



Smithsonian
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Interview with Ned Cartledge

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Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with Ned Cartledge

at Artist's Home in Atlanta, Georgia

March 12, 1984

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "theirselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: " 'cause," was transcribed as "because," " 'fore" as "before," " 'yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "____" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

Interview

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Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

NC: Ned Cartledge

WV: Willem Volkersz

[Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. C1-A]

NC: . . . I mean it's not big as living room art, you know. (laughter) So I have to do a few things to support my habit of doing ____.

WV: I understand.

NC: But this I call my Uncle Sam series, here.

WV: Oh, they're wonderful. Oh, boy.

NC: That's called *Message to Khomeini* [Iranian leader—Ed.], in which I call his attention to Afghanistan [where he's so]. . .

WV: Right, right.

NC: It's a little more historical now, though.

WV: That's pretty good. What, I have to think. . .

NC: See originally when I did that. . .

WV: _____ the price of oil?

NC: No, when I did that, there were supposedly fifty hostages at that time, but it turned out later on there were fifty-two.

WV: Ohhh, okay.

NC: But what I'm saying there is they were really prisoners of oil.

WV: That's right.

NC: Had it not been for the oil situation there in the Middle East, we would have probably taken a different reaction to the whole problem, see, and that enables him to kick Uncle Sam around and, supposedly with the hands tied, you know. We were limited in what we could do because of the, we didn't want to interfere with the oil supply of our allies.

WV: Right. What kind of, what do you carve out of?

NC: This particular piece—most of these pieces are basswood. Now, some of my earlier works I did in poplar and in western pine shelving. That used to be the readily accessible wood.

WV: Right.

NC: You could get that.

WV: And you paint them with acrylic, it looks like?

NC: Well, acrylic up until about '81. Latter part of '81 I began to do a few pieces in oils. And then everybody said, all the dealers said, "Well, oils have a better impact on people. They like, they are leery of acrylics.

WV: Hmm.

NC: But I'm, I'm not that [way]. I've got a rock out in the back there that my daughter painted like twelve or thirteen years ago, just a little decorative thing on it, and we had it around the house and we didn't want it, so I just put it out in the back to _____ . . .

WV: And it's doing fine, right?

NC: . . .about ten years old, and it's still, the acrylic still shows.

WV: Sure, yeah, that's pretty strong stuff.

NC: Yeah. Now this is called *Our China Policy*.

WV: (chuckles)

NC: And after I did that, Dean Rusk says that we are naive to think that we are, we were going to be able to play the Chinese off against the Russians, you know, that they're not that, they are a little smarter than that, you know, to let us play it off. But that's what everybody thinks now; that's why they're supporting our policies with China, which, you know, when you analyze it, if you're opposed to Communism, the Chinese are just as communist and authoritarianist as Russia is, as far as that goes.

WV: Sure, it sure is.

NC: So I'm not condemning China or Russia either one. That's, but if you're making a comparison, you know, trying to, if you're. . . In other words, if you can stomach one of 'em, you ought to be able to stomach the other one. (chuckles)

WV: Good point, good point.

NC: Now this is my pet peeve right here. We've got like 40,000 troops in South Korea, at the expense of billions of dollars. . .

WV: Right.

NC: . . .to the American taxpayer, while they are making goods to send over here. I've got the little, see Uncle Sam is barefooted, with his patches on his clothes, saying he owes a trillion dollars.

WV: (laughing)

NC: He's holding the defense umbrella over them, see.

WV: That's great.

NC: And the little Korean says, "American taxpayer is very generous to provide protection for Koreans so we can make goods to send to the USA."

WV: You're making a pretty good point, there. (laughing)

NC: Of course this [_____—Ed.] is along in the same vein. When I say that we don't have any, really have any foreign policy, we don't get upset when there are oppressive governments in a country as long as that government says it's not Communist, see. Once they say Communist, see. I say we'd send, if the Devil convinced us he was anti-Communist, we'd be sending aid to Hell, see.

WV: That's right.

NC: Of course, they wind up, once they get that, once they get the idea across that the Communists are opposing their governments, then they get their hands in _____ [pot], you see.

WV: Right. Nicely hidden there, but it's there. (laughter) That's great. Oh. Oh, boy.

NC: Yeah. Now this piece is in Jay Johnson's book, *American Folk Art in the Twentieth Century*. Now this is, sort of counteracts. . . I'm not, people might get the idea from those pieces that I'm not anti-Communist, but I am. But here's, this is just a little, a more, in other words, it applies more to Africa than it does to us.

WV: Right.

NC: But it's a general piece in that it's called *The Communist Loaf*. In other words, it's almost like the old slave days when they enticed the native into accepting their gifts and things, and then they enslaved them, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: And for the deceitfulness of it, I've got the snake in the grass, there.

WV: And you're trying to say that we just have a mask on there, from. . .

NC: Yeah, the Communists, or the Soviets, usually get somebody to front for them. They get some of, the Cubans, or somebody else, to go and do their dirty work for them in those countries, see.

WV: That's right, that's right.

NC: But I was amused one time, you know, after I do all this to say this message, make this point here, this lady comes in and she looks at it a little bit, and she looks at me and says, "Oh, that's the cutest little butt I ever did see." (both giggle) A long way. . .

WV: Kind of missing the point a little bit, right?

NC: Yeah. This one I call *Trickle Down Economics*. (laughter)

WV: Oh, that's great.

NC: You don't have to, you got that, you got the point.

WV: I got it. Yeah, right. Let's see. [reading: "I guess this is trickle down economics. I don't know nothin' about no economics, but I think we're getting pissed on." (laughter) Oh, that's marvelous. Oh, that's a good one! That's a real good one.

