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Oral history interview with Allan Rohan Crite,
1979 January 16-1980 October 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Allan Rohan Crite on January 16, 1979 and culminating on October 22, 1980. The interview was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

Note: Susan Thompson, associate of Crite, participated in interview of Oct. 22.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was born March 20, 1910, at 190 Grove Street, North Plainfield, NJ. As far as my memory of the place is concerned, I'll be a little bit vague because I left there when I was less than a year old, and came to Boston. But I did go back just recently, during the month of December, so I had a chance to see my birthplace -- the house is still standing. It's a funny little two-storey frame house, on a tree-lined street.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did your parents bring you up here [Boston]?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, I brought my parents to Boston (both laugh). I really don't know, exactly. My father was studying at Cornell University, and then I think he came and went to the University of Vermont. I think my mother, when she came to Boston, worked out in Danvers for some wealthy family there. They felt as though the atmosphere in Massachusetts probably would be a little better, or something like that; I'm not too sure. Anyway, Dad went to the University of Vermont for about a year, and then we settled in Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: He was an engineer, wasn't he?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He started out as a doctor. Then he switched to engineering for some reason or other. He got a first-class engineer's license about 1923, I think. He may have been one of the first black people to get an engineer's license in Massachusetts -- I don't think he was the first, but one of the first. There aren't too many of them floating around. It's rather difficult to get an engineer's license in Massachusetts anyhow -- it has the reputation for being very thorough, very tough. So it's quite an accomplishment.

ROBERT BROWN: He was a good deal older than your mother, right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, he was 35 when he married my mother; she was 18 at the time. I think they got married on June 5, because his birthday came on June 7 and he wanted to reduce the span of years as much as possible. [RB laughs] So 35 and 18 sounded a little better than 36 and 18, I guess. [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: What do you remember of him? Your father died long before your mother did . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. He died in 1937. Well, the impression I have of him is of a very powerful and very strong person. He may have had some frustrations, in a way. He was an engineer. He had some interest in my work . . . [Interruption: ringing telephone]

ROBERT BROWN: You said the black community in Boston was scattered, and it was fairly small, but you were just beginning to tell me how it was highly structured in social terms.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, we had the equivalent of "the blue book," you might say, which was made up of professional people. My dad could qualify for that and some people got after him. But Dad was a bit of a loner. He didn't seem to take much to "this social business," in a way. And probably I've inherited a little bit of that from him, I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: On the other hand, was your mother a would-be "joiner?" Did she like clubs and other such activities?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes and no. She was very much into the church, the Episcopal church; and she did work in the Shaw House, the settlement house. She did a lot of work there. But she wasn't one of these people to join a whole lot of clubs -- the only clubs she was [in] was the mother's club at the Shaw House. Then of course she worked in the Episcopal church. She was a person of extraordinary intellectual curiosity. She went over to Harvard University and became involved in the extension courses over there. She went there for about half a century, as a matter of fact, attending lectures and things like that. She never took exams, and some of the professors were a little bit exasperated with her [laughing] because they wanted her to take exams. But she had kind of a psychological block there. Anyhow, she got after me and I went over to the extension courses. I got my

degree of Bachelor of Arts in extension studies in 1968. I'm still associated with the extension studies at Harvard through the Library. So, in a way, the name of Crite has been associated with the Extension School at Harvard University for practically its entire existence. Which is a record of some sorts, I guess.

ROBERT BROWN: How was regular school itself, when you were a child -- was that a big part of your childhood?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, the same part as any other child, I guess.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it something you liked?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] It was something I tolerated, just like any other youngster, I should imagine.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, being something of a loner, I guess you maybe didn't like very much being around so many other people.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, when I used the term "loner," that didn't mean I was anti-social. I had a certain preoccupation because I was drawing. So I was a loner from the standpoint of an observer. But that didn't mean I was anti-social -- I had a whole lot of friends, I still do, as a matter of fact. I have a relatively active life, and anybody looking at my guestbook-diary -- usually people remark, when sometimes I say that I'm a lonesome old man, "You can't prove it by this." [Both laugh] They say, "You have more visitors than any two people." And of course, that's what happens. A lot of young people come and I'm working with them on projects. Like last night I was working on a slide-tape presentation this girl has to make relative to what you might call a study of the South End -- rather, a study of Columbus Avenue. So she was synchronizing slides with her tape. I have some equipment here.

ROBERT BROWN: You're really able to contribute to that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You went to the Children's Art Center here in the South End.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I went there when I was about 10 or 11 or 12. what happened then was, one of my teachers at the School -- her name was Miss Brady -- she got hold of my mother and said that "this boy has some talent, you ought to take him over to the Children's Art Center," which had just started up then. That's at 36 Rutland Street. It was started, I think, by a Mrs. Perkins, Elizabeth Ward [?] Perkins, and also a Mr. Charles Herbert Woodbury, who's a famous watercolorist

ROBERT BROWN: A very well-known painter.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, he was.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they the teachers?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they were more or less the founders, you might say, of the Art Center. Mr. Woodbury did have some few of us out to his studio, and we made some drawings from movies. It was of they were trying.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you'd sit in a movie and make drawings while it was on?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. They had what is called a daylight screen, I guess. They had movies of animals and things so we could make some drawings from that.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the intention of that, do you suppose?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE To sharpen our vision.

ROBERT BROWN: You had to work fast, didn't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE More or less, yes. I just vaguely remember that. But we used to make trips up to the Isabel Stewart/Jack Gardner palace. I remember going there. Of course, the collection they have there is just a blaze of color, the courtyard. I made several drawings. One of them was sent to Mrs. Gardner and she was rather pleased -- she was still alive at the time, this was before 1924 (I think she died that year). My mother tells me -- she came out with a group of children from the Art Center, and Mrs. Gardner saw her and asked her to come in and sit down and have a cup of tea with her, so she did. That's one of those little pleasant incidents -- sitting and having tea with this rather fabulous woman. My mother recalls that she seemed rather sad. I suppose Mrs. Gardner may have had her moments of sadness -- I think she lost her only child; she was incapable of children. And the palace was, I suppose, a kind of substitute, in a way. But, at any rate, it was my introduction to the place. And, as I said before, I just remember this blaze of glory, of color, of flowers and the streaming down in

the courtyard; and then of course the mysterious nooks and corners, with bits of Italian paintings and carvings . . .

ROBERT BROWN: You were saying you were struck by the color . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, that's what I remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Your mother had been taking you, at an even earlier age, to the Museum of Fine Arts too, is that right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I practically grew up in the place.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you'd go there like on a Saturday after school . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, Saturday and Sunday classes in drawing. Then, of course, I went there with my mother -- she took me there often in a baby carriage. All I just remember is the Museum was there, and I was there, and, as I said before, I practically grew up there.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were a little fellow with your mother, would you spend quite a lot of time there, do you think -- several hours?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I can't remember that . . .

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when you were a bit older, did you . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Then of course I went on my own. I went to the classes . . . they had children's classes.

ROBERT BROWN: Who taught those, do you remember?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Gosh, you're talking about, what, 50 years ago.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they pretty good classes?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You learned quite a lot?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I did. Then of course I went to the high school vocational art classes, which were held in the Museum. I remember some of my teachers there -- there was a Miss Labreck [phon. sp.], she was still alive; and then there was Miss Alice J. Morse [phon. sp.]; and quite a few others. I think Miss Morse was connected with the Museum school. Through the high school vocational art classes I did get a scholarship to the Museum school. It came at a kind of interesting time. I had been admitted to the Yale School of Art and so forth, which was rather surprised at my scholarship -- my marks in the college board exams were rather poor; they were very poor, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this . . . when? The Late 20's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, 1929.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you gone down to Yale to look it over?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, did the whole thing by correspondence. I got my letter of admission, by sending in my records and At that time I got a scholarship to the Museum school, so I voted to go to the Museum school. And it was rather lucky that I did, because if I'd gone down to Yale I'd have had a problem, because my dad took ill, and that sort of shock [Transcriber's note: New Englanders customarily call a "stroke" a "shock".], shock with cerebral hemorrhage -- a massive cerebral hemorrhage -- should have killed him but it didn't; it disabled him. So Mother and I had about 210 pounds of man to deal with for sever years. He died in '37. So I stayed at the Museum school on scholarships.

ROBERT BROWN: Because you'd had these Saturday classes, did you get to begin a little ahead of the people who came in green? At the Museum school?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Nobody came to the Museum school green.

ROBERT BROWN: Most of them had had some training?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. These people are screened to go into the school. Everybody who went to that school had some talent.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you required to do when you began there, do you remember? It was a long program, wasn't it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I remember some charcoal drawing of statues. Then after that we did some life drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you enjoy most?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [After some hesitancy] I liked the whole business. Of course, the charcoal drawing was a bit dreary, because I'd had several years of cast drawing before. Then of course it got into life drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy that -- you liked that more than the drawing from plaster casts?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, naturally, doing something which is living. I took two courses -- the course in Drawing & Painting, and also the course in Design. So I completed two courses at the school -- they're two separate things; I got a diploma in either course.

ROBERT BROWN: What did Design consist of, then?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Industrial design, fabrics, interiors

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of your fellow students at the school? Were there some of them that you've kept up with that stuck with art?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE As a matter of fact I haven't kept up with hardly any of them. There's only one person -- Ralph Rosenthal, who was at one time head of the art department in the school system in Boston, I believe. He just recently retired. Some of the others I haven't seen hardly at all. Edna Hibble: I hear about her but I haven't seen her. I think she has a gallery on Newbury Street. And there's a chap, Victor Mullo [phon. sp.], I used to see him every once in a while -- he was a guard at -- was it the Jack Gardner Palace, or the Museum?

ROBERT BROWN: He'd been a student at the art school?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Some of the others [He mentions 3 names, two unclear to attempt].

ROBERT BROWN: Were you fairly close to some of the teachers?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes and no. I mean, to some of the teachers I was. When I first went there, there was a chap named Philip Hale, he was head of the Painting department, and I think he was the son of Edward Everett Hale, the famous author. Philip Hale was quite a character.

ROBERT BROWN: In what way?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, he was sort of brusque; a rather kindly sort of person, but he was of the old academic school. Then when he joined his ancestors, we had a couple of teachers from the Slade School in London, I think a Mr. Guthrie, a Mr. Burns. They held forth in the painting dept. for about four years. After they left, we had a rather exciting person by the name of Alexander Yakovlev [phon. sp.]. He was an arts anthropologist. Russian-born. And this type of drawing was something like Botticelli, only just translated into modern terms. He had a great deal of virtuosity -- he could make a full-size life drawing in about a couple of hours. We would just stand around watching open-mouthed. He wandered all over the place -- he'd come back from these different expeditions: back from the Gobi Desert, or North Africa; and bring back portfolios of drawings of the Tuaregs and other peoples of North Africa or some of the people in Tibet or something like that. I think he was with the first Sitran [phon. sp.] motorcade across the Sahara; this was back in the 30's, of course. He died unexpectedly of cancer, on the operating table. He was a relatively young man then, probably in his 50's.

At any rate, I was there during his regime and I left during his regime. The experience was extraordinary. I had the experience of actually going to three different schools while still in the same building, and under three different regimes and three different disciplines. I think all the artists, all the students who had that particular experience did rather well for themselves.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean you feel it was very useful to have had this breadth of training and outlook?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The school itself was going through quite a few changes at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: How did the two men from England teach? What was their approach?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, they were very precise, and a great deal of detail. As far as color was concerned, there were sober, quiet colors, as I recall.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Yakovlev put the emphasis on drawing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, yes. His coloring was rather sober in many ways; he'd go in for more or less quiet colors, as I recall. But in his conte crayon drawings, they were very bold and very striking.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of things were you doing by the end of your time there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, making illustrations for spirituals -- black-and-white brush drawings. And then, of course, documentaries of black and white people, just as ordinary human beings. See, back there in the 30's, the concept of blacks was usually of somebody up in Harlem, or the sharecropper from the deep south, or what you might call the jazz Negro. There was a sort of Harlem Renaissance going on. But the ordinary person -- you might say middle-class -- you just didn't hear about them. So what I did in my drawings was just to try to do the life of people as I saw them round about me; in the streets, and a sort of neighborhood painting scenes. They turned out to be historic, because what I did, I painted these various streets which of course have vanished. A whole way of life has vanished. Now I find the paintings have considerable value as documents.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were, even then, attracting the attention of other artists, weren't you? And collectors? You mentioned that through the architect Walter Kellum [phon. sp.] you became involved with the Society of Independent Artists here in Boston.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you describe that a bit?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. There was this Society of Independent Artists. They had an annual, non-juried show, as a way of introducing newer talent to the art public. The exhibitions were of course uneven -- you had some sub-professional and some professional work. They had the exhibitions in a place called a bar on Joy/Joyce Street. Walter Kellum became interested in my work and, as a matter of fact, I worked up at his farm-estate for about a year or so, a lot of it in one summer.

ROBERT BROWN: In New Hampshire.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. In Tamworth. He suggested I join the Boston Society, so I did. I received a very favorable interview, rather, a review, of my work -- I think it was about 1929 or 30, no, it was later than that, around the 30's. It was a painting called "I'm Settling the World's Problems." That was reviewed by the distinguished art critic, Mr. Cochran [phon. sp.] of the Boston Transcript. Usually, when he introduced you to the art world, you had it made, as it were.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it in that painting that struck him? What was the painting about?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well it was just a group of people sitting in a park, Madison Park as a matter of fact, discussing the world's problems. The painting has been lost. I sold it during the Depression and I don't know where it is now. The only record I have of it is the newspaper clips of it. What I did recently is to take the newspaper clips and reconstruct the drawing and made it into an offset print on which I did some watercoloring. So I have what you might call an offset print/watercolor. That's on exhibit now at Government House exhibit now, from Jan. 14 through February 10.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know some other, perhaps slightly older artists, through the Society of Independent Artists?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I sort of ran into quite a few of them.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you become fairly friendly or close to some of them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not really. There were people whom I know -- I'm trying to remember their names. One person, I think, by the name of Pepper . . . ?

ROBERT BROWN: Charles Holly [?] Pepper? That would be a much older man.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE And then there was another artist named Hopkinson, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Charles Hopkinson?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Both have bought some of my things, as time went on. And the Grace Horn [?] Galleries became interested. As a matter of fact, they became my semi-patrons, in a way; I don't say handled my work. Back in those days, for an artist to be on Newbury Street, where the Grace Horn Galleries was, was unusual, and I think I was probably the only black artist who had any gallery working for him at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there many other black artists, though, at that time here?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Very, very few. As a matter of fact, the only professional black artist I can recall back in those days is a chap by the name of Romaine Lipman/Litman [sp?].

ROBERT BROWN: Being black, would that have been an impediment to your getting into these galleries? On Newbury Street, at that time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That I wouldn't know. I would assume that it might be. The only thing that I know is that the Grace Horn Galleries did have me, and that black artists are conspicuous by their absence. There just weren't very many of them. The situation was much different then than today -- today we have a plethora, you might say, of very talented black artists in the city. And, as a matter of fact, there's a good possibility that we might have a Boston Renaissance somewhat similar to the Harlem Renaissance, the difference being that the Harlem Renaissance was more supported by the government because that was during the WPA period. And it was more or less literary. And the Boston Renaissance, should it come, would be more in the graphic arts. And I think that Northeastern University with its artist-in-residence program, and they give them all that studio space up on Leon [?] Street, is one of the most exciting things that's happening.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work with Grace Horn at her gallery?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, I think Grace Horn herself had probably retired, but the gallery carried her name.

ROBERT BROWN: Who did you work with there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The person who ran the gallery was named, I think, Margaret Brown. She's gone to her reward.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, who later had her own gallery. Do you recall her, or the other people? Would they come to your studio to look and see what you had done? Or did you take things over there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I took things over to the Grace Horn Gallery. Now, this Margaret Brown I refer to is not the Margaret Brown the painter

ROBERT BROWN: I know. The gallery-owner.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE There's another person by the name of Rideout [sp?], and one other person's name I can't recall. All of them have gone to their reward.

ROBERT BROWN: You submitted things to that gallery over a number of years.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. They gave me several one-man shows. These are the neighborhood paintings. One of them was sold. I didn't sell very many things. During the same period, I put out a couple of books . . . I made the drawings for the books which were later published by Harvard University Press. That took place 1944 and '48.

ROBERT BROWN: Your drawings . . . from spirituals were done in the 1930's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they published . . . were they done . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. You see, the drawings of the spirituals were done in '36, in the '30's. They weren't published until the '40's. It was quite a formative period, I guess. I was going through several changes.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean changes in your style, or in the . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Outlook, I guess. I went through what you might call a Catholic revival. You'd understand that if one would look into the history of the Anglican Church. You note there was a period of Catholic Revival that took place in the 1830's. In a sense I went through a similar kind of experience. I was a "low churchman" and of course I became a "high churchman." I don't like the terms, but anyway, I guess that's the best way of describing it.

ROBERT BROWN: Why? You find the terms are kind of meaningless?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They're meaningless today.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this mean that you became much more devout, or much more concerned with liturgy?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I became much more interested in liturgy. It was very useful, because it gave me a

framework of discipline within which to do my work. So I used that, for example, as the frame of discipline to illustrate the spirituals, by making use of the liturgy, the vestments, and everything like that -- using the vestments and appurtenances as, you might say, a vocabulary.

ROBERT BROWN: You wrote about that -- those illustrated spirituals -- in 1938. You said you did them to express a sense of an absolute faith in God "which made it possible for my people to worship," and so forth -- to carry on their life. You feel that the spirituals did that, or had done that, at least?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. You see, spirituals are a form of oral tradition. And so it enables people to know something about the Bible, folks who didn't have the opportunity to learn how to read. And then the other things, of course, about the spirituals is that they were used sort of like a code. If was going to escape, or something like that, you'd use the spirituals in that way. The River Jordan might be the Ohio River, something like that. There were several purposes. And then of course the music was an idea of fighting against the impersonality of slavery, or rather the de-personalization in an institution such as slavery. We could use the spirit of the spiritual today, because this age of technology that we have is non-human in many ways. We need to have something to express our humanity. The message of the spirituals was really just that, so it goes beyond an incident in history which we call "slavery," as far as this country is concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: Were your parents interested in spirituals, things of that sort? Was this a product of your own study, or was it naturally around you in church or in jazz forms? Or course, you differ, I think - - you've said that jazz is not spirituals . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they're not. The resemblance between the two is the element of syncopation that one might get. But the spirituals served a definite purpose. As far as their being in the church is concerned, of course you don't get spirituals in the Anglican Church. You get that more in some of the evangelical churches.

ROBERT BROWN: You're familiar with them, too? You'd go to them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, occasionally. I never heard the spirituals in a real setting. They used to have these huge camp meeting grounds in a place called Darby, in the outskirts of Philadelphia. These camp meetings were huge affairs -- you'd get a choir of about a thousand people singing these spirituals. This was back around the turn of the century.

ROBERT BROWN: This was when your mother was growing up down there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. These people, of course, a lot of them had had the experience of slavery -- this was around 1910. People around 70 or 80 would have had that experience. So, therefore, the way they sang was much different than today. When you have a choir of about a thousand people singing these, you get a much different impression than you do today on a concert stage of something else that is more or less "devised," you might say.

ROBERT BROWN: Through the '30's now, -- I know in the '40's you began a long term of employment with the Navy. Before that, how were you supporting yourself? You were living with your mother?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. My mother had work. Dad was knocked out, of course. She had work. And, of course, I supported my schooling mostly on scholarships. My mother was criticized by a lot of people who'd say, "I'd take that boy out of school and put him to work." On a short-term basis, of course, they were correct. On a long-term basis, they couldn't be more wrong. I've earned my living by drawing, though I haven't earned my living as an artist in the limited sense, QUOTE/UNQUOTE. But I've earned my living by drawing. As an illustrator in the Navy Dept., of course, I had to use all the skills that I had learned in school.

ROBERT BROWN: In the '30's, after you were out of school, did you work somewhere for those few years?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, I tried getting some work -- this was around '36, '37

ROBERT BROWN: The Depression was still bad.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. But by that time the war in Europe had started. They were getting into war work here. So I went into Civil Service, in the Navy. First I was of course at the Geodetic Survey. Then they transferred to Washington and I was transferred to the Navy Yard and stayed there for the duration.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of work did you do there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE First, I started as a draftsman. So I did a great deal of that. Then, as time went on, the engineers found out I could draw so they had me drawing. So if they got ideas of propulsion systems or anything like that, they'd come to me to make a perspective drawing. So I had to be well-acquainted with machinery and everything like that. They kept me busy doing that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that pretty interesting?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. It made me feel less schizophrenic [laughing] and I was the only person in the department that could do it. I could pretty well call my own shots. It was helpful. I looked upon my work in the Navy Dept. as a means towards an end of promoting myself as an artist. It gave me a more secure financial basis, in a way. It really helped me a great deal.

ROBERT BROWN: You still had plenty of energy after you were through work to do your own . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, yes. I lived a relatively disciplined life, I guess, in that way. Then, of course, I was busy with lectures on liturgical art. They would give me time off to go off and do these various things for the church and stuff like that.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you become a lecturer on liturgical art? Was this because of your interest in liturgy?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I am a liturgical artist.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the Episcopal Church ask you to lecture? How did this come about?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I'd give talks in different parishes. They'd have exhibitions in the parishes and schools. There was a strong movement towards liturgical art in both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, so I was tied up in that through Mrs. Perkinson [?], who was a Roman Catholic. So I came into contact with such people as and people like that. And back in those days, the . . . They were more or less interested in the English school of artists who were interested in liturgical art -- Eric Gill, people like that. So I was right in the middle of all that. We had a sort of liturgical art store

ROBERT BROWN: Here in Boston?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I think it was the St. Botolph group to start off. I was very much involved in all of this. Then I became acquainted with Bryan Bush [?]. Then with McGinnis & Walsh

ROBERT BROWN: Some of the big decorating and architectural, liturgical and ecclesiastical How did you . . . ? You began working in New York City for Arambush (Ambush [?]) Decorating Company. How did that come about? Did they contact you, or did they see examples of your work?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, they contacted me. It came at a rather fortunate time because I was laid off at the Navy Yard . . . it was just at the close of the War and there was a great reduction-in-force. So Arambush had me come down there. I worked in New York for about 14 months. Then, when I got through there, then the Navy called me back.

ROBERT BROWN: So you always had this cushion. Had you worked for companies -- for architectural firms before this? Was this a new experience?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it was a new experience.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you go about it? Would you consult a lot regularly with people at Arambush?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I worked right in the company. For example, they'd get these commissions -- I did this mural decoration for St. Augustine's Church in Brooklyn

[TAPE APPEARS TO STOP, THEN RESUME]

ROBERT BROWN: Back to the work with Arambush Decorating Co., had you done . . . ? This was a very large mural, about 345 feet square, that you did for St. Augustine's Church in Brooklyn. Had you done mural work before?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I hadn't. [Laughing] And I was scared to death when I did this one.

ROBERT BROWN: That's an immense project.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it is. The largest thing I ever did -- the largest single thing I ever did. That Church was destroyed by fire in 1972.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you set about it? Did you have the benefit of skilled workmen from the Company to assist you in . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, they gave me advice. I made several sketches and these were shown to the client.

After that, I made scale drawings, and then I made a full-scale cartoon right in the office itself. Then they built a scaffolding at the Church, and then I went to work on the painting itself. I had to do the work all by myself. It took me about 38 days, actually, to do with painting -- adding all the times together. The total job probably took me about 80 days -- the research, preliminary sketches, and so forth. I did have a background, of course, of information because of all the classical studies and everything else that I had done in school, museums, etc. That wasn't a problem. I did a little bit of research on St. Augustine himself, getting points of his life, and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find him an appealing subject?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Challenging. After all, making a painting of a man 21 feet high is rather challenging. That was not the only thing I did with Arambush, however. Another thing I did was a ceiling, a baldocchino ceiling for the Franciscan Monastery in Washington, D.C.

ROBERT BROWN: A baldocchino ceiling? Painted on canvas?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no. I made up a design, and then the design was executed in cooper wire and then painted. So the person looking up at the ceiling from the altar would get the impression of cloisonné enamel. The pillars were designed and executed by a fellow named Gleb Derujinsky. The Monastery is something of a shrine in Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work with Derujinsky?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like to work with?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Very friendly. I judge from his name he was Russian. He was a very friendly sort of person. The staff at Arambush, they were all skilled craftsmen. There was a sort of no-nonsense kind of business about it, and you really had to know your business. He didn't know it, and [Laughing] they knew it and they let him know it. The mural dept. is headed up by a German, I've forgotten his name. He really gave me a very rough time.

ROBERT BROWN: Why? He didn't think you were skilled enough?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's the feeling I had. He sort of made me feel my place, [He laughs] in a sense. I was rather awed, in a way, because I was surrounded by all these highly skilled and developed people. I think most of them were Europeans. With that type of people you really have to know your business. They don't take anything less than excellence. It was very good training. I couldn't wish for anything better. It was rough going through it, but I look back at it with a bit of nostalgia in many ways.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you did a project, also for them, in Detroit. Was that another mural?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it was. I was back in the Navy Dept. when I did that. I took about a couple of weeks off - rather, took one week off. The first week I spent at home to get acquainted with the medium -- it was casein color. I made full-scale drawings. Then I flew out to Detroit and closeted myself in this particular chapel of the Oblate Order of the sisters of Providence. And I made these 14 stations paintings in less than a week. It was a very enjoyable experience -- it was something like a Retreat for me. The Sisters said their offices in English, and there is a sufficient amount of relation between the Anglican and the Roman so that I could more or less get the feeling of it. Every morning I went to Mass at the parish church, the Catholic parish church. Then I went directly from there to the convent. So it was practically a week's Retreat for me. And also I did a set of Stations in metal for Chapel in Washington. Then, also, the farmed another job to me -- stained glass for an Order, I think it's the Holy Family, in New Orleans, a Novitiate and a Mother House of a particular order. I did the work here in Boston, as far as that chapel was concerned. And the Stations -- I did that work in Boston. That was something which the people farmed out to me. Probably, if I'd lived a little closer -- I was living in New Haven or somewhere like that - they'd have sent more work out to me, but living in Boston it was just a little bit too far away.

ROBERT BROWN: In the 1940's, you had begun publication . . . I think they were mostly based on spirituals or the liturgy, weren't they? "Were You There?" published by Harvard in 1944, and then in 1948 they published something called "Three Spirituals."

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And then the, I think, Hyde Episcopal Society of St. John the Evangelist, 1948, published "All Glory."

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Which reminds me, I'm supposed to send out 25 [?] copies of that book. somebody in Hartford; I just got a little letter reminding me.

ROBERT BROWN: These consisted of illustrations of spirituals or portions of the liturgical service . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, those are two separate things altogether.

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't we take them in order?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE What I do with the spirituals is just take a hymn and break it down in its different phrases and just illustrate each phrase. In other words, I just tell the story of the words through pictures. In the book for the Society of St. John the Evangelist, I just took the Prayer of Consecration that we follow in the Anglican service, or mass, whatever, and illustrated that. I think it took about 20 drawings to do it. [Laughing] It took quite a bit of doing because it's one thing to go to mass and hear the prayer day in and day out, but then to sit down to visualize it -- that takes something else. One of the people at Harvard, Professor Kenneth Conant (no relation to the president) was an interesting person. He was a member of the Orthodox Church, I guess Greek Orthodox. Anyhow, he was interested in my work and he introduced me to Mr. Scaife [sp?], who was the editor of Harvard Press and the father, I believe of Bishop Scaife, of New York, I think, I can't remember offhand -- he's retired now anyhow but still with us. Conant suggested I illustrate the Prayer of Consecration. I did, and the drawings which I did are what you might call first-draft drawings. I intended to do the series over again, refining the drawings; I never did. [Laughing] It probably was just as well because the drawings have a certain amount of freshness and spontaneity, I imagine, that the first-draft thing would have.

ROBERT BROWN: Conant said, "We'll take them as is?"

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. He said he would talk to the Society of St. John the Evangelist. And they got them published, I think it was by Shea [?] Brothers. They were fairly successful.

ROBERT BROWN: This was work that you thought was quite important to do?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Of course, I think the work I do is important for me. [Laughing] It was just another phase of my work.

ROBERT BROWN: Although you have had, now, these commissions for this sort of thing, and also the work with Rambush [?], by and large even those things, the commissions, have been in areas that are of great interest to you, aren't they?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You've been fortunate in that way, haven't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I guess so, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You continued this work in the 50's when you did . . . I think by 1955 you got a multilith press which brought you into doing large and cheaply and expeditiously editions of your prints. Is that correct?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. What I did then, I started making bulletins for the church. When I first started, I used -- I can't think of the chap's name now -- he was a master printer and worked on a multilith press. So, at first I'd make up the drawings and he'd run them off on his press. Later on, I was able to use a small press at the St. John's Church, which was a Model 80, and we ran off the bulletins there. Then I was able to acquire my own press, a 1250, the machine that I have now. So that enabled me to do my own printing. A friend of mine thought that I should have my own equipment. I was wondering, "Gee, where in the world can I get it?" Even a factory-built press back in the 50's cost in the neighborhood of \$1,900. What happened was that the Jesuits [?] were changing their 1250 for something else, so we picked it up on a trade-in, and I got it for less than \$500. That was really a lucky break. It's an old machine -- as a matter of fact, it had D.C. motors when I picked it up, so I had A.C. motors put in, and so forth. And even today, when servicemen come to work on the machine, they say, "Boy, this is an old-timer. You hang on to it!"

ROBERT BROWN: Had you done much printing before that? Making your own prints?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. I did some work on a mimeo graph machine, but the only printing I'd done prior to that was of linoleum blocks; which I still do. The offset press is, of course, lithography. So fairly recently I've been doing these sort of documentaries on the offset press, because we're making these in limited editions.

ROBERT BROWN: That's this press you got in 1955?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find it, as opposed to, say, linoleum block or woodcut or something that you'd done earlier, that this multilith was a much freer medium? You can sort of draw?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it is a freer medium for me to use, so it's just another medium, it just enlarges me . . .

ROBERT BROWN: And you enjoy them all?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And you enjoy the more laborious as well as the less laborious?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Each has its own particular area of discipline. So one is not a substitute for another, it's just another addition to my arsenal, you might say.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think . . . is there a certain subject matter you prefer to do in lithograph as opposed to linoleum block, or painting?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE With linoleum block I do the ecclesiastical things; it fits more or less in that. I did do one or two secular things in linoleum but for me it isn't that type of medium. When I used linoleum, I used to think in terms of doing liturgical themes. With the multilith press, of course, I do liturgical things -- I've been doing these church bulletins -- but then I do other things -- secular things, etc. I've been going out into the streets and making drawings using the plate as a drawing pad, so I can make my drawings right on the spot. I did a whole series of things in the South End, and I've been doing some things down in "the combat zone" [where prostitutes openly pick up customers] which I've found a very interesting area in many ways, and I've done quite a few sketches down there. I can take this thing all around with me and make my drawings right on the spot. Then I come back and work on my drawings a lot more, for my press. I could run off about two or three thousand but of that type of drawing I purposely limit an edition to about 30 or 40 prints. Of course, with the church bulletins, I run off an average of 1,200 or so per Sunday, because I'm serving several parishes. About three here, one in Oregon, a couple out in Michigan, one in Washington, D.C. Sometimes I serve more, sometimes less.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you find that the linoleum block, or the woodcut, is a more rigid form, isn't it? Do you find that it lends itself to more abstract liturgical or ecclesiastical art than does the lithograph?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I suppose so.

ROBERT BROWN: I don't know whether I mean to say abstract -- it's more simplified. I can see your wood blocks are much more simplified than are your lithographs.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, it would have to be, because that's the nature of the material. Now, there's one thing: I've only done a few woodcuts, very few, but I've done quite a few linoleums. They look alike in many ways, as one looks at them . . .

ROBERT BROWN: They do look very much alike.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE . . . the techniques are similar. The only difference is that linoleum is a little bit softer than wood, and I like it because I can work faster.

ROBERT BROWN: Have you always worked fairly fast?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's what people seem to say. I do work quickly-- if you're making drawings out in the street, you do have to work rather quickly. Even when I make my watercolors and drawings outside, I work very quickly. I wasn't too aware of this until fairly recently. I'd been doing some life drawings here at the house -- this has been a recent development; I've always done life drawings, for a long period, but from 1944 to '77 I didn't do any, because there wasn't any opportunity unless I went to an art school. But now I've been able to have some of my friends come pose for me here at the house, different girls. I make life drawings of myself as far as male models are concerned. But they impressed me with the fact that I work so quickly. [Laughing] It never occurred to me to even think about it. The average drawing that I make of the girls would probably take about 20 minutes or something like that. If I make a portrait study, that might take a little longer. But it's very quick.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think this goes back to the way you were trained at the museum school? Or do you think it's to your own credit -- that you always had a facility with drawing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well . . .

ROBERT BROWN: Because you did have to do a lot of quick sketches and memory sketches at the museum school, no doubt.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I probably did. But the thing is, at the museum school they didn't stress speed. That was just something that was part of my own makeup. I've known some other artists who worked exactly the

opposite -- they take a long time to develop their themes, etc. It just so happens that in my particular case I can work rather quickly, but that would have nothing to do with the training in school.

ROBERT BROWN: Although they did have that type of drawing, didn't they? In the life class there? It wasn't, probably, stressed -- the main emphasis was on a very finished

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. That's the way it was in the days when I went to school. We did have one person who did some line drawings -- what are called "construction drawings," trying to express as much as you could with as few lines as possible. There was a great deal of that.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd done, as a young boy, some stick drawings, I believe, that caught the attention of . . . there are some at the Addison Gallery in Andover.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. They're sort of stick-men drawings. The interesting thing about the drawings -- about my drawing in general -- is how little change there is in one sense. The compositions that I did at the age of 10 or 12, basically it's the same thing today. Of course, I've developed, but I mean there's a great deal of

ROBERT BROWN: What was there that you wanted to achieve by your compositions that seems to have stuck with you? Do you notice some kind of emphasis, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't know. It's probably just something like handwriting. It's a certain style, I guess -- the way I massed my figures, the way I arranged things when I was a child, and still do.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

ROBERT BROWN: This is the second interview with Alan Crite, in Boston, Massachusetts, March 1, 1979, Robert Brown the interviewer.

ROBERT BROWN: We're looking right now at some childhood work, I think, beginning in the early 1920's. You were, I think, working on your own, weren't you? And to some extent, then, you were going to the Children's Art Center in the South End. Why don't we talk about this first one, which is a drawing colored with color pencil, I think. It's like a street scene

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It is. I think I wrote on it -- it's from Brookline Street on Shawmut Avenue to 395 Shawmut Avenue, "Winter Scene in November 1930" and I signed my name "Alan Crite." In this drawing is the South End Branch of the Boston Public Library. My house is at 401 Shawmut Avenue. All of this is written down.

ROBERT BROWN: You show the building, but there are no figures in it or, if there are, they are very minuscule. What were you, about 10 years old there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You're interested in the buildings, their rooflines, I notice. This is viewed head-on. You're interested in the profile of the roofs, the openings, and any elaborate decoration around the entrances.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I stood across the street and made this drawing. The church is in the center here, or sort of right center; and that was the South End Branch of the Library. There used to be an Armenian church -- I think originally it was a Congregational church. This church and the two buildings on both sides form almost an architectural unit.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think you were aware of that as a 10-year-old, when you drew it? A very pleasing . . . you liked the buildings?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. [Laughing] Well, I lived there. You see, I lived at 401 Shawmut Ave. and I also practically lived in the Library, right next door. So it meant a great deal to me, a part of my formative period, you might say.

ROBERT BROWN: I suppose it isn't possible to recall at this date, but what was your intention by this drawing? To show your parents? to make an accurate record of something around you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I just wanted to make the drawing. I liked to draw, so I liked to draw things round about me. So, it was a record

ROBERT BROWN: But you had a sheer delight in drawing.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I enjoyed doing it. It was a way of telling a story and so forth. This drawing was lost -- I came across it two or three years ago. It was a bit of a shock, in a way, to see it, because I'd forgotten I'd ever made the drawing. So it gave me a very vivid picture of that particular period in my life. Because, today, 401 Shawmut Avenue still exists, but the church, and 395 have been destroyed. The building on the left still exists. So I only have this drawing to give me some idea of an early scene of my childhood.

ROBERT BROWN: This next one is, similarly, pencil, colored in, and it's another streetscape but much more complex. We're looking through end buildings down the backs of streets -- alleyways, I suppose. And, again, was your intention here more or less the same? This is a very familiar or local neighborhood?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. You see, what I did here, I just crossed the street and I turned around and I looked at this open lot, which was right off 401 Shawmut Avenue. This building on the right-hand side, the back view of it, that used to be a convent. Then you have this open lot here. I think at one time there was a fire station which of course wasn't in existence when I made this particular drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: The neighborhood generally, though, was very built-up, was it? A lot such as you're looking at here in the foreground was the exception, was it? A vacant lot?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you like this environment?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Oh sure, I lived there.

ROBERT BROWN: As a child, it was a pleasant place?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, in the wintertime . . . this happened to be a winter scene, I think I called it "winter scene opposite 401 Shawmut Avenue, snowing, Nov. 21, 1920" -- I'm glad I wrote down these dates. [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: You were very concerned even then about being precise about . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not as much as I should [Laughs] but occasionally I did.

ROBERT BROWN: The colors here are quite bright -- yellows, greens, the red of the brick.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I tried an experiment: I used both of these drawings as the base for making a reconstruction of the area.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean recently you did this?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Just sort of as a recollection of my childhood. It was a strange experience, because I felt as though I was going back -- you see, this is 1978, and it's going back almost half a century, or more than that, recalling all the things which took place. There's a little bit of the elevated over here on the right-hand side; you can just make that out. Of course, as I look at this drawing, I think of horse carriages, and the Holy Cross Cathedral is right nearby. And I think the Prince and Princess of Belgium came and heard Mass at the Cathedral. I think it was celebrated by Cardinal O'Connell. It was a big "do," in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: Some of the vivid memories. The next thing you have here says, "To Dad from Alan, Christmas 1921." It looks like a medieval page or person blowing a trumpet with a banner on it. How did you get this idea?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It's a copy.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do a lot of copying from illustrations in books and magazines?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I did that because it's good training. I made up this book for Dad -- I have the rest of the book in my hand. As a matter of fact, I made up two books. One was birds and animals, and the other was, I guess, general things. The birds and animals book was partially destroyed but the drawings are preserved and are now in the possession of the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Art in Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you doing this for your dad because you wanted him to know what you were doing? Did he encourage you to do this? He was an engineer . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, he was an engineer?

ROBERT BROWN: Was he interested in your doing this art work? You were now an 11-year-old boy . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, he thought I was pretty clever. He was interested. He had one experience with me, though. I made a drawing of an automobile and I didn't show any spokes in the wheels of the car, so he thought he'd help me out and put in the spokes in the wheels. And I looked at him rather reproachfully I said, "Dad, what did you stop my car for?" [Both laugh] And he said that finished him as far as

ROBERT BROWN: Ha ha! Whereas he, as an engineer, was intent on showing every little part that he knew to be in the thing, whereas you were more interested in what it looked like when

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It was in motion.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was sympathetic to you and your work.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE To a degree. Later on, when I got into high school, he didn't have quite an understanding of it. But when I got into the museum school, he commenced to see what I was doing. But he did have a problem -- as an engineer, being a practical person; because he shared the attitude that a lot of people have: Can you make a living at it?

ROBERT BROWN: The next thing we're looking at is a pencil drawing, an extraordinary one. It says "Mrs. John Gardner's Court from memory." A drawing of her Fenway Court, at that time still her house -- she died in 1924 -- and now a museum. Comment on this.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was at the Children's Art Center -- I have another sketch here of the Children's Art Center where I went from about eight to when I was 14 or so, maybe a little later. And so we used to have groups of people growing up from the Art Center to the Gardner palace. So I went there and it made quite an impression -- the color and so on, and I made these memory sketches, of which this is one. And one was sent to Mrs. Gardner, and the report was that she was rather pleased with it. There's a little footnote I suppose I could mention here. My mother went with us -- I think several parents went with the group of us children up to the palace -- and Mrs. Gardner saw my mother and she motioned for her to come in, and so my mother sat down and had tea with this frail little woman. It was quite an experience for my mother. And the impression she had of her was that Mrs. Gardner seemed to be so sad. This was about 1922 or 1923, something like that. I don't know whether her friend Sargent was still alive at the time or not, but I know they were very friendly.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this kind of give a grim feeling to your mother about the place?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, no. She was very much impressed with the color and the beauty of the place. She was also impressed with the graciousness of Mrs. Gardner in having her to tea.

ROBERT BROWN: You seem to have been impressed as a child in this drawing with details of various pieces of sculpture and architecture and all. Is that an accurate assessment? Were you interested in the details?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE From the looks of this drawing, I would say yes. It's pretty good -- I mean, so far as memory is concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: A similar thing is borne out in your drawing, pencil drawing, of the Children's Art Center, and also this part of the old Back Bay Railroad Station, where you show the various architectural parts.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, at the Art Center, who did you work with there? Were there regular teachers?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Any artists involved there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Curators were there - I think one was a Miss Bramhall [sp?], another was a Miss Matlack

ROBERT BROWN: Where were they curators from?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They were curators of the museum. You see, the Children's Art Center was a fine arts museum for children. It was founded, you might say, by Mrs. Elizabeth Ward Perkins.

ROBERT BROWN: Was her friend, the painter, Charles Woodbury . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, he was very much involved. They were very much interested in my work. A group of us children -- if I can remember, I think there was Kohler [?], and there was a Maurice Kaplan in that group -- and we made some drawings of animals for motion pictures. This was an experimental kind of thing. I think we tried

that out at Mrs. Perkins' home in Jamaica Plain. So I was practically a charter member of this art center. At the moment of this recording, we're preparing an exhibition of three of us at the art center -- three alumni, you might say. Not the three that I just mentioned; of other people.

ROBERT BROWN: Would Woodbury come around and give some instruction once in a while? Because he was a fine watercolorist.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I think that happened in that particular case -- we went out to Mrs. Perkins' home and made up these drawings. He was the guiding spirit, you might say, behind the arts. I don't recall him going to the art center itself.

ROBERT BROWN: This is looking back . . . you've been told that, and you realize that he was.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of teaching did you have there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE We had a group of teachers that came in, our teachers, who would give us ideas about drawing and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: What was their approach -- can you recall?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE This was a museum, as I mentioned before. So we had bits of sculpture -- we had some animal sculptures by Baer/Behr, I think it was, and some other very fine bits and pieces. And then, of course, there were the changing exhibitions, works of various artists, partly from the Newbury Street galleries, or from museums, etc. So we children had good professional examples to look at all the time.

ROBERT BROWN: First-class things were brought to you.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And then would you be set to drawing from them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, we'd make drawings from that. Then we'd make imaginary drawings. And all kinds of things -- like, for example, this sketch here of the art center -- I probably sat out in the garden to make this particular drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: That wouldn't be a typical drawing you made at the art center, would it? More typical would be a drawing from a painting or from a piece of sculpture?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. This would be typical, as far as I'm concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: You were fairly well left to do what you wanted to do. This was a voluntary thing. It was after school hours?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, yes. But it was directed. We were given instructions as far as drawing and things like that were concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they like? Can you recall how they instructed you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, in drawing statues, you had to correct your proportions and stuff like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that interesting?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Some people describe that type of copying -- drawing from a statue or a cast -- as kind of tedious. I suppose that, as a small child, you were pretty curious, weren't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, I had the same kind of thing at the Museum. They had children's classes at the Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: At about the same time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Like, Saturday drawing class; and I think they had some Sunday drawing classes. I think there still is a children's program at the Museum even today.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, there is. You've mentioned to me that one teacher you remember was a Miss LeBreck

[phon. sp.].

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. She's still alive. She's well along in years and not in the best of health. She was more or less my high school teacher, I mean during the high school period. Also, there was a Miss Brady, who was a teacher in the seventh grade at the Rice [?] School. She was the one who called my mother and said, "This boy knows how to draw; why don't you send him over to the Children's Art Center?" which had just opened.

ROBERT BROWN: This was the Rice Grammar School?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So Miss Brady was the one who saw this talent. Were you probably drawing an awful lot of the time? Like in school, if you had a little spare time, you'd be possibly making a drawing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Then of course in the art classes, I was the star of the place. [Laughs] So Miss Brady was very much impressed. One of the important things about grammar school teachers or primary school teachers -- they're extremely important, I think; these early grades are extremely important. It's through these early grades that the child is introduced into the world in which he's going to live for the rest of his or her life. What kind of introduction he or she has will probably determine a great deal of what's going to happen to him. To make a point of that: when I first started in at public school, we went up to a school in Roxbury, because we lived up at 689 Shawmut Avenue at that time, one of the few times I lived in the Roxbury area. We went to the Lafayette School. I was a rather taciturn individual, so the teacher there thought I was slightly retarded. She wanted to put me in a speech class, so she had me in there -- in the kind of class that today we call for "special children," I guess. [Laughs] My mother wasn't too happy with that but there wasn't too much she could do about that because we lived in that district, and you had to go to school in your district. Then we moved down to 401 Shawmut Avenue and I went to the George Bancroft and Rice Schools. The teacher there, Miss Brady, said "This boy knows how to draw" and she called my mother and suggested I go to the children's Art Center. So there are two instances -- if I'd stayed at the Lafayette School, I probably never would have known anything about drawing and I probably would have had some problems, as being in that teacher's eyes sort of mentally retarded -- not hopelessly so, but

ROBERT BROWN: Inside, were you not very interested in most subjects in school?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I had, I guess, normal interest. But anyhow, what impressed this particular teacher was my lack of talking . I guess I've sort of remedied that particular deficiency, since then.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe you were just shy.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't know what it was. Even at home during those early years some of the other people - - not my parents -- would get after me and say, "Boy, why don't you talk?" And I'd say, "I don't want to." [Both laugh} Of course I can't remember that, but that's what they've told me.

ROBERT BROWN: You spent a lot of time to yourself in those years . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I guess so, because you see I was the only child that lived. If all of us had been alive, there would have been four of us. But I was an only child and I presume that would have some effect.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your mother around, though, quite a lot?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I was very close to her, I suppose. I was born on March 20, 1910, and I was a premature baby. As a matter of fact, all of us were premature. With today's science, probably my sister would be alive today. I think she struggled along for a few months before she succumbed. According to "rules and regulations," I shouldn't be alive either but nobody told me that and I didn't know that at the time. [Both laugh heartily] I weighed less than three pounds when I was born. I was about a month early. Then for a long while it was touch and go as to whether I'd make it or not. My mother tells me that what she had to do each night was fasten me onto a kind of ironing board thing, fasten my legs down on this particular board, to keep my bones straight. If she hadn't done that, I probably would have been a cripple. It wasn't until I was around five that they were sure I was going to make it.

ROBERT BROWN: Even a little later than these times you're talking about, were you a little frailer than your contemporaries?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I guess so (hesitatingly). I suppose. But in a picture of me when I was six, I look healthy enough there. (RB agrees) But that doesn't give any idea of the struggle I had to bring me up to that particular stage. And I've enjoyed reasonably good health up to now.

ROBERT BROWN: We're looking, here, at something that's delightful -- it's the struggle of two dinosaurs, much

bigger than little tiny humans down on the ground who are shooting at them. [He laughs] This is no doubt from imagination. What source is there for this? Could you go into this a bit? You've done a number of things like this.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, there was a movie that came out called "The Lost World" and I think one of the chief characters in it was a chap called Wallace Beery, of the famous Beery brothers -- there was Noah, and Wallace. It was a sort of science-fiction thing. The story was about this plateau in Patagonia, down in South America, upon which the dinosaurs still exist. A group of England went down to visit and had all kinds of adventures on this plateau dodging pterodactyls, brontosauri and tyrannosauri and all the other various denizens of what you might call the Jurassic Period. There was a caveman mixed in there, too -- how he got mixed into this particular deal I don't know, but he was there, too. [Both laugh] So that made quite an impression and I made a few drawings of these creatures. This particular sketch of these oversized pterodactyls, a pen drawing

ROBERT BROWN: An example of that.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you frightened by it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no

ROBERT BROWN: Did you wish you lived in a place like that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, I found it fascinating, an adventure -- sort of like this space stuff we have today.

ROBERT BROWN: How old were you, when you did this?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, say around 12, 13 or 14.

ROBERT BROWN: The line seems much surer than in the earlier drawings. There's a feeling of one animal biting another, and the little human figures moving around in different postures. You seem much more sure of your composition and drawing. This is after you'd had a couple of years at the Children's Art Center?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Here's another streetscape. South End, no doubt.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But it's in perspective. And again I'd say the drawing . . . what was it? Charcoal?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, it's pencil, rather soft pencil.

ROBERT BROWN: The drawing seems a little surer. It's more of an impressionistic effect, as compared with those very early ones we looked at.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, the period is almost the same. I'd say I was around 12 or 13. And this is a view of Warren Avenue. It shows the Old English High School. It's a drawing that I could probably use as a basis for a reconstruction. It shows how they tore down trees in those days. The tree was sawed through, then a chain was attached to it, and then a team of horses would apply pressure to bring down the tree. That's what this shows, here.

ROBERT BROWN: This was something you saw?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You sketched while they were doing it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I probably did. I may have drawn it right on the spot. If not, then shortly thereafter, while the memory was still fresh. I sort of search for these drawings, now, because they do show bits and pieces of the life of that particular period. I'm sufficiently removed from it now so that it is a sort of historic moment. There's a car that looks like a model T Ford in the background.

ROBERT BROWN: This next one coming up is a pen-and-watercolor drawing of a circus -- the elephants, one wagon and the tents. This, no doubt, as for many children, was a very vivid thing.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. In those days they used to have real circus parades. Then, the tents and things were thrown off at a place where Northeastern University is today. Ringling Brothers & Barnum & Bailey, and also Sells-Floto would come. That's one of the few times when Dad and I would go around together. I remember he

and I used to go to the lot there and watch them put up the tents and all that sort of activity. It was interesting to see the animals and get the smell of sawdust and the whole bit.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do quite a few sketches of the circus?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Apparently I did. I only have one or two here.

ROBERT BROWN: You say this was one of the few times when you went around with your father. In general . . . well, he was busy working, for one thing.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I didn't have too much association with him, in one sense. Of course he was home every day, naturally. But, as a companion, like man-to-man kind of business, he was somewhat distant. He was considerably older than my mother. Age-wise, there were almost three generations. Dad was 35 when he married my mother, and she was 18.

ROBERT BROWN: So by this time, what is he? About 50 or so? Or approaching that age?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Somewhat dubiously] Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In contrast, to your mother you were quite close, you said. Maybe one last thing we could look at here, you've got here a watercolor by your mother herself.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she paint and draw quite a lot, as well, during your childhood?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE She did a little drawing. As I look at her work today, she did have the ability on her own to be an artist in her own right. Of course, she was never trained. She used to write poetry. Nothing that was published -- maybe one or two things that would get into a newspaper, something like that. She could write. And she had the basic ability to draw.

ROBERT BROWN: I think her color here is quite fine, too. A ship at sea, with an Indian on the beach. The waves, and the cloud effects in the sky are

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It's called "Lonesome Pine." There's a lone pine tree up there, growing in the rocks.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this have an effect on you? Your seeing her write poems? You liked to write, a lot. And your seeing her do some painting once in a while?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE As a matter of fact, her writing was probably the beginning of my drawing. When she started to write, I'd see her pick up a pen, and of course I'd want to write, too. So she started me off on drawing just to keep me quiet, I guess. That's how it came about.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? [Laughing] At least, you could, even as a small child, do that with your pen, couldn't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. [RB laughs heartily]

[END OF THIS INTERVIEW]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE

JUNE 29, 1979

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: Today we're going to begin inching our way through your work, discussing what phases of your career it represents. I thought we'd begin in the very beginning. After your youthful work, you were at the Massachusetts College of Art for at least a brief time, in 1930. Could you discuss that a bit?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was at the Mass. College of Art, I think, for one semester, and I think I went at night. If I remember correctly (that was a long time ago), I took a course in -- maybe it was sculpture. I vaguely remember an instructor by the name of Mr. Potter, I think his name was. I don't remember much else of that particular period. I think I also went to Boston University business school and took one or two courses there. It's something like the extension courses that they had. That was about practically all, as far as Mass. College of Art is concerned. That was about it.

ROBERT BROWN: You have no vivid memory of that. Apparently -- you'd had courses earlier, and there you had a few more. Probably in night school.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Assents]

ROBERT BROWN: But this prepared you then, or at least after that you immediately went to the school of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Is that correct?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was there at the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: At the same time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, you see I went to the Museum School from 1929 through '36. During that period of time, I went to the Mass. College of Art at night for just about one semester. In other words, I was going to two schools in time.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you come to enter the Museum School, in 1929? How did that come about?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I studied at the Museum of Fine Arts in the vocational art classes, a program which they had in connection with the Boston school system.

ROBERT BROWN: This was Saturday classes?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, this was all during the week. So, as soon as I got through high school, I went up to the Museum and took courses in charcoal drawing, design, textile design, composition, and so forth. In my senior year -- the Museum school issued one or two scholarships to the students of that particular program -- I was lucky enough to get a scholarship to the Museum School.

ROBERT BROWN: This was called a vocational program?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE In those days, they called it High School Vocational Art Classes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were many of the children in those classes then going into industry or work for retailers or something, as illustrators, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't know. It was just a series of classes offered by the Museum of fine Arts. So I suspect that some of the students may have gone into professional schools from there.

ROBERT BROWN: And others might have gone directly to work, I guess.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's a possibility.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop some chums or friends while you were at these art classes?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not really. I'd probably only see them once a day. I didn't develop any more friends there than I did in other high school classes.

ROBERT BROWN: With a scholarship, then, you entered the Museum School in the fall of 1929?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. And it was rather fortunate that I got the scholarship, because you see at the time I'd made application to the Yale University art school. And though my grades weren't the best in the world, for some reason or other they decided to accept me. So I had a letter of acceptance from Yale. Then the Museum School scholarship came through, so I decided to stay here in Boston. Some people were rather unhappy about that. They thought I should have the experience of going away to school. But, as it turned out, it was a rather fortunate thing that I did stay because my father was seriously injured in October. He was a very powerful man. He was an engineer and, of course, he had an engineer's license. Apparently he was working with some kind of electrical drill and the thing short-circuited. Anyhow, it caused him a massive cerebral hemorrhage. It should have killed him immediately but it didn't. So that meant that Mother and I had about 200 pounds of man to deal with for the next seven years. Also, in 1929 was "the great Crash." That meant that a lot of people were out of work.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have to exist on your father's pension?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE In those days they didn't have pensions. The company paid some monies to us for a while. But not much. He didn't have such a thing as workmen's compensation. That didn't come until later on; I guess with FDR.

ROBERT BROWN: You were living here in the South End of Boston?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, we were living at No. 2 Dillwood [?] Street. That's right on the edge of the South End.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were within easy walking distance of the Museum School, then.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, that was no problem. My mother was able to secure work, I guess you'd call it, as a domestic -- cleaning up apartments, things like that, for well-to-do people in the downtown area. I might say, just as a matter of tribute, in a way, that she worked for quite a few young men. My mother was a very good looking woman -- I'm not saying that because she was my mother, that's a matter of fact. And these young men appreciated her, and they appreciated what she was trying to do -- help me go through school, and so forth. They also appreciated her character. So they made sure she was never molested. And they would recommend other people, when she got through working for one person or another. And they would be scrupulous about that. Because it would have been very easy for a person like my mother to have all kinds of unexpected difficulties. I must say that, as a tribute to these young men, that they were so careful of her and practically acted as guardians for her, you might say.

ROBERT BROWN: Here at the very time you're going to art school, there are lots of concerns and worries. Is that the way you felt at that time, as a young student?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I didn't. Because I wasn't conscious of that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time you were mainly intent on going to the school? Were you very excited about doing so?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [With some hesitation] Yes, but it was tempered by the domestic situation. Having a father who was practically helpless, that had a very sobering effect.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you do at the beginning when you went to art school? Could you describe to us what was the curriculum? Who were some of the teachers?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Philip Hale was head of the painting department. When I first went to the school, we did cast drawings, then we went into life drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work with him? Did he teach you directly?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Again hesitatingly] Yes, I just remember that vaguely. I went in for design. There was a Mr. Clark who was head of the design department, so I took courses with him. Then there was a Miss Alice Brooks, she was also a high school vocational art class but she also taught design. There were two or three other teachers; I can't remember their names.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they work closely with you? Or were they dignified remote figures?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they worked very closely with me. They were very much interested in my work.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose they were?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't know. I suppose I could be egotistical and say that they saw a spark of genius in me. [Both laugh heartily]

ROBERT BROWN: But they probably did think you were rather precocious? At least very able?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They probably did. But, as far as talent is concerned, I was just among a group of very talented people. Because almost everybody in the Art school was of a high caliber. In the school, we went through an extraordinary experience, as far as that school is concerned, which was extremely unusual. It has to be people in that particular time frame who have experienced it. That is this: during my tour of duty there, I went to practically three different schools during that time. By that I mean this: When Philip Hale had joined his ancestors, then the whole painting system was changed, you might say -- revised and so forth. We received a couple of teachers from England, from the Slade School in London -- a Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Burns. So the painting department was under their tutelage or headship for a period. That meant the whole philosophy and everything else went through almost a revolution.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it? What did it consist of, this change?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, Philip Hale was of the old school, academic school. And of course they had Mr. Tarboom [phon. sp.], Mr. Vincent [?], and Patrick Gavin [?]. The name Patrick Gavin is of particular interest. I don't remember any contacts with Patrick Gavin but he was there for a short while, apparently. Then he became an instructor at the Mass. College of Art. But the reason I bring up his name is because he's the father of The Reverend Kearney [?] Gavin, who happens to be the curator of the Semitic Museum at Harvard, with whom I'm working today.

ROBERT BROWN: So it's a real connection.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it is.

ROBERT BROWN: Philip Hale's program, then, was traditional academic, drawing from a cast, and the like.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE And the life paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: But the two Englishmen, Burns and Guthrie -- what program did they follow?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They had rather precise drawings. There was a great deal of stress on draftsmanship. I guess the best way I could describe them is that their approach was a little bit like the Flemish masters -- like the van Eyck brothers, for example, or Rogier van der Weyden, or people like that. A great deal of stress on detail. The color work was rather sober, rather subdued in a sense.

ROBERT BROWN: What medium did you work in? Several?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I did work in oils and watercolor and drawings and so forth. They stayed on for I guess about four years.

ROBERT BROWN: By the way, your seven years there, was that typical? It was a long curriculum?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, I took two complete courses. I took a complete course in design, and also a complete course in drawing and painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you explain the design? What did that mean?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, textiles, and interiors

ROBERT BROWN: Whom did you work with?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I worked with [tries to recall names] -- Alice Brooks - -

ROBERT BROWN: She was the general design instructor?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE She was one of the instructors. And the man whose name I'm trying to remember

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of work did he have you do?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Designing textiles, and interiors -- for example, design a room, what the furnishings would be. Then go to the Museum and study the period rooms they had over there. They had just opened up some brand-new rooms there, like the Tudor Room, and 18th Century, and so on -- a brand-new wing opened up back there.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you asked to do variations on period rooms, in your interior design?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, that was one thing. Then I was asked to make up a design for a four-room or a 12-room home, for example. And that a person would like to have this or that or the other, so I'd design something like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Based on what, historical furniture?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't contemporary design in this course?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, yes, we had that, too.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of things did they stress there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, it was "contemporary" for back in the 1930's. Whatever was the popular mode then would reflect itself so far as the school was concerned. I'd have to refer back to Saturday Evening Posts and Cosmopolitan and McCall's magazines for the kinds of things back in that particular period of the 30's. I don't think I did any fashion designs; I don't recall any. Then, of course, there was the idea of composition. There was some blockprinting

ROBERT BROWN: Was composition taught in a theoretical, general way?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. You'd study the Old Masters like Veronese, the Venetian man of the Renaissance, and the theories of that kind of design -- pyramids, diagonals, and the controposto, I guess, of people like Rubens. You'd take off on Titian, go back to Raphael

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy these studies of art of the past?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. We had some art history too, so at least I know the difference between Doric and Corinthian, and also something about Gothic and Baroque, that sort of business.

ROBERT BROWN: You said earlier there was a third change while you were still in school. Burns and Guthrie were there, then they left.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Then we had a teacher named Alexander Yakovlev [phon. sp.] and I would practically call him an artist-anthropologist. He was Russian. The best way to describe his work would be -- he had a precise drawing, something like Botticelli. So, if you could translate that into 1930 terms, it might give an idea. He made a tremendous impact on all of his students.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose he did?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He was a vibrant personality, for one thing. He had what you'd call charisma, I guess. Being an artist-anthropologist, of course he was quite adventurous, a venturesome person. He was the Citroen Motorcade -- the auto company had a motorcade across the Sahara, so he'd bring back all these drawings of North Africans. Like the Tuaregs, for example, and other peoples in North Africa. Then he'd go on another expedition out into the Gobi Desert and come back with pictures of the Mongols and the Yoruks. And he went to Japan. He had huge portfolios of these drawings, sort of conte crayon drawings, red heightened with black for accents. So he invited us over to his studio, some of his students. You'd see a great display of these various things. I kind of wished he'd gone down into the Andes Mountains and got pictures of the Peruvians and all that kind of business down there.

ROBERT BROWN: You feel that he left out one continent! [Both laugh] What was your attitude? Were you just sort of in awe of how facile he was?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, all of us were. He made a tremendous impact on all of us. A lot of his students became almost, you might say, little Yakovlevs in a sense. I'd be less than honest if I didn't admit that a great deal of his influence came through on me too. Yes, he was a great virtuoso in a sense; that is, he could make a life-sized life drawing almost within an hour in demonstrating to us what he wanted us to look for and so forth. He had these huge sheets of paper and the model would stand over on one side and he'd go ahead and make up this drawing showing us what he wanted. Of course, we all stood around almost open-mouthed at this miracle of work.

ROBERT BROWN: He'd lecture while he worked? He'd be talking to you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. He had an accent that was a sort of combined Russian and French.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he trying to emphasize, do you remember, when he was drawing and talking? What was he trying to get across to you students?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He emphasized the accuracy of drawing and understanding emotion -- making your things vital and living. Hard to describe

ROBERT BROWN: Would you say that in your own case this was a new ingredient -- that you weren't able to be so accurate or get this vibrancy into your drawing until he came along?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, I had it already, I guess. He just more or less accentuated it, in a way. I would say that the most important thing to look back at now is probably the sense of inspiration he gave to all of us.

ROBERT BROWN: What did he inspire you about?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you felt alive when you were working on your drawings. Just a sense of vitality that you'd have.

ROBERT BROWN: All of this work you were doing, on the other hand there was a counter-force to that, and that was the situation at home, right? Your father's invalidism Did you often get depressed at that time or was work at school so intense that it carried you through this very bad period?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes [With hesitation]. I don't know. You see, after the first shock of my father's illness -- it was really quite a shock because we saw this great big healthy man going to work in the morning, and then we

got a call from the hospital and seeing him laying up in bed, with distraught face and practically helpless -- the initial shock was quite something. Then there was a period of readjustment. After that, that became the normal way of life, so we more or less adapted to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe we could look at two or three of these drawings from your time at the Museum school. The top two are figure studies from 1934. Who would have been your teacher at that point?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Alexander Yakovlev.

ROBERT BROWN: Here you are working in conte crayon -- it looks like a sepia crayon?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: In the male and female study. As we look at these, could you explain what you were trying to get across in this -- what lesson you were trying to satisfy? [ARC laughs] I assume as a student you were.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, one thing I wanted to get was solidity, to get the impression that I was working with a solid mass there. Then, of course, there's the bone structure, then the muscles on top of that, then the skin on top of that. In other words, you were working with a solid human being, so I tried to get that. There was great stress on the structure of it.

ROBERT BROWN: On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be too much stress here on the feel of the surface, the texture. Is that accurate?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I guess so. I hadn't thought of it, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT BROWN: The appearance of the skin. It does seem that the concentration is on volume.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there other teachers? You mentioned Guthrie and Burns -- would they have been more interested in appearance and, say, the very texture of various materials, flesh and the like?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Reflecting] Well

ROBERT BROWN: You said they were something like the Flemish painters.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The thing was, in a sense, preciseness. That is, for example, if I made a drawing of a brick building, then they'd say put in all the bricks; that type of thing. In drawing they were very precise; they had that thing. One thing I must say about the school as a whole: All during these three different periods there was a great deal of stress on drawing. That was considered of prime importance. I don't know what they do in school today but back in those days, they stressed you must learn how to draw.

ROBERT BROWN: You feel that's been a good thing.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I'm a firm believer in that. I'm a firm believer today that a person should be able to draw in the classical fashion and know how to do it. I feel that's important as a form of discipline. But I don't believe you should make exact drawing an end in itself, but rather it should be a means toward an end. Because, if the person masters the art of drawing, then of course that individual has the skill at his fingertips. Then he's perfectly free to do whatever he wants -- to make an abstract, or wants to do this, that or other, he'll be able to do so with a great deal of facility. If he has an inability to draw to begin with, then of course he'll always be faced with this particular problem -- that he wants to do something, he can't do it, because he doesn't have the ability to do it or the skills to do it. So I believe that learning how to draw is just the same as learning how to handle tools -- like a carpenter or any of the other disciplines.

ROBERT BROWN: Expression can come later, is that right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I mean, it's like rules of grammar. It just makes it a little easier for you to make whatever statement you wish to make. But if you don't understand the rules of grammar to begin with, then of course you'll always have trouble.

ROBERT BROWN: You've mentioned already that you had painting in color. Was color not as stressed in painting, wasn't as stressed as drawing? Is that your recollection as you look back?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. All was stressed. When you went into painting class -- of course we did oil painting -- the color was stressed.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have to study color?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, they had color charts, all that. I got that in the design department.

ROBERT BROWN: This drawing here, a charcoal of about the same time, at least the time when you were in school, you said to me earlier is directly drawn; or at least it's drawn from memory of an incident. Could you describe this a bit for us?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, while I was in the art school, that was you might say only one portion of my whole drawing experience. During the period of art school I was making these neighborhood paintings, I was also making these illustrations for spirituals, and I was doing these pencil drawings which apparently became well known. At least, I find right now that that seems to be one of the favorite aspects of my work which is being purchased. But anyhow I used to go down to the wharf, because the waterfront was quite a fascinating place. So I was very much interested in ships. This particular charcoal drawing I have here shows one of the Eastern Steamship Line -- it may have been either the Yarmouth or the St. Johns. Back in those days, in the 20's, there was this teamship company of coastal steamers which served New York, on one hand, and went up to Portland and Portsmouth and Yarmouth on the other. This particular steamship line was the one that had that famous ship that went out one night to Portland, was lost, and never was found. I think that particular ship was a side-wheeler. But at any rate

ROBERT BROWN: There's no details to speak of, in this drawing. You weren't drawn to the details of these ships, you're hardly a ship's portraitist. You were more interested, it looks like, in large volumes and very simplified -- what was your intention, would you say, here?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's just more or less a study in composition. Showing loading one of these ships. I was just trying a pattern of light and shade.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

[TAPE PICKS UP IN MID-SENTENCE]

ROBERT BROWN: . . . painting. Perhaps you did. If you had, what would you have stressed then?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I would be stressing an incident. Showing the movements of people going on board ship, loading it and so on, the kind of activity you get on a waterfront scene like that.

ROBERT BROWN: It's not unlike, then, what you've called your neighborhood paintings . . .

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: . . . or you once called your genre paintings of this time.

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE
JUNE 29, 1979
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Alan Crite on June 29, 1979.

ROBERT BROWN: We're looking now at a pencil drawing of a woman flanked by two small children. They're all very nicely dressed, walking down the street. You call it "Sunday Afternoon." It has the subtitle, "Sunday Swank" and dated August 1934. So you're in the Museum school at this time, but presumably this was more or less done on your own. Could you tell me why you did this? What did you have in mind when you did this? Is this sheer observation, one of the neighborhood paintings or drawings?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, you see, during the particular period I did a lot of pencil drawings, made a lot of studies of the neighborhood and the people in the neighborhood. I had several reasons for doing it during this particular period. I was making studies of black people just as ordinary human beings, because the usual picture that one had -- at least that's my impression -- was that the artist was strongly influenced by, you might say, the jazz person up in Harlem, or of the sharecropper in the deep South. There was nothing in between -- of just the ordinary middle-class person who goes to church, does the work, etc. What I decided to do back in those days -- and as a matter of fact I'm still doing it -- was just simply to record the life of black people as I saw them in the city where I lived, which happened to be Boston. That's what this drawing is an expression of. This would probably be a Sunday morning, and of course back in those days the life of the church was extremely important in the lives of the people because the church served as a place of worship, also as a community center, and quite a few other functions. It was more or less the heart of the life of the great majority of black people in those

days. So, you'd come out in your Sunday best, and that's what I was trying to show here. This young woman, who is obviously attractive, or at least I thought so, flanked by a couple of children. And in the background a couple of well-dressed young men giving this gal the once-over and approval. It's a typical kind of Sunday scene that one would see on Columbus Avenue, on Tremont Street or any other street here in Boston.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned one time that you felt you were more of an observer than a participant in much of this.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I sort of regarded myself as a recorder, or you might say a storyteller. As a matter of fact, I suppose that would be one main characteristic of my work -- that I am a storyteller. Something like what they call the zheero [pure phon. sp.], so far as the African tradition is concerned. And I didn't realize how much of a storyteller I really was, because I made recordings of the life of the 1930's, and also showing the background of the various streets of the city. Today, of course, a lot of these streets have vanished, the people have disappeared, and the only record of them in many instances are the drawings which I made. So, the simple idea that I had in the back of my head as I made these drawings is just simply to show black people as ordinary people, human beings that had their loves and their distresses, their joys and happiness and sorrows -- just plain, ordinary people. So I made all these different street scenes with the horse carts, the vegetable man, the fish man; or people gossiping, children playing in the streets or the playground -- all of these sort of homely things.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there quite a distinct and stable black community where you lived?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, there was. Relatively stable. As a matter of fact, the neighborhoods in general, whether they were black or otherwise, were relatively stable back there in the 30's. In the South End there was a kind of transient population, where you'd get population changes. But they were more or less gradual. The massive disruption didn't come until later when there was this great urban renewal project which, in my opinion, was a disaster, when neighborhood after neighborhood was wiped out. One classic example is what took place in the West End. Unfortunately, West End isn't an isolated phenomenon, but rather more or less the usual method of procedures. The bulldozers would come in and knock down and destroy houses, knock down and destroy neighborhoods, and people would become you might say "development refugees." So we've had a tremendous refugee problem in this country. The life that existed just simply vanished. That's one of the things which has happened.

ROBERT BROWN: These neighborhood recordings, as you call them, of the 30's were shown and displayed occasionally, weren't they? Some of the paintings you made were collected by museums and the like, weren't they, at that time? Or fairly shortly thereafter?? I'm thinking of -- there's at least one in the Phillips Collection in Washington, and I think -- well, there are now several of the Boston Athenaeum, but certain museums and people were collecting them, weren't they?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. People were. Of course, at the time when I made the paintings, very few of them were sold, as far as the oil paintings are concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have a dealer?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. The Grace Horne Galleries, on Newbury Street, took an interest. And as I look back on it now, it was an act of courage on their part. They had a great deal of faith in me, in a way. And I'm relatively sure that I probably may have been the only black artist who was consistently shown on Newbury Street back in the 30's. So they were very much interested in the work, obviously, and they did display it. A few of my things were sold. Of course, we have to remember that this is during the Depression, so that unless you were very well off, you simply did not buy works of art. But I had a formal introduction into the art world. I belonged to a society called the Boston Society of Independent Artists. And in one of the exhibitions I had an oil painting called "Settling the World's Problems" -- I wish I had that painting today -- and that represented my more or less formal introduction into the art world. I was introduced, you might say, into the art world by the dean of art critics of that time. Mr. William Cochran/Cochrane of the Boston Evening Transcript. There was a great reproduction of my painting in the paper, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this practically the first time you got acquainted with some of the older artists of the area?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [With hesitancy] Yes-s-s, and no. In the Society of Independent Artists I did have a chance to meet a few of the artists. In that society you had well-known professionals as well as sub-professionals, because the exhibition was a non-juried show. And the idea was to give younger people like myself, unknown, a chance to be introduced into the art world and receive recognition.

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Cochran/Cochrane was important in this, but who were some of the other people you got to know?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE As far as the critics were concerned, there was a Mr. Philpott [sp?] of the Boston Globe

ROBERT BROWN: What about artists?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE People like Harvey Pepper, and Charles Hopkins, and William B. Hazleton.

ROBERT BROWN: These were people you got to know to some extent?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: By the way -- I haven't asked you -- did you, with either of these artists or with your fellow students, did you discuss art very much?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. These artists that I mentioned -- Pepper and Hopkins and Hazleton -- were much older than I.

ROBERT BROWN: But still, would they . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, they would discuss my work. Sometimes they'd buy it. Hazleton did give me some instruction. I went up to, I think it was Rockport, and he had me doing some watercolors up there; watercolor studies. I ran across somebody, I can't remember his name, he recalled that particular period to mind.

ROBERT BROWN: In what way?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He reminded me of the time I did work with Mr. Hazleton. I was introduced into the Independent Artists society by Mr. Walter Killum [?]. He was of the Killum, & Creedy [?], architects, in Boston. It was rather an extraordinary period, because I was introduced to some other architects. I became acquainted with Ralph Adams Cram -- not to know him very well, but I did become acquainted with a Mr. Charles McGinnis, who did some work at Trinity Church. He was more or less responsible for a later development -- introducing me to Harold Rambush [phon. sp.] of the Rambush Decorating company

ROBERT BROWN: . . . of the 1940's when you worked for them. What was McGinnis like?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He looked like a patriarch. He was a great big towering man with white hair and a huge mustache, as I recall. His voice boomed like an organ [Laughing]. I probably didn't see or hear him, it was just that image that I had of him. A very, very dynamic person.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were fairly regularly illustrated and written up in the Boston press, at least, as we can see. And you've described it. About that time, 1934 or '36 -- we've just been talking about the genre and neighborhood paintings -- came the Works Progress Administration, the WPA. And you were on the Project for a bit. How long?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was in two projects, you might say. There was one that came, I think, about 1934.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that the Public Works of Art Project? The Treasury Department, right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The office for that was at the Isabella Stewart/Jack Gardner palace. I was on that for a few months.

ROBERT BROWN: This helped to subsidize your going to school?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. And then I was on the WPA, the Works Progress Administration, for about a year or so. They had two categories -- non-relief artists, and relief artists. I was on as a non-relief artist. Then, when the money ran out on that particular section, they wanted me to continue, but I'd have to continue as a relief artist.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the difference?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That meant that you were on relief. My mother and I, we didn't quite like that connotation. So we took the painful decision to not continue in the program.

ROBERT BROWN: You would have been on what we call "welfare," today.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. We had a kind of less-than-enthusiastic view of that. But the genre paintings I did for the WPA were just an extension of the work I was already doing

ROBERT BROWN: That's why I ask about it, right now. There are a number of street scenes. Here's one of horses

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's the Shawmut Avenue Stables. One of the things that surprised me about all of these paintings which I did back in that particular period is the prevalence of horses and wagons. I hadn't thought of that, but of course you very seldom see that nowadays.

ROBERT BROWN: They were very common still, then, even in urban life.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: I notice, as I look at it, this particular scene, it's quite simplified. You're not exactly under the spell of Guthrie and Burns at this time. This is 1936. There's a great deal of spirited action -- sort of frozen action tough, but spirited postures on the people's part. The man pushing the handcart, the man leading the horse into the stables. Were these, then, acquired by the government?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, they were. The paintings I did on WPA were government property. I lost track of practically all of the paintings except for one painting which is now in the national collection of the Smithsonian -- that's called "School's Out." That made quite an impression. As a matter of fact, that was in an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York of WPA paintings, and this one was featured in reviews when they came out. I think it was in the New York Times, something like that. I had the pleasure of seeing that painting recently at an exhibition of Decorova [phon. sp.] Museum, so I had a chance to reacquaint myself with it. It was a rather strange experience to see this painting

ROBERT BROWN: Because you hadn't seen it for so long?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. And then of course it recalled so many [Loud crash in room, obscures a few words.] Because the whole scene has vanished today -- the school and everything have just disappeared. There's a housing project now on the location where the school was, as shown in the painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the supervisor? And what relation would you have had with him or her on the WPA Project?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The only supervisor I remember offhand -- I think his name was Frank Sterner -- I think that's what it was. He knew me from an earlier period which I can't remember offhand. But he was instrumental later on in establishing a painters' workshop which had some relationship to the Fogg Art Museum. We studied techniques of painting, mixed media, and so on. And we were just going into mosaics, but by that time World War II had made things rather difficult. So that particular project died. We had classes over at the Kensington Building that used to be on the corner of Exeter and Boylson Streets. That building was identified by a couple of stone lions that stood up there in solemn dignity. These lions had been removed to the Copley Plaza and unfortunately some of this dignity had been covered with gold paint! I can't imagine anything more [Words seem to fail him here.] [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: Was that a useful thing -- the painters' workshop, for you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I had a chance to do frescoes -- the only frescoes I'd ever done in my life. Both of them are in this house right at the moment. And I learned something about wax painting and a few other things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: But at the time you were on the WPA, you didn't have that much contact with a supervisor, and you were in fact allowed to paint pretty much what you wanted to paint. Is that right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. my commission was just to do easel paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: And no questions about subjects or anything.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no. They just about left that completely up to me. My feeling is that, as far as the WPA is concerned, it left the artist with a great deal of freedom. The program was quite successful. The present NEH program which we have today is of an entirely different character, and to some extent rather less supportive of the artist when you compare it with the Works Progress Administration. I think the WPA probably followed a little more the European model as a supporter of the arts, shall I say. It covered a great deal more than just painting -- the visual arts were also covered. The , and the theater arts, and so forth. So it's probably responsible at least in part for what you might call the Harlem Renaissance -- people like Countee Cullen and Baldwin.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you aware of that Harlem Renaissance in the 30's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Vaguely. We heard a whole lot about Harlem, but of course the picture I got of Harlem -- I have some relatives down there so I used to visit there now and then. But of course I would see it from the point of view of visiting a place where my relatives lived. I had an uncle who was a policeman. In the art field, I wasn't that conscious of . . . I was conscious of Harlem more as being a jazz center, and conscious of what you might

call the jazz Negro. That would be the time of Duke Ellington and I guess Gillespie and all the other jazz greats.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you interested in jazz yourself?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, not really. My mother had a very dim view of jazz.

ROBERT BROWN: Why, do you suppose?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, there are two approaches you might say, as far as Black people are concerned, I guess. Some people regarded jazz -- some of the good church people, regarded jazz as almost a drumbeat to the Devil. My mother's father was a Baptist. Some of the churches looked with less than favor upon such things as dancing, and jazz, and that sort of business. So I must say that my grandfather didn't object to my mother doing dancing or anything like that, but he seemed to have, or at least my mother had, rather a prejudice against jazz. As a result, my enthusiasm has been extremely tempered. A little bit of it goes a long way with me. I've probably been rather preconditioned in that sense.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, to get to another expression of yours in the 30's namely, portraits, I get the feeling as I look at your portraits that there is a severity, almost a quiet dignity, about the people you portray. Perhaps we could talk a bit about the portraits. What we're looking at here are oil paintings. Again, something you're doing while you're at art school but, I gather, like the neighborhood paintings, done on your own.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Do we want to start by looking at what you've told me is the earliest?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I did quite a few portrait studies. I did some of my mother. They're mostly of my friends.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the one over there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's a portrait of Lois.

ROBERT BROWN: Lois. That's what -- the early 30's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you comment on that? What were you attempting to do?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Lois was a friend of mine. If I'd followed through with my instincts, she would have been my wife. She was the child of a friend of mine. When I say childhood background -- she was about six, I was probably about eight or nine. We sort of grew up together. She went to Simmons College. She used to come to the house quite a lot, so I used to make drawings of her. I decided to make this portrait study of her. At that time, I was thinking of James Abbott McNeill Whistler -- that more or less governed control of my coloring and composition. The painting has been on exhibition at the Museum for the Jubilee show of Black Art that's been there, and it's been shown, I think, at the National Center for Afro-American Artists.

ROBERT BROWN: to what extent is this indebted to what you were learning at art school? It's a rather limited palette. You said it's been influenced somewhat by Whistler, and certainly the composition is more like that of Whistler's "Mother," vaguely speaking.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think in this you see any other intention besides . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, well maybe something of Guthrie and Burns -- the sort of sober coloring might have had some influence. In all of the portraits, the parties are very still -- that is, none of them are animated to any extent. That probably may be characteristic of my portrait studies, at least of that particular period. I haven't done any oils since.

ROBERT BROWN: Are there any others you'd like me to bring up for . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Turning aside off-mike] Yes, well, there's this man with a mustache. His name was Jack Bates. He was a playwright, so I have in the background a scene from one of his plays. He used to write these dramas of rural life in the South. Some of these were broadcast over the radio. I sang in a group called the Clef [?] Choir -- we sang spirituals. And he used this as musical background for these particular plays which were broadcast over Station WNAC, here in Boston. Jack Bates died about two or three years ago. I think he was a little bit older than I. He was in World War I; he had been gassed in that War. But he was on the border of genius, you might say, as far as his plays are concerned. Some of them were produced in some of the little theater

groups that existed back in those days in the 30's -- the Peabody Playhouse, the Fine Arts Theater which used to be on Norway Street. Today, of course, they've got that concrete pile called Church Park.

ROBERT BROWN: This portrait shows a very intense, youngish man. He seems to be sort of gazing off into space. Were you close to him, or was he a fairly reserved person?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, he was quite lively as a matter of fact. I have to say that in my portraits I wasn't able to get much animation. That isn't because the people weren't animated, because [He laughs] they sure were. But it's just my interpretation of them.

ROBERT BROWN: It could be, perhaps, again, you were a student at this time. And you're getting, as we saw in the life drawings, a great deal of attention is given to volume relationships and giving a feeling of structure, and not a great deal to expression and vivacity.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I'm not a portraitist by nature. It takes quite a bit of discipline to be a portrait painter -- a certain kind of discipline which I didn't have. This thing here, of these two young women -- the darker woman on the left and the lighter one on the right -- of the lighter woman I wanted to make a drawing. But she was a cousin of the darker woman, so in order for me to do it I had to do the cousin. [Laughing] But the cousin took part in some of Jack Bates' plays. She's still around -- in fact both of those girls are still around. One is in her 60's, the other one in her 50's. They came to the house a few weeks ago and were rather fascinated to see this painting of themselves done over 40 years ago. I promised to send them a slide, at least, of this.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they have to say about it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Well, they were a little bit surprised, a little amazed, in trying to recognize themselves as they appeared back then.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they flattered by the way they looked then?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't know. [Laughing] Because both of them are not slim young things as they were then. One is a grandmother, and the other -- the lighter one -- never married.

ROBERT BROWN: Your first interest in these two was in the lighter one. What do you think you were trying to get across when you did this portrait? Again, it's rather dignified, they're seen in three-quarter view, from the chest up, against a wall with a few details in the immediate background.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Apparently, from the looks of the wall, I must have done that in the girls' house. It isn't any furnishings that I have here.

ROBERT BROWN: When you were in their house doing this, was there a lot of banter, was it fairly lively, or were you proceeding pretty soberly and with some, even timidity?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, there was a great deal of banter and fun. The portrait sessions were fun because these were friends of mine. Apparently a lot of this doesn't come through in the painting. But the paintings were experiences, all with young people together. Because all these people are my contemporaries, not paintings of my clients.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was just like . . . well, that was the about the spirit of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember whether you were pleased with this painting or not?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yeah, I sort of liked it. But I didn't quite get all that I wanted to. As I said before, I'm not a portraitist, you might say.

ROBERT BROWN: There's one other here . . .

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That one there ought to be interesting . . .

ROBERT BROWN: . . . that you said you had something to say about -- a story or background lay behind it. It's a frontal view, again a bust, of a young woman, with a vaguely sketched landscape in the background.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE She was an interesting girl. I rather liked her but she married somebody else. She features often in a pencil drawing which I called "Busy Streets," where I'm standing with my arms around her, which was probably more dreams than reality. But at any rate she married somebody else, obviously. But the chap she married was named Avon Long. He took the part of Sportin' Life in one of the early productions of "Porgy and

Bess." And he's still active in the theater even today, and I think has a part in the current musical revue called "Eubie." "Eubie" of course refers to Eubie Blake. Back in the 20's there was a musical called "Shuffle Along" which may have been a sort of theatrical breakthrough. There was a quartet - Miller & Lyles [?] and Cissel & Blake. I think Miller & Lyles were writers or musicians, and Blake played the piano -- he still does. He's the only one of the quartet that's still alive today, he's in his 90's. But "Shuffle Along" made a great hit. And I remember, in the chorus line of "Shuffle Along" was a long-legged brown beauty who became the toast of Paris -- her name was Josephine Baker.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh yes. You saw that performance?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I saw that performance. I think it was down on Tremont Street, the theater is still there. I've forgotten its name; I think it's been changed.

ROBERT BROWN: This woman here was someone who was very attractive to you.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever sit for her portrait? I mean, did you go to her place . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no, she came here to my house and I sat her down and made a portrait study of her. She had a kid sister. I saw this sister, we worked together at the Naval Shipyard back in the late 60's. She would report to me about this girl whose name had to be Gretchen. Of course Gretchen is now a grandmother. It's rather strange: I look at these portrait studies, and I see all of these young people, and I have to remember that all of them are my contemporaries.

ROBERT BROWN: It's only in your paintings that they remain young.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: The one I'm looking at now -- you say "Study of Auntie, April 16, 1931" -- the paint's laid on in warmer colors, more thickly, almost a fury, it seems to me -- there are curvings and sudden breaks in the brushstrokes. Could you explain this a bit? It looks very out of character, at least it's quite different from anything we've talked about earlier.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. This was done during my Frans Hals-Anders Zorn-John Singer Sargent period [Laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE These particular artists used very heavy strokes, thick brushstrokes, sort of almost slashing away. So I used that technique in this painting of my aunt. She was my father's brother's wife. Her name was Eliza Crite. So I made a rather quick study of her. So I guess in a way it's a much freer painting than some of the other sets in which I tried to get a certain amount of finish. As a result, in this painting I acquired a great deal more vitality than in the others.

ROBERT BROWN: There's one last aspect of your work in the 30's that I thought we could talk about.

[END OF THIS INTERVIEW]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE
FEBRUARY 29, 1980
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: This is a continuation of the interview with Alan Rohan Crite, Robert Brown, interviewer, in Boston, Mass. The date is February 29, 1980.

The last time, we'd been talking about your painting in the 1930's. Today I'd like to begin by asking you how you came to start drawing and painting liturgical, religious subjects, many of which seem to be set in glorious church interiors -- vestments, visions, and the like. How did that come about and when, more or less, did you begin doing these religious and liturgical subjects?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, of course I always did religious drawings. That was one of my ambitions. The stickmen drawings are a much earlier period and deals with that. But back in the 20's, there was movement of the Roman Catholic Church -- you might call it an apocalypse towards Black people; a sort of moving into that particular area. A friend of mine who was a very devout Roman Catholic thought he could bring me into the true religion, you might say. He knew I was an Episcopalian, so he figured it wouldn't be too much of a job to move me over. I have a habit of not "moving" unless I know what I'm doing. I had the normal education as far as the

church was concerned -- the catechism classes and so forth -- but I didn't know too much about the church, really -- about this history of it, its liturgy, etc.; just what you get out of catechism class.

ROBERT BROWN: You're talking about the Catholic catechism?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, Episcopal. When my friend went to work on me, I had no defenses, in a sense. So I decided to really look into the church, see what it was all about in many ways. That meant I had to study its history, its *raison d'etre* -- I mean, this idea of the bishops, priests, and deacons, which is of course one of the hallmarks of the Episcopal Church; their attitudes on the Eucharist. And then I went into study of the liturgy, etc. Well, in the Episcopal church you have two schools of thought. One is High Church, one is Low Church. Back in the 20's and 30's, that was a very, very vigorous point of discussion.

ROBERT BROWN: You were involved in it to some degree?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Ye-e-ess, I was. Not too much, but I was aware of it. In the Low Church, they expressed the Protestant aspects of the Episcopal Church, while the High Church expressed the Catholic aspects of the church. There was quite a difference in many ways. If you go into a Low Church, the altar furnishings are very simple, and the priest who celebrated the Eucharist just wore the Catholic surplice and stole; whereas, if you went in a High Church, they had all the Eucharist vestments like chasubles, the whole bit. I was introduced to that the of St. John the Evangelist had -- they have a church down on Street -- and I became aware of the thrust, you might say, of the High Churchmen. In other words, I was convinced of one thing as far as the liturgy of the Catholic expression of Christianity. So my problem was to see whether such an expression existed in the Episcopal Church or not.

ROBERT BROWN: What in the Catholic expression of Christianity were you convinced of?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, the doctrine of the Eucharist, the idea of the priesthood, and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: And now you turned to see whether this existed in the Episcopal . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The principal idea, as far as the ministry is concerned -- you see, the Episcopal Church claims the Catholic priesthood "perks" -- it claims that the Bishops are Bishops, and that they have the capability of ordaining priests, and so forth. The Roman Catholic Church in those days denied the validity of Anglican Orders, as they called it. They said that, because of a defect in the Edwardian orders [?] back in 1600 something-or-other, the Bishops didn't have the powers of ordination and consecration. Hence, all ordinations from that date on, as far as the Episcopal/Anglican church is concerned, were invalid, and so ceremonies like the celebration of the Eucharist, etc. were invalid because of the defective orders. It's a kind of legal question, in a way, but it was very much to the point back in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: What did your look into the Episcopal Church reveal to you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That the argument of the invalidity of Anglican orders based on what was the arguments presented by the Roman Catholic Church in those days was, at the very least, dubious, and at the most didn't carry weight. It would be rather a long discussion to go into that, but more recently there has been a great deal of conversation between Canterbury and Rome, and the atmosphere is entirely different.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this only heighten your religiosity? This search of yours?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] I guess so -- whatever "religiosity" is. What it did was to make me aware of things, very much aware of things. It was the best thing that ever happened, because it forced me to study the Church, the liturgy, etc. And of course there isn't much difference between the two liturgies -- rather, you might say that the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran liturgies are the Western liturgies of the church; belong to the same particular family. Then of course you have the Eastern liturgies, another variation -- I'm referring to the Greek Orthodox and the Eastern Rite churches.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think of maybe becoming a priest at that point?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. A lot of people thought I should. Some people still think I should. It's strange, in a way - - as I'm walking down the street even today and people say, "How do, Reverend" and [pitching his voice lower, and saying slowly] I say, "Hi." Once in a while I'm referred to as "Father." Apparently I give the impression of being somewhat sacerdotal, I don't know why.

ROBERT BROWN: But in the 30's when you were examining these differences between the two churches, this when you were looking for something similar to the Catholic liturgy in the Episcopal Church, your expression was not decreased but -- what? What did you think to do? Did you have some reaction you wanted to convey?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. You see, my first job as I saw it was to reassure myself as far as the Episcopal Church

was concerned -- as far as the total validity of the Church was concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: And once you'd done that, as you said earlier, what did you then . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Then, of course, I had my information -- and of course I studied all of the liturgy, the Latin as well as the Anglican.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your intention all along to express this as an artist?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not necessarily. No. But it became an area of discipline for me to use later. Then, of course, I became interested in liturgical drawings. These drawings I made more or less as a result of that; I found expression in that. This particular drawing is of the Christmas Mass. It's based on experience. I don't regard myself as a mystic -- not that I have anything against mystics, I don't. What happened: the father of a dear friend of mine had died around Christmas time. He was a Baptist minister, and I was very much interested in his daughter. She represents one of my first mistakes -- the two girls whom I could have married (not both of them at the same time -- [He laughs] I don't believe in bigamy and I'm not a Muslim). Anyhow, this particular girl was my childhood sweetheart. Everybody thought we were going to get married. I just let her drift out of my life. At that time her father died, at Christmas time, and this was in the midst of my QUOTE Catholic revival UNQUOTE. I was assisting the priest at the midnight celebration of the Eucharist

ROBERT BROWN: Where was this?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE At St. Bartholomew's church in Cambridge. And at the consecration I had this sense that behind the altar there was this presence of the Christ child and the Mother. It was a vivid impression -- I didn't see anything like that; it was just something that I sensed. So I made this drawing trying to interpret that impression that I had. Of course I used the complete vestments there -- the priest in the chasuble, the subdeacon behind what is known as the humeral veil -- "humer" comes, I think, from the word shoulder -- in which he holds the and then that's brought up to the altar after the consecration. This is the moment when the bread is consecrated -- this is what I tried to show, and to get all the glory of the altar, the angels, the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And it's done in great taste; very precisely; very careful drawing.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I paid a great deal of attention to detail in regard to the etiquette of the Mass, to be sure it was liturgically correct.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this just done for you, sort of a pious reaction to this very exalted moment for you -- this moment of vision? Or did you have in mind to convey your feelings to other people through your drawing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. All my drawings are designed for somebody else, not designed for me.

ROBERT BROWN: In this case whom did you have in mind?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE People in general. I just wanted to convey something to people as a whole. The drawings are instructive. All my work is designed -- I'm telling a story. As a matter of fact, the old African tradition -- what they call a giro: storyteller. That's what I've been doing all of my life in all my drawings. I'm a storyteller.

ROBERT BROWN: You think this is just in your nature, in your heritage, to do so?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Hesitantly] Ye-e-es. I hesitate to say that [Laughing] because it might have all kinds of interpretations -- that I have within me a sense of the continuity of the African tradition, which of course I don't. The African tradition which I might have is one which is acquired. It's more in the nature of a recovery, in a way, rather than a continuous tradition -- in the same sense as one might say he's an Anglo-Saxon, or someone else who's had an interruption

ROBERT BROWN: The actors in this whole liturgical scene of consecration are all Black. Is this the way it was in the vision at that time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's the interpretation that I used. St. Bartholomew's Church is a Black church, so I had that.

ROBERT BROWN: That's part of the factual setup . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. A lot of people did ask me why I used Black figures in the depiction of people in the Bible. I might note here that I work on several levels. One level is painting the life of black people in the city, just ordinary people as I see them, the neighborhood paintings. Then another level was illustrating the spiritual, so I used the Black figures. In that case I was just telling the story of Black people, and using the Black figures

because the spirituals are related to Black people naturally. Then there's another area where I used the Black figures such as in these particular liturgical drawings and similar things. There I was using the Black figure to tell the story of man. So the Black figure in this particular sense goes beyond, you might say, the parochial, racial idea. That's just the story of Man being told with the Black figure. Those are the three levels on which I worked.

ROBERT BROWN: And you consciously distinguished these three tracks, throughout your work?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: The one is the locals of the street scene or whatever. The other is symbolic Man, using Black figures. And there's the third, which is spiritual -- now, the spirituals were also something you began working with, at the time.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. The thing with the spirituals was this: I used the Catholic medium as the means of depicting the spirituals.

ROBERT BROWN: The Catholic medium -- what do you mean by that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The use of the liturgy, the vestments, all of the paraphernalia. And I did that on purpose, because the vestments and all the rest of it you might call a kind of language -- it's a vocabulary. So I used that particular vocabulary to tell the story of the spirituals. I did that on purpose because -- you see, most of Christianity is familiar with the Catholic expression -- like Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and so on. Therefore, if I tell the story of spirituals using that particular medium, people will get an idea what it's all about. People who are Protestant, and the Black people from whom the spirituals come, they get an understanding of another dimension as far as the richness of the spirituals is concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: Can we look at perhaps an illustration? This is one of the first published of "Were You there?" That came out in the 30's.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I did the drawings in the 30's, the book itself was published in the 40's.

ROBERT BROWN: We'll just look at a representative illustration from "Were You There?" -- for example, the initial one: "Were You There When They Crucified?" Could you explain wherein the richness lay for, say, a Protestant, as opposed to one who would pick up the liturgical symbolism?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, in the way I've shown St. John the Evangelist, for example. He's vested in a cope with the symbol of the eagle. And then, in the halo around the Virgin, I've used the 12 stars representing the 12 tribes of Israel. There's a cruciform halo for the Christ. The Crucifixion spiritual is interesting in a way because what I've done there is to show it in its peak scene, and I've used the background of the city for it.

ROBERT BROWN: And in that measure you meant to relate to those who wouldn't pick up necessarily the liturgical overtones, -- they could relate to the street scenes.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. So I showed the thing as contemporary. Then of course there's a liturgical aspect to that, too. Through the liturgy, you see, events of the past are made a part of the present. The celebration of the Mass, etc. is a form of the drama. In that way the past is made present. Or you might say we are made part of an ever-growing congregation of people. All of that is behind us, behind these illustrations.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know these spirituals very well yourself?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I did. The spirituals are more or less a part of my tradition vicariously, you might say. My mother knew them, of course, quite well. She lived in Philadelphia at about the turn of the century, and they used to have these big camp meetings in a place called Darby, on the outskirts of Philadelphia, then. These people would get together at these big meetings. They'd have choirs of people singing the spirituals. The choirs at the camp meetings in those days were huge. I guess the nearest comparable thing today might be one of Billy Graham's things. And they were quite formal -- the men wore Prince Alberts, the women were formally dressed. Sometimes when one speaks of camp meetings, and especially of Black people's, you get the idea of a sort of undisciplined shouting thing. If anyone is familiar with some of the movies that were made -- for instance, "Green Pastures," that they made into a movie; and some of the other movies. Sincere, but the whole thing is so darned staged. But at these camp meetings, the people sang spirituals. And of course, back then, around 1900 or 1899, a lot of those present had had the actual experience of slavery. So when they sang spirituals, it means something different than what you get nowadays. You had, then, these huge choirs, maybe about 1,000 people singing in the choir. This made a tremendous impression on my mother, and she conveyed somehow that impression to me. And in one of the spirituals that I portrayed -- it's called "Heaven" -- she said that in the way I showed the chorus of people moving in this particular series of drawings, somehow I had captured that spirit.

ROBERT BROWN: Could we have a look at that?

[END OF THIS SIDE]
[TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

ROBERT BROWN: This is the second side of the Archives tape, and we're talking now about the illustrations of spirituals, particularly with your mother's comment in mind -- that you had really got at the spirit of the spirituals and the singing of them as your mother remembered them. What's the one we're looking at right now?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's one of the closing drawings for the spiritual called "Heaven." I have the choirs moving on as they're singing. This is, she says, the way they did it. She wondered how I got the idea. She didn't exactly tell me that, but apparently there would be a long line of these people, lined up together. And they'd be moving along singing the spirituals pretty much as I have them here.

ROBERT BROWN: They're very solemn; it's almost like ranks. And they're also very elaborately dressed in liturgical robes with it looks like bishops' mitres, or crowns

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, a couple of crowns. Since this is a spiritual dealing with Heaven, everybody's crowned with heavenly crowns. And I've used the vestments like the cope and you might say the dalmatic, and underneath that the alb.

ROBERT BROWN: These are all heavily embroidered, decorated. That's the first scene from the spiritual "Heaven." What followed -- a series of several, didn't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE This is another drawing of the same spiritual. These are the final drawings of this particular hymn. These are just showing the saints going before the Throne of God. I've used the liturgy again. I've used the young boy, here, with the vestments -- the dalmatic, the alb underneath, and he's carrying a censer and is being followed by the saints, who, as they pass the Throne of God, they lift up their crowns. Around God are shown the figures of the trinity, indicated by the triangle in the midst of the halo. And then the crown of the figure, of the A, the Alpha and the Omega. Then, around are the cherubim. I don't show the songs here but I do show it in another drawing. [He pauses to search] I think maybe this last drawing -- yes. This drawing here shows a throne underneath the Throne of God. Thrones there are shown as winged wheels. See, there are nine choirs of angels according to Byzantine tradition. These nine choirs are divided into three groups. The first group, which is closest to God, are the cherubim and seraphim enthroned. Then there's another group called, I think, counsellors, principalities, and powers. And there's a third group called virtues, archangels and angels. Each has their own particular sign. Here I've shown the cherubim and seraphim enthroned. The thrones uphold the Throne of God

ROBERT BROWN: The thrones of angels uphold the . . . what shall I say, the ultimate Throne, the Throne of God?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Then of course He's surrounded by the cherubim and seraphim. The seraphim usually have six wings, painted red, and the cherubim usually have four wings, painted blue. The seraphim and the red represent the Love of God and the blue represents the Wisdom of God. I say "cherubim" -- sometimes people think of these cute little babies, with cute little wings, that they call "cherubs." That's rather unfortunate; that came from, I guess, the Roman putti. How they ever wandered into the picture I don't know. The cherubim mean the Old Testament, like huge winged lions with men's faces; that's one idea of cherubim in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the cherubim would be, as indicated here -- like these over here - might have four wings. And the seraphim have six.

ROBERT BROWN: And the crowd here are the saints.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Bowing down before the Throne of God. These of course were drawings; they were never colored. Is that right?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they never were. These are all brush drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you inclined, and if you could now, would you have worked them up into paintings, with all the colors such as you've just described?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. The things are designed as black-and-white brush drawings. The color is supplied by the person who looks at them.

ROBERT BROWN: This is an intentional thing on your part.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: When you look at them, for example, these colors, these descriptions from the Bible, and all, come forth to you? As you look at that drawing, it takes on color, you might say?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well I see color. Even though I might do a thing in black-and-white, I see it in terms of color, naturally. But then I let the other people see the color, too.

ROBERT BROWN: These were published in the 40's. These are mostly drawings from the 30's. And the first one to be published was "Were You There?"

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: That was published by Harvard University Press. How did that come about, do you recall? Did somebody approach you, or did you approach them? Had your drawings been exhibited someplace, so that you were fairly well known?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I'd given several lectures and illustrated them with these drawings. I've illustrated 12 spirituals [Pausing] or maybe it's 11 spirituals. Only four have been published. I planned to do 13. The original scheme was to do two books on the Old Testament, three books on the New Testament. The first was going to be "Go Down Moses," and accompanying that would be "Steal Away." The reason I prepared them together because "Moses" is the idea of freedom of people, and "Steal Away" is freedom from the earth, you might say. Then the second book was going to be "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." Then I think I was going to have the spiritual "Somebody's Knocking at Your Door" to accompany that. The third book was going to be the Christmas spirituals, that is, "Oh Mary, Where Is the Child?" and "Go Tell It on the Mountain." And then there was going to be a spiritual on the ministry of Christ, -- "I Know the Lord," I think. The fourth volume was going to consist of "I Know the Lord, He Laid His Hands on Me." And then there was going to be a Palm Sunday spiritual, and the Crucifixion spiritual. And "Oh Lord, Have mercy on Me," which would be a Holy Communion spiritual.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work out this scheme with somebody?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no, I worked it out for myself.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was it that picked up this interest? Was it some particular group of people that were interested?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE And the fifth book was going to be this one here called "Three Spirituals."

ROBERT BROWN: Who did you go to? Was there anybody that wanted to have these published?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, how that came about is kind of interesting. Professor Kenneth Conant at Harvard University became interested

ROBERT BROWN: How did he get to know about them? Through his friendship with you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Then he saw the drawings. And, as I mentioned, I used to give lectures on liturgical art back in the 40's. I gave talks at the Museum of Contemporary Art -- in those days it was called the Museum of Modern Art.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you did? This was a lecture to artists mainly, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. They just had me come in and I gave the lecture -- I gave a whole lot of lectures back in the 40's; I was quite busy doing that. So, Kenneth Conant became acquainted with the work and became interested. He happened to know Mr. Scaife [sp?], who was the Editor of the Press at the time. He approached him and Harvard said, "Okay, we'll try, give it a whirl." So they came out with the "Were You There?" in 1944. It sold out. But it wasn't reprinted because that was during the War, so they couldn't do anything -- shortages, etc. Later on, Harvard did the "Three Spirituals" in 1948. And the "All Glory," that's the prayer consecration. I did that, also in '48. That was printed by the Cowley [sp?] philes [?]. I'd been associated and acquainted with the " " for quite a long while, by then. There was quite a body of interest -- the Cowleyphiles did a lot, in exhibitions and promotion of the work. So there was a great deal going for the "Spirituals."

ROBERT BROWN: In your lectures, what did you generally talk about?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The Church , the meaning of it, the use, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think the use would be of these illustrations of spirituals? Religious?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The idea of illustrating the spirituals came about because I listened to the radio, back in those days. I heard a radio announcer say, with all good intentions, "Now, ladies and gentlemen, we'll listen to this beloved spiritual called 'Old Black Joe.'" I kind of figured we were in trouble, because that isn't a spiritual; it wasn't composed by Black people. I had a feeling that the spirituals were being lost. What I did was just try to illustrate a few of them, so that people would get an idea that spirituals are hymns of the church, part of the religious musical literature of the world. That's why I illustrated them. Almost as an act of preservation.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you see them as knowledge of them being lost . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. When you get an announcement like that [He laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: I'm sure you do! What about among Black people themselves? Did you feel there was a need for them to know more about them? Or did you find they were sort of getting distorted with the passage of time, and you wanted to capture them in their purity? Did that . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Slowly, after reflecting] Not really. I mean, as far as Black people were concerned, the spirituals were a part of some of their life. But of course spirituals have been transferred from, you might say, QUOTE the Church UNQUOTE to the concert stage; like Roland Hayes. And then there were the Fisk Jubilee Singers and other groups of singers wandering around the countryside and elsewhere, singing spirituals as a fund-raising thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know any of these singers -- Roland Hayes?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Did you know him when you were a young man?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. To me as a young man he was one of these exalted, distant persons. But there was a kind of personal tie as far as Mr. Hayes was concerned. He used to live on Greenwich Street, if I remember rightly. My mother and I lived on Greenwich Street for a short time. He lived on one end of the street, and my mother was apparently in the middle of the street. Anyhow, he opened his windows and of course he'd be practicing. So my mother had the pleasure of hearing him under what you might call informal circumstances. But later, of course, we knew him, and by that time he'd sung to crowned heads, etc. We used to go to his house every once in a while.

ROBERT BROWN: He'd moved away?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. After he became well known, he bought a house out in Brookline. So we used to go out there every now and then. He'd open the house up for Africans to come and give talks. The last time we saw him was several years ago. My mother and I were looking for someplace to live; we had to move from 2 Dilworth Street, so we saw Mr. Hayes. He had some suggestions. That was the last time we saw him alive -- he was well into his 80's by then. He wrote the forward to one of the books of the "Spirituals"

ROBERT BROWN: This [book] is Roland Hayes' Introduction to "Three Spirituals," February 1948. He talks about their simplicity which is deceptive, but actually, he says, they're filled with grandeur and symbolism to which he thinks you've contributed; you've brought that out in your illustrations.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, the spirituals are deceptive. I remember one time during the Civil Rights movement, I was talking to a young priest. He spoke about the spirituals. He said, "The spirituals are slave songs. We sing songs of freedom." I appreciated his sentiments but I thought his facts were wrong. The spirituals are quite valid even today. The point of them was: they stressed the idea of a person's humanity within a system which denied that humanity. That happened to be the formal system of slavery. Today, we have a formal system of technology which does practically the same thing in many ways. It denies your human dignity. Something like spirituals are needed to reinforce the idea of the fact that we're human beings.

ROBERT BROWN: And particularly the relation of the human being to God?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, the human being to God and the human being to fellow humans. The spirituals are quite practical. People sometimes think of them . . . they work on several levels, you might say. The spirituals of course were hymns; they were oral tradition. People, a lot of them, didn't know how to read, so they used this form of hymn as an oral tradition. They were instruments of worship. They were also instruments of communication. There's a great deal of symbolism, like the River Jordan would be the Ohio River. And there's a great deal of code business in them. For example, somebody would say "There's going to be a great camp meeting in the Promised Land." All the massa would hear would be this great camp meeting in the Promised Land interesting; that's all he heard. The message was "There's going to be a meeting someplace." Then too they were commentaries on the Scriptures; therefore the admonitions of how to live one's life. The point was

that, no matter what your station was, you were responsible for that life which you had. So, they function on several levels.

My friend looked upon them, of course, as being slave songs, I guess, with the "pie in the sky" idea -- that you'll get your reward in Heaven by and by.

ROBERT BROWN: The speaker back in the 60's. In the 30's, your fellow Blacks felt they were proud of these illustrations, they were interested in this, they were proud of their spirituals.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They were interested and sometimes a little curious. The idea of "Black is beautiful" hadn't caught on, back in the 30's. You see, there were terrible things which were going on. Being Black back there, there wasn't much of a role image, [Hesitates] I don't know how to say it. But you see, Africa, back in those days, the image you got of Africa, was man-eating cannibals, wild animals, Tarzan of the Apes, and the Rider Haggard story of King Solomon's Mines -- that kind of mythology. And Africa in those days was under the rule of colonial powers like England and France, etc. Information about Benin and Yoruba peoples, the kinds of Benin and Ife [sp?] -- that kind of stuff wasn't available on a popular basis. The picture you got of Africa was something like that. And the depiction of Blacks in the United States was either of sharecroppers or jazz Blacks of Harlem. Anything with "Blackness" in it wasn't always met with great favor. Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn't, but there was this continuous barrage of propaganda, advertising, in which a Black person was just simply invisible. If you look in magazines like Ebony, even in the 50's, they're full of skin lightness and hair-straighteners.

So, my coming out with this idea of Black people, the way I did it, in the liturgy and the spirituals, bothered some Black people and encouraged a lot of others.

ROBERT BROWN: They were really rather bold things in their time.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I was a revolutionary [Laughing] in many ways.

ROBERT BROWN: It's interesting, on the other hand, to see that the Phillips Collection and the Museum of Modern Art acquired two of your paintings of street scenes. In other words, sort of social, realism, rather than this kind of thing. Do you suppose the white world in the 30's was more interested simply in looking at the American scene rather than the very personal, the spiritual Black concern that you express in the "Spirituals?"

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Carefully] Not really. As a matter of fact, as far as the white world QUOTE, UNQUOTE, is concerned, I always have a problem with that. Everything moved. I mean, the paintings moved, the drawings moved, and everything moved. One of the popular things I did

ROBERT BROWN: "Everything moved" -- you mean, everything sold, or everything got shown?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Everything got shown, everything moved. Not rapidly, that was during the Depression, but one of the most popular things I did was a pamphlet called "Is It Nothing To You?" That came out also in 1948. That went nationally, as far as the Episcopal Church was concerned. That was a Black figure.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a story about what?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The story of the Passion against a background of the city streets. The theme was a variation of the "Were You There?", the Crucifixion spiritual. This particular drawing, here, of the Christmas Mass, that was used as the cover design of the national publication of the Episcopal church back in '48. So there was a great deal of acceptance all the way around. It made its impact. I have no idea of knowing how great an impact. The only thing is, every once in a while I get a feedback that sort of humbles me, when a priest comes and tells me -- and these are mostly white priests -- they're in the business because of the drawings I made.

The work which I do -- the drawings and all that kind of work, the reactions to them, people either like them and with enthusiasm, or they dislike them with [Laughing] equal enthusiasm.

ROBERT BROWN: What are some of the reasons why they dislike them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, some folks may be bothered with Blackness, something like that. Then of course, with style, which has nothing to do with the subject matter -- some people like a certain style in drawing, others don't. For example, some people might think that Thomas Benton's things are wonderful, other people

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Your style was not a conscious choice? It was just the way you sort of automatically did it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, yes, my style is my personal style, just like anybody's style of work. You can tell Michelangelo's things or Leonardo's things

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. Although your paintings of the 30's are often much quieter or with heavier figures

sometimes -- some of the paintings that we discussed earlier. Your drawings are another medium, perhaps that gives you a lightness of hand and a precision.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, yes. I work within the disciplines of the medium. But it would be my style of work all the way through, though.

[END OF THIS DAY'S INTERVIEW]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE
AUGUST 22, 1980
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Crite, we haven't talked, at least in any detail, about your affiliation or your showing with the Society of Independent Artists in Boston. About when was that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I became associated with the Boston Society of Independent Artists around 1929. The way it happened was, I went up to Tamworth, N.H., and worked on the farm estate of Walter Killum [sp?] He was one of the officers of the Boston Society. When I came back, he suggested I become a member.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you do while you were in Tamworth? You painted, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. It was almost just being away from home for awhile, almost like camping out.

ROBERT BROWN: He selected you and other artists to come up there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, he just had me come up. It isn't quite clear as to how or why I was there. I'll have to look back in my journal -- I think I was writing a journal, then -- and see.

ROBERT BROWN: You came back in the Fall of 1929?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What as the Society? What did you find it to be like?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The principal function of the Society was to have an annual non-juried show. What happened was, there were quite a few well-known artists in it, and it gave them an opportunity to discover unknown artists and present them to the public. The show was down at Beacon Hill in a place called The Barn, I think it's on Joy Street. My first showing there was about 1929.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you recall showing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] A couple of watercolors.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there critical reaction? Was it written up in the newspapers?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it was, but I wasn't written up, the show was written up by the art critics. Sometimes they panned things and praised others, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the purpose of this partly for artists who couldn't get a showing in regular galleries and clubs? Or people who resented juries?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE N-n-no. My feeling was it was the idea of partly discovering new talent. An artist like myself wouldn't be able to show in a gallery because nobody knew me. So by taking part in the Boston Society, that was one way of getting the work out.

ROBERT BROWN: You were still an art student at that time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I'd just started at the Museum school, in '29.

ROBERT BROWN: What effect did this have on you, this first show, do you remember?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, it was very exciting.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to meet some other artists?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I met Charles Holly Pepper. I think another one was Hopkinson -- Charles Hopkinson.

ROBERT BROWN: What were these men like, do you recall?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They were very generous and very kind and very understanding. I think I met William Brooks Hazelton -- as a matter of fact I studied under him up in, I think it was Gloucester, maybe it was Rockport [Laughing], I can't remember which. There were others whose names I can't remember offhand -- this is going back almost a half a century.

ROBERT BROWN: Of course. These people were being very generous and kind. Did you get to know Pepper?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not to any great degree

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like, as a person, do you recall?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, he was a very understanding type of person, as I just vaguely recall. He bought some of my things later on.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, among students, this was probably pretty unusual, to have a show, wasn't it? Did most of your fellow students have shows as well?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That I don't recall. There may have been other Museum school students taking part in this show but I can't remember offhand. At any rate, I showed for awhile. I'm looking at my records here, a record compiled by the Library.

ROBERT BROWN: Which years do they indicate -- through the 30's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. 1929 was my first showing. Then, 1930. Apparently, from the looks of this thing, these are watercolors. Then there seems to be a break of a year; I must look in my journal to see what happened. 1932, called "A Back Yard." I don't know what that was; it may have been a watercolor. Then there's a painting called "Cl...r's Child," an oil painting, I have that here.

ROBERT BROWN: That was of what? Was that a portrait?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no, it's just a young family standing on some steps and some children. The painting is upstairs. Then, in 1934, there's a big thing called "Settling the World's Problems." That was an oil. That one is when I got my formal recognition. I was introduced, you might say, by Mr. Corcoran/Cochran. He was the dean of art critics at that time. He wrote for the Boston Transcript. They made a big to-do about it -- there were photographs of the painting in newspapers. That you might say was my formal introduction.

ROBERT BROWN: That's when to people you became much better known.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this result in your having additional exhibits at that time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The Grace (Holmes) Horne Gallery became interested. This was in 1934.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she show you several times?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, later on they did. The Gallery acted as my patron, you might say, for several years. Then, in 1935 there was another oil painting, called "Thus Saith the Lord." I have a sketch of that around somewhere.

ROBERT BROWN: You're talking now about the exhibits of the Society of Independent Artists?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. In 1936 there's another painting, called "The Children's Pilgrimage." This was the Stations of the Cross pilgrimage at St. Augustin's Church in Boston, Roxbury. That painting is still in existence, it's at the St. Augustin's church now.

ROBERT BROWN: By that time you were mainly doing liturgical subjects?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I was doing both.

ROBERT BROWN: You were doing both that and neighborhood scenes?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. All of these things went on at the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: Would it be through these shows or, say, through the Grace Horne Gallery that people like Duncan Phillips in Washington got to know of your work?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I guess it would be through that.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he contact you directly?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Through the Gallery, I think. For that I'd have to go back and look at my journal, because I did keep an active journal back then. In 1937, there was "Columbus Avenue." That was reviewed. There was a photograph of it in the newspapers.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that acquired by someone?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. That painting "Columbus Avenue," "Thus Saith the Lord" and the "Settling the World's Problems" -- I think I sold those paintings during the Depression. At a ridiculous sum -- I think about \$35 each, something like that. I wish I could get hold [Laughing] of those paintings! I've been hearing some rumors. There's a chap down on Kneeland [?] Street, a wool merchant. He bought the paintings. He may have bought some more. He kept them there, kind of like an investment. His son, I think, has or had a book store on Massachusetts Avenue near Harvard Square. I think the book store isn't in existence or is under another name, something like that. I was talking to Byron Rushing [phon. sp.] and he said he came in contact with a dealer who said he saw these paintings fairly recently. So Byron is trying to track them down and see what can be done. If these things are stored away, maybe you can walk in and say casually, "Well, what's this?" And if the dealer isn't too aware, might pick them up.

ROBERT BROWN: This is something you might want to do. But at the time, in the Depression, you had to sell to make some money. Your mother must have been extremely proud of this recognition you were getting so young.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Ye-e-es, I guess so.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she openly tell you this?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Hesitating] Yes and no. My mother backed me. At this time of course my father was ill; he was ill from 1929 until 1937 when he died. So I got complete backing from my mother. And of course I was in art school, in the Museum School of Fine Arts; I was there on tuition scholarships. So I got thorough backing from that. And Mother was working -- she was intensely interested that I get an education. And she was criticized for it by some people. Some people said, "You ought to take that boy out of school and put him to work." And on a short-term basis, they were very right. But on a long-term basis, it would have been a disaster. The fact that I'm sitting down here now, retired, is the result of the fact that I earned my living by drawing.

In 1938 there's an other painting, called "A Car Stop."

ROBERT BROWN: That was another genre painting?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, these are all genre paintings. This one, I think, is at the Boston Athenaeum. I think it's called "Northampton and Washington Streets." I did two paintings [Hesitating] -- the reason I'm hesitating is because I'm looking at the dates: 1936, I was with the WPA; I did quite a few paintings then

ROBERT BROWN: They commissioned urban scenes, too?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I did easel paintings for the WPA. They gave you free rein.

ROBERT BROWN: Those paintings were sent to Washington, those paintings?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, some were. I lost track of a lot of them. There are maybe eight or nine paintings that I have a record of

ROBERT BROWN: You don't know where they are now?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. One painting that I have a record of, called "School's Out." I did that in '36. That was in the Museum of Modern Art in a WPA show there, but it's now in the Fine Arts [Nat'l Collection of Fine Arts Museum] collection of the Smithsonian Institution. They used that recently in this calendar thing, as you've seen. I recently purchased another painting called "Sunlight and Shadow." I did that in 1941; that's also part of the Collection.

ROBERT BROWN: They purchased that from you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: This was one, another urban scene, a genre?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. I did a lot of that. You see, my oil paintings once were genre.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you go out -- did you set up your easel in the street? Or did you work from sketches in your studio?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I worked from sketches.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy doing that kind of study?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I did it on purpose, you see. The idea was to establish a record, just to show the life of Black people in an ordinary setting -- to show them "just as people" and not a social problem. The paintings weren't editorializing or anything like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you criticized by Blacks at that time for not being a little more political?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. At least I don't remember anything like that. You see, I was doing about three things at the same time. I was doing these genre paintings -- oils, watercolors and drawings. Then I was doing the liturgical drawings; they were Blacks [these were brush drawings]. And then I was illustrating the spirituals.

ROBERT BROWN: By the way, were the liturgical drawings being done for certain patrons, or certain people?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. It was just part of my own Catholic revival. I went through, you might say, a personal Catholic revival of an Episcopalian. I was, I am. So I went through a period from Low Church to High Church, if I may use that expression. Then I became interested in the liturgy, so I made these drawings just for the sake of making them. But out of that came these blockprint Stations of the Cross which were sold around and about. The Museum of Fine Arts has a set, purchased around 1945 or 46, something like that; I can't remember exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, not to go into any great detail, but how long were you then involved with the Society show -- the Society of Independent Artists?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I'm surprised, because I was involved with it from 1929 to 1958.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that about as long as they continued?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Apparently. Apparently they went out of existence in '58, at least the records don't go any further than that.

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps you did no more than habitually send something over for their show, but you weren't otherwise involved.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes

ROBERT BROWN: Or were you? Were you ever an active member, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE As a matter of fact, I think that the purpose of the Society was its annual exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: And nothing much more than that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I don't recall any other activity.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Walter Killum [?] the person who got you into the Society?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? He lived up there, at their place.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He was an architect, and he was Old Yankee [Laughing], in a way. The Eastern part of their firm was called, I think, Killum, Hopkins & Greeley. I don't know whether that firm exists today or not.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like as a person to you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He was a sort of patriarchal type of person. One almost thinks of him, I guess, like maybe one of the early Pilgrim Fathers [Laughing]. He was a very kindly, understanding sort of a person. I became acquainted with another architect, McGinniss [?]. He designed the altar for Trinity Church; he did quite a few things. I became acquainted with -- rather, I just met -- Ralph Adams Cram. And I had some dealings with Carnick [sp?], Charles Carnick. [Voice overlaps w. interviewer's; name obscured]

ROBERT BROWN: What was your relations with McGinniss? Did you do some design for him?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE He was very much interested in my work, so he more or less sent me down to New York and got me acquainted with Rambush

ROBERT BROWN: The lighting people?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. And they did church decorations. So he got me acquainted with them. Through that introduction, I was able to be with the Rambush Decorating Co. for 14 months or so.

ROBERT BROWN: This was after the War; this was in the late 40's?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE This would be in the 50's -- '49 and '50 I was with the Rambush Decorating Co.

ROBERT BROWN: You were already, though, a draftsman at the Naval Yard.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So you did this part-time?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, what happened

ROBERT BROWN: You got a leave of absence?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No -- yes, I did, I got a fourth leave of absence [laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Or they cut back on staff?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. My Civil Service was sort of off and on. I was there from about 1940, '43, '43, something like that. Then I went back again. Then I was laid off again. And in that period, from about 1948 to the latter part of 1950, I was off in the Navy Dept. But during that time I was with Rambush Decorating co. Then when I got through with them, the Navy called me back. And then I stayed on until I retired in 1970.

ROBERT BROWN: Now -- to go back -- what was McGinniss like, as you recall?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I remember him almost like a patriarchal figure.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was no Yankee. Did you and he discuss things quite a bit?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I did but -- we were sort of caught up in what you'd call a "liturgical art movement." It was strong in the Catholic church, in those days. There was a kind of school of thought, you might almost say. Among other people I ran into was, I think his name was Cary Graham -- no Graham Cary/Carey. Used to live out on E. Garden Street. They were sort of tied in with the English school of artists, like Eric Gill, for example.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they think they were doing? What were they striving for in their liturgical art?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They were trying to put some good art into the Catholic church. Because, you see, they had all these plaster saints and stuff like that, put up by -- I forget the name of the companies.

ROBERT BROWN: How did they think they could upgrade the art of the Catholic church?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE By putting in original works of art, and designing the places, things like that. They had some support from the Cardinal.

ROBERT BROWN: You went to New York and worked Rambush. Who in that firm did you principally work with?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The whole company. It was run like a studio, you know. I think the Rambush Decorating Co. is probably the nearest counterpart to a Renaissance studio that you could find.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they had a whole range of craftsmen and artist?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you fit in there?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was in the mural department. Then I did design some glass for a Protestant church. I made a tabernacle design -- tabernacle candlesticks, as I recall.

ROBERT BROWN: Your principal project was for a mural, wasn't it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Could we talk about that a bit?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I did something else while I was with them. I designed the baldocchino ceiling for the Franciscan Monastery in Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that to be a mosaic, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, it was a strange kind of thing, absolutely hard to describe. I designed the thing and it was painted on copper. The drawing was delineated by means of copper wire. Since a baldocchino ceiling is about 35 feet above the altar, looking up at it from the floor, you'd get the effect of cloisonné enamel. It was quite an experiment

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of paint did you use, on copper?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They used an enamel paint. All I did was make up the cartoons, then the craftsmen did the actual execution from the cartoons.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you supervise them closely when they were doing it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE To a degree. Not closely, but that they follow the design.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the color?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I indicated the color.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you correct them? Did you have the veto power on it as the designer? How did things work . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE What I did was the design, what they called the full-scale cartoon. Then it was turned over to the people who did the execution.

ROBERT BROWN: They weren't there, obviously . . . they carried

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Then they installed it and everything like that. I was working with a sculptor named Gleb Derujinsky. He made the decoration for the columns of this baldocchino.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you and Derujinsky work together? I mean, he did the columns, and you did the ceiling . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Two separate projects.

ROBERT BROWN: You coordinated your styles?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. The things are entirely different in style.

ROBERT BROWN: How would you describe your style for that ceiling?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Well, it's more like a

ROBERT BROWN: Stylized?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh, you'd have to be highly stylized, because the drawing was indicated by the wire . . . you can only do certain things with it.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd simplify.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, quite a lot. I suppose you might think of it almost like a stained-glass technique, a very early stained-glass technique, in that the drawing would be delineated by the lead lines more than anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there figures?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: So you brought about faces, and expressions . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They were very simplified. I should have had some photographs

ROBERT BROWN: The mural project was for the church in Brooklyn?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE St. Augustin's Church in Brooklyn.

ROBERT BROWN: An Episcopal church.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was the project that you were given the commission to do through Rambush?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The way that worked out was that Rambush contacted the priest in the vestry and they made the arrangements. Rambush told me I could do this in either one of two ways: I could take the whole job and supervise it, or they could do the work and all the supervision and I'd work with Rambush on a salaried basis. I chose that. Because I didn't know anything about all the contracts and all those complications.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you done any murals to speak of before that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Voice assuming a mocking quality] No! [He laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: How did you begin? How big was the space?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Forty-five feet by fifty-five. I had to make small scale drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the theme supposed to be?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The central figure was St. Augustin flanked by St. Monica, and his mother and St. Ambrose. Then at the feet of St. Augustin, the Christ Child.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was a very ambitious undertaking.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, it was. But of course it wasn't "ambitious" so far as Rambush was concerned, because they did murals by the acre. [Both laugh] A lot of them they did right there in the studio, and then they'd go and install them. In this case, I had to go to the wall itself. So I made . . . first I made the sketch, several sketches. These designs were shown to the priests in the vestry, and they decided which one they wanted.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort did they approve? What sort of things did they seem to want?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, anything dealing with St. Augustin.

ROBERT BROWN: Did they want any particular style over another?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. They just wanted me to do it. You see, the church was mostly Black, so it was the idea of having a Black person doing it.

ROBERT BROWN: They were pleased by that.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. At any rate, I made up several sketches, and they approved one. Then I made another scale drawing from that. That's in the other room. After the scale drawings were done, then of course I had to make full-scale cartoons. The cartoon paper was about five feet wide, and unlimited in length. so I could draw a full drawing of St. Augustin, for example, and another one of St. Monica, and so on. The wall space of the studio was sufficiently large so it would accommodate a 21-foot figure.

ROBERT BROWN: The figure of St. Augustin was that large?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Twenty-one feet: I think that's large. Then after I got through with the cartoon, then I went to the church itself. The Rambush people built the scaffolding, and they prepared the wall. Because it was going to be oil on a prepared wall. They did all that -- supplied the paints, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have helpers, then, when you went to paint?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. You see, there was the question of union. I was a non-union person, in a sense. They did all the preparation, putting up the scaffolding, etc. then I went traipsing over there with my cartoons. I pounced the wall

ROBERT BROWN: You pricked through to the wall . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. It took me almost a day to do the pouncing.

ROBERT BROWN: The surface was not . . . you were working in oil; it didn't have to be wet . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But it was sufficiently roughened so that it would absorb? Or did you size it first?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they did all of that.

ROBERT BROWN: That was all prepared.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE They prepared everything for me. So all I had to do was go there and paint.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd never done painting on that scale before, had you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] No -- I was scared to death. I was scared on two counts -- the size of the painting for one thing; the other thing, working on a scaffolding. I'd never been on a scaffolding before. The senior mural painter told me sort of cheerfully that the Rambush people were giving me a concession -- the scaffolding they had was about five planks wide; normally, you'd have only one or two planks wide. A plank is about so big

ROBERT BROWN: About eight [?] [Auto noise through window] inches wide?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE So, they gave me something like this.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you tend to step back much?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] No! [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: You stayed very close to your work.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I did. After a while I got used to it.

ROBERT BROWN: You never walked off a plank . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not that I know of. [Both laugh] I wouldn't dare, anyhow . . . you know, the priest might be a little bit annoyed, it would mess up the sanctuary floor

ROBERT BROWN: Oh yes! But you had to simplify a great deal, because these images, large as they were, had to carry a great distance, didn't they?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But you'd worked all that out in the cartoon.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you done enough detail in the cartoon that you'd refer to it . . . or you'd count from there and simply follow along? Your specters of color, you knew exactly what you had to do?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Of course I did modify a little bit, because I could step back in the church and see how it was coming along.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have to modify colors much, once you got the whole thing in oil?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Not too much. I used the colors that they gave me.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of colors . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Sort of flat.

ROBERT BROWN: Fairly low key?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, kind of. Not too much, but sort of low key. Reds, blues, and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: Would that have been your choice of colors?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. From the cartoon. I was on that thing about 40 days, because I had to get it done in a

hurry.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that work fairly tedious?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. You see, I'd come down and I'd go right straight to the mural. I worked on it quite a long while -- I did more than eight hours a day on it. Because it was interesting work, for one thing. And the people -- persons would come in to see what was going on. If I was wise to the ways of the world, I could probably have had one or two interesting adventures. But I was innocent of the ways of the world, so I didn't have any adventures. [He laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: The people were very interested in you as well as the work?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I remember one person in particular. As I look back at it, I'm sort of amazed at how innocent I was, [Laughing] so naive. I'm quite sure I could have pursued things that would have been of more than just casual interest. [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, back to your working. Would you step down, and back, quite often, as you painted during the day? Look at the whole thing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Sort of keep the whole thing under control.

ROBERT BROWN: One thing is, linking the whole together, on this scale -- the various parts together. Did you have to alter from your cartoons at all, in that respect?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, not really. You see, I put down enough in the cartoons to serve as a guide. I didn't put everything in the cartoons, yes, outline and

ROBERT BROWN: It was a very symmetrical composition. And there's a rocky landscape that sort of runs through much of it that would kind of link it together.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. And, you see, symbolically, the base of the painting was Africa, and the top part was Italy. A sort of biography starting on the left-hand side -- our left-hand side -- I indicated the town of where St. Augustin was born. Then next the town of Carthage, where he went to the university. On the right-hand side, lower right-hand side, is the town called Hipporegius [sp?], where he was a bishop. In the upper part of the painting, I show Milan and the Church of St. Ambrosio where St. Augustin heard St. Ambrose. On the right-hand side is Ostia, the seaport town of Rome -- his mother is buried around there. Behind St. Augustin I put the city of God, the book.

ROBERT BROWN: The church was very pleased by it?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. During the service the mural served as a kind of focal point of a pilgrimage for the people of the General Theological Seminary -- so they could go over there and see this mural that was done by one of the churchmen. It was quite a thing.

[END OF THIS SIDE]

[TAPE 2, SIDE 2]

[TAPE 3, SIDE 1]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE

AUGUST 22, 1980

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: To finish our discussion of the mural at St. Augustin Church in Brooklyn, you were talking about the General Theological Seminary students coming over