't paint the way I do, and we have nothing in common when it actually comes to painting. But he's a great painter. He's good copy, too. But people insist on looking at him as "old hat," and so forth and so on. He's actually a great painter.

BH: He did a portrait of you several years ago when he was visiting here, didn't he?

SM: Yes, that's right.

BH: Do you still have that; or what happened to it?

SM: Oh no! I'll tell you about that portrait: I said to him one day, I said, "Tom, we have known each other longer than any two painters have ever known each other, I think." (I met Tom first in Paris in 1906 or '07, and we've corresponded, and been more or less intimately related -- that is, socially speaking and as friends -- ever since that time; but without any hiatus at all). I said to him, "What do you want to paint in portrait for now?" He said, "I'm doing a series of portraits of maniacs."

BH: Ha, ha.

SM: Then he said, "The second one I do will be . . . ." (Who's this fellow who dragged MacArthur back -- the President? Truman!) . . . . He said, "The second one will be Truman. And, he said, "The third one will be one of my friends who was a great labor leader in Kansas City." So, he said, "That's what's doing. So that's the reason I want to do yours." I said, "All right. Go to it." Well, I wasn't too well anyway, so sitting down didn't bother me. And Tom was out here during the whole process with a pan of water near him. And he chewed tobacco with great rapidity and used this pan of water to spit in, to save himself from having to go to the edge of the porch to let it over the edge. He's a very sweet person: I am very fond of him. I'm very fond of Tom and always have been; he's a very sweet fellow.

BH: I wonder if he has the portrait?

SM: Yes, he has it. I heard from him not very long ago, because I had written to ask whether he had ever finished it. Because when he left here he hadn't quite finished it. He said that he had finished it, but that [BREAK IN TAPE]

SM: . . . . background in one of my pictures in which he was going to put me in front. I don't know what ever happened to it. though.

BH: I believe that was the year he was given the architectural award in San Francisco at the National A.I.A. meeting, wasn't it?

SM: I think it was, yes. He was out here; he stayed with me for a week or so. [BREAK IN TAPE] [BH IS INQUIRING ABOUT MORGAN RUSSELL.]

BH: . . . . California, or . . . ?

SM: No, no. I don't know. I wouldn't say exactly as to that. I know he was in New York for a while; he was a protege of Robert Henri. And Robert Henri, as anybody knows, was one of the most local-minded men that ever taught here, and probably one of the best teachers who ever taught in America. No matter what you think of his painting, he was a great human being; there is no doubt of that. I know I got Russell back here in 1916. And Henri, who had taught him, introduced him to Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, who supported him -- gave him, perhaps $75 a month for several years on which they all lived at that time; that's what she gave her proteges. When he came back here and Henri found it out (he was in New York), he asked Morgan Russell if he would please come over to his studio and give him criticisms. Now that is something you don't find in a painter who is arrive; but Henri was that kind of man. And I always had a great respect for him in that sense. In the same way that I had for Frans Hals, and those later dutch painters -- more than I had for those (what did they call them?) -- that Ash-Can New York School.

BH: I don't want to get back to Thomas Craven especially, but he did make a remark I wondered about: he said that you and Mr. Russell had been influenced by Cezanne, and I wonder whether you felt that . . . ?

SM: That's perfectly true, Mrs. Hoag, in this sense. That there is no modern painter, living at that time (That is, they're all dead except myself and Picasso: that's the only one and he's not doing (anything)) -- every modern painting that existed, from the time of Cezanne, was influenced by Cezanne. Cezanne was a great spring, out of which many of those boys (of a man like Othon Friesz) would take a cupful; but the spring was still there, gushing. And without Cezanne there never would have been any devolvement of modern painting.

BH: That's a beautiful tribute to him!

SM: Well, I only wish that I could make it stronger. The man was a great man, there is no doubt about it.

BH: Somewhere I read that you had invented some kind of machine for Synchromism, using mirrors and lens and all . . . ?

SM: Yes, I have!

BH: Do you have one of those?

SM: Yes.

BH: Have they ever been put into production, or used for any other way, or is it just . . . .

SM: I never wanted to do it. I had these machines made . . . . I'll show it to you in a minute, if you'd like. The machine with which I photograph that on strips of film is in the corner. I'll show you the projection machine. There [indicates it, in the dining room area] is the screen up there [indicates it in the living room]. It fills that. I

project it from back in the other room. I had the machine-work done on three different machines of that kind until I got one perfected. And I've never done anything with it because I did it for my own interest.

BH: Was it an aid to yourself in painting: was that the purpose of the machine?

SM: It's not a painting at all, no. These were specifically done as drawings; and they were photographed in black-and-white; and come out as color.

BH: For goodness sake!

SM: I'll show you: that's what this is [indicates, showing a drawing]. These are strips; these have all been photographed. Here's the beginning of this thing [unfolds the scroll of it]. All these things run through . . . . There you can see. There's a multiplicity of films running through the machine at one time. And they cross over and exclude each other, etc., etc. It is the most astounding color. It is just taking abstractions, which I have conceived of as being an articulation point between the old type of painting and an entirely new art. And it's the utilization of abstract painting and non-objective painting in a musical phase, as it were, that's all. I've only been back from Japan for a little while now, so I've done nothing about it; and later on . . . . There's a friend of mine, a Dr. (Mauritz) Jagerdorf, who's a picture-collector, a very sweet fellow, who is coming out to stay with me for a week or so here. He wants to come out to see this show of mine; I begged him not to. I said, "It's a little show and not going to be worth looking at at all. It's small pictures and . . . ." [BREAK IN TAPE] . . . . the 27th of this month. He'll stay a week . . . . [BREAK IN TAPE] MR. WRIGHT EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS GOING TO SHOW THE MACHINE TO HIM, AND INVITED MY HUSBAND AND ME TO ATTEND THE EVENING OF THE EVENT. BREAKS ARE DUE TO SM'S DELETING THINGS HE DID NOT WANT ON TAPE. HE THEN TOLD ME ABOUT A MAN FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES ASKING TO SHOW THE MACHINE; HIS ANSWER:

SM: . . . . if you want to pay for putting it on film for yourself, then I will give you all the drawings for the machine, which I have made. I had to make those drawings myself because it is something that has never been done before, you see. I went to one of the greatest engineers there is, Hernfelt, out in Culver City, the Hernfelt Engineering Corporation. I had him make two machines for me. And besides I made the first machine myself. And it looked like a horse-stable: it was about that size. Well, this thing has gotten down now to the size where it at least gets in the house.

BH: Heh. How large is the machine?

SM: I'll show it to you in a minute, when we get through here (with the taping). So I told him if he wanted to do that and put it on film, I'd be very glad to do anything possible (to help). Well, he tried to do it; it cost $1500, something of that kind, to put it on the film. But, my God! I've spent $12 or $15,000 . . . .

BH: And many years working on it and developing it.

SM: Well, I must say I did it on my off-time, to a great extent. But I have thought this machine since 1913, and my brother wrote a book on this machine which was not built. He wrote a book on it called "The Future of Painting" and that was written, I think, in 1915. And I never had any time from that time up until now to monkey with it. So then I did it; and, as I say, that book was written at that . . . .

BH: Was this Willard Huntington Wright?

SM: That's right, yes.

BH: He was named after your uncle of the Huntington Library, is that correct?

SM: A cousin. Here he is [indicates in a book]. This is one [book] I had to get from his first wife; and I had to get my niece to take it out of the house for me. It's called "The Future of Painting." It has to do only with that machine. Let's see, what's the date on this? (looks in book).

BH: I think it's over here: 1923.

SM: '23? I thought it was before that. It couldn't be; that must be a second edition.

BH: Did he write another book called "Modern Art?"

SM: Yes, and another one called "Creative Will."

BH: Oh? I read somewhere that you had helped him write a lot of that; is that right?

SM: Mrs. Hoag, there is no critic alive today who hasn't had his work done for him by an artist. It's a fact; I am not joking with you. Seuphor, who is a great friend of mine, learned a great deal, everything that he has, from

Mondrian, with whom he is great friend. He is ten years younger than I. But it is such books . . . . This is the last book I got from him (shows it); this has just appeared. It appears in five languages. Now, this is the one which was put out not a year ago, which was a general conception of abstract painting.

BH: How interesting!

SM: It's a beautifully gotten-out book. But Mondrian was his great interest.

BH: Does he have some of your paintings in it?

SM: Oh yes. It would have to have, would have to have my part in that movement altogether. Here it is. Here's mine and there's Morgan Russell's (painting reproductions). There's also another one in here . . . .

BH: Los Angeles County Museum has another one of yours in the hall, which I have always loved; it has many blues in it. It is very, very nice.

SM: I never saw it, out there. They bought it, I think, from Barbe, the Coca Cola man. I know the Robles (Esther Robles Gallery in Los Angeles) sold them that picture, but I don't know for sure where they got it.

BH: I'll ask Esther about it.

SM: Yes. I am trying to buy some of the older pictures of mine, all over the world as a matter of fact; and I can't get anybody to sell them.

BH: You've exhibited all over the world; some of these questions were about that, every place . . . .

SM: Yes.

BH: Here, I have Tokyo . . . .

SM: I never exibited in Tokyo!

BH: You didn't?

SM: I never exhibited in Tokyo.

BH: Now in 1937 you spent a year in a Zen monastery in Kyoto, didn't you?

SM: Yes, yes. Well, I live in a monastery now.

BH: You go back there every year?

SM: I go back there to a house which has been given me in the monastery. That (indicates a painting on the wall) is from the last exhibition in Kyoto. That's from just last year. As a matter of fact, I think it was here in '64. You see this thing? You see this thing? Look (Indicates part of the painting), that's an elephant's trunk. That (indicates a Japanese sculpture in the dining room; large re 4', horizontal) at the end of the room, that's where I got it, see?

BH: Oh, yes! Of course I do, the same feeling!

SM: No, I never exhibited in Tokyo.

BH: Then you were a Fulbright professor in Japan in 1952 and '53?

SM: That's right.

BH: Do you feel there is any Oriental influence in your painting?

SM: Not a particle; absolutely not! Not a hair's breadth!

BH: Then what is it? Just a spiritual thing you feel?

SM: Well, I became interested in Oriental art through probably the greatest aesthetician with whom I studied at the Sorbonne, in Paris, when I was a very young man over there. His name was Focillon. He is the man who is recognized, I guess all over the world, as being the greatest aesthetician of modern times; he is a very sweet fellow. And he said to me one day, "I know nothing about Oriental art, but I think there is a great deal in it." Now, you see how far back that is! And he said, "I am sure it would interest you." And I began to see what . . . . At the Museum de in Paris, for instance, they have nothing Japanese to speak of up there. Chinese? Yes, many phases;

and there is much porcelain, but very little else in the way of paintings and that kind of thing. And I became interested in it and I started to study not only that and its philosophy, but when I came back here to this country I studied the Chinese language. And I studied the Chinese language for about five years here. But it's altogether something . . . . I don't believe it is possible for a Western mind to . . . . Well, let's put it this way: I'll quote Jung and say I think it's very dangerous for a Western mind to monkey with Oriental ideas. I don't think it should be monkeyed-with at all.

BH: The Western mind can't apply their ideas, you mean?

SM: I mean that if you take them too far you go "off your rocker."

BH: I see.

SM: Our minds don't work the way theirs do. Anybody who has studied Japanese would realize the utter difference between our method of thinking and what the Japanese do. For instance, what would you say if you should introduce me to someone some day and I should say to that person, "The honorable I adheres?" You would think I was crazy. That's what I have to say to every Japanese I meet, you see: "Haji Mete O Me Kakarimasu." And then you add, "Dozoyoroshiku," which means "please," and the general idea of it is: "Speak kindly of me to your family." But they never end it: they always mutter at the end "zzzzuu . . . ." and everybody knows what it is. "From the beginning, the honorable I adheres." Now, that's the Oriental mind, which in the Japanese is much more contrary to ours than the Chinese is . . . .

BH: It is more?

SM: Yes. My Chinese today, after I've not spoken it for probably thirty years . . . . I can probably speak it as well today as I can Japanese, where I live half the year every year. It's an amazing language. And you can get an idea of what that is from just things of that kind.

BH: Do you paint all the time that you're over there?

SM: Oh, yes. I do practically all the painting that I do over there.

BH: Oh, you do? Because you have more peace and quiet?

SM: I am not harassed by anything over there. As I say, we live in a monastery (my wife is the only woman they ever allowed on the grounds); the house that we live in is the same size, to the foot, as this house that you're in now. I have my studio in that house upstairs, where down here I have exactly the same-sized studio downstairs (although I use this for a studio here (meaning the living room where we were sitting)); it's oriented in exactly the same direction; and it's divided in exactly the same way as to rooms. Strange coincidence, and that coincidence is the thing that gave me that house. When the head bishop found out about that thing, and several other extraordinary coincidences, he became convinced that I had lived there in times gone by.

BH: Isn't that wonderful!

SM: So he handed me that house for the duration of my life.

BH: What a beautiful gift!

SM: And I've had something built onto this house (in Japan), so that we are absolutely comfortable in the place as far as heating goes, and I spend the winter over there. Most people eschew Japan in the winter because there is no way of heating houses or anything of that sort, is the way it was; in a modern hotel it's different. But I mean in a monastery it's a different thing. But when I went there in 1937, I was a good deal younger (I was 47 then); now at the age of 70, and over 70, I can't stand the coldness which I could stand 35 years ago, or anything of that kind.

BH: But you have it heated now?

SM: I have it thoroughly heated. And I had hot and cold running water put in there which flabbergasted the bishop, and I had the whole place re-wired, so that he himself could get some electric heat when he wants it. But he's one of the sweetest old fellows you've ever seen in your life. When I first went there he said to me, "I suppose you wish to study Zen?" It's the original foundation of Zen in Japan; the original (Wright means the monastery itself is). That was founded by Eisai. And this year marks (as a matter of fact, it is just over now), marks the 750th anniversary of the death of Eisai Zeshi (the latter word means "Master"). And Eisai's tomb is within tossing distance of my studio: I mean I can reach across to it with a fishing pole. And that's where I live.

BH: Is it part of the monastery, or . . . ?

SM: It's all monastery. It's what they call a "Sodo;" the Sodo of a monastery is the center, or heart, of the monastery. And this house, as I say, was built for retiring bishops; and this man has not retired. So, as they say, "Wright-san," he retires there.

BH: How long ago did they give this to you?

SM: Four or five years ago.

BH: I wondered if that was why you taught Oriental art at U.C.L.A.? Because you had lived there before . . . .

SM: Not at all. I taught Oriental art there because the aesthetics of Oriental art had always intrigued me to a great extent. I've even been in touch with Alexander Pope, the great Persian Scholar, to find out about Persian aesthetics, about which he said, I have a letter right here in one of these dossiers here, in which he writes me a very nice letter, in saying that he himself has hunted for aesthetic expression in Oriental art. And I wrote him afterward and suggested that he might find it in a book by Rowan (Wright was probably referring to Benjamin Rowland) on certain elements of spiupism, etc., which I did. No, I was interested in Oriental art from the time I was about 16 or 17 years old; the time I was in Paris with Focillon, when I first went into the Sorbonne.

BH: Well, when you were a Fulbright professor in Japan, did that mean you had a research fellowship or were you teaching?

SM: I was supposed to have a research scholarship, but when I got over there they found me teaching. So I was sent to the Dai Goko, which is the oldest educational college in Japan, and I lectured to them on the development of modern art; and I lectured it in two languages, both French and in English. And the best papers I ever got from a college class in my life (there were about 140 in that class) were from those Japanese who were not hearing one word in their own language.

BH: How perfectly amazing!

SM: Well, it's amazing in a sense, but, on the other hand, remember that the colleges over there are built more for study than they are for -- what shall I say -- status symbols; which they are here. Now in that class I had 4 or 5 professors who audited the class; the rest of them, except for one person, were men. That one person was the daughter of a professor, who happened to go there. And at that time, that was in 1952, they hadn't yet arrived at what they have now; going out and trying to kill persons for Communist reasons, etc. The professors were just getting hooked on that; now they have it thoroughly! See, they go to college over there . . . There might be applications of 6 or 7,000 for a college year; and they have room for 400. The result is that they are screened very carefully, and the people who go there, go there to study; they don't go there and horse around, the way we do here. Which I find an advantage.

BH: They really want to learn. I have been wondering if you felt that you had applied Synchromism to any of the murals, and . . . .

SM: Here? No, not at all; not at all! I was going to say that, far from working for the government on this thing here, they got together here in town, for the government -- and I suggested it to the Mayor -- and they got together; and through Merle Armitage, who was the local boy on the PWAP, they called a meeting in the library down there. And they raised, from the public, one thousand and a few dollars ($10 - $15, something of that kind) to pay for the materials to do this. And the materials actually were spent on that; and they cost me besides that about $300 in 18 months doing it (Wright is referring to the mural for the Santa Monica City Library). So, that is how that was done.

BH: I wondered whether you felt you had influenced any of the younger artists here by your drawings for it?

SM: Not a particle.

BH: There was no contact that way?

SM: No! No! When I got through, all the drawings I had made for that were put on sale in the library and sold for a couple of dollars apiece, something like that. And they were sold, not to the young ones but to the old ones. I ran into George Barker the other day (He is probably one of the finest painters that California ever produced) and he said to me, "Say, you'd be interested to know . . . ." (I hadn't seen him for many, many years; I happened to run into him up in Pacific Palisades in the hardware store) . . . "...that I sent back to -- (someplace where he comes from, someplace in the middle west, I think) a lot of your drawings." I said, "Where on earth did you get a lot of my drawings? I've been trying to buy some!" He said, "I got 'em when you finished the library." "Oh," I said, "no." Well, there were heads, feet, details, things of that kind. All of those things were put in, which I gave to the library for their own benefit. And these things were published, at no expense to the city or the library at all.