NC: They had that on, one of the TV stations here did a little segment on me; they showed four or five of my pieces, and they asked, I explained them. Of course, I had to bleep that, but everybody got the message.

WV: Yes, yes, I think so.

NC: Strange enough, you know, I almost missed it. I didn't realize it, I knew it was going to be on there, but they ran it at the very end of the program, see, and I almost missed it, but anyway, a fellow came in the other day, and he says, "Oh, I've seen that piece before." Says, "Did you ever, have you ever. . ." No, it's never been in a gallery in Atlanta. And he says, "Well, I must have seen it on TV." And I said, "Well, that's where it was."

WV: That's where it was. That's a beauty.

NC: Now here, this piece in here. . .

WV: Hello. [speaking to new entrant to the room and conversation, Mrs. Cartledge (MC)—Ed.] I'm Willem Volkersz.

MC: Yes, how are you?

WV: How are you? It's nice to meet you, ma'am.

MC: Yes, it's nice to know you.

NC: I just want, Bill, I wanted to bring you in here and show you [just, this] one piece. Now that's probably got more actual work on it than any of the pieces that I have here in the. . . [examining Mountain Crafts—WV].

WV: Because of all the detailing?

NC: Yes.

WV: Oh, that's beautiful. Oh! That's beautiful.

NC: Now it was a. . . It was taken from a postcard that my wife's mother mailed to her mother the year my wife was born. I'm going to give her age away.

WV: Okay.

NC: It's 1911. (everyone laughs)

WV: Boy.

MC: You're supposed to say, "She doesn't look it."

WV: You don't look it. (more laughter)

NC: Now, this, I didn't follow it exactly, but that's the general idea was, except she was patching his pants, but in order to get a little more color in the thing, I got her doing a quilt, doing quilting there, see.

WV: Boy, that's marvelous, the detailing on the logs and the tools and things up on the sides. Boy, that's a beauty. How long do you work on a piece like that?

NC: I'd say probably on that piece it's probably 150 hours. And one of the things—of course the basket is, was hard to do. For one thing, basswood chips out a little bit, you know, so it's hard, you have to be very careful with the basket.

WV: Ohh, very careful.

NC: But the chairs, when you get, them required a lot of time, of course, both the baskets too.

WV: Do you ever keep track of the hours? Is that how you have some idea?

NC: Just, I don't really. I've started lots of times, lots of times I've started on pieces and say, "Well, I'm going

to keep time," you know, but, you know, I work a while and forget.

WV: You forget, yeah.

NC: But I estimate somewhere around 125 to 150 hours.

WV: Boy. Do you have specific kind of working habits? Do you work day or night, or both, or whenever you feel like it, or. . .

NC: Well, you see, I just retired about two years ago. And, but I don't watch much TV. I usually watch the news in the evening, see.

WV: Right.

NC: And then I'll usually go to my room, and I'll usually carve most, like, up to 11:30. But when I get to painting them, I like to paint them, because the color, their color. . .

WV: It brings it out.

NC: . . .brings it out and they begin to show up more. And sometimes I get involved in the painting, I'll go on till one o'clock in the morning, and two o'clock in the morning, see.

WV: That's great.

NC: Not that there's any deadline for me to finish one, but I just get carried away with it, and I want to get it _____.

WV: Did you particularly start to concentrate on carving after you retired?

NC: No.

WV: You'd done some before hadn't you?

NC: No, I had. . . When you get right down to it, as a boy about seven or eight years old, I started carving little pistols and little guns and little things out of wood. You know, use to you could go around in back of a grocery store and get all kind of packing crates and things that have great soft pine wood in them.

WV: Right.

NC: My mother would fuss at me about getting her paring knife; I didn't have a pocket knife. And I'd carve with her paring knife. I'll bet I had, in my, when I'm growing up, I bet I had fifty blisters in my hand from using the paring knife to carve and cut things out, you know.

WV: I believe it.

NC: And I used to splint off little pieces of wood and make little, I make little airplanes, you know, like, construct them with the splints all down the fuselage, that hold the framework, you know, and never cover them [with paint?—Ed.].

WV: Oh, I see.

NC: A lot of them I never covered, but just do a little wing framework and all that kind of stuff. I made a lot of things. Unfortunately, I don't think there's any of them in existence any more.

WV: You've given them away?

NC: Given them away, or they got, while I was away in the army, several things got away from [me], you know. Nephews and things probably took in and tore them up and didn't keep them.

WV: When did you start carving these kinds of things? Was it after you retired, or a little bit earlier?

NC: Well, after I got married. I jokingly tell people—in my wife's presence—that my chain didn't reach very far after I got married. So I could take up something to do around the house, you know. (laughter)

MC: Get [on]. Terrible.

NC: If you like, Bill, we'll go on in here. Now, I tell you, I really started into doing little detailed wood carving things. Unfortunately, I don't have any pieces left anymore of the little, like the little. . . I used to carve little

boxes, and carve little scenes and things on them, to, you know, that'll be personal to people, and give them as gifts. And from that, I went into, got more into. . . I might. . . [moves away from microphone] Excuse me a minute. _____; I'm just not sure where. Really, the piece that caused me to get into doing bigger, more detailed pieces. . . I'm trying to. . . This is pretty much the only work that I have. [finding a packet of photos of his work—WV] That's one of my favorite pieces; that's Seat Belt. I have nothing against the seatbelt itself. I'm opposed to the idea that somebody decides. . .

WV: For you, right?

NC: . . .for me that I've got to have something done, you know. And some businessman in—I'll let you look at these when I find the piece that I was looking for. That's really the first political piece [Seat Belt—WV]. Here. What I had done, Bill—this is Story of Cotton—I spent 35 years in the cotton business. I made a little box for one of my bosses who was very good to me. He was high up the line; he wasn't my immediate boss, so it wasn't a matter of buttering him up.

WV: Right.

NC: He came out to see my house after I'd built a house, and he came out to see me, sent my wife a nice set of plates, you know, as a [housewarming present?—Ed]. . . So I did a little box for him. And it had these little scenes on it. So I gave him the little box and I decided I'd do another set of the little scenes in it, but I never did them into a little box. And I finally decided I'd do them like a bale of cotton. I don't know if you're, from the midwest, I don't know whether you're familiar with cotton bales or not.

WV: Sure, I've seen them. That's wonderful, that's a nice idea. These are the straps around them, or. . .

NC: Yeah. But that was the first large piece that I ever did. Then along when the Vietnam war came along, I began to do what I call social and political comment. I was one of the old folks opposed to the. . .

WV: Good. Good for you.

NC: . . .Vietnam war, you know. This is kind of crude, but the minister of my church, he just thought it was great. He just loved it. It's called *Uncle Sampson*, and what I was trying to. . . See, I got the impression of talking to people, these hawks, that they thought somehow that the Vietnam war was a chance for us to reap vengeance on the Communists, you know. And I was drawing an analogy; I called it *Uncle Sampson*, and drawing an analogy between their desire. . . They didn't mind wrecking the country in order to wreak vengeance on the Communists, like Sampson, he wreaked vengeance on his enemies but he killed himself too, see. They were _____.

WV: Right, good point. Perfect point.

NC: And of course, that's a little helmet like the little peasants over in Indochina wear, and this idea of blood was that it was continuous, you know, in their. . . They brought together blood of one GI and them together, come together. That's. . .

WV: Boy.

NC: And it was, to make it more continuous, I ran it over the frame.

WV: I see. That's a powerful piece.

NC: Yeah. And of course it's a large piece, and I learned from. . . The first pieces that I did were large and they're big and heavy and they're hard to transport, so I just, I _____. . .

WV: How large was this piece?

NC: That piece is probably like 50 inches by 30.

WV: Oh my. And what year was that made, do you think? In the sixties?

NC: That was made, yeah, that was made about '66, I think I estimated.

WV: Right.

NC: I didn't put a date on it.

WV: Keep track.

NC: But I was going to. . . I don't know how much you want to know about all the rest of them, but I was going to [show the other pieces—Ed.]. . . That's another piece called *The Bureaucrat* ____ _____. A man in Washington, D.C., bought that. This is a thing, the High Museum here [in Atlanta—WV] owns that piece. It's called *Coming Back*. And that's a little, that building actually was built by the [Ku Klux—Ed.] Klan; it was their warehouse, in the rear of a building out here on Roswell Road. And how I got to know about it. . . I was manager of the Cotton States Arbitration Board from 1963 to 1973. And we had offices up in the main building up in the front, and we used that for our storage warehouse in the back, so I knew about it. And what I was showing, that they're coming back with their hoods and their burning crosses and their lynchings, and that underneath the facade of all their things, they're really, you know, fascist. But yet they—the little crosses in the window—they use Christianity a [lot]. . .

WV: As a front, sort of, yeah.

NC: Yeah.

WV: Now, I can't see exactly what was carved here. I mean, I know that this is carved out.

NC: No, that's not carved.

WV: That's not carved?

NC: The only thing that's carved is the little building.

WV: Ohhh.

NC: This is really constructed. Like this, this piece is not carved either. This is a wood construction, and these pieces are. . . The only thing that's carved is this part of it right in here.

WV: Oh.

NC: But then after that time, I. . . That's the piece [_____—Ed.] that I sold for the most money I've ever sold a piece for. I sold that for \$3,000.

WV: Where did that go?

NC: Some people in New York bought that.

WV: That's wonderful.

NC: A gallery in New York. But I don't have anything in the gallery in New York that sold that for me, because I terminated my contract with him, because he didn't believe in social and political comment.

WV: Oh really? Who was that? What gallery?

NC: Jay Johnson.

WV: Oh, Jay Johnson. ____ ____.

NC: Yeah. No, I don't. . . Now that's Jay's business.

WV: Right.

NC: He's a businessman; he's not supposed to be, oh, propagandizing my social and political views, and I realize that social and political are, doesn't sell much, but strange enough, most of what he sold was social, were social and political.

WV: Were those pieces.

NC: And since that time, since I've got all of my, most of my work here, the interest that people have in my work has been in the social and political comment. At least the decorative, few little decorative pieces that I've done, like this piece [*A Still Life with Flowers*—WV], I haven't sold a whole lot of those.

WV: Isn't that interesting, yeah.

NC: But I did those because the people at the galleries kept telling me, "I wished,"—if you'd pardon my language—"I wish you'd get off of that social and political crap and do some nice pieces." You know. Well, nice pieces I've still got. (laughter)

WV: You've still got, right. Isn't that interesting.

NC: Now this piece was sold by Jay Johnson. That's not a good picture at all, Bill, but that's called *Beware of Imposters*, and that's on the Jim Jones type personality. [speaking of Rev. Jones, who led 900 people to their deaths in Guyana—Ed.] He's got his big cross there fronting for him.

WV: Oh, I see it.

NC: You can't see it very well in that. That's not a good picture. And his money's comin' out his pockets, and all these people that are following him, they're blind. They got their prayerful attitude, but they're blind. They go along, got their eyes closed, and of course there I got the sheep there.

WV: Right.

NC: Follow, you know, like the, they're followers. See, the only two people, the only people in the picture that got their eyes open are the little children, you know.

WV: The kids, yeah.

NC: And that's, of course, that's his purple Koolaid he, that it. . . [speaking of the liquid the 900 drank to commit suicide—Ed.]

WV: That's right.

NC: But he's leading them to destruction. That's what I'm saying.

WV: He's got his hand in his pocket, and up her skirt, yeah.

NC: Up her dress, yeah. Jim was pretty handy with the girls, you know.

WV: I've noticed that. I remember reading about that.

NC: Yeah. And now I've got a quotation from Bible also, and I got something I said down there, and I forgot what was said. (chuckles)

WV: Can't read it, huh. Yeah.

NC: But I can't read it. But I was going to, what I wanted to you was, sort of bring you up to. . . I don't have that piece. That's at the gallery.

WV: Yeah, that's the piece.

NC: Oh, were you at Judy's. . .

WV: No. Yeah, I was at Judy Alexander's [a folk art gallery in Atlanta—WV].

NC: Yeah, and she showed me that piece, yeah.

WV: Yeah. [Reading:] "News item: Citizen's Gripes About President to Visit from Secret Service."

NC: Yeah.

WV: "The necessity is to plead for every infringement of human freedom—William Pitt, 1783."

NC: See, what prompted me to do that. . . Apparently nobody else got disturbed by that, but this old man up in New York, who voted for Reagan, who was a Republican, life-long Republican, he kept calling his Congressman and complaining about Reagan, you know, about Reagan's policy. He never threatened Reagan, or anything.

WV: Right, right.

NC: And this was even before the attempted assassination on President Reagan. But anyway, one day he goes to the door and there's two Secret Servicemen there to question him. Well, I thought that smacked of the gestapo.

WV: Yes, that's awful.

NC: And I got upset right away by it.

WV: Good for you.

NC: And so that's why I'm depicting those men kind of like gestapo gangster types, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: And, you know, the gestapo always had the swastika on the sleeve.

WV: Right.

NC: They're representing our government, you see. And I thought it was terrible.

WV: Well, I grew up in Holland during the war [Second World War—Ed.], so some of this is very meaningful to me, you know. I know the other side of that.

NC: Yeah. Well, this was shown in the Emory University [in Atlanta, Georgia—Ed.] Human Rights show they had here last. . . Last year they had a big sort of exhibit.

WV: Right. It's a wonderful piece. I think it's a very strong piece.

NC: Yeah. I've got. . .

WV: May I look at this. I'm just curious. (laughter)

NC: Well, that, I got that. . . That's called *Whom Kudzu Hath Joined Together Let No Man Put Asunder*. (both giggle) [Kudzu is a highly invasive vine that once established can not be eradicated and has been known to completely cover and consume houses—Ed.]

WV: Very [poetic].

NC: Now this piece is sold to a doctor out in Washington State. Now, a lot of people misinterpret that piece. I'm saying on here that candle power is better than nuclear power, see.

WV: Yeah.

NC: But I'm suggesting that is an alternative to nuclear power, because I'm not opposed to nuclear power. I think we're going to have to have nuclear power to supply the energy needs of the country. But I'm conceding the danger in the nuclear thing in that the grass is dead here, and the trees are dead around there.

WV: Very good.

NC: But what I'm saying is—see, that's sort of a Don Quixote-type figure.

WV: Right.

NC: I'm suggesting that some of these people that are opposed to nuclear power—this is a, you know, controversial thing—for them, they're a little, they're like Don Quixote; it's noble, but it may be ill-advised. It may be impractical, you know. We may have to resort, you know, to nuclear power.

WV: Now, are all those bricks carved in there?

NC: All those bricks are carved in there.

WV: Boy, it's a beautiful piece, very powerful piece.

NC: Yeah, I really didn't want to sell it, but Judy. . . I've done a lot of things on this, of that ____ . . .

WV: ____, portraits of politicians, uh huh.

NC: W. C. Fields [in this].

WV: Right.

NC: I'm trying to find the pieces that I'm trying to kind of bring you along with. . . Now this piece is owned by the High Museum. I got into watermelons.

WV: Yeah, I notice a few of them over there.

NC: Well, see, that's the pieces I do support my habit. Judy had a show for me in '79, but I didn't have much

work, and so she said, "What else have you got?" I said, "Oh, I got a few little things. I have a watermelon I did, you know." She said, "Oh, bring it on over here." So even before the show opened, Mr. [Vitco] of the High Museum here, he came by and bought that for the museum. It wasn't, that was my display of it, with the fork and the knife and the saw there, but they don't, I mean, it's not displayed like that at the museum.

WV: How big is it?

NC: It's probably 17, 18 inches at least. These are just some little pictures of some things that I, you know, just. . . I don't tell around, but I do, I had to, I got into abstracts and wild geometric things.

WV: Really! That's interesting.

NC: I just sold that piece Saturday.

WV: You had this artists' tour here, and is that when sold it?

NC: Yeah, that's when I sold it. It has a message, but it's not obvious to everybody. You see, here's two clowns with red noses, and they're making fun of this guy that he's got a blue nose. See, I'm saying that's what people are. . .

WV: I see.

NC: You know, they're clowns themselves, and they only see what's different about other people.

WV: Right, that's a good point.

NC: And this is a piece that I did back in the early, well, the early, in the seventies when I thought the country was a little bit at, not, had no direction, and it's called *Where Do We Go From Here?* I felt like a lot of people thought they were in a corner. Of course, this is a flat piece.

WV: Yeah, right.

NC: The bricks are carved out, but it is a flat piece.

WV: Sure, I understand.

NC: Yeah.

WV: Very good.

NC: Here's. . . That's just a closeup of one of those faces that I did.

WV: Was that somebody I should know?

NC: [speaking simultaneously—Ed.] That's Saul Bellows.

WV: Oh, Saul Bellows, yeah.

NC: That's just a portrait of him. Of course, that's Sadat. Here's. . . I've got about sixteen pieces of these. Now they're not my ideas; in other words, the caricatures themselves; they're little things I got out of magazines and newspapers and things.

WV: Right.

NC: I just record them as a matter of history. I just did the ones that I liked the nature of the, not particularly the individual, but the nature of the caricature. This one of Nixon, I've sold three of those. People, everybody that sees it wants one. Strange enough, I sold it to this lady, and she came back to tell me. She had to have it for her husband, you know. And so I said, "Fine, that's all right, you know, I'm glad he's an admirer of Mr. Nixon's, you know. He doesn't have too many admirers right now." I thought I'd put that in, and she says, "It ain't cause he admires him." Says, "You won't believe where he hung this thing." Says, "He hates Nixon so bad, he hung it in the bathroom." (laughter)

WV: That's great, that's great.

NC: Of course that's. . . This piece right here—of course I still got it—see, that's called *Under the Cloak of Justice*. Now that's that multicolored wire that, out of a telephone cable, see, and this guy is cutting it, you know. I'm insinuating that under the guise of justice, under the cloak of doing justice they'll cut our communications, or so to speak, interrupt them, you know, under that guise of. . . And this, I'm not prophetic or anything—I don't

want to get into that—but I did dream this character right here.

WV: Ohh.

NC: See, and he had a little microphone imbedded in his. . .

WV: In his forehead?

NC: . . .in his forehead, see.

WV: Oh, boy, that's scary, isn't it. Geez.

NC: And I dreamed that after I read an article in Time magazine about wiretapping, and to all the avenues it could go.

WV: Does that ever happen. . . Has it ever happened since or before, that you have a vision or idea?

NC: No, I never have. Of course, I think of things in the night.

WV: Yeah.

NC: Now this is one of my favorite pieces. Of course it won't take you long to find out my politics.

WV: Sure.

NC: This is called *It's Appropriation Time*. And the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, bought this piece, and I was quite flattered that they didn't try to get me to donate to them or anything, they just paid the price that was asked for it.

WV: That's great, good for them.

NC: This little boy has found in the garbage can a bone and it has a tag on it that says, "From Stockman." I wish I'd a put on it, "Reagan." (both chuckle) Because a lot of people don't even know who Stockman is, you know.

WV: Right, a bone from Stockman. That's great.

NC: Yeah. And of course, this is us, the bull is us, and I'm saying that when it's appropriation time, they start, the military starts waving a red flag with us, telling us how much the Soviet's got, and how dangerous they are, and everything, to get a big defense appropriation, see. And of course, there's the missile in the background.

WV: Yep, yep.

NC: And this sign here, over these bare bull bones, says, "This is what happens to bulls that charge blindly at Red flags."

WV: Excellent piece, excellent.

NC: Now this is another piece that I did on the right-wing crowd, so to speak. This is called *The Eagle with One Wing*, and I said, "This eagle cannot fly with the right wing only."

WV: (chuckles)

NC: And I'm, my plea is for political balance. We can't have, I think we're, personally I think the country is in great danger right now of the majority oppressing the minority of people, especially on this school prayer issue. I feel very strongly about that. And I've got a quotation here from Margaret Chase Smith in which she warns us about those type things, you know.

WV: She was a great lady.

NC: Yeah, unfortunately, she's not around any more. [I'm fairly certain he did not say unfortunately; he is probably implying "around to see what is going on now"—Ed.]

WV: Right.

NC: But this has the John Birch Society, and the Moral Majority, and the Ku Klux Klan on the. . .

WV: Right on the ax handle.

NC: . . .on the ax handle, yeah.

WV: Where is that piece at?

NC: A lady in New York bought that, she bought that from Jay Johnson. See, that's. . .

WV: Um hmm.

NC: Now this piece right here—of course it's called *Noah's Ark*, and that's the unicorn. He missed the ark, you know, according to the Irish Rovers, he missed the ark. Now this sign here says—of course everybody knows it's not a direct quotation from Noah—but it says, "The future belongs to those who prepare for it." That's a universal message, as far as I'm concerned.

WV: Right, excellent.

NC: See, what happened here was the two elephants have got their big fannies wedged in the door and all the rest of the animals stopped. So while they were stopped, these two rabbits over here [are] copulating on a stump, see.

[Tape 1, side B; Volkersz' No. C1-B]

WV: That's great.

NC: This guy who runs a toy museum here says, "Ned, god damn it". . . Excuse me, is it all right on [the recording—Ed.]?

WV: Of course it is.

NC: Yeah. He says, "God damn, if you hadn't of had them two rabbits fucking on that piece, I'd of bought it for my museum." (laughter) I said, "Well, Joe, that's just typical of rabbits when they have a little spare time."

WV: That's right, that's what they do, right.

NC: Now this piece. . .

WV: That's interesting.

NC: . . .is, a lot of people, you know, since back in the old slave days, the whites had black nannies to nurse their babies. People think this is the opposite of that, that we, but it's not. What I'm trying to say in. . .

[Interruption in taping; the end of the original recording]

NC: . . .but she saw a picture of that piece and she said she'd like to buy it from me. So she bought it from me.

WV: It's one, it's like. . .

NC: Yes, sch____, it's like, a motherhood piece is all it is.

WV: Did you make the whole thing? You made these. . .

NC: Yeah, made the whole thing. Yes, I made the whole thing, whole ____.

WV: It's a white woman suckling a black child.

NC: Yeah, um hmm. Now this piece. . .

WV: Phew!

NC: . . .is called *White Fence*, and that won the second award in the Savannah Arts Festival in 1969.

WV: Wonderful.

NC: That other piece, I forgot to mention that one, *Under the Cloak of Justice*, that won the best in the show award, Savannah, in 1970.

WV: Good for you. That's wonderful.

NC: But what made this piece special. . . I won the second award, but Johnny Mercer [American song composer—Ed.], who was alive then, whose home was in Savannah, he presented the art awards to the people.

WV: I see.

NC: And in our arts festival, they turned down this work. I submitted it to them in '68, and they turned it down, so I sent it to Savannah in '69, so that's. . . I mean, there's no, I'm no, I'm not criticizing them, because there's different, every judge has a different idea about what is art.

WV: Yeah, different jurors, right.

NC: And the other piece, they turned it down also, see, the one that won the best in show, but that's still a matter of opinion. I'm not criticizing them for that.

WV: Sure.

NC: Now that's one of my. . .

WV: A little box.

NC: . . .early boxes. That's a little Georgia box.

WV: Oh yeah, I see the state.

NC: Yeah, and the peanut, the pine industry, the forest industry, the cotton and the tobacco, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: That's the little white house down at Warm Springs that I had a peach and dogwood on the back. Stone Mountain was on the back side. And I was flattered; one of the prominent artists here in town bought that piece, and I was flattered.

WV: That's great.

NC: Now this piece I don't have here now. That's Old Yeller and the Chipmunk, and that's a picture of my cat. I had a cat. In the back, and I used to raise tomatoes in the back and the chipmunks were after them so bad, you know, then this cat came and took up with us, and he was quite a predator and he kept the. . .

WV: Kept the chipmunks out.

NC: Yeah. Of course this is a piece that was bought by. . . Called *Hell Ain't Half Full*, and it was my piece against boozers and users, you know.

WV: I've seen that reproduced somewhere, haven't I? Is that in a book?

NC: Yeah, it's in a book; it's in not Jay's book, but in another book called *Treasures of American Folk Art*.

WV: Yeah, I think I've seen it, yeah.

NC: This is, I've got that over there. That piece grew out of my. . . I broke my leg last, well, in last February, and so I became accustomed to a urinal, and that's called *Memorial to the Urinal*.

WV: (laughs)

NC: Judy hated it.

WV: Oh really?

NC: She hated it, see.

WV: I think it's funny.

NC: So I submitted it to the arts festival, and she just scolded the devil out of me. So they accepted it.

WV: (laughs)

NC: The arts festival accepted that piece—I only submitted three pieces to them—they accepted that piece and the piece over there called *Grounded*, and the piece outside with the devil [_____—Ed.], you know.

WV: Gee, that's great.

NC: Chase Manhattan bought that piece from me [_____—Ed.].

WV: That's nice.

NC: That's called *Try and Sell You All Flowers*, and I say down in the bottom—that's a loan and savings place—"If he'd a put more in there, he wouldn't have to be out here." I used to tell somebody, I tell people, "Yeah, and that's going to me if I can't sell some of this artwork." (laughter)

WV: Seems like you're doing all right, though.

NC: Yeah. But this piece is one of my older pieces.

WV: Interesting.

NC: And that's called *Mother Earth Has Had It*. What I'm trying, you know, the different peoples of the earth making so much demand on poor old pregnant—she's pregnant again—you know, more, greater population.

WV: Yeah, right.

NC: . . .that the, that's, you know, the earth is rebelling, so to speak, in that we're having all the pollution problems and. . .

WV: Right, we're demanding too much of it, and. . .

NC: Yeah, in our soil and all that kind of stuff. Now this is another, this is another piece that Chase Manhattan bought. If you read the menu—that's called *Southern Cafe*.

WV: [Reading:] "Breakfast special: country ham, two eggs, grits, hot biscuits, coffee, thirty-five cents. We serve grits with all our breakfasts. If you all don't like grits, [kick, get] your Yankee heads back up north. Lunch special: All the turnip greens". . .

NC: Black-eyed peas.

WV: . . ."black-eyed peas, corn bread. We serve possum."

NC: I was surprised they picked that. . .

WV: "In God we trust; all of us pay cash." And "Mom's in the kitchen, but we got pop on ice." I've seen those things before. That's a nice piece.

NC: Yeah. Back when I was growing up, back in the thirties, in nearly every little restaurant they'd have either one or two of those signs.

WV: Yeah, right, I've seen those. There's that piece. Who does your photography for you?

NC: Sears Roebuck.

WV: Really? You take the pictures, yourself, or. . .

NC: No. No, I just take them over to Sears, when they have one of these. . .

WV: Oh, like portraits!

NC: . . .portrait specials, see.

WV: Well, good for you; that's a good idea.

NC: And it just turns, they turn out great pictures.

WV: It's a great idea.

NC: And, see, I worked for Sears the last ten years before I retired.

WV: What were you doing for them?

NC: I worked in the hardware department as a salesman. Worked out great, see, because I've always done woodworking and everything, and I knew the. . .

WV: I see, you knew the tools, yeah.

NC: . . . I knew about the tools and that. It worked out great for me, and they were good to me. I was their leading salesman in hardware.

WV: Good for you.

NC: And sometimes even the leading salesman in the entire store.

WV: That's great.

NC: But they appreciated it too, and they were nice to me. My boss was just great to me, you know, and it just worked out fine, enabled me to have a small pension when I retired, and plus medical and hospital coverage, insurance policy that I wouldn't have had because I, you see, I worked for one company 25 years, and I quit.

WV: Ohhh.

NC: And I didn't have any kind of pension or anything coming from them.

WV: Now you've got something, yeah.

NC: Yeah, I've got a little something, and with my social security, and picking up a little. . .

WV: Yeah, you pick up a little loose change. (laughs)

NC: Yeah, not, but people think, well, you know, when I tell them about having sold that piece for \$3,000, you know, they think I'm rich right away, see. But you don't sell but one of those, maybe, a year.

WV: Yeah, right. One a year?

NC: Most, yeah, most of the major ones. Now, I. . . This is my Carter piece there, you know, and I'm saying here that. . . You know, Carter was kind of a born-again Christian.

WV: Right.

NC: This is sort of his cross, he had sort of that cross, but he, the millstone around his neck was his image as a peanut farmer, you know. People looked on him as being sort of an unsophisticated, country bumpkin, you know, from the south, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: It hurt his image, you know, though intellectually he was no bumpkin.

WV: Right, clearly.

NC: Intellectually he was superior to the man in the White House now.

WV: That's for sure.

NC: And this [_____—Ed.] is just a little. . . I don't do a lot of three-dimensional pieces, but I kid everybody, you know, my wife's _____. . .

WV: Is that cedar or. . .

NC: No, that's old pine.

WV: Old pine, oh yeah.

NC: Hundred-year-old yellow pine.

WV: Gee.

NC: I tell everybody my wife posed for that, and that it's hand-rubbed pine. (both giggle)

WV: _____, that's good.

NC: Oh, I started to tell you about the watermelons. See, of course, I've sold a lot of watermelons. The Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh bought a couple of my watermelons. And they've had them at auctions here, benefit auctions, and they auctioned off like \$300 and \$200.

WV: That's great, that's great.

NC: At the auction, so, but one slice was in the Burt Reynolds picture, Sharkey's Machine.

WV: Really?

NC: It was in there, but you'd have to, if you didn't ____ ____ . . .

WV: You'd have to look for it, huh?

NC: . . .you'd have to look for it because it was dark. He went into this house where his friend was and it was dark and, as the camera swung by the mantle, the watermelon slice is on the mantle, but you've got to really look.

WV: So how did it get in there? I mean, was it in somebody's collection?

NC: Somebody gave Bert the watermelon slice.

WV: Ohh. Oh, that's great. Boy, that's an interesting piece up there.

NC: That's another one that Judy hates.

WV: Really, now I like that. I guess we have different tastes.

NC: It's called *Hooker's Green*.

WV: Of course that's the name of the color, right?

NC: Yeah, yeah, that's the name of the color, yassuh! (laughter) And she's putting the money in her bosom there, you know.

WV: Oh, I love it.

NC: But I've always liked the piece, but Judy hates it. She says it's demeaning to women. I said, "Judy, it's not, I'm not making any comment on the lady; I'm just recording a little bit of history there." Because that used to be P Street and Baker Street uptown there, used to be the center of the walking prostitutes, you know, back. . .

WV: I see.

NC: And back during the Depression, when I was growing up, hell, you couldn't even walk on the street. Six or seven of them would accost you maybe in a three or four blocks' run, you know.

WV: That's a real nice piece. I really like that a lot. Now that's one of your abstract pieces?

NC: Yeah. That's called *Value Five*, and I've got the value five acrylic colors in there, see, is all that is, and I just, I used it kind of as a guide, a color guide, so I could use. . .

WV: That's neat.

NC: This piece right here at the bottom is called *One of the Leading Economic Indicators*, and of course that's one of the sad pieces that I've done, because that, those kind of people, they're going to be more and more of them, because technology is going to put a lot of old, unskilled people out of jobs, and these people are homeless and have no place to go. But, you see, I'm kind of ridiculing Reagan there, in that I put the want ads section of the Wall Street Journal on there where they want these account executives, you know. You know, Reagan was saying, "Well, you just look in the newspaper and you can see that there's, that unemployment's not as serious as you would have it."

WV: Yeah.

NC: You know, of course, "there's a lot of jobs available, you know, if people would just get out and get them," you know.

WV: That's a strong piece, a very powerful piece.

NC: Yeah. Now that piece was in the Birmingham Biennial last summer.

WV: How much would a piece like that sell for?

NC: Well, I'm not trying to, Bill, I'm not trying to sell my political and social comment pieces, but that piece I wouldn't sell for less than a \$1,000.

WV: It's a very beautiful piece.

NC: I wouldn't, I already, I've been offered that; I couldn't sell it, because I've got. . . I sent slides to the City of Atlanta; they're going to send some artwork to France as an exchange thing with France, and this is one of the pieces I sent and one of the pieces they accepted to go to France now. They've decided that instead of sending just a couple of my pieces, they want to send five or six of my pieces.

WV: That's wonderful.

NC: So I've got to get up some more slides. I've got to go this afternoon; I had some more slides made. I didn't have slides on all my work. Unfortunately, I haven't, I didn't, I wasn't experienced enough in the art world to know that I should have started out taking slides and pictures of my work at the very beginning.

WV: Oh, right.

NC: Because see, like that picture, *The Imposters*, see, that's a lousy picture, but I asked the people that owned the piece to send me that, and that's what they sent me. And of course I couldn't complain. Now the piece up above there is called *The Victims*. That's another one of my Vietnam war pieces, and I'm saying that of course, in the war that it's the children and mothers that are victims. That's all carved.

WV: Yeah, I see that.

NC: I mean, I didn't buy the, I carved out the. . .

WV: The frame, yeah.

NC: . . .the frame, yeah.

WV: Right.

NC: Now this is a piece right here called *Water Boy*. And that, in 1926, a little town west of here, they were putting in waterworks in the little town, see, and I got the job, when I was about 11 years old, as the water boy—ten or eleven, you know, the job, you know.

WV: Hah! How interesting.

NC: And the ironic thing about it, here is a restaurant, a cafe, and a drugstore. They're digging ditches to put in the water system, but they couldn't even have got a drink of water in any of those places there, see.

WV: Yep, that's right.

NC: Now this piece above is not typical of my work, but I said I do do some abstracts, and this is called *Conflict*, and I did that in the middle seventies when I felt like that there was a lot of conflict and divisiveness in the country, you know, as a result of Watergate and all, and I was trying to depict that in that piece there. These two pieces are not, they're my decorative pieces, and they're not, as I said, they're not selling too well. Now, this piece right here is in form of a little icon, and this is another thing [that—Ed.] causes a lot of controversy. This is called *My Lai*, and I'm depicting [Lieutenant—Ed.] Calley there. [referring to the My Lai massacre—Ed.]

WV: Um hmm.

NC: And the reason I'm depicting him so sarcastically is because—excuse me—a lot of people defended Calley on the basis that these people that he was killing was killing over there were Communists, you know. And I doubt if the people that he killed had ever, maybe had never heard of Communism.

WV: They might never heard the word.

NC: No. And see, that's what I'm, I'm depicting him Mr. Clean; he's not guilty, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: They didn't think he was guilty.

WV: And he's got a bloody halo over his head, sort of.

NC: Yeah, right. And Judy likes this piece real well, and one of the curators over at the High Museum, Peter

Morrin, he likes it. He tried to sell it to the High Museum and Judy told me and said, "How about bringing the piece over. Peter wants to see if the High Museum won't buy it." I said, "Judy, that crowd wouldn't touch that piece with a ten-foot pole." You know, the committee of big businessmen, the big contributors.

WV: Yeah, right.

NC: They're not going to touch this piece because they're probably ones guilty of that type thinking, you know. So, and they, people think it's wrong to have criticized Calley, but I. . . When I get through here I'll show you something that might be. . .

WV: No, I don't think you're wrong in criticizing him at all.

NC: Yeah. Now this is another one of the decorative pieces, now. Eric [Zaphrin], over at the High Museum, he thinks that's one of my greatest pieces, right there, see.

WV: Huh, huh. Why does he think that?

NC: He likes the depth of it, and the way it looks and all, and the colors and all, you know.

WV: Oh, right.

NC: And the detailed carving, and all.

WV: Right.

NC: But as I said, this piece, and the devil, and that's going to be in the, our big arts festival here, Piedmont Arts Festival. Then it's going from here, it's going over to South Carolina to the South Carolina Museum, South Carolina Science and Art Museum, it's called, for a month's stay.

WV: Great. Mostly political pieces of yours?

NC: Yeah. Yeah. See.

WV: Well, they are the most powerful, for me, too.

NC: Yeah, yeah. And I've, also I got two pieces in, you know, submitted to another show, and I haven't heard from them yet what they're going to do. This piece right here, and the piece in my wife's room there. That's called *Out of Reach*.

WV: Yeah.

NC: You see, that grew out of my experience with my leg injury.

WV: Being in the hospital.

NC: Yeah. You see, it's unbelievable to some people that my leg—I had a few little complications. I had embolisms, too, and I had to go back in the hospital, due to the surgery, and they took bone out of my hip, and put it over in my knee. And I developed embolisms on this left hip. But fourteen thousand dollars, it cost.

WV: That's extraordinary! [whispered]

NC: And I just, what I'm trying to say there, you know, of course the, I'm saying. . . I don't fault the doctors as much as I do the hospitals, because that was the biggest. . . I thought my doctor bill was reasonable, for the amount of work he did on my knee. Of course, he operated on me nearly five hours.

WV: Hmm.

NC: But, see, that's bringing up socialized medicine.

WV: Yeah.

NC: And I maintain that if it weren't for the hospital insurance plans and Medicare, people just couldn't afford medical treatment. They'd demand socialized medicine next week—though, I'm opposed to socialized medicine. We'd still have to have socialized medicine to take care of the medical needs of the people.

WV: Yeah.

NC: Okay, now, I don't want to. . . Let's see. Here's a piece.

WV: Yeah, I was just looking at that, yeah. Interesting.

NC: Now that's an interesting piece. You remember. . .

WV: [Reading:] "At the ____ Americans were a great people but they forgot their obligations to one another—1776. This state will be determined by you and your fellow citizens." Oh, yeah, I see. 1776 to something.

NC: Yeah. Back in the, around '69, '70 was the big campaign against littering. So this is sort of a paraphrase of something that John Gardner said, but it wasn't in relation to littering, but I thought it applied to littering. People who don't regard other people, they litter and throw junk around, you see. And so I was exhibiting down at the, what they call Golden Isles Arts Festival down at Saint Simon's Island off the coast of Georgia. So I put this down and leaned it back at an angle. I put some, couple rods in there so it'd lean back so people could see it.

WV: Ahh.

NC: And I put some old bent cans and some old paper cups and an old piece of automobile muffler around there, to depict what I was saying, that people who litter and throw junk around are not thinking about anybody else, you know.

WV: Right.

NC: Before the end of the day was over, this area was absolutely covered with junk. People thought it was a junkpile, see, and they just threw stuff all down, all over the. . .

WV: That's amazing.

NC: [in response to ringing telephone] What? Excuse me.

WV: I think she said she's going.

NC: Well, I believe that's about it. Excuse me. [going to answer telephone—Ed.]

[End of interview]