BH: The brochures which went with it?

SM: Yes. And there were a lot of them published. They used to sell them down there, I don't know what for. Anyway, it went to the library.

BH: Wasn't there a part of the Federal Project that you took part in which was called Easel Projects? You did for instance, a "Malibu Lake" and "California Country" drawing?

SM: Well, they had nothing whatever to do with that! I would occasionally go out when I was directing the thing because I wanted to have some decent drawings made, and made drawings, that was all.

BH: They didn't exhibit drawings that you had made?

SM: Well, they were exhibited I think at many places; a lot of them were sent back to Washington and belong in places back there (I don't know what places they are because it never interested me to find out).

BH: You didn't do them specifically for exhibition by the Federal Project . . . ?

SM: No, I did them and gave them to the Government, that's all.

BH: I see.

SM: No, that's the same way I did the designs for the City Hall (Santa Monica), and the high school (ditto) the fountains, and all that kind of business. And what is this mural, "The Development of Writing?" Where is it?

BH: Oh, at Southgate Public Library.

SM: Yes. Do you read Greek at all?

BH: No, I wish I did.

SM: Well, I'll tell you something that's very funny: I didn't sign that, you know at all, and yet I did sign it. On the right had side of this thing . . . where's that thing? (He looks for photograph of the mural.)

BH: Is it like in the Santa Monica Library mural where you have your name in Chinese on the back of the easel which you father stands in front of?

SM: No. There it is: "Stanton Erected Me." In Greek! And nobody's ever brought that up because nobody has any education to go down there to find that, to read it. All the rest of it is in different languages. See: here's Greek, that's Phoenician, here's Sanskrit, here modern Chinese . . . .

BH: What do all these other ones day, in their language?

SM: . . . . Persian. This all has to do with the development of writing.

BH: An alphabet, or something like that?

SM: Yes, I have Coptic, and ancient Egyptian as well, on that.

BH: That's interesting because in some of the San Franscisco murals of this period they were so very socially-counscious, they put . . . .

SM: They put hammers and sickles. Yes. They tried them out with me, down here, but I had them painted out.

BH: I haven't seen many signs of social content in the other work down here.

SM: No, there's very little. If any of that stuff got by me, it got by me because . . . I don't know why. I had a lot of trouble with those boys at that time . . . .

BH: You screened them out when you found any?

SM: Well, you couldn't exactly weed them out, you had to get rid of them by stealth more than any other way. Because the Government itself didn't mind. After all, they were working toward Socialism at that time and they didn't care. I cared about it.

BH: Do you think that this Project did any good for painting in California at the time?

SM: I think it set back art all over the United States a hundred and fifty years.

BH: You do, really?

SM: I do! I think it was absolutely the worst thing that could possibly have happened.

BH: Why?

SM: Because they got five thousand and one hundred useless, untalented people in the place who went in saying they were artists, and nobody cared because what they wanted to do was to give money away. They had over 5,000 people, and when the Project ended in -- what was it, 1940? I guess it was about 1940 more or less, those people kept right on painting. And vast numbers of those people that you see exhibiting in galleries now are the same people. That's what's the matter with art.

BH: It convinced them they were artists when they weren't, you mean?

SM: I don't say that for all of them. There were a lot of extremely talented people who were in it, but they were in such a minority that it would be like sifting all the garbage in Los Angeles to find one egg that wasn't broken.

BH: Well, weren't there some of them who were competent artists who might have starved to death without help at the time?

SM: There were competent artists, as I say, in this thing. I had some extremely competent artists here. This Feitelson was one of them, for instance. He's one of the finest draftsmen we have in the country. And the man who was the head of the mosaic department, Albert King, is more than competent. We had very competent men as far as that's concerned. And I immediately made them heads of departments so as to give them a little time to do some of their own work, something of that kind. But the general run of those people would have been better off if they'd starved to death as far as art is concerned. Eddie Cahill, who was the National Director at that time, said to me years afterward . . . . I happened to be back in New York, I think it was in 1955 when I was on my to Paris. I was having dinner with him, and he said, "Well, Stanton, now that this is all over, and it's all over for a long time, fifteen years, what is your real opinion of the Project?" Of course, he was a man who was dedicated to it, he was a sociologically-inclined baby, he was an institutional slave by temperament, a very sweet fellow. I said, "Eddie (his name was Holger but we all called him Eddie), I think it set art back a hundred years." He never spoke to me after that. I never came in contact with him again.

BH: Did he give you a chance to tell him why you thought that or was he just upset?

SM: No. I wouldn't have told him anyway. Let him find out for himself. I stopped teaching in 1954, you know. I didn't teach after that.

BH: I wanted to ask you some of the details, if I may . . . .

SM: All right, go ahead.

BH: For instance, in the Santa Monica Public Library, how many people did you have helping you?

SM: Nobody.

BH: You did it all yoursel?

SM: I had not one human being except one fellow by name of . . . (What's his name? I'll tell you in a moment.) Fred Bessinger who prepared the wooden panels. Those are all painted on three-quarter inch wood panels, and he prepared those as I told him to do with white lead. But nobody ever touched a brush or a drawing or anything else to those murals except myself. They never laid a hand on them under any circumstances.

BH: That's amazing! I thought there would have been a whole crew working for you.

SM: There's two hundred feet of those things; there are approximately two hundred portraits; and it took me eighteen months to do it. Some time back when I was in Japan, my doctor had written me that they were going to tear down the library. So when I came back I called up the head man here in Santa Monica, and I said, "I think there is one thing that should be saved when you destroy those murals. Over the desk there is one small panel which is now obscured by piles of books and things of that kind. I would like to purchase that one if you're going to destroy the murals." He said, "Well, maybe. Nothing will be done for six or eight months. We might be able to sell it to you if you want it."

BH: Sell it! Ridiculous!

SM: The panel I wanted was the portrait I did of my father.

BH: Of course you would. To the left of the door as you look down?

SM: It's to the right of the door as you enter the front door, on the right hand side . . . .

BH: If they're on wooden panels, all of them could be taken down, couldn't they?

SM: All of them could be taken down, yes.

BH: Well they certainly must be saved!

SM: Well, you know, to scribe that place and to get that mural up there was no easy matter. I had the blueprints by which the building had been built, but they didn't resemble the walls. Apparently the man who erected it found himself necessitated, either by expenses or something, to change plans as he went around. So the blueprints had no value at all!

BH: Where the blueprints showed studs you could have nailed to, there weren't any?

SM: Yes. So I had to go down there and scribe that whole business to get those things to fit. When I got through scribing and they put them up I only had a disparity of three-eighths of an inch on the largest wall. Which I considered a marvelous job especially for me, because I am a first-class dope when it comes to anything pertaining to mathematics, figurations or anything else.

BH: Well you're not supposed to be a carpenter! I noticed the title of it was "Man's Twofold Development." Was it the idea of Science and Art carried out?

SM: Yes, that's right. They didn't have that down there, incidentally. [He indicates a pamphlet about murals he has loaned to me.] Please get that back because that's the only one I ever had.

BH: Mr. Wright, I will have all of these things back, I'll be careful of them.

SM: Fine.

BH: Do you remember what year that was done?

SM: '35 it was set up.

BH: 1935. And then what about the asbestos fire-curtain in the Santa Monica High School?

SM: When was that done?

BH: Yes. And did you do that alone?

SM: I don't remember exactly when that was done. I don't remember now.

BH: That was done on asbestos, wasn't it? What paint medium did you use?

SM: I didn't paint that at all: I designed it and sent men down to copy it, to square up the design. I didn't have anything to do with that. These boys, some of it were, - were specialists on things of that kind.

BH: These were men on the Project?

SM: Yes.

BH: I see. You don't remember the names of any of the ones who worked on it?

SM: I don't know.

BH: And what about "The Landing of the Vikings?"

SM: Well, it was done about that same time, but the exact date I don't know. I was just looking here [in pamphlet] to see if there is some notice of when that thing was done. Here is a portrait that was taken at that time. It was in some magazine (I was just looking); it's in "Saturday Night," and does it give any date?

BH: Yes, December, '38.

SM: All right. And that's all we want to know?

BH: Yes. 1938.

SM: Here is another photograph [indicates again] that was taken in my studio over here at that time.

BH: Oh yes. Mr. Feitelson did the mosaic work in the Vikings mural, didn't he?

SM: No, no, no!

BH: You designed it, I mean, and he did the execution of the "Landing of the Vikings" in Santa Monica High School?

SM: No, no, I did that!

BH: Did you lay the mosaics yourself?

SM: Oh no. Neither did Feitelson! They had a regular group which laid that. I think Albert King had charge of it. Albert King also put up the biggest unbroken expanse of mosaics in the world, down on the facade of the Long Beach Civic Auditorium.

BH: Oh! That was your design too?

SM: No, no. That was a group of designers. Al King had a great deal to do with it. The original design for that thing was a boy from Long Beach whose name I no longer recall, and then we all put a finger in it. Then Al took seventy-five people down there and they worked for six months putting that thing up. Now that's how it was. But this "Vikings" is my design altogether. That photograph was made of the original design. You also have here [indicates] a photograph taken of the mural itself after it was up. You see how closely that resembles my design? I also have a colored picture of it too.

BH: Oh, wonderful! That's in terrazzo, isn't it?

SM: Hm?

BH: The finished thing is in terrazzo mosaic?

SM: No, that's not terrazzo. That was what they call tesserae; this was a tesserae, which is what they call all small pieces of mosaic. Only this was a non-glazed mosaic. It has a matte-surface in fact.

BH: The one of "The Vikings" is also non-glazed?

SM: Yes, yes, that's right.

BH: And the Santa Monica City Hall?

SM: The City Hall mural is not mosaics but what I call "Petrachrome." I invented the name for it and the process. Petrachrome, inserted to create large areas, means "petri"-"stone." and "chrome," "color." But it's made of concrete. It's made of a white concrete, which is then colored by oxides or colors or one thing or another, and by different kinds of ground-up colored stones all mixed together. Then that is made into pieces about that [indicates] square and installed. King also put that up.

BH: He did? And the group of men helping him were all Federal Arts Project workers?

SM: Yes. He could tell you more about all those things, and he probably has photographs of these things.

BH: Good! I want to talk to him and ask him about it.

SM: You'll find many of these people who were on this Project who know much more about it than I do. My interests were not as specifically connected with it as many of theirs were.

BH: Well, it was from a different standpoint.

SM: Yes.

BH: There are some details about the Santa Monica City Hall mural I want to ask you about . . .

SM: Yes.

BH: . . . particularly the one where the polo-players are. Do you remember the man in polo jodphurs standing in front, and then a man on a horse behind him with a mallet?

SM: Yes, I remember.

BH: Did those have anything to do with Will Rogers and his polo field?

SM: Yes. And that airplane and the automobile are very distinctly related to Santa Monica. The biggest automobile road-races that they had in California at that time were held in Santa Monica . . . .

BH: On San Vicente Boulevard?

SM: I don't remember whether they were there or whether they were on Wilshire Boulevard, I forget. Also the first airplane field, Rogers Field, was built and given to Santa Monica by the son-in-law of this fellow about whom I told you, Gorham; he is depicted there. Now the plane business was important then. The Douglas building is shown in the mural. Douglas was the first great airplane-builder in the United States. And the tennis players! Remember, the best tennis players, the world champions, were all developed in Santa Monica: May Sutton and the Ryan girls and May Sutton's daughter and Tom Bundy (who was later her husband) played in the doubles, and so on. All the greatest tennis players. So all those were put in the mural for good reasons.

BH: I see. That's very interesting.

SM: The dogs that you see there are my own dogs.

BH: They are chows, aren't they?

SM: Yes, they're chows. The greatest dog that ever was bred, I think. Also I used both of those dogs in the "Primitive Man" scene of the Santa Monica library mural, standing as though they were wild dogs.

BH: I remember them there . . . you used them again!

SM: My dogs, yes.

BH: What were their names?

SM: Well, one of them was Min Wong, a very highly pedigreed dog, and the bitch was named Yung Wevay named after a very celebrated concubine of the Sung Dynasty. She had no breeding at all, but who was just as lovable nonetheless. NOTE: I'LL HAVE THAT .

BH: There were some things in [Barnum Hall, at Santa Monica High School] the fire curtain that were obviously symbols which I wanted to ask you about, too.

SM: Do you mean in that "Vikings" curtain?

BH: Yes, the "Ride of the Valkyries," with Brunnhilde in the center, apparently.

SM: That's right.

BH: What are the ibex above it?

SM: They are the goats that, in Nordic mythology, were supposed to draw the chariot of -- who was it -- the sky divinity? I don't remember those things.

BH: Then that's who the wind god is at the right?

SM: Yes. It has to do altogether with Valhalla and all -- whatever they call the ice bridge of the gods, etc. I did that because that's what the kids wanted there. And then of course the mosaic is just the Vikings landing on the shore (let us say) of Santa Monica. And did you know that the gold and silver in that is real gold and real silver? There's no monkey-business about it! Those golds cost the government something!!

BH: The colors are very interesting in that mural, with all brown figures and no other color except the sun and the grapes.

SM: Yes.

BH: You centered it very effectively.

SM: Well, I wanted to get something a little gray out there, I thought it would attract the attention less.

BH: I think it's very, very beautiful.

SM: I am going to be very bad to you for this reason: I'm not allowed to do much talking. For instance, talking to you as long as this, I'll probably have to go to bed for six or eight hours.

BH: Oh, I'm so sorry.

SM: I don't know, it [he had been ill] left me with a very peculiar thing, which it apparently didn't do to Mr. Eisenhower, who plays golf and gives speeches. I couldn't do that at all. So I'm going to ask you, if you have more questions, to come back another time.

BH: May I come back another time?

SM: By all means! I should be very happy to have you and we can continue with this thing. [END OF INTERVIEW] TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT MAY 5, 1964 INTERVIEWER: BETTY LOCHRIE HOAG [BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE 1]

BH: This is the second interview that we've had, Mr. Wright, and I thought that we would go back from the beginning and go more slowly on things we hurried on before, because I would like you to tell me about any of these things that you will for the Archives . . . .

SM: Well, if you'll give me the questions I'll try to answer them.

BH: Well, the first one, a recent book by Brown, "American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression" said that you were an Impressionistic painter in Paris before you started with your Synchromy, and I wonder . . . .

SM: I was never an Impressionistic painter. I admire Impressionist painters but I never did them myself at all except as figure exercises. I sometimes used to go out in the spring there when I first arrived in Paris with Tom Benton. We used to paint. He did Impressionistic pictures; I admired watching him and often did them myself. But I never exhibited them and never did them as a study at all. Because I'm not a landscape painter.

BH: I see. This was with Thomas Benton, you say? SW: Yes.

BH: Was he an Impressionist painter at that time?

SM: He was altogether in Paris, yes. He was influenced very strongly by Impressionist painting, yes.

BH: I see. He never did any of your Synchromatic painting?

SM: He attempted that at the time of the Forum exhibition in New York and that's understandable in view of the fact that when I first came back to America -- rather when I came back here the first time -- I found that Tom Benton had given up painting altogether, was living a veritable dog's life out at a little place on Bikeman [Dykeman] Street painting little pots of Belleek-ware, Irish Belleek, which he sort of peddled here, there and elsewhere. He used to paint flowers on them and have them stoved, and he'd given up painting entirely. And I knew the talent of the man and I worked with him a long time. As a matter of fact, some of the pictures he painted at that time I posed for. And at the time of the Forum exhibition he sent a number of pictures to the Forum show, which were turned down by the jury there because there were too much - what shall I say? - too much a flattery of me, as though they were imitations, in other words. And Benton took them back and that's the first time that he ever tackled that and the last time. And he did it then simply because he hadn't been painting for a long time.

BH: This was in 1916, wasn't it . . . ?

SM: Yes, I believe it was . . .

BH: At the Anderson Gallery?

SM: Remember that I'm an old man, dates are a little difficult for me any more.

BH: I think they're difficult for anyone. I have them written down, that's the reason I can say them here. I understood that Robert Henri had sponsored that show with other people. Do you remember . . . ?

SM: My I correct you with the pronunciation? He called himself, H E N R I [LONG I]

BH: Oh, he did.

SM: Yes. It's a good French name but he called him self Robert H E N R I [LONG I]. Robert Henri was one of hte sponsors of it. There was a man by the name of Waexel, who was one of the ripsnorting Reds of the day and Stieglitz was another, and my brother was another, and I think there was a couple of critics connected with that, and Robert Henri. They all wrote forewards to the catalogue which was published in hard covers, and I have a copy of it somewhere around here but I don't know whether I could ever find it or not. And each artist that exhibited there had a forward which he had to state with a reproduction of the work he wanted. It caused a

great deal of excitement in New York and a great deal of bitterness, as all exhibitions do which make large claims.

BH: If they are good exhibitions, they give people something to think about. I hope you find the book. I haven't been able to, and I would like to see it.

SM: I've got it somewhere here.

BH: You probably don't remember, yours was called "Organization Number Five" . . . .

SM: In the Forum exhibition?

SM: Yes, that. It was pure abstraction. Does that sound . . . ?

SM: Does it say the size of it?

BH: No, it doesn't.

SM: Then I can tell you the size of it, it was six feet by four. And it was sold to George F. Off of whom was not a picture-dealer, but a paint-man and a frame-maker in New York, and who himself painted some of the best Renoiresque paintings that we've ever had in America. He's dead now. But he was a very talented man and a very nice fellow. Whatever became of the picture I don't know. I don't know what became of my pictures that I had in Paris or Munich or Warsaw or London or Milan or any of the rest. All of those things are totally out of my mind; I never kept any track or any notes of what sold quickly, any more than I ever did when I taught at the University, to find the name of any student that I had. I tried not to find out.

BH: After you said it in the picture or taught the pupil you were through, right?

SM: You know when an artist is finished with a picture, generally (unless he's got a fine commercial sense, which I haven't got, as impractical as I am), he's gotten all that he can out of that picture. If it's going to fecundate somebody else, that's the time for it to work at it, but as far as he himself is concerned, it has done what it can for him. It has expressed what he had to express at that time, which naturally is always the same thing -- which is himself. But he wants to start on another thing. And personally I never kept track of those things at all. Even now, when I send pictures to exhibitions in Europe or anything, my wife always makes the list of my paintings, and so forth and so on, because it would never occur to me to do it. I forget about it.

BH: You wouldn't know if some were lost even?

SM: That's right, I wouldn't.

BH: It's a good thing that Mrs. Wright does that then.

SM: Well I came on a very strange thing: there's a family up in the Ojai Valley who called me one day and said they had a picture of mine and they sent me a photograph of it. It was a colored photograph but I didn't recognize it. I told them I thought perhaps I had not painted it, because that happens very often . . . . People bring me pictures I've signed that I never painted. This, they said, had no signature and several months later they brought it down and it was my picture. But it was a picture that was stolen from me along with three or four others out of my studio in New York.

BH: How amazing that it found its way out here!

SM: Of course, I didn't claim it which I should have done, because they liked it so much. It was unfinished. I've come on three different pictures in the last 15 or 18 years that have been stolen . . . .

BH: Well that's a great compliment in a certain sense . . . .

SM: I don't know. It might be a stupidity on the part of the people that took it; they might have got a suit of clothes that would have been much better.

BH: I'm sure it isn't. You just said something which interested me about the painting always being an expression of yourself. That is then why painting changes because a person always changes, isn't it?

SM: No, I think it's just the contrary. I think painting is always the same. I think the French have a saying: "Plus ca change la plus ca la meme chose." Which means "The more a thing changes, the more it remains the same thing." I think the outside of a painting, the exterior, the surface of it, would change as a person, let us say, grows older; but I don't think the fundamental quality of either a human being or a painting ever changes. I think it remains the same. I think people that knew my painting when I was 22 years old would recognize that painting

today. I don't mean that it looks the same; I mean that there's an indelible mark placed on it. But I think that's true of everybody. I don't feel any change in myself except for becoming old; I get weaker and probably stupider or something like that.

BH: What I was thinking about was something that you gave to someone who interviewed you, I think about ten years ago, telling about going to Japan and being interested in Japanese philosophy and about what you called an "interior realism," which was in Japanese called yugen, is that correct? And that, as I understand it, is a kind of empathy with which an artist can feel himself into his painting when he creates it.

SM: Yes. That is a theoretical thing which I think can be borne out in actual practise. It's what the Germans call "einfuhling" and we call it "empathy," and the Japanese have their own word for it, which is a form of "Kunja," which has to do with feeling itself. And I think it has been proved that it requires a great deal of discipline. Of course the art production of today has no interest in such a thing. In the great periods of art they did have interest in it. I don't mean the great periods such as the Renaissance because all Renaissance painting was a commercial painting. But I speak of the Middle Ages, for instance, up through the Romanesque period, great artists painted from the time of, let's say the 16th and 17th century; the artists did the same thing in the 14th, of course, that's primitive painting. And we find the great periods of that kind have that feeling . . . that they put themselves into their work because they feel that in order to know a thing one must become a thing. Do you realize that in India itself in the old days a sculptor had not only -- was forced to take the rock itself out of the ground (the stone which he sculpted) but he had to live with it. He was not allowed by his masters to get away from it. They insisted upon his dreaming about his rock. And remember that the models which they used were all divinities. Not being able to bring them down in visible form, they went into such profound periods of meditation that they visualized them to the merest details which served the Indian artist (that is the ones who made the set formulas for the production of those things which were very strict). They posed for them, these imaginary dieties did, much more definitely than had they been actual.

BH: Isn't that amazing!

SM: You were speaking of empathy. That's what it is. It's a feeling into something. As the Japanese, which takes from the Chinese says: anything which interposes itself between the artist's brush and his canvas, or between the brush and the paper, immediately means that the whole picture is ruined! It's no longer of any value at all. It has to be that way. But people, as I say, are not interested in such statements any more. We are not interested in art; the artists are no longer interested in art at all. They are interested in selling paintings. And that's the reason I don't exhibit.

BH: Do you think one reason possibly is society, because the artist, if he is a good and conscientious artist, knows what he is trying to say . . . ?

SM: No, he doesn't.

BH: Don't you think so?

SM: No. In the Forum show, every man, as I told you, had a forward. I believe there were sixteen men exhibiting that that time -- I wouldn't say, I might have gotten mixed up, nineteen, sixteen or something, but I think it was sixteen. I could name many of them now. Out of that number anyway, the totality of the people, I had 80% ask me to go around and get from them their statements of what they were doing. I went around. They hadn't the foggiest notion of what they were doing and it ended up in my writing for them 80% of that which was published in the Forum catalogue.

BH: That's rather discouraging, isn't it?

SM: Not particularly discouraging. It might be revealing.

BH: Well, when I say that possibly part of it is because of society, for instance, take the work of Giotto, whom I understand is one of your favorite painters. I think everyone who loves painting . . . .

SM: I think Pietro della Francesc . . . .

BH: But in a case like that, the Church was behind him; and the audience, the people, all knew what it was, the visual image he was trying to say. Today I wonder if part of it is our confusion about not being sure about our material or spiritual world.

SM: Well, Mrs. Hoag, I don't think the public in the Middle Ages at the time of Giotto, or any other time in the history of the world, including the Greek, or the Italian, the Persian, the Chinese, the Japanese, that the people ever had the foggiest interest in what the artist was doing.

BH: Well, in India, for instance, through folk art didn't they know these gods and goddesses that the artists were visualizing?

SM: They knew the old gods and goddesses, yes; but what they were interested in was the literary teaching that had to do with words and names, not with forms and artistic or aesthetic meanings. That's something that has never touched them at all. And they have never been interested in it. But in the time of Giotto, for instance, remember that all the men at that period, the men before him, and the men slightly after him, and even men up to the time of the 16th century, or perhaps the middle of the 17th century -- there was so much inability to read or anything of that kind, the Gothic cathedral, as well as the paintings even of Romanesque period, -- taught these people Biblical lessons. And they also in the later Renaissance art became the status symbol of families, such as the D'Estes, and the Medicis, and the rest of them who utilized the artists merely as a status symbol, as one does now a Cadillac or a Lincoln-Imperial (Continental), or something of that kind. That's all they amounted to. And they were not interested in them in any other way. I don't say that that was absolutely the totality of people. There were a few people who were interested in art. But I don't think in the history of the world there have been many people who have been interested in art. And when you talk about folk art or folk music you are really stating something that has no sense to it. When you see folk music anywhere, you see it's grown up, it hasn't been made by a lot of people getting together and deciding that's good. It's been made by one man. That man might have belonged to the folk clan but he was the artist. The rest of them heard it after he said, this is it. They sang it. It's the same thing with folk art, and so forth. There's one type of picture in Japan which is now very popular, due to the fact that it's probably very bad. It was a picture called Otsvae. Otsvae pictures were done in Otsu. And these so-called artists lined up outside of temples and the worshippers went through there. As they went by they could see these pictures lying on the street where they painted them right before them. And those pictures done in the -- I think they began in the 17th century -- and they went up to maybe 50, 60, 70 years ago. And those Otsvae are strictly amateur-done. They're pictures of demons; they're pictures of gods, they're also pictures of other more or less lay subjects, but mostly demons and mostly gods. They're very expensive today. When they were bought originally they were bought by the people. They were bought that way in the same way that Christians bought pictures of Christ. The Japanese government shut down on Christianity and made the people, once a year, gather in a place where the Christians were, and if they failed to trample on the ground on those pictures of Christ, they no longer had a chance to tramp anywhere else because they lost their heads. Those things are handled -- don't get the idea that because people buy pictures they like pictures; they don't. They like a message which the picture might give them. What people buy pictures for now is the same reason they buy my pictures and other peoples' pictures. My pictures have gone up 300% in ten years. That's a good investment. It's almost as good as General Motors.

BH: That isn't why people have bought them.

SM: Of course it is. They buy pictures of mine never having seen them.

BH: Well, maybe -- undoubtedly some people do, but some people . . .

SM: Most people do, Mrs. Hoag . . . .

BH: . . . buy them because they love them and enjoy them.

SM: I don't think so. There are very few people that like pictures as pictures. The collectors that I've known: there isn't one out of a hundred collections that I've ever come in contact with where they really like pictures. They like them for other reasons. Many families now buy pictures having no possible idea what they're doing, what the painter is doing, and neither has the painter, for that matter. But they buy these things for status symbols, because they're advertised as such. Why does everybody run down when they hear of a new-type automobile and buy it? We have compact cars now which we use. A "compact car" because the American would not stand for a moment riding in what's called a small car. So they change word "small" to "compact." That, he can take. But nobody would ever have bought a car if it was named a "small car." But now it's a "compact car." In Europe they're small cars. But here they're compacts. And we have to give those semantic idiocies to practically everything we do. And it's true with art as well, so-called art. I mean you will find in me an idealist as far as art is concerned, but not an idealist as far as being sociologically-inclined enough to think for one moment that people who buy pictures like them. They don't.

BH: When you paint pictures you don't do it just for yourself?

SM: I certainly do. And for nothing else.

BH: Well, you must know there are those who love them and that makes you happy doing them?

SM: Not at all. I don't give anybody a thought at all. When I'm painting a picture I'm not thinking about anybody loving it, my loving it, or anything else. As a matter of fact, I, like probably every painter in the world, when I'm painting a picture think of practically everything in the world except the picture. I reconstruct whole pasts for

myself. I think of what's going on here. I think of whether I want this or that for dinner. I think of what somebody said to me some other time, that has nothing to do with the picture. One paints pictures, if one is an artist, subconsciously. That is, after you have learned by a long discipline your composition and then it requires no conscious thought. Your mind is perfectly free at that time. No . . . I was on a radio program here about a year ago with Dr. Harvey. I don't know whether you heard it or not, probably didn't. Well, he asked me that question. He said, "Well how can you say that? Does the artist feel no responsibility to the public?" I said, "The artist feels just as much resonsibility to the public as the public does to the artist, which is nothing." He said, "You have no feeling of responsibility to the public itself?" I said, "Less than none." Those are all mistaken ideas that people have got from people who have written about art who knew nothing about it. And of course that is in years gone by. What they write now is strict gobbledegook. They don't know anything about it (wouldn't have anything about that). The writers look at something and they write something ostensibly about that picture. But it's actually about what I, the writer, like to feel about myself when I can read my own words on the thing. It has nothing to do with the subject. However, don't get me on that subject. That is something that I suppose every man who has a modicum of intelligence finds out after he's been exhibiting for two years. And I've been exhibiting since 1912, which gives me a pretty profound idea of what I'm talking about.

BH: We were mentioning some of the Renaissance artists and I compiled a list of people whom I have gotten from various sources as being people you said you liked. We talked about Cezanne on the first record, you remember?

SM: Yes.

BH: But there are also Hals, Velasquez, Rubens, and 15th century Persian prints. I wondered if you wanted to say anything about any of those three people or about the prints?

SM: Well there's nothing much I could say that hasn't been said much better than I could say it. I'm a great admirer, of course, of the facility, as the French say, habit of the Renaissance painters, particularly the Venetian School. I've even traveled around here, there and elsewhere simply to see their pictures. But I'm not a great admirer of them as artists. I'm a great admirer of them as technicians. I think they're much greater artists than we have. For instance, one of the greatest paintings (I shall make a trip which will cost me at least $5,000 to look at one picture for an hour, probably next year) is in the Accademia in Florence. It's a "Birth of Christ" by Van der Goes. But you don't hear so much about him. You hear much about other people, you see, but that to me is one of the greatest pictures that's ever been painted in the history of the world. And to me it's one of the greatest pictures of Western civilization. Now there's one picture that I have traveled up and down Japan to see which is the "Buddha Arising from His Tomb," which was done in an early Kanunkara (late Heian) Period. That picture is to me the other great picture, sort of an Oriental kenta to this Van der Goes, which I have traveled all over to see. It's one of the most magnificent pictures I can imagine.

BH: Is the artist known in the Japanese painting? Where is it?

SM: It's no particular place. It belongs in the National Treasury. Strangely enough, it was bought by a private individual recently, but of course he's not allowed to take it out of Japan. It belongs to a monastery there and is loaned at different periods to different museums which exhibit it. I have seen it twice at the Haku Butsu (Kan Huchensan, or gallery) in Kyoto, and I've seen it also in Tokyo. Wherever I see that they're having exhibitions at which that picture is, I go there; I don't care where it is in Japan.

BH: It must be a very beautiful painting.

SM: If I were living in Japan I would have sold this house and my other house in order to buy the picture. I would have kept it. I think it's a great picture. As I say, I mean it's what I feel about a Chinese painter by the name of Muhsih (in Chinese) (that's called Muchi or Muki in Japanese) who painted six persimmons. If you recall, in my show up there there's this picture of six persimmons with the writing on it, calligraphy. Well that writing simply says this, "This is not an imitation of Muki, it is my humble way of expressing my admiration and respect for a painter whose work is beyond both pen and tongue."

BH: How beautiful!

SM: That's all it amounts to. That's how I put it. That man also, I would go anywhere to see him. As a matter of fact that picture is kept in Kyoto and it is aired for three days every fall in this monastery along with their other great pictures. But Muki painted several pictures, I think very great pictures; but that six persimmons is to me one of the most magnificent pictures I've ever seen. But that's only my opinion of it. It's simply a black and white thing and I'm sure that it didn't take Muki over a minute and a half to paint it.

BH: That's the subconscious you're speaking of.

SM: Yes. It's the perfection of his discipline, the ability to become that thing which he depicts, that's all.

BH: I like yours much better with the orange color in the persimmons.

SM: Yes, well . . . .

BH: His are lined up in a row, are they not? The one you're speaking of?

SM: There are two rows. There are four on the back and two on the front. I think I have a picture of that thing here accompanying an article in Japan which I wrote once for something, I think it's some educational institution. Knowing how I loved that picture, although the subject matter itself had nothing to do with the picture, they nevertheless very kindly put a reproduction of that with the article I had written. I'll look it up. I'll see if I can find it for you. But you probably know the picture anyway.

BH: I know the painting.

SM: Well, that's what I mean.

BH: Apparently not well enough. I didn't remember it was two rows.

SM: Yes, it's two rows.

BH: I love yours in the show. It's beautiful. You have a second picture with persimmons in the show.

SM: Yes, I have a lot. I have more persimmons here also. I like persimmons.

BH: And You also sign your name differently on the persimmon pictures?

SM: I sign my name differently. I sign my name in six different ways. I sign it SMW; I sign it S. Wright; I sign it S. Macdonald-Wright; I sign it Stanton Wright; I sign it Stanton Macdonald-Wright; and sometimes I just sign it S.W.

BH: Are these to do with the medium or to the way you feel?

SM: It has, as a rule, to do with the medium. Generally with drawings or watercolors I sign it just my first name, that's all.

BH: I wanted to ask you more about Morgan Russell and the Synchromy movement. It has often been compared to Orphism. Would you care to comment on that?

SM: It has nothing to do with Orphism and anybody who has read the first catalogue of Synchromism of the Bernheim Jeune exhibition of 1913, or of the Nue Kunst Salon Exhibition in Munich of the same year would realize that we poked fun at Orphism and at Delaunay in spite of the fact the Delaunay was a good friend of mine. But the artists of that time did that. We had nothing whatever to do with it. I think I have mentioned before that the reason that we have been likened to Delaunay and Orphism, which was also called "Simultaneisme," of which I was an admirer, you understand. The reason we were likened to it is because we were the first people to break away from the monochromatic type of work that was done by Cubism at that time. All they used was burnt sienna, black and white, or maybe some other color like burnt sienna, perhaps an umber . . . .

BH: These were Picasso and Braque and such men?

SM: Yes, yes, particularly Braque. Braque was the man who started all this thing. Picasso was the man who imitated Braque, if that's possible. They linked us up with it for a very simple reason, which I think every American who has been to Europe and has spent any time thinking about what happened to him over there would recognize. And that is, that we were Americans and ipso facto if we were Americans we were barbarians. And ipso facto, if we were barbarians, we couldn't do anything original and naturally being in France where the gods of art had their being, we would have to be some way influenced by the French. So we were put in under that and in that catalogue we stated very specifically in the first lines of it that we called ourselves Synchromists in order that we not be dragged into a movement of which we had no possible relationship at all.

BH: About the only similarity was they were both moving toward abstraction?

SM: They were both color. Delaunay had a very delicate sense of color, a very charming sense of color. Delaunay was probably right in the French tradition of its most magnificent decorative quality, just as Braque was afterward. But I consider Delaunay, in spite of our arguments (and we've had even fisticuffs at different meetings with Delaunay; we liked each other very much) -- I considered Delaunay and Braque to be the two greatest men of that particular movement. I don't consider Picasso to be a great artist in any sense of the word. But I do consider Braque to be, and I consider Delaunay to be. And it was only in the last fifteen years that Delaunay has been even known in the United States. At the time of the first World War in order to paint he went

to Spain. Well, they had a terrible time getting back because they didn't want to take him back again. His wife, her name was Delaunay-Terk, was, I believe, a Russian woman and one of the most noted dress designers of the period. Delaunay-Terk, and I met her the last time I was in Paris, she's an old lady now. I think she still paints. I never heard of her painting before Delaunay died. But after Delaunay died I began to see paintings by Sonia Delaunay-Terk. She's a very nice person. As I say, I met her at Soupault's house. He gave a very nice little party for us when we went over there the last time and he invited Delaunay-Terk. Strangely enough, altough I had known Delaunay very well, I had never met his wife. And she was, I think, the first woman who ever made clothes taken, to a great extent, from the idea of color in her husband's paintings. In a woman's clothes, for instance, they were non-symmetrical, they would be purple down one side and maybe green along the other, or white.

BH: Harlequin?

SM: Yes, well you would know the name of that. I think it obtains here, and in Europe now, very expensive dresses very often will have a color here and none here or some different color, or a sleeve or something. She was the one that did it, and it came from Orphism.

BH: That's very interesting. Did you know Kupka? (Frantisek Kupka)

SM: Kupka I never met. Kupka saw our work when we were in Munich and exhibited in 1913. If they're going to link us up with anybody, Kupka ought to be linked up with us because what Kupka was doing (I don't know when he did it), but much of Kupka's early stuff looks a good deal to me like the early Synchromism. But I never met him at all.

BH: Did they have an idea of associating music with the painting in some way?

SM: Who?

BH: The artists.

SM: Not at all.

BH: Did you know Man Ray at that time?

SM: Yes. Man Ray. When I came back to New York we used to have the same dealer, Daniels, on Fifth Avenue. Yes, I was out to dinner with Mrs. Robles the other night. She had a Man Ray hanging in the room. I thought, my God, I've been set back here 45 or 50 years to see a Man Ray. I think he lives out here now.

BH: Oh, I didn't know that.

SM: Yes. I think so.

BH: It would make you feel like having a friend in the room, I would think.

SM: No. I wss never friendly with Man Ray. As a matter of fact, I don't think I ever said ten words to him in my life. When I was in Paris the last time, he was having an exhibition in some little place and I went down to see it and I looked in the front door and I came away. He had a lot of friends there or something of the kind. Anyway I didn't go in. I just saw him for a second. He was a photographer for many years and over there he started painting and many of the things that he had at Daniels Gallery at that time many of us thought looked like patterns for the making of pants that were hung out, and so forth.

BH: These were his photograms, weren't they? Didn't he call them photograms?

SM: Well, they were just flat, pattern things. They looked like pieces of stuff, patterns, that tailors would lay on a table.

BH: Very strange . . . .

SM: Well, they're not so strange. Looking at them now compared to what I saw out at Robles the other night . . . . Comparing them to what they call Abstract Expressionist, they look like masterpieces. He's a very bright fellow, Man Ray. And they tell me a great photographer -- I don't know because I'm no expert in this sort of thing.

BH: In 1914 you and Russell brought your Synchromistic paintings to New York for the first time, didn't you, to the Carroll Gallery?

SM: It would be '13.

BH: '13?

SM: I think it was '13, let's see, I think it was -- you may be right, I don't know.

BH: Well, I have in '13 that you exhibited in the Paris Salon des Independents . . . .

SM: Yes, I exhibited in 1913 in Warsaw and Milan, London, Paris, and I think --I may be mistaken but I thought it was '13 that we had at the old Carroll Gallery . . . .

BH: At the Carroll Gallery.

SM: I remember that the moral censor of the day, a man by the name of Anthony Comstock who upon his death was found to have had the most -- I heard, of course I wasn't there myself, it's purely hearsay, and maybe just viciousness on somebody's part -- the greatest collection of pornography that had ever been brought together in the U.S. Yet he was the moral censor and he could walk into a gallery or anything and if he saw a nude he didn't like, or he liked too much, he would say, "Take it down," and you had to take it down. He came to my exhibition at the Carroll Gallery and made them take out two pictures. One of them was a picture of myself, a life-size portrait of myself standing up and behind me was some poor bedraggled little Italian model in Paris who just didn't happen to have any clothes on. And He found that pornographic. But it certainly was far from being exciting, I assure you. It had no pornography in the sense that the judges use the description today.

BH: Was he a representative of the City, you mean?

SM: He was a representative, I suppose, of the City. I know he had complete police power. When he died another fellow came right up -- I forget his name because I never came in contact with him. I don't know whether the other fellow was a good as Anthony Comstock was -- or as bad . . . .

BH: Did you know Stieglitz in New York?

SM: Stieglitz! I not only knew Stieglitz but I was one of Stieglitz's five or six boys.

BH: Oh, I didn't realize that.

SM: First at 291 Fifth Avenue at the Photo Session Gallery; then I left New York and the first exhibition I had in New York when I returned from Paris -- when I first got back there, I think it was -- I forget the date of it -- -- it was an exhibition at 291 Fifth Avenue at Stieglitz's place. I knew him exceptionally well. As I say, in 1932 or '33 I had not exhibited for many many years and I went back to New York because I had been invited to exhibit there and Stieglitz came up to the apartment where I was at the time and said, "You couldn't treat your old Stieglitz that way; you have to exhibit where I am now for my American Place." And my brother at that time said: "Don't go near Stieglitz, he'll simply use you." But I am a sucker for male tears and I cut everything out and exhibited with Stieglitz in that place. And he used my paintings as a background to show off his wife's paintings. Georgia O'Keeffe ....

BH: Oh, no!

SM: Not only that but he also used her to show off one of the best painters that this country has ever produced from abstract standpoint, which was Arthur Dove, and whom he used for that purpose altogether. I don't blame Stieglitz. I blame no man who murders his friends for love. And Stieglitz was a man who was dedicated to this woman. She's still alive.

BH: Your brother's advice was right in that case.

SM: Yes. So I know that there was nothing sold in that show. At that time there was a man by the name of Scribner, who was a publisher -- you've probably heard of him in New York -- he was a great friend of my brother's. He went to my brother and he said, "Why on earth is your brother exhibiting pictures here when you can't buy any?" Well my brother said to him, "I didn't know that he didn't sell anything." Well, Scribner said, "I went down to Stieglitz's; I saw a picture that I wanted very much, and I said to Stieglitz, "How much is this?" Stieglitz said, "You know it's a peculiar thing, but that's not for sale." And Scribner -- this is told me by my brother, who is, as I say, a great friend of Scribner, (who published many of my brother's books at the time) said, "I offered him $5000 for this picture and Stieglitz said, "You know, Scribner, it's a strange thing, a man brought these pictures 3,000 miles from California and none of them are for sale!" And as a matter of fact every one of them was for sale!

BH: What was the matter? What was his point?

SM: The matter was that Stieglitz was in love . . . .

BH: With Georgia O'Keeffe?

SM: Yes. I not only never held that against him but I wrote probably the most laudatory article that Stieglitz has ever had published about him, that Stieglitz himself sent out here and bought up the entire edition of that magazine. It was written in some little idiotic magazine called "Rob Wagner's Script," which has been out of publication for many years here. It was published by Mrs. Wagner who was a sort of Hollywood this-and-that. I was art critic on it. I wrote that thing on Stieglitz and told of one certain thing that Stieglitz had done back there which would endear him to any painter in the world. Stieglitz bought up the whole edition.

BH: To distribute among his friends?

SM: Apparently.

BH: How amazing!

SM: I have even now books here published by Stieglitz called "Camera Work" in which there are dedications to me in it and so forth and so on, which I wish to give to somebody who is more or less the archivist for Stieglitz and his papers, etc. Yes, I knew Stieglitz!

BH: That certainly is interesting . . . . Did you know him at the time of, let's see -- I was going to say when you first came back from Paris. He didn't have his gallery there then, I guess . . . .

SM: Oh yes, he had his gallery, it was just called Two Ninety One. It was 291 Fifth Avenue. The name of it really was the Photo Gallery. But I knew Stieglitz only in the beginning, about 1916 or 1917 . . . .

BH: In 1917 you had an exhibit at the Whitney Museum . . . ?

SM: I never exhibited at the Whitney Museum.

BH: Oh!

SM: I've had pictures -- they own pictures of mine, but I never exhibited there, to my knowledge.

BH: I have Independents Exhibition. Does that mean something? Would that be a different museum? It was a show of borrowed paintings. There was one called "John Dracopoli," an oil that you did in 1912 . . . .

SM: Dracopoli. That was one of the original pictures from the shows that I had in Europe and that I brought back to this country, at which time I cut out only the head of Dracopoli and threw the rest of it away. Dracopoli was a great friend of mine . . . .

BH: Who was he? What kind of painting was it?

SM: Well, he was nobody in particular. He was just an extraordinarily nice fellow. When his sister wanted to be married, nobody in Europe would publish the bans for his sister for this reason: his father was an Italian who had the only name of Dracopoli (which means 'dragon' in Greek and his original name was "the Dragon of Jerusalem," comes down to him from the Crusades). And he had extensive properties in France and in England. I have visited Dracopoli and his family in Buckinghamshire, in England, many times at a place called Chaluants and Jimer (Chalveson-St. Giles). Dracopoli used that name. The reason they wouldn't publish the bans for his sister was for this reason: his mother was an Englishwoman. Dracopoli had this Greek name. His father was born in Italy, he was an Italian, but he later on became the aide-de-camp to the King of Montenegro, and (for this reason) he had to take on Montenegran citizenship in order to do that. In the years after that he came to America and took out himself his first papers of nationalization here. He never took out the second papers because he didn't particularly care for it. He went back and settled in England. So you can see that he was Italian, Montenegran, American, English and French, because he had vast properties in France . . . .

BH: One might call him an internationalist . . . .

SM: So they couldn't do it. And, strangely enough, when his sister married a French army officer, the French would not publish the bans. Neither would the English, in spite of the fact that his mother is straight English, a very charming English lady. Finally they went to the American Consul, and the American Consul said, "I will consider you an American for two hours." And they published the bans and she married this French officer as an American girl. And, as a matter of fact, at that time a woman's nationality followed that of her husband, so naturally she became a French citizen. So that's who Dracopoli is. He was a sculptor himself. He married a great friend of mine who -- a young lady that I had known for many years over there, who herself was an exceptionally gifted woman in painting and in draftsmanship.

BH: And why did you cut the head off the painting?

SM: I liked that part of the picture and the other was too big to carry around. That was sold in the Maitland Collection and afterwards was bought by somebody by the name of Newberger in New York, who is one of the very large collectors, from whom I have many letters here asking if I had painted it and so forth. And I told him I did. And I heard afterward that it was exhibited in several places. I think one of the last places was in Ann Arbor in Michigan. Some friend that I have said, "I saw a picture of yours back there," etc. etc. Well, at the time that it was shown out here it was shown at UCLA -- the Maitland Collection -- and young Maitland was there. I went to Maitland and I said, "You don't know the circumstances under which your mother bought that painting from me." And I said, "I had not wanted to sell it to her, and did not care to sell it, and I said that now that she has departed this world, and all of these things are in the hands of the bank or her trustees," I said, "When that estate comes out of escrow, will you please do me the favor of permitting me the first refusal of buying that picture back?" He said, "I promise to do that toyou." I said, "Don't worry about the price. I am willing to pay any price you wish to put on it." I never heard anything further until I heard from Newberger, which was at least ten or twelve years later, that Newberger had bought it. And I asked Newberger from whom he had bought it, and he never told me. I also asked him if it was in his private collection or in the collection of the Society of which he is president. That he never told me either. So I don't know what happened to it.

BH: When did the cutting take place?

SM: I don't even remember that. I have a reproduction of it right here, both in its original shape and as it was in the Newberger Collection. I have photographs of it.

BH: I hope you'll let me see it some time.

SM: Yes.

BH: You said Mrs. Maitland bought it from you under circumstances...?

SM: Yes, she was a very sweet person and she wasn't a well person. She came to my studio one day and saw that. It was in a corner; it was the only picture that I had of my own that had been done in 1912. I had no others at all. I didn't want to sell it. She insisted upon buying it and I refused to let her buy it. She went away and she called me, and she'd call me up at all times of the night and day. Finally she bothered me to death. She came down with her husband several more times and, finally, I put a price on it that I didn't think anybody in his right mind would pay for it, and she bought it. And I was stuck. Because I didn't want to sell it.

BH: Getting back to that show in 1917, there were two other ones: "Airplane, Yellow and Orange," which was at the Philadelphia Museum . . . .

SM: Is that where it is? I thought it was the Metropolitan.

BH: That is what a catalogue that I had said that . . . .

SM: Well, they ought to know better than I do. I don't remember. I know the Metropolitan has something and they sent me a colored-slide of it a little while ago. I don't know.

BH: And in '21 there was a Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Ats show exhibit showing later tendencies in art. Do you remember . . . ?

SM: I remember that very well because Stieglitz wrote and told me that a man had come in and thrown acid on a picture of mine which he owned and had in the show. He asked me if I could fix it. I said, "It depends upon the acid and how much (damage was done) to the canvas." And Stieglitz sent that picture out. It is quite a large picture, I should say approximately three by four feet, and I believe it was called "Spring." I wouldn't swear to it but I think that's what it was. It was three figures and the acid had dribbled down on that. That's the only one they spoiled. But somebody apparently (I would take it from that as not needing any further proof) didn't like me. And Stieglitz sent the picture to me and I fixed it for him. The acid had not burned the canvas through; it had dribbled the paint off and melted it. It was very definitely an acid. At that time I had a chemist who was a friend of mine look it over, and he told me it was some corrosive whose name I forget. Yes, that picture I remember!

BH: And that exhibit you wouldn't forget then. It reminds me of another picture of yours I saw a reproduction of recently which I thought was very beautiful, and I was wondering a few minutes ago about the date because I thought it was 1932. It was called "Three Holy Women," very lovely . . . .

SM: Three Women. Yes.

BH: Mary, and an Indian woman, and I believe a Chinese woman . . . .

SM: Yes. Mary, Sita and the Chinese Quan Yin.

BH: What I want to know is about the tiger. What does it symbolize in that painting? At the lower left-hand corner . . . ?

SM: Well, the symbolism of that painting, which I was interested in at that time -- one of my divergations into the unknown, trying to find out something which would take the place of a lot of formalism which had come into painting -- was the idea of the perfect virgin, who was Mary; the perfect wife, who was Sita; and Quan Yin, the perfect mother. No. The perfect mother was Mary; the perfect virgin, who was Quan Yin; and the perfect wife, who was Sita. They're the "Three Women." I also did "Three Men" at the same time, who were Lao Tzu, Buddha and Christ. I have a photograph right here. A fellow just died in New York not long ago who photographed those things and his wife sent me the pictures that he had of mine at that time.

BH: The "Evening Outlook" had an interview with you. And the woman who wrote it said that you had done a great series of religious founders. And I wondered in the early '30's ...

SM: That's what she meant - the "Three Men," that's all, the founders of different religions.

BH: I wondered if perhaps she meant the Santa Monica Library murals, because there are quite a few religious figures in that, aren't there?

SM: Yes, that's true. Well she might have meant that. One part -- yes, I have Siva with the eternal dance on one side. I had Lao Tzu, who was of course the great writer of Taoism in China, generally placed in the 6th century B.C., but actually it's the 4th century B.C. And Confucious, and some of the great philosophers; There were Zeno and Socrates, and there was also the young Alexander and Plato, Aristotle. That, I think, maybe is what she meant.

BH: Would you tell again for the Archives about Galileo and the cats in your painting? You told me before . . . .

SM: About what?

BH: There's a figure of Galileo with the two cats at his feet in the mural . . . .

SM: Oh, that's just the old story that they used to tell to show the vagaries of a man of great intelligence who in small things becomes almost imbecile. Are you speaking of Newton?

SM: I probably wrote it down. I thought it was . . . .

SM: Galileo?

BH: Yes.

SM: What about the Galileo scene?

SM: Yes it was Galileo. Oh, there's nothing to that. I just put Galileo in there with a telescope which he himself made for himself for finding the rings of Saturn, etc., which upset the church. You remember he was brought before the Pope and they made it known that they wished he would deny what he had stated before, that the sun went around the earth. "Still it does move" he muttered as he went out -- he denied it, he went back on himself to save his life -- you couldn't blame him -- but when he went out he muttered, "Still it does move." That's celebrated . . . . The other thing I was speaking about first that I thought you meant was Newton when he put these two holes in the door, one large one and one small one, because he had a mother cat and a small cat, so that each one would have a hole there. He overlooked the fact that the small cat could have gone through the large hole.

BH: There are a lot of other things I want to ask you next time about Santa Monica murals. But one thing just now before we stop: what about the painting that hangs above the girl's head? You said it was one of Russell's. Is it a copy of a real painting of his or just one that he would have done . . . ?

SM: No, it was a painting that I had a photograph at that time, a good deal like the one that Mr. Stevens has at the present time. I spoke to you before about it. It is not an absolute copy of what Russell did, but it's the type of work that Russell was doing at that time. As I told you before, Russell was the first man to paint a truly non-objective picture. That was before either Braque or Picasso did; but because he was a great, original man, , of course paid no attention to him. His last years he lived here isolated and absolutely forgotten in a little town in Pennsylvania where he was with his wife. Her daughter was married to a very wealthy family here, I believe. And his wife was the niece of Monet, who was the great Impressionist painter. She is now living with one daughter in Dallas, Texas, I understand. I heard from a man by the name of Agee, who is writing a book on us, on the Synchromists, in which he told me that he had been in touch with Russell's second wife. His first wife was also a Frenchwoman but I think she was run over by a big truck or something of the kind. I know she's dead anyway. And Russell . . . .

BH: He certainly had a sad life altogether, didn't he?

SM: Russell?

BH: Yes. He wasn't recognized in his time . . . .

SM: I don't think he cared particularly. He was a man of great intelligence. I don't know whether I told you or not, I have yet to meet a man of greater mental capacity than Russell in any line of endeavor. His was an astounding mind. A man whom I went to see in Paris when I was over there the last time, who had bought a certain house for Russell at Aigre-Mont par Poilly, told me that he used to entertain doctors, lawyers, or anyone else down there -- he was a man who appreciated Russell -- and Russell could talk in their own language, and talk about their own work and understood more of it than any of them . . . .

BH: Even when it wasn't his field at all?

SM: No. He was an astounding mind. I had great respect for him. I never cared for him at all. We were very closely related in exhibiting, etc., but neither one of us ever claimed that we were each other's friend. I don't think either one of us had many friends. I know that I'm not an easy person to become too intimate with and neither was Russell. We'd eat together occasionally, we'd play cards, we'd even box together, and we exhibited together; but outside of that there was no avidity for either one of us . . . .

BH: You didn't paint together?

SM: Oh God, no! Nobody paints with anybody else.

BH: Well, you go sketching with other people sometimes. Is there time to tell the story about your sketching near West Point, or would you care to tell it, the one you told the other night?

SM: Let's put that off to another time.

BH: All right. I've overstayed my time . . . .

SM: Let's see what we're going to take out of here (indicating books to look at). [END OF INTERVIEW] TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT AT HIS HOME IN PACIFIC PALISADES MAY 16, 1964 - 3RD INTERVIEW

BH: Mr. Wright, there were several things that we didn't get to or that we wanted to clear up from last time which I would like to ask you about. One was that we were discussing the portrait that Benton did of you, and I asked you what had happened to it. I think we accidentally erased where the picture is. Do you remember?

SM: Well, the picture as far as I know is still with Mr. Benton.

BH: Fine, thank you. And I had another question about him that I wanted to ask you. What did he think of his portrait in the Santa Monica Library mural where he is primitive man with fire?

SM: I never showed it to him.

BH: I wonder if he knows that it is there.

SM: No, I never told him.

BH: Someone should. And I had a question about your father. You told us about his portrait being that of the young artist who is standing at his easel to the right of the door as you come in. And some of the catalogues telling about the mural at the time it was done said that your father whose name was Archibald Davenport Wright was the "Father of Santa Monica?"

SM: The Father of Santa Monica! No!

BH: Well, they gave him this tribute. It was a very nice one. He apparently was very important in the community.

SM: No!

BH: Well, that's what I wondered.

SM: Why no, I never told you that.

BH: Had he lived there a long time?

SM: My father was, no -- he came out here -- my father was in Santa Monica for perhaps, let's see, from 1900 to about 1904 or '05 at the outside, and he moved up to Los Angeles. He never had anything to do with Santa Monica at all except that he bought a great deal of real estate, which he afterwards found out was under water or something . . . .

BH: Well, maybe the City appreciated the fact that he bought it because that's in the catalogue about your murals which the library was selling.

SM: The "Father of Santa Monica" strangely enough, is the father also of the very celebrated Mexican actor, what's his name . . . .

BH: (Leo) Carillo?

SM: Carillo, yes. He was the first judge of Santa Monica and was really the father of Santa Monica was Leo Carillo's father. That's the reason I painted him in the mural in the Library. I painted both him and his father.

BH: Perhaps you told them that and whoever wrote the catalogue got the fathers mixed up.

SM: I don't think I read that catalogue.

BH: I thought possibly he had been one of the pioneers in Santa Monica.

SM: No, by God, no!

BH: Then there's another misconception about Willard Huntington. I understood he was your brother and then I think you said he was your cousin.

SM: No!

BH: He's your brother?

SM: Willard Huntington was the nephew of Collis P. Huntington, the man who was the uncle of the man who gave the Huntington Library, and so forth. Collis P. Huntington was my mother's first cousin, and my brother was named after his brother, whose name was Willard.

BH: Oh, so there are two Willards there.

SM: Well, with the difference that his name was Willard Huntington and my brother's name was Willard Huntington Wright, he goes by a pen name also (S.S. Van Dyne).

BH: I see. SW: My name is actually of course Van Vranken.

BH: It was actually what?

SM: Van Vranken.

BH: Oh!

SM: The Dutch side of my family, which is mixed up of Dutch and Spanish.

BH: An interesting combination. Would you mind spelling that back?

SM: V A N V R A N K E N.

BH: Thank you.

SM: That side of the family was all from New York up around Coney Island near Albany. And out here Huntington, when he founded San Marino where he lives, has a place out there he calls Oneonta which was the place in New York State where the Huntingtons came from.

BH: Is that O N I ...?

SM: O N E O N T A. It's an Indian name. And it's all that country around there is where Cooper wrote his "Last of the Mohicans," "The Deerslayer," etc.

BH: That's interesting.

SM: Now we got this straightened out.

BH: Thank you very much. I imagine that you and your Uncle Huntington didn't enjoy the same kind of art. There must have been a little discrepancy then.

SM: Well, I didn't have much time to see Huntington at all. I had no interest in the railroad business and he had no interest in art. Although he spent millions of dollars on it, like all the other collectors, he didn't know a picture from a piece of sculpture. I could really tell you some funny things about him.

BH: I wish you would.

SM: There's no use in bringing that up. I think the shades of my mother would come down and blast me. My brother and I used to make fun of him. Before he died, I was at an age where one is pretty brash and doesn't care how he hurts people's feelings or anything of that kind. The old man out there used to tell me some of the most idiotic things in the world when I was having lunch with him or something like that. I remember one time I was out there and his butler set me at the table looking at the picture of "Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse," which is one of the great pictures of the eighteenth century.

BH: Sir Joshua Reynolds' painting?

SM: Yes. And I said, "Ed, if you don't mind, let me sit where you are, and you sit here." He said, "Why? Does the light hurt your eyes?" "No," I said, "I don't care for English portraiture at all. I much prefer to sit where I can have my back to it." And of course he was the greatest collector of American and of English portraiture that there was. Things of that kind are impossible. He's not in my temperament.

BH: I don't think your mother would mind your telling that story. When we were talking about your life here in Los Angeles and painting, I had wanted to ask you more about the group on Spring Street where you were teaching.

SM: The Art Students' League.

BH: Was it the Art Students' League?

SM: Yes.

BH: Would you like to amplify that a little?

SM: No, but I'll tell you there was a article about the old place written by Arthur Miller, who used to be the art critic of the "Times," and I'll tell you who can tell you more about it and who likes to talk about it much more than I do and that's Frank Stevens. He loved the place and he'll tell you all about it. Get him to talk into a machine.

BH: I will do that. I understand that Ben Berlin was in the group studying with you at that time and he's one of the Project artists, I believe, who died some time ago . . . .

SM: Yes, he's dead, isn't he?

BH: I wondered if you remembered anything about him?

SM: Yes, I remember a good deal about Ben Berlin. Ben Berlin was a talented fellow but he was never sober enough to paint much. I think that eventually killed him. He used to live down on Spring Street close to where the old Art Students' League was. But he painted some probably remarkable pictures. I don't remember it very well because it was a good many years ago. I've seen a good many pictures since then. But he was a talented fellow. He was a terrific boozer.

BH: Was he a young man or old man at the time?

SM: He was a fairly young man.

BH: I wonder why he was drinking.

SM: I think he'd be now about my age, might be maybe younger, I don't recall exactly. That's right, he was on the Project for a while, that's right. Yes.

BH: There were some women on the Project that I thought you might know about. I can't find anything about them from anyone else. They were sisters, the Bruton sisters -- Esther, Margaret and Helen Bruton -- and they exhibited at Bullock's during the 1930's, and later . . . .

SM: I think all of those people you can get more from Mr. Feitelson on them than I can. He was closer to them.

My job on that thing was mostly talking to these politicians and the people who were heads of industries to get them to give ten percent of putting up some statues or pictures that they didn't need and didn't want, and I had to go around and browbeat them and then I had -- at one time I had five secretaries there that were writing letters here and there all of which was of no possible importance one way or the other. But we used to kid ourselves that it was practically a heaven-kissing thing, you know. Nonsense, it was just another way of setting art back a hundred and fifty years . . . .

BH: Well a lot of people were actually eating who might not have been at the time . . . .

SM: Well I don't know of anybody who was eating that wouldn't have been that should have been eating at all. I think they would have been much better off and so would the world had they not eaten. I haven't much of the sociologist in me and my heart doesn't bleed very easily for those people. If you had been around there you would have realized what I mean by it. They spent most of their time complaining bitterly because we hadn't gone directly in with Russia . . . .

BH: Oh really!

SM: Most of them were what we would call (due to the law which they passed that nobody can call a person by their name) at that time Communists. They spent most of their time trying to get everybody that wasn't a Communist out of the place and to fill it up with Communists. And from what I hear, and this is not an opinion of mine but, from what I've heard from the National Director, most of the New York Project was made up of those babies. And that doesn't only go for New York but practically every other city, except this one out here. And I had my hands full to keep those people from taking over the whole work. Two or three of them even got to the point where they painted murals and sneaked in a picture of a hammer and sickle here and there on them.

BH: For heavens sake!

SM: And I had people watching those things all the time and I had a brigade of whitewashers there that would go right out and wipe that mural off the wall or cover it up with something. I had to do that how many times. Because at that time the public wasn't as thoroughly inured and used to and indifferent to those Communistic pastimes as it is now. They would welcome it now probably.

BH: I hope not.

SM: Well look what the young Democrats did the other day, in their meeting. They wished to make homosexuality outside the law so that there could not ever be any legal processes against homosexuals no matter whwere they're found, in colleges or anything else. And the last time I talked to Knudsen who was the Dean of the Graduate Division at UCLA, I found out that UCLA was so thoroughly honeycombed with homosexuality that they've had all the men's rooms bugged. He said he had to sit and listen to the conversations of these people and that very often they'd send police over to get them.

BH: Goodness sakes! I was over there for a while, I didn't see any signs of it . . . .

SM: That's what I had to watch continually.

BH: And you also had to guard against that getting into the newspapers, if anything happened, I suppose.

SM: That's the whole thing. It just happened that Arthur Miller was the art critic of the Times, which was the only paper that counted for anything I mean as far as art was concerned, and he was a friend of mine and he used to keep much of that stuff out of there. He worked with us. When he found something hidden, hammers and sickles and things of that kind, hidden here and there, he'd call me up immediately, I'd go over and take them out.

BH: It's a good thing you had him there.

SM: Yes.

BH: It reminds me of a story that you told the other day which I thought was quite delightful and I wonder if you would mind telling it again for the tape, when you were accused of being either Communist or German when you were up the Hudson River painting near West Point. Anyway you were supposed . . . .

SM: Well, that's all there was to it. I was out sketching at -- I forget the name of the place -- it's six miles up the River from West Point just between West Point and Newburgh, which is the county seat there.

BH: What year was that, Mr. Wright?

SM: I don't know exactly. It was sometime during the War. I don't know. I went down when I came back to this country and enlisted because I had -- I was not taken in the draft at all, I wasn't too well -- and I tried two other

forces, the French Legion d'Etrangeres and the English Public School Brigade and I came back to this country in 1916. We got into the War, I think, in 1917, see, it had been going three years in Europe. I got back, so like an idiot I went down to the Red Cross and told them that if they wanted -- if they had any need of a truck driver or something of that kind to go back there. At that time I spoke Spanish and Italian and French and enough German to get along, besides another French language. I told them if they needed anybody for that purpose, I'd be very happy to enlist to drive a truck or an ambulance or something of that kind. They said, "No, they didn't need anybody of that kind at all." So, as I went out, there was a young fellow that I knew there who was working in the office. He said, "I can get you in that if you really want to get there." "Well," I said, "I'm not monkeying around just walking because I don't want to get in there." I said, "I came down to enlist." " But," I said, "you don't need any." He said, "They need them all right. I'll tell you how you can get in it. I can get you in if you will donate the truck." We have very few expressions which they have today but I managed to tell him exactly what I thought he could do with the entire Red Cross. It was nothing that I could repeat in mixed company.

BH: You wouldn't want it in the Archives.

SM: I wouldn't want it anywhere.

BH: Well, that's an amazing thing.

SM: There is the story about poor Marin, this watercolor painter in New York . . . .

BH: John Marin?

SM: Yes. John Marin was sitting down making some of his childish sketches of one of the big buildings there, I forget which one it was, but a mob attacked him during that thing, thought he was a German. Now imagine a German spy going down and sitting in the middle of a parkway and trying to hide the fact that he was making something for the Germans, and it took the police an awful -- had an awful struggle to get that poor fellow away from the mob, they were going to hang him . . . .

BH: Isn't that ridiculous!

SM: Well, it's the way -- it was fantastic there, the fanatacism at that time.

BH: Well it almost happened to you the day you were sketching near West Point.

SM: Yes. I never expected to get out of that at all.

BH: Was it one of the guard duty from West Point who first arrested you . . . ?

SM: No, it was a man in these towns, it's funny, I can't remember the name of the town because it has a town on the River and then a town a little ways in and it's still all three the same name. No, I think it was the sheriff or some head policeman or something of that kind was instructed by West Point to come and grab me. His name was King, I remember, and he came down and then he took me up to this other man who was his superior whose name was Tombs. He's the fellow that said, "Tombs is my name, my name is Tombs." you see backwards and forwards. Then they threw me in jail in Newburgh over night and took me out the next morning, whistling and screaming with sirens. I think it was about twelve miles down . . . .

BH: Didn't he tell you they kept you in jail to keep the people from coming after you?

SM: I don't know why. They probably put me there on the orders of West Point. They couldn't make a military prisoner of me 'til they found out definitely that I was an enemy, to get the courtesy that is extended to military spies rather than just an ordinary plainclothes spy . . . .

BH: Like a petty thief.

SM: Yes. He said he'd gotten seventeen reports the day before that a man who couldn't speak English without a very strong German accent was taking photographs of the New York aqueducts. Well, I was making an abstract watercolor of simply the banks of the Hudson River. I had no more idea that I was near the New York aqueduct that I thought I was near Peking, China. It was all settled all right.

BH: He found your brochures about painting in your room, didn't he? Didn't he search your room while you were in jail?

SM: Yes, he found scrapbooks and everything of the kind, so then he began to make some calls. He found out that the scrapbook was genuine and that I had been mentioned in all the European histories of art so he decided that maybe -- none of them mentioned the fact that I had ever been in Germany. As a matter of fact, I had been in Germany a number of times. I went down there to exhibit mostly. Another time I went down to see the

religious play at Oberammergau.

BH: Why did they think you had a German accent? That's strange.

SM: People don't think! Just as I told you before, instead of brains they have a bladder of oatmeal in their heads. They don't think at all. They just wanted to see me shot.

BH: Well, they missed out. Instead of that, the man from West Point gave you carte blanche to go ahead and paint anyplace.

SM: He gave me a written letter on the thing. It's the same thing, Mrs. Hoag, that makes people who are just such lovely people and upholders of all the morals and the ideas of non-violence let a poor horse or a dog get in an accident and bleed on the street and stand there with their mouths wide open enjoying every second of it until the poor creature dies in agony or is dragged away dead. You tell me about it. They just wanted to see me shot, that's all.

BH: A horrible thing! We're going to jump way up to San Francisco again. I wanted to ask you if you would tell me something about the work you did on Terminal Island on the school with an artist from San Francisco . . . .

SM: I know very little about Treasure Island. See, that was under the aegis of the Northern California Art Project and where I had, one might say, perfunctory authority. I didn't pay much attention to it. Some of the work on Treasure Island -- the only thing I remember particularly was a very talented man going in to paint some murals there when the painters' union in San Francisco came in and stopped it and threatened to tear everything down if they didn't take every artist in the place out of the place for decorating it. They had to become members of the union before they were allowed to do anything. That disgusted me with what was going on there and I don't think I went near the place. I went once and walked through Treasure Island and that's all I know.

BH: Well, I don't know San Franciso and I'm not sure we're talking about the same thing. What I have is Terminal Island. Is that the same?

SM: Terminal Island?

BH: An artist, I think a woman artist named Hideo Date in the records . . . .

SM: Hideo is a man's name.

BH: Oh it is? Is he the man you're talking about?

SM: No, no, this was a man by the name of Garrity, John Garrity.

BH: Oh! Well maybe that was later. This was during the Project time.

SM: So was Treasure Island.

BH: It was!

SM: Yes. But I didn't know anybody by the name of Date.

BH: A Japanese artist. I understood that you worked together on the designs for a school that was on Terminal Island, a Federal project . . . .

SM: I never heard of anybody by that name. I don't know where Terminal Island is. I thought Terminal Island was off -- in New York Harbor or something . . . .

BH: Mr. Wright, I will look up the files and next time ask you what this was . . . . Another one I wanted to ask you about was working with Don Totten and I believe he's still here teaching, isn't he?

SM: He's teaching now in a Catholic University I think in Palos Verdes, a very talented boy. He was a student of mine in the old Art Students' League. I don't remember whether he worked on the Project or not . . . . Yes he did, yes, he worked on it.

BH: He did the murals for Los Angeles Manual Arts High School under your direction, I believe. That's what the records show.

SM: Well that's when I was Director of the place. I never told any of these boys what to do. They were footloose and fancy-free as far as that's concerned. All we had to do is the school would select a subject that they wanted the mural done on, I would transmit that information to the artist, then he'd go and do what he wanted to do.

And his design was all that I looked at; most of those were looked at by Mr. Feitelson who was my Administrator of Design.

BH: So usually you weren't there around them at all.

SM: Well, he was much closer to them than I was. BH We're hoping to have people remember things that happened that might be of interest . . . .

SM: I think anybody on that Project would have a better memory than I have. You know I can say this, and it sounds more or less cynical, but I only remember things that I'm interested in. And I was never interested in the Project.

BH: I don't think anyone remembers things after such a long period of time very clearly. There's no reason you should . . . .

SM: Well no, especially when you're not interested in that time element . . . .

BH: The sad thing is that no one wrote it down at the time. They were all so busy and that's why I think the Archives are so very worthwhile . . . .

SM: Mrs. Hoag, there was a minute record written that took into consideration everything that was done on that Project to the buying of one lead pencil. There was never anything done, a picture allocated to any institution, a statue made, or even attempted, trips taken here, there and elsewhere, that sometimes we would have to do to different towns because I had an office at one time in Santa Barbara and at San Diego as well as in Los Angeles, and one in Riverside also. And there was not one thing ever done that didn't have a minute record made of it. Now where it is I don't know, because I had nothing to do with that. When I handed that over to the Government, when I closed the door on that Project, as far as I was concerned I washed my hands not only of the dirt of Government indoctrination but also of the dirt of most of the pictures that were painted in it.

BH: Well I believe that all of those were microfilmed and sent back to Washington. The Federal Government has them someplace.

SM: Undoubtedly!

BH: I'm sure they're all on record.

SM: If anybody really wants them enough and they could get some of those people in Washington to stop playing pinochle long enough to dig those things out, why you'd find them all, I'm sure.

BH: Well I imagine the Archives can get them from Washington.

SM: Oh yes.

BH: What they want us to do is talk to people about what they remember that happened. For instance, Caspar Duchow did a proposed fountain for Beaumont City and I can't even find it on the map. And it was one of your petrachromes -- using the petrachomes that you designed . . . .

SM: What city was it?

BH: Beaumont City. The Beaumont City Hall in Beaumont.

SM: Beaumont is quite a large city out here in the direction of Riverside. Wait a minute -- or was that the man's name? Caspar Duchow, yes. That's right. Beaumont is -- they always speak of two cities together here called Beaumont and Banning. And they must be close together somewhere. That's funny. It must have been a restrictive map or maybe they changed the name of the place, I don't know. It's quite a large place. I was out there to look at it ....

BH: To see the fountain?

SM: Yes. I had to go look at all these things when they got through with them at any rate. I'd pass them and then go and see if they'd tear them up . . . .

BH: Did you have anything to do with the Art Association Annual Shows here, were you active in those?

SM: The Los Angeles Art Association?

BH: Yes.

SM: No. That was run by a woman by the name of Wurdemann . . . .

BH: Helen Wurdemann is still there.

SM: Under the advice of Feitelson. I never had anything to do with it.

BH: Well, I just wondered if you had exhibited work by many of the people from the Project during 1940's and '50's.

SM: I don't think so. I was a member of the thing for some time but I was a member of a lot of things, most of which I never went to.

BH: If you went to all of them you wouldn't have time to paint.

SM: I think that in the course of the years that they have exhibited, my pictures, some pictures, in that place. I know that Miss Wurdemann owns one or more pictures because I remember distinctly her coming down here once and buying one. But outside of that I know nothing about it.

BH: She told me she had two or three of your pictures that she's very fond of. She's very proud of the fact that she has them.

SM: She was at that opening the other night in La Cienega Blvd., I think.

BH: Yes. She said she closed her gallery early to go over to it . . . asked if I'd been there. And of course we had. And she was telling me something about, and asked if you remembered the times that you had luncheon at sidewalk tables near the old Stendahl Galleries which are now I believe where Town House is on Wilshire Boulevard ...

SM: Yes, right opposite the Town House. Yes I remember it very well.

BH: Were you exhibiting at Stendahl Galleries? Was that the occasion of having artists eat lunch there? I didn't get the point.

SM: No, I think that -- I remember that Mrs. Halpert of the Downtown Gallery was a guest of mine there. And visiting artists from New York would occasionally come there because it as quite close to everything that we had. I had a whole building on Seventh Street at that time that the Project was in. They used to have a place outside, a very nice place to eat. You could get a very good meal there for around seventy-five cents, which was worth at least thirty, and the same meal you'd pay four dollars and a quarter for, today.

BH: Times have changed.

SM: A lot of us used to eat there.

BH: Some of the artists who have died since the Federal Project days are hard to find anything about. I just wondered if you, for instance, remembered anything about Durston's work.

SM: Who?

BH: Durston.

SM: Yes!

BH: Did you know him at all?

SM: Durston?

BH: Arthur Durston.

SM: Yes! He changed his name, went back to New York a very successful painter.

BH: Oh! For goodness sake! No.

SM: Durston's name here was Goldstein.

BH: No, that's Gustin. He changed that to Philip Gustin.

SM: Yes, that's right.

BH: This is Arthur Durston. He was an English painter and he . . . .

SM: D or G?

BH: D . . . D U R S T O N.

SM: The name is familiar but I don't recall anything about him at all. I thought you meant Gustin.

BH: No. Philip Gustin. He's probably in New York now.

SM: Gustin was a talented fellow there. I remember I gave him a number of things to do on there which he carried out very nicely.

BH: He changed his style of painting over the years quite radically . . . .

SM: Dear lady, he's changed his style every time that the style changes. Mr. Gustin changes his style -- he's a man who is always fashionable. Don't think for a moment that that's peculiar to him.

BH: I think most artists have in fact a capacity to work in different styles. I saw a painting of yours the other day, which I just loved, and which you have probably forgotten making. In fact it isn't signed or dated. I was in a shop where they frame pictures and the woman who owns it, who works in a studio (I don't even know who she is), said that you had painted this of her and her little dog some twenty or thirty years ago. She brought it in to have it framed. It's a beautiful painting and it's a completely different style than your . . . .

SM: I painted a picture of a woman with a dog?

BH: She's sitting in a chair . . . .

SM: She's got me mixed up with somebody else or she's one of the worst fakirs that ever lived. I never painted a picture of a dog in my life? Never!

BH: Well, the dog's lying in her lap ...

SM: Mrs. Hoag, I painted one portrait in forty-five years. I painted that of Mary Sutton Bundy's daughter, Dorothy Hunter, who was a tennis player. And I painted it because her father, who is a great friend of mine, Tom Bundy, who is also a tennis champion, begged me to do it. I tried to get him to get other people to do it. He insisted upon my doing it. And when he got through with it I took a palette knife . . . . He paid me for it before I started it. And I said: " I will paint it, it will probably not look like your kid, I'm not interested in doing things of that kind, but when I get through with it you take it or you throw it away." He said, "I'm perfectly willing to take that chance." When I finished that picture he was delighted with it. I depicted this little tennis player, the girl -- a very pretty blonde girl -- standing on the beach where they lived down here -- he was one of the first men to build a house on the beach at Santa Monica -- with her arms full of wildflowers. And he liked it very much. Then he began to get relatives in there to look at it. All of them looked at it and said, "Can you make that left eye a little smaller, can you raise up the right side of the mouth, the nose seems to be bigger in the left nostril, the ear is green" -- or something. Well, anyway, I said to him once, I said, "Tom, I'm going to change once more for you," and I said, "after that no more." He said, "Well, I don't blame you, I just want one other person, my cousin, he's just come into town, I'd like to have him come and see it." And half the times when I would stand in front of the picture and take a perfectly dry brush, Mrs. Hoag, when they said, "Can you open that eye a little more," I'd stand with my back to them in front of the picture and I'd take a dry brush and would not touch the picture and when I got away I'd say, "How is that?" They'd say, "That's all right."

BH: Like Michelangelo's David's nose, wasn't it?

SM: Something like that. Well, what happened, this cousin came in and he said something, I don't know, he wanted some lock of hair changed. I took a knife and I slashed the whole thing into pieces and threw it into the corner. And Tom got perfectly white. And he said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "We had an understanding with that before." And he was very quiet. He was a man of good will, Bundy, and I was in business with him for some time too. He said, "I don't blame you. I lost on it. I'm just too big a damn fool to let those people come in." He said, "Every change you made on it I didn't like it as well as I did when you did it first." "Well," I said, there . . . ." Well, that's the only portrait I ever painted. If any woman ever tells you that I painted a portrait of her with a dog, there's something wrong with her. I never painted a dog.

BH: I was surprised . . . .

SM: I've drawn my own dogs, chow dogs, a hundred times and those drawings, a large quantity are in the Aronsberg Collection. He bought them out of Stendahl. That's the only dog I ever painted or had anything to do with. I never painted any women with dogs. Or dogs with women either.

BH: I wanted to ask you because it didn't seem to fit . . . .

BH: It was someone who painted beautiful pictures, but it wasn't I. Crazy. Pardon me for saying it.

BH: Certainly. Thank you very much for our interview. You've been so gracious.

SM: Not at all. I'll try to find that thesis for microfilming for the Archives; in fact, there are two or three of them . . . all put in hard covers and everything.

BH: These were all used as theses?

SM: I think everything is in them. There were a couple of them I had to read and if there's anything erroneous in them, a date, or anything of that kind, I probably made a mark on them. One of the girls who got her M.A. on that is working on Life Magazine at the present time. I think her name is Doris Watson. Let me ask Mrs. Wright if she knows offhand where the thing is . . . .

BH: Good. That would be very nice, Mr. Wright. This is the end of our interview. We plan to continue it at a later time. [END OF INTERVIEW] TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH STANTON MACDONALD WRIGHT AT HIS HOME IN PACIFIC PALISADES, CALIFORNIA SEPTEMBER 16, 1964

BH: This is Betty Hoag interviewing Stanton Macdonald-Wright at his home in Pacific Palisades, September 16, 1964, just before Mr. Wright leaves for his other home in Japan for half the year. I very much appreciate being able to talk to you when you're so busy getting ready for your trip and when you've also been busy getting many of your paintings and sculptures [his collection] shipped to send away. Today, Mr. Wright, we're going to talk about some odds and ends that I forgot to ask you before. First, I'd like to talk to you about the book about color which we were just discussing. ["A Treatise on Color," Henry Mayers, Pub.] You were telling me how much Robert Henri thought of this book: called you "the greatest color theorist that we've ever had." Is this correct?

SM: No, he called me "the greatest master of color in painting that ever lived." And he told me that this book was the finest, most simply-put book on color for the artist that has ever been written; which I consider very complimentary, especially coming from Henri. He was a very sweet fellow and one of the most dedicated and honest painters the country ever produced, I think.

BH: Had you written this book for your students when you were teaching at UCLA?

SM: No, no! I wrote nothing for the students of UCLA. I'm not interested in such things! I wrote this for students that I had in 1924, which is something like 16 years before I ever knew that UCLA existed. I had a school of my own at that time, the old "Art Students' League."

BH: Oh, and this was written at that time for those students? I think that must have probably been a most exciting period for art students in Los Angeles.

SM: They liked it down there.

BH: Some very fine artists came from it, people who were your students at that time. You, of course, had been interested in color-theory since your days in Paris. This book, with its color plates, looks very scientific to me. Can you tell me a little about it?

SM: I don't think it's particularly scientific, Mrs. Hoag. Russell and I both studied with a man by the name of Tudor Harte in Paris. He was an Englishman, perfectly stark-raving mad, a man very much interested in color. The three of us (that is Tudor Harte, Russell and I) were experimenting in color which we worked on from (you might call it) a chrome psychological basis. When we had finished, we called in the scientists from the French Academy and demonstrated this theory to them, not only in pigments, but also in light and in fluids.

BH: Excuse me, what kind of fluids?

SM: Color fluids. Just simply color fluids, to show how fluids themselves in mixing had some elements of color pictures with them as well as some element of pigment natures. Because after all, water is a gas; it's a pretty ethereal kind of medium and came closer perhaps to light than pigment would since it always has a large residue of achromatic, non-coloring matters. Fluids don't have them; and light has practically none at all. So we worked it both from the additive and subtractive processes. Well, Tudor Harte had put his soul into this thing for many years, long before Russell and I knew him. When they got through presenting it, the academicians got up and thanked him very politely and said, "Of course, Monsieur Tudor Harte, we must still continue to have our great respect for [Hermann von] Helmholtz, and [Ogden N.] Reed, and [Michel] Chevreul and a few of our own people here. We thank you none the less." And Tudor Harte became so incensed that he said, "I will not live in a country with such imbeciles as that!" and he got up, packed, and left, went back to England where he had come from; and I never heard of him again. I don't know what happened to him. He was a man who had a great --,

what should I say? -- intuitive grasp of color possibilities. He himself painted, but he was probably the worst painter who ever lived. And he couldn't use his own theories at all, although they were, in the main, pretty solidly established. He worked it by relating the color spectrum of the 12 notes to the chromatic scale on the piano; and from that he would separate by interval -- the same interval would separate the piano that produces diatonic scale. That was the thing that he worked on more than anything else. This book that you have here has to do with the emotional possibilities of different types of work, such as portraits and landscapes; or of producing different moods, emotional reactions, etc., which a man can get from both pigments and light in color. That's all. It is a very ABC-derie book and written for, one might say, the beginning student.

BH: Sounds like a psychological study, too.

SM: Well, it is to a certain extent. That's what Birren said and what I particularly like about him. He has written many books on that subject. I sent a lot of them up to [Frank] Stevens to read; he read 'em and sent 'em back by saying, "This is all 'old-hat' to me. I learned all this stuff from you!"

BH: A long time ago?

SM: I said that was very kind of him, but Birren's a man who is a "going concern" when it comes to color.

BH: Would you mind spelling his name?

SM: B I R R E N. His first name is Faber. F A B E R.

BH: Any relation to "Faber Paints," I wonder?

SM: No-o-o.

BH: You say that he collects books that have to do with color . . . .

SM: He has a large collection of great books, the first and oldest great books, written on color. He had several reprinted. He sent me one of the earliest ones, written in 1700-and-something by a man with the name of "Harris," I believe. It was a very nice thing to do because he wanted to perpetuate the man's reputation by republishing his book exactly the way it had been published then, even with the colored charts, et cetera.

BH: And did he reproduce it in any quantity?

SM: No, he reproduced only the ones he sent to friends of his. I don't know how many he had made. It was done on beautiful paper, the same kind of hand-made paper that was originally printed; same format; and the same color plates; and exactly the same type, spelling, and everything of the kind; with a short introduction by himself.

BH: Where does he live, in New York?

SM: He lives in New York. His workshop is somewhere up-state in New York, but his office is at 500 5th Avenue.

BH: And is his collection of works open to the public?

SM: I doubt it.

BH: And he's the man you had a telegram from this morning, isn't he?

SM: Yes.

BH: He wants a copy of your treatise?

SM: Well, he has one copy, but he wants this complete copy. I'm afraid if I lend it to him I'll never get it back. Well, I don't care particularly but it was given to me so I don't want to lose it. A very charming woman gave it to me; I've known her for 40 years; she's a very talented painter, Mabel Alvarez.

BH: Was she a student of yours?

SM: She was a student of mine, yes. Also, I made her go and study with Russell. She's the sister of the celebrated Dr. Alvarez who writes medical things, I think, in the "Times" two times a week.

BH: Oh yes, I've seen his name. I want to tell the tape that Mr. Wright did not have a copy of this book himself, and his friend and former student has just recently given him a copy which is the one that Mr. Birren wants to borrow for his collection. This morning there was a telegram asking for it.

SM: I've been told that Birren doesn't always return things that he borrows. Well, who does?

BH: I hope the Archives will get all of your things back to you, we've appreciated borrowing them. Getting back to Mr. Tudor Harte and his reception in France, I can't understand the French reaction to him. You mentioned Chevreul, Helmholtz, and Reed: weren't they scientists?

SM: They were scientists, yes. That's what Tudor Harte considered he was doing. Making a scientific variation on certain theories of Helmholtz's. Only he thought he went still further than Helmholtz by -- what shall I say -- making it available so people could make practical application of color from the standpoint of painting and harmony.

BH: This certainly was important to you and Russell in your painting because it was shortly after this that you propounded Synchromism, wasn't it?

SM: Yes. Well, 2 or 2 years after that, yes.

BH: That's very interesting. Last time that I was here we talked about several different portraits, one that Thomas Hart Benton painted of you when he was here, and one that you painted of Benton in the Santa Monica Library mural which he does not know about. There are some other portraits that I want to ask you about. For instance, I have read several times that you did a self-portrait in 1951 and I wonder where that is. Before I go home I would like to see it if you have it.

SM: Let's see, it was done in 1958, I believe. I've done several portraits of myself. But the one that was done in 1958 was in exactly the same light as the one that was in the Dewar Collection in New York which was done in 1918. This was done just 40 years later.

BH: Do you have both of them?

SM: Yes, I have both of them because, when I was in New York last time, I bought back from the Dewar Collection the portrait that was done in 1918 at a time when I was doing abstract pictures altogether.

BH: Then this 1958 one wasn't abstract?

SM: No, it was just under the same light exactly. And I cannot say that the age is not visible in that!

BH: Well, wouldn't you be disappointed if it weren't?

SM: Yes, to think that I had remained an imbecile which I no doubt was, at that time.

BH: I didn't mean that. You did another portrait of Jack Wells which several people have mentioned. I wonder who owns that?

SM: Jack Wells gave that to some woman to whom he was once engaged down in Texas somewhere and I haven't the foggiest notion where. I met her once, but I don't know what her name is, don't know whatever became of her.

BH: I understand that it was a good portrait.

SM: Well, you know, recently I have found out how little I know about my own pictures for this reason: I'm exhibiting with Rose Freed in New York next February and Rose is planning on having a catalog (which the French would call a "catalogue resumee") in which there would be all the necessary background for future art historians to go through as source material. She asked me for one thing, "Please put down all people who own pictures of mine." And I -- who have never in my life cared who owned my pictures nor kept track of them, nor even asked dealers to whom they sold them -- I found it one hell-of-a-job to figure it out. I racked my brain and surprised myself; I came in with some 90 names! But it doesn't mean they still own them. Many of the people at that time, both in Europe and this country, who had collections have been dead for many years. Of course everything they had has been dispersed. Like the great John Quinn collection, one of the greatest collections that this country ever had. He was a celebrated lawyer and great collector of modern painting and also of ancient painting. He had 4 of my pictures, and I have no idea where they are now.

BH: Was he in New York?

SM: He was in New York, yes. He left those four to the Metropolitan Museum under the condition that they would exhibit them all, accept all of them, exhibit them, and not pick and choose. They refused to do it because at the time he died the Metropolitan hadn't gotten to the point where they had any recognition of modern painting at all. They wanted to pick this, that and the other thing. So he told them they couldn't do it that way (or at least his will said so, or maybe he arranged it before he died, I don't know). Anyway, when he died the

whole collection was dispersed. I have the catalogue of that collection. It was magnificent, a whole book. It was a very beautiful collection. He had one of the most beautiful Ingres that I've ever seen. It's as beautiful as that magnificent nude at the Louvre -- what do they call it?

BH: "Odalisque?"

SM: "Odalisque," yes.

BH: I would like to be able to borrow the catalogue and have it microfilmed for the Archives. It would be very interesting. It's amazing that museums do not seem to keep their old catalogues. You know, the only time you find them is when someone happens to have kept one.

SM: Well, I don't know that they do too badly. There's so much of this junk that's been painted which the museums have gone into that will all have to be eventually thrown out, burned, run down the cellar and one thing or another, the vast amount of it I should say -- nine pictures out of ten of modern collections will have to be destroyed. They're no good. They're just a passing style, that's all.

BH: Well, let's hope many of them will . . . .

SM: You hope they will be destroyed?

BH: A great many of them; I hope so.

SM: Yes, I think so.

BH: I discovered the mystery of the "Woman With the Dog." You said you'd never painted a woman sitting with a dog?

SM: I did? Now that you mention it, I do remember.

BH: It was one of your students, Dorothy Jenkins.

SM: Jenkins. Dorothy Jenkins is a very celebrated woman.

BH: After I talked to you I interviewed her for the Archives.

SM: Oh, you did?

BH: And she told me about studying with you, and how wonderful you are, and she said, "Incidentally, he did a portrait of me with a dog." And I said, "Is it in a frame shop?" And she said, "Why, yes." Isn't that funny?

SM: Where is it?

BH: In a frame shop, she was having it re-framed. And I happened to see it.

SM: Does she own that picture?

BH: She owns it still, yes.

SM: I didn't know that. I'm glad you mentioned it. That gives me one more name.

BH: One more -- 91 for the list.

SM: You know, Dorothy Jenkins took the Oscars a number of years for the design of clothes for the great moving pictures, the big costume moving pictures.

BH: I saw some of her designs in her home and they're exquisite, beautiful. She's a charming person.

SM: Well, she's a highly respectable person in this sense: for she was extremely badly treated by her parents, her mother; when she was 13 years old she had to go out as a "slavey," and slave to earn a living, and so forth. And she's made herself, without any help from anybody.

BH: Isn't that wonderful!

SM: I'm not too much in love with her personally, but I have a great respect for what she's accomplished.

BH: It's a different thing, yes. She told me about walking to your school at night when she was a young girl -- having to go downtown all alone and taking the street-car way across town. It was a very moving story. There is

another painting that I want to ask you about. Frank Stevens thinks that you have it and it sounds very interesting. It was done by Al [Albert] King at a time when a group of you in the Stag Club at the League had a painting of Charlie Russell's.

SM: "Charlie Russell," who's that?

BH: Charles M. Russell, the Northwest, Montana artist. It was a picture of horses at night, and someone -- I Think Stevie said you -- dared Al [Albert] King to make a copy of it. He did and it was very good. Charlie Russell came to Los Angeles and when it was shown to him he thought that Al's picture was the original and no one told him he was wrong.

SM: Now I'm going to make you feel very embarrassed, and I don't want to do it. That Charlie Russell had nothing to do with anything pertaining to it. Charlie Russell, you say, was a painter of west. What you're talking about was by Morgan Russell: it is a picture of a horse on which a warrior sat. That whole story is perfectly true, but it had nothing to do with Charlie Russell. It was done by a great painter, Morgan Russell. And it had nothing to do with any of these western businesses at all!

BH: Well, I had an idea that it was "The Last of the 500" by Charlie Russell.

SM: No, No. It was one by Morgan Russell. I never owned the picture that was owned by Mr. Wells. I imagine that when he died he gave away many of the pictures that he owned to people, and what he didn't have time to give away went to his sister who is also dead. So what becomes of those things, God only knows. There's one picture I painted here called "The Family." I have tried to get in touch with the person who bought that. It did belong to a family by the name of "Hobgood."

BH: In Los Angeles?

SM: Yes. He was killed by an automobile many years ago, and left it to his wife. I got in touch with her once, years and years ago, and tried to buy the picture from her. I don't know what transpired, but anyway she didn't answer. She went out of town or something, and I have no idea where she is now. That's a picture that I'd like to buy back. But there's no way of finding out about those things.

BH: I imagine Jack Wells must have had a very large collection of paintings too, didn't he?

SM: Jack had Morgan Russell, and he had my pictures, and he had about 3 or 4 other people, California painters then, William Wente and a few other people of that kind. I don't know just how many. I remember he used to keep them under the bed, and in the clothes closets and everywhere else. The guy never hung them up at all, and in that he was just like John Quinn in New York. I went to see Quinn once. He asked me to come up and see him about something and, when I was there, I said, "You have one picture which I'd like very much to see." "Well," he said, "I'll show you any picture here, have it brought out for you." I said, "A picture by Courbet, I believe it's called 'La Macidge' ['The Toilet'] or it's called 'La Toilet,' I don't know. But it's a woman sitting in front of a commode; it's a magnificant picture." "Well," he said, "Certainly, I'll have it brought out . . . ." So he rang a bell, and the servant came in, and he said, "Go to the third floor and, in the clothes closet, the 4th one from the end of the pictures as they're stacked against the wall, bring that picture down here." And he brought it down, and it was the picture I went there to see. And that's where he kept his pictures, didn't hang them at all. He was like an Oriental: They bring pictures out when they feel like looking at them. They don't leave them around as ornaments.

BH: Well, Mr. Stevens shocked me by the way he keeps his.

SM: Well, he doesn't really "keep" them.

BH: And he has beautiful things. He has your "Hommage to Picasso."

SM: To Picasso? Mine? I don't even remember painting one.

BH: It's either yours or Russell's. I thought it was yours . . . that's what I have in my notes.

SM: What's it a picture of?

BH: It's a very abstract painting.

SM: Is it? That's funny.

BH: Incidentally, his son, who is an Episcopalian minister, has a lot of his collection. He probably has some of yours if you should be hunting for present owners, I mean. He told me both of his sons have taken paintings away which is something to know for your record. I don't know where the other boy lives; I think he is in Los

Angeles.

SM: Well, if I had known that I would have gotten about 95. You've given me about 5 names of people who own pictures of mine that I never thought of. Ha ha.

BH: There is one of Russell's I'd like to know more about if you know. Mr. Stevens referred to it, and he knows no more about it than the fact . . . .

SM: What's this?

BH: Than the fact that it is one that Modigliani did of Morgan Russell.

SM: Yes. Do you want to know where it is?

BH: He said that Henry Clausen sent him, Stevie, a photograph of it when Stevie was in Montana; and he doesn't know whether Clausen had the original. It would be very interesting to find out who does.

SM: Clausen hasn't the original of anything. Clausen is practically in the bread-line all the time. If he has a Modigliani he would not have to be. I have a reproduction of the picture but it's in an article written about both Morgan and me in the French Magazine called L'Oeil. There is a reproduction of Modigliani's portrait of Russell.

BH: I would like to see it.

SM: By the way, I got a letter from Seuphor today. He said his new, vastly enlarged article on the Syncromisis is about to come out, including all . . . . I don't know just exactly what it is! I didn't read it; I haven't had time to read my own letter yet! He says, "My article in the L'Oeil on the Synchromist has been done over again but corrected and enormously enlarged. I have the right to put only one single colored reproduction in each article, according to the Magazine's policy, so I have naturally put in something of yours. I have chosen an ectochrome that you sent me 2 or 3 years ago. It is a very colored work of 1960, I believe, and I find that it is very beautiful, very lyrical and construction (constructed) at the same time."

BH: What is an ectochrome?

SM: That's a kind of photograph, all in color. The real name for it is diapositif, I think we call it, which simply means a transparency in color from which they make reproductions. That's all.

BH: I see. Isn't that a complimentary letter?

SM: A very old friend.

BH: You told me at one time something I didn't get on the tape. Going back to the Santa Monica Library mural which you did, the dancer in that was the wife of Frank Tuttle: is that correct?

SM: That's right.

BH: I just wondered because it doesn't say in the brochure.

SM: She was a Russian girl which was why many people thought afterwards that she had been sent over here to spy on the country. And Tuttle (who was a gentleman and a very fine fellow, one of the best directors that Hollywood ever produced) became really the kind of victim about whom one might have written a book.

BH: She was a "Not for Burning" type of thing?

SM: Well, no. She was not too pretty a woman at all, but "the slave of the flesh she became." And so he became a Communist. He went to Russia, and he wasn't allowed to come back to this country for some reason, and he died in Europe. And there! [He indicates a photograph in his scrapbook.] That's one of my best pictures of that period which Tuttle had. It was called 'Young Japan," and whatever became of it God knows; I don't.

BH: What was the subject, children?

SM: The subject was a little Japanese girl who was given to me by her family and was married out of my house in Santa Monica, a very sweet little Japanese girl. She didn't want to marry at all, but all those marriages at the time were made. I know my wife at the time said, "You should not allow her to marry because she doesn't wish to marry." And I said, "I will not interfere with the mores . . . use of old culture. After all, we are barbarians when compared to those people when it comes to cultural things. They got along pretty well doing what they wanted to do up to the present time as long as we let them alone.

BH: But it was a hard transition for them to make, living here.

SM: Well, that was what the subject of this painting was about.

BH: There was another figure in the Santa Monica Library mural I would like to have you tell the tape about. It is the portrait of your father who is standing as if he were a painter, which he was not. And on the back of the easel, what was written?

SM: "This mural is dedicated to my father."

BH: Is it in Japanese?

SM: Chinese. I studied Chinese before I studied Japanese.

BH: Oh, did you?

SM: I'll show you another painting that Tuttle had if I can find it. [He looks through scrapbook.] Here it is! I think there's a photograph of it here somewhere.

BH: Beautiful!

SM: That's "Young China," that one. Now that belongs to somebody in New York and I don't know who it is. My brother built his penthouse in New York around that one, but he died. His wife had it when she died. Her mother has it, but I don't know who her mother is, or where her mother is. That's the picture, I'm sure that I have a larger reproduction of it somewhere. This whole book is battered up.

BH: I's a good scrap book.

SM: Here it is.

BH: Oh-h-h, isn't she sweet!

SM: That was done in 1930. That belonged to Frank Tuttle. Her name was Yoshih-erama.

BH: Was there any symbolism in that ace-of-spades?

SM: Yes, because it means to me that Japan is dead. She's laying out cards there, and she's handing the ace-of-spades which is the death card. The idea of life and aristocracy in Japan is the chrysanthemum: these are dead chrysanthemums. Here it looks as though an atom bomb (which hadn't existed at that time) had burst on the island itself, the island behind with the broken bamboos. But that was done, that was done . . . .

BH: . . . in 1930?

SM: . . . 15 years before what happened to Japan happened to it!

BH: Oh, what a fascinating picture.

SM: She was a very sweet girl. This is a little prettier than she was actually.

BH: Somehow we're going to have to track that down, find where it is now. I'd love to see it.

SM: That isn't the type of pictures I buy back. It's the much earlier ones than that.

BH: Another question I wanted to ask you was whether or not you painted the mural in the Santa Paula High School?

SM: No. I did not.

BH: I have a Mr. and Mrs. Botke who worked on them, and Mr. Botke is still living there.

SM: The name is familiar to me, Mrs. Hoag, but I don't recall those people. The artists were changing continually, and there were 300 of them. I would assign them to do things and look at their things to see that everyone was paying attention. At the opening I had to go out and see that the work was properly put up.

BH: What has been confusing me, Mr. Wright, since I've been working on this is that I try to read all the old newspaper articles I find in people's scrap books. They refer to "Mr. Wright's mural at someplace-or-other." When you were really in charge of it, had not directly designed it. For a long time I thought you did every one of them. I'm still trying to sort them out! I think Southgate and Santa Monica are really the only two you worked on

yourself?

SM: Southgate and Santa Monica, that's all that I ever did, yes. No, there was one more; there was a Negro school in Los Angeles somewhere for which I did a small mosaic design over the door. I don't remember what the school is. I had a color reproduction of it somewhere here. It was a picture of 2 big hands, and on one side it had to do with natural objects, on the other side the productions of mankind, machinery and so on. It isn't very large. But I remember doing that.

BH: Was it petrachrome or tile?

SM: Mosaic.

BH: I have something else to ask you about your color machine which we discussed quite extensively on an earlier tape. In my reading since then, I saw a reference to the fact that you and Russell had been approached in Paris by the Swedish Ballet wanting you to do a curtain.

SM: That's right. We were supposed to do the opening, not a curtain, but the opening thing in colored light -- which would have been a new art at that time for Stravinsky's "Feu d'Artifice."

BH: Is that "Artificial Fire," in English?

SM: Well, "Fireworks" is what it really is. You gave it the literal translation.

BH: Did you ever do it?

SM: No.

BH: That was too bad!

SM: It would have lent itself very well to Stravinsky's "Fireworks." In Japanese called "Hanabe." Hanabe means 'Flower fire." That's a very much prettier name than "artificial fire." Hanabe, Flower fire. It does look like flowers when those big things open up like this, you know.

BH: Yes. Another thing, in my reading I have come across bits of a column that you did in Hollywood for a while, art reviews. Several of the Project artists have saved reviews you wrote.

SM: Agee has all of those things. He wanted to borrow them and took them back east. I believe he loaned them to me. He had the whole list of those things, 3 years of them. They're around here somewhere, I think he sent them back.

BH: Well if he didn't, I hope he'll let us borrow them now and have them photographed for the files.

SM: I'd be delighted to have you take them . . . . I'll ask Mrs. Wright if she has any idea where they were placed. I don't know.

BH: We were talking about you as an author, and I wanted to remark on the tape that you have written two other books. We haven't talked about The History of Mosaics and Beyond Aesthetics, the last one also published in Japanese.

SM: Published in Japanese, yes, but not "also;" it's only published in Japanese.

BH: Only? Thank you. And you have written articles for one of the encyclopedias, I don't know which one. Do you remember?

SM: Well, that was another thing that Rose Freed asked me to do, get together a bibliography of all that I can remember of things I have written. It is not at all impressive.

BH: I think the list I have is impressive, so yours must be more so! I have articles in Art Digest, Art Journal, Magazine of Art, California Arts and Architecture, Art News . . . it just goes on and on. I've been reading some of them.

SM: Well, I've a few more than that, but it is not too impressive because I've written a number in Japanese and also a lot in French, you know.

BH: No, I didn't know that.

SM: Yes. I have those things around here.

BH: Hm-m, a very long list. Incidentally, the last one I read was your article about "Chinese Painters in California," written in 1935, I believe. That was a very interesting article. And I noticed that two of the people you asked about were on the Project. One of them was Tyrus Wong, whom I'm going to be seeing sometime this month, and the other one is ---

SM: You're going to see Tyrus Wong?

BH: I've had a letter from his wife and . . . .

SM: He's a very nice boy, Tyrus. He did some very beautiful things for the Project in black and white -- monkeys --. Typical Japanese brushwork.

BH: I've seen pictures of some of his scholars too, they were shown, I believe, in San Diego.

SM: He worked for Disney in animation for some time, I believe.

BH: He also does Christmas cards for some company.

SM: Yes, I saw one. Stevie sent it to me, I'm surprised to say.

BH: The other artist is Jade Fon, I imagine a girl. I don't know where she is . . . .

SM: Jade Fon was a man who was a very excellent draftsman in black and white, pen and ink. At one time he was the actor who took the part of assistant to this celebrated Chinese detective . . . .

BH: Charley Chan?

SM: Charley Chan, in the movies, yes.

BH: Oh no!

SM: That's who Jade Fon was, yes.

BH: Well now, did he take a western name?

SM: I don't know.

BH: To paint under.

SM: No.

BH: Because the other day --- I was going to ask you about this. The other day in a little shop I ran across 2 blockprints which I bought because I could afford them, and one was by Lionel Barrymore and one was by Barry Bertoya who is the sculptor who did the work in Yale, in the chapel at Yale that was so beautiful . . . and this was in 1940. And then of course Lionel Barrymore's is just interesting, it's a very nice little etching of a ship. But there was another one in the same place by a man who is a Japanese, or was, a Japanese actor and I wondered if it could be an . . . .

SM: Well, this was Chinese. This boy's name is, Jade Fon was China. He's Chinese, he wasn't Japanese at all.

BH: Well, this had a name that I couldn't understand on it and it was very, oh, art nouveau style, black and white woodblocks.

SM: Oh these were varied -- I think there's some reproductions of these things in that article I wrote about him. I think it was . . . .

BH: Yes, it was.

SM: Whatever became of him I don't know. You lose track of people like that, and when you get to be my age practically everybody you knew 40 years ago is now dead.

BH: It seems to me that everyone who was on the Project has been shaken together in a sack and then dropped all over the face of California. They're all mixed up.

SM: Or dropped out under the face of California.

BH: I think there are a lot of them around. I'm not even beginning to catch up with them. The whole group of people who were here at the time you were teaching at the Art Students' League was very interesting --

Hadakichi and Gsura Stoyana . . . .

SM: Stoyana, yes, but he was never a pupil of mine.

BH: They apparently went around together in a group?

SM: Is Stoyana still with them?

BH: He seems to have disappeared. No one knows, hasn't known, for many years.

SM: He was a strange fellow.

BH: With the beatle haircut?

SM: Well, I don't know, I imagine so. Yes, as I look back. He was a strange fellow. I think he was, not Czechoslovakian, but --- the same nationality as Tito. What is that?

BH: Oh, not Roumanian: a Magyar, wasn't he?

SM: Yes, something like that anyway. He had been down in the South Sea Islands for a while. He never let anybody in the house at all. He didn't exhibit. He didn't want to do anything. He was a total hermit, an ascetic who had married some little American schoolteacher --- She looked absolutely stark-raving mad to me, as if he had driven her crazy. I remember that he told me as a joke, with great gusto, once about someone who had gone to his house to do a favor for him. A very well-known man went up there, wanting to buy a picture or something. He went up to the door about twilight and Stoyana had a dog which rushed out barking to greet this fellow. Stoyana didn't know this fellow at all but he opened the door about 6 inches and stuck his head out, and said, "You see, dogs know people!" and slammed the door. Ha, ha. I thought that was very funny.

BH: No wonder his wife looked the way she did! I've had a little trouble sorting out all the people from the group who actually were in the Art Students' League and then the group called the "Young Moderns" who put on a show in 1926. There had been a "Modern Art Show" in 1925, and I'm trying to connect Thomas Hart Benton to the group. He had an "Airship" in the 1925 show.

SM: He had something in it?

BH: "Airship" it says in the catalogue.

SM: Where did they have it? Here in Hollywood?

BH: I'd have to look that up, I think it was in the Hollywood Library.

SM: I think it was too. I remember something shown at that time, yes.

BH: And then 1926, the next year, they called themselves the "Young Moderns" and Morgan Russell had "Earthen Dish . . .

SM: I'll be darned!

BH: . . . With Fruit," I guess it was.

SM: Did you ever look up Ryder and Mrs. Ryder, the former Librarian, down in San Pedro?

BH: No.

SM: Well, she had a lot of pictures of mine down there, and other people's, of Russell's too. Or at least Ryder bought them. But I don't know whatever became of either one of those people.

BH: No, I haven't been to San Pedro at all.

SM: I'm sure it was at San Pedro Library where they had them. And they had a number of pictures down there, some of them very famous pictures. They had a picture called "Three men," and still lifes, and so forth and so on.

BH: Oh, you're talking about Mrs. Charles Joseph Ryder? My next question was to find out from you about the fact that in 1929 you were in charge of putting in a branch of the Arts Students' League in San Pedro. You were going to have Charles Winter and Al King teaching. Then you were also going to put in a branch at San Francisco. Right? And I haven't been able to find out anything more. Did this materialize?

SM: There were no branches ever put there.

BH: Joseph Charles Ryder was the one who was apparently putting up the money it.

SM: Yes, he wanted to put it in there. I didn't have much interest in the idea. I had no interest in teaching, anyway.

BH: Were you just supervising it?

SM: He was. King was going to teach there. Have you talked to King?

BH: Yes. but I have to go back again. He talked about 4 hours and we both wore out. I have to go next week. It's interesting and they apparently had paintings from nearly all of this "Young Modern" group who were around at that time.

SM: You know, Mrs. Hoag, here's one thing that you ought to remember. Your mother painted, but I don't think you've been around the art world much to know what's going on. You should remember this, and it is applicable, not only to art, but it's applicable to everything else that people do -- whether it's politics or sex or anything. If a thing is greatly talked of, if it becomes a national matter, it does so not because of itself, but because somebody's making money on it. There's no other explanation of it. Somebody's making money, otherwise nobody would ever hear of it. You may realize that our public communication systems are run not for eleemosynary reasons. They're run for people who make money, the same way with the newspapers. I have to laugh at people who write in to the newspapers and complain about the attitude they take. The newspapers made their own polls many, many years ago to see what readers want. What readers want they give them.

BH: I think that makes it a little hard on artists, doesn't it?

SM: I don't know. Look how hard on the general public the artist has been. He's sold them junk for many years now. He's taken vast sums away from people who have no possible interest or the slightest artistic taste or sensibility. He's taken vast sums away from them to hang these "dogs" that make up public institutions which they paid for. My God! The artist has treated the public (if you call it "treating" the public); I mean treated the people who are the opinion-makers for the public --- who are at the present time the museum directors, the critics, the writers in art magazines and newspapers, and things of that kind: they make the opinions for the people. You might blame them, but the artist is, after all, the man who supplies all the junk that's given out there!

BH: But they're not all doing it. When I was down in San Diego I saw Donald Hord's things and I fell absolutely in love with them. I think they're just beautiful. You certainly would say that he was out-of-step with the times compared to constructivist sculpture, yet he seems to be "doing all right." In fact, the library of the new branch of the University at La Jolla has just been given one of his things, one of the largest diorite statues that was ever made. It's called "Coming Spring," I think. It's beautiful.

SM: Donald Hord was made by the Project. Don't forget that.

BH: I suppose so.

SM: He was made by the Project.

BH: He was not known at all before he did "The Aztec?"

SM: Well, he was known only locally. I wrote half a dozen articles on Donald Hord that dealt particularly with the "Aztec Indian" that he made for San Diego State College. I think he was a real sculptor. I don't know what he's done in the last 20 or 25 years because I haven't seen anything. But remember that down there he had very definite and authoritative backers. There was that fellow who used to run the museum who always bought things from him. He was the one, I understand, who got him in with Hatfield Gallery here; they sell many of his pieces of wooden sculpture, his cuttings of pieces of lignum vitae wood and things of that kind brought up here. Donald has had the kind of publicity, locally speaking, that it is necessary to have. But Donald has never had it nationally.

BH: I don't see why! I think his things are beautiful.

SM: You don't see why for one reason. That's just what I told you! Somebody's got to be able to make money out of Donald Hord, otherwise he will never be known other than locally. No matter if Michaelangelo should suddenly appear in the streets of Los Angeles -- he'd starve to death. There isn't a gallery here which would take a drawing of piece of sculpture of his until he had been in the newspapers and had been nationally acclaimed.

BH: As a matter of fact, I wonder if Donald Hord is appreciated locally, because I haven't seen anything except

Project pieces there. The other ones he's done have gone off to other places . . . the Museum of Modern Art . . . .

SM: Well, I don't think he's appreciated particularly, but I think that what he has sold, and what Hatfield has sold, has been done through the writings and the advice and the conditioning opinion-makers of the art world --- museums. That's all anybody does.

BH: Incidentally he said to ask you, that you would probably remember, who had one of his statues in Santa Barbara. He couldn't remember and I wanted to see it when I go there.

SM: One of his statues? I never knew anybody had . . . .

BH: He thought it was under the Project that one was sent up there and is stationary somewhere in Santa Barbara.

SM: What was it? What was it made of?

BH: I don't know. I presume it was one of those hard metals. No, I think it was one of the jade pieces.

SM: Wood pieces?

BH: Jade.

SM: Jade!

BH: Jade.

SM: We made those jade pieces after the Project had shut off. He never made any before then.

BH: At any rate, you don't remember one up there?

SM: I don't. I couldn't remember all those things. Remember that on the Project we had here in Southern California, I was allocating those things to public institutions up to the day I closed the doors of the place. And I was the last person to leave the office and close the door. Practically up to that minute we were making allocations. We got rid of everything. But it wasn't a jade piece he had because I remember going down to San Diego long after the Project had closed . . . . I don't know how many years, 10 years perhaps . . . and seeing for the first time a piece of jade that he'd worked. I don't think the jade work that he did ever amounted to anything. I think that its greatest interest lay in the fact that it was jade and jade that was found in this country. Because much of that jade that they cut in China is found here, and sent back there and cut up into small pieces and brought back here. Jade that they find, I think it's up in Montana, is in pieces that are that square, like this [he indicates], enormous pieces of jade. It isn't jewel-jade of course; God knows, a piece like that would be worth 50 million dollars! But it's jade that they can cut. Its interest lies in the fact that it's jade, an American-cut jade. And it's the same thing with the work that he's done in volcanic glass. it's one of the most difficult mediums to cut that man has ever figured.

BH: The true obsidian?

SM: Obsidian, yes. That's what it is, and you can't cut it. It has to be abraded, and no modern man except Hord has the patience to abrade it. It's an astounding job but, as an artistic piece, it doesn't compare with some of his wooden things or with his diorite.

BH: Well, the fact that the Federal Arts Project gave such an impetus to him makes me think of something that you said in this little booklet which you loaned us and which I had microfilmed the other day. It is such an expressive statement. I'd like to read this one sentence you wrote. It is from an address that Mr. Wright made over the radio in Santa Barbara in October of 1941, on the occasion of opening a new gallery under Donald Hord's directorship. You said, "Let us also remove our criticism from out the ages of a spurious and grandeloquent jingoism. Let us recognize that our own consciousness of youthful vigor encouraged by the Federal Arts Project, has without the shadow of a doubt, raised the average standard of American painting. But let us not confuse topics with technique, and let us take a slightly longer time-view of our qualities than have been recently found in the writings of our critical tycoons." I thought it was very good that you made that remark. I presume you were referring to our consciousness of regionalism and having to stand on our own feet in painting coming out of the Project?

SM: Mrs. Hoag, I was working for the government at the time. I'm always loyal to the person I work for. You see those two heads there? That Greco-Buddhist head on the end and this Chinese head here? Both of those pieces I got from Donald Hord. This is Mexican onyx and that is Tennessee pink marble. And both of those pieces I got from Don. I cut that one because I was studying Greco-Buddhist art at the time and I wanted to see how much I had known about it, and I used no model.

BH: You did it, you sculpted it?

SM: Yes.

BH: I didn't know you ever did anything like that!

SM: I started studying sculpture when I was in Paris, cutting granite. It's the hardest thing there is. Yes. And I used to cut this because I had moments and this is the same way. Now this is harder to cut, this Mexican onyx, because its spawls (?) underneath.

BH: Did you do it?

SM: Yes.

BH: Well you just amaze me!

SM: Why?

BH: It's beautiful! Because I didn't know you ever did anything like this. Incidentally, it looks like Mrs. Wright.

SM: Yes?

BH: Very much.

SM: It was long before I ever knew Mrs. Wright. I call that "The Cantonese" because the Japanese had just gone into China, and on the forehead of this there is something like a lurid scar coming down on the forehead. It's like a little Chinese girl who has a wound on her. I call it "The Cantonese Girl."

BH: Ah, you mean the scar is grained in the material?

SM: Yes, it's just a flaw in the material but I cut it that way on purpose. No, that's, ah, both of those things. I've done a good deal in stone and most of it I've thrown away. I simply did it because I love to do it, that's all.

BH: Oh no! Seems to me you wouldn't have to collect these lovely things from the Orient because you're capable of creating them right here.

SM: This was bought from me by Hirshhorn, the great collector, but I wouldn't let him have it. I have his money; he paid for it, but he never got the head.

BH: Aren't you ashamed?

SM: I won't let him have it!

BH: What did you do, paint him a painting instead for his collection? He probably has one too.

SM: Oh yes. BHP: There's another question I wanted to ask you. It doesn't relate to anything else so I'll just throw it in here at the end of our interview. Mr. Stevens (again) told me that you and your brother Willard at one time lived in a house in the Silverlake district which had once belonged to Jessie Hart Benton, who was General Fremont's wife.

SM: Whose wife?

BH: General Fremont's. Jessie Hart Benton. She was the aunt of Thomas Hart Benton, the painter. Since he was your friend, I wondered if there was any connection . . . if you ever knew that you lived in the house that General Fremont's wife had died in?

SM: In that district up there?

BH: Yes.

SM: I've never lived anywhere near that district!

BH: Well, that is what he told me, and I thought just for the records . . . .

SM: I don't know where he got that idea. Maybe both of us are getting senile, because we're about the same age, but . . . . Stevie's getting senile with different information than I have! Reminds me of somebody who came to me once when I came back to America and said, "I knew a great friend of yours, a man by the name of So-and-so. I met him in Paris." I said, "Is that so? I never heard the name before in my life." Then he said, "Yes, an

old friend of yours, used to live with you when you were down in Bordeaux." So I said to him, "Well, that's funny that I don't remember. I've a very short memory. The truth of the matter is I've never been to Bordeaux in my life." So I don't know where people get such strange ideas.

BH: Well, I'm glad I asked you because if some scholar starts writing your life and runs into that remark of Mr. Stevens', he might get very confused. So at least we've set that straight.

SM: I never knew that Benton had any relatives that lived up in that part of the country. I knew his wife has some relatives but they have an Italian name. And I never lived there at all. I never lived in that quarter of town. As a matter of fact, I've lived in Los Angeles only in 3 locations. They're all in the western part of the city, and one of them was in the south . . . . Let's see, the south-west part of the city out near West Adams. That was back in 1919. I was there for about a year, I guess. Then at one time I lived over near Melrose Avenue off Vermont near where that college was. I lived another time in my mother's house out at 23rd and Cimarron. But outside of that I never lived in Los Angeles. I invariably used to come down and live in Santa Monica.

BH: Now you're living in 2 places and you're about to leave for your other home, aren't you?

SM: Yes, and it's possible I'll be living in 3 places and perhaps 4, because on the way over I'm stopping for 5 weeks in Honolulu to get a rest, a vacation finally. I'm going to spend a lot of that time as I have before, looking for a proper place, and if I can find what I want on the Island of Maui I shall build over there. Then I'll live over there for 3 months during the year. Then I have an idea of getting an apartment in Venice. I'd like to go there for 3 months a year because Venice is the only city left in the world, I believe, where it's impossible under present conditions to make progress.

BH: To make progress?

SM: Progress, yes.

BH: You think you could be undisturbed?

SM: I could be undisturbed because there are no automobiles there even.

BH: I know.

SM: What are you going to do with canals? They can't build factories in the canals and until they fill those things up there's no land for them to put factories on. They have to go outside of Venice and it's nothing but the boats on the canals into the Adriatic there.

BH: I can see only one thing wrong with your plan.

SM: What's that?

BH: Carrying all those materials to paint back and forth. You'll have to have four complete sets.

SM: Well, that's all right. I have 2 now -- I might just as well add 2 more.

BH: Really? Double it?

SM: Yes. I have a set that always waits for me in Kyoto at home. If that were the only difficulty it'd be all right.

BH: Well, I hope it works out, it sounds like . . .

SM: So do I.

BH: . . . a good solution.

SM: I never felt too much at home in this country. I think it's a very terrible thing, perhaps, to let a sensitive person pass the formative period of his life in an old culture. And that's what happened to me. I was brought up in a strictly European manner. I had never even spoken to my father without being announced first. I never in my life even saw my father with his coat off. I was brought up that way. Also to have vast respect for an elder brother, which is a European consideration altogether. I felt more at home when I went to Europe as a young boy to study. I felt at home in European traditions because, as I told you, I had to speak French always at dinner and Spanish at lunch, so I was really trilingual as a kid. I felt much more at home there than I ever have in America, I would say. And when I go to Kyoto it's just very funny. My wife and I both get off the train and just breathe -- feel whole again.

BH: Well, I'm surprised you say that when you have made it such a lovely home here. It is . . . .

SM: Well, I'm very proud of this place, I'm very fond of the place.

BH: . . . a very beautiful home. It feels like you.

SM: I only regret that things don't move here the way I'd like to see them move, that's all. But then it's happening all over. It's entirely possible I'll give up my home in Japan. Dr. Joan Cavell, the Japanese scholar who has written many books on Japanese art, is writing some on some parts of my collection now. She was here the other day and was speaking about Japan. She left the current "Life Magazine" which is devoted to Japan, and looking at the pictures of that thing I became positvely nauseated.

BH: At the change?

SM: Not that I don't know all about what's going on. But to throw it all in your face in one batch! Have you seen this magazine?

BH: Just glanced at it; I haven't read it yet.

SM: Oh, it's terrible, disgusting, absolutely repugnant, a most nauseating thing. But of course we don't have that so much in Kyoto as they do in Tokyo.

BH: In Kyoto anyway you are in a monastery.

SM: I am in a monastery and I am not only shielded from a great deal of that stuff which I don't have to look at, but also the language barrier makes it much better in the sense that I'm incapable of understanding on the television or radio the different types of patois that the Japanese speaks.

BH: Advertisements?

SM: Well, not only advertisements but the things that they're doing. And I can get along in Japanese but when it comes to an absolutely running conversation on philosophical things I've lost it. I started studying too old. But here I can understand it which is a great drawback.

BH: I hope you have a lovely half year visit there.

SM: Well, I shall certainly get a good rest in Honolulu, I hope.

BH: By the time you come back I will have gathered a hundred other questions to ask you, some that may lay some ghosts at rest. I hope you'll let me come back then.

SM: Certainly, very happy to have you. I think next year instead of going to Japan we'll go to Venice. The Biennale won't be there; I won't have to be there with those crowds that go to look at it. BH; You'll go the odd years?

SM: Yes, there's one picture I want to see in Florence, one of the greatest pictures. It's a Flemish Nativity, very large, and I want to see that. To me it's worth the fare over there and back, to see that picture. I think it's one of the two greatest pictures ever painted. That one the best in the Occident. I think it's much greater than anything done in the Venitian school or any of the rest, what I call "cafeteria decorators" such as Titian, Giorgione, etc. BH; Was the one you want to see the Vandergo?

SM: The Vandergo is the one I have in mind; I think that's what it was. And the other one is that "Rising from the Tomb of the Buddha." Now all of my Oriental collection has gone up north; not all of it, but 20 pieces of sculpture, to Santa Barbara. Doesn't this place look absolutely denuded, horrible?

BH: Your house looks so bare with everything gone!

SM: Yes, I feel I'm living in a warehouse of some kind.

BH: When you were on the telephone I glanced up and was looking around. It didn't seem like the same studio! Thank you so much, Mr. Wright; I certainly have . . . . The reference on the end of this tape to Mr. Wright's collection was the fact that he had sent a large part of it up to the Santa Barbara Museum to be exhibited while he was gone. And it did look indeed bare because many of the beautiful pieces he owns are large and take up a great part of his studio and home. I called him up, I believe it was the day after this interview, and he was quite upset because the pieces were supposed to have arrived in Santa Barbara and the fire had broken out and was raging up there. And he had thought they would be very safe lying in the Museum while he was gone! They might have been destroyed as so many works were -- like the Ludington collection. However, when he called the warehouse in Los Angeles, from which they were to have been shipped, he found they had held them until the emergency was over and the fire out. And later they did get up there because, a week or so afterwards, I

stopped at the Santa Barbara Museum and saw his beautiful peaceful works of art being shown to the public.
[END OF INTERVIEW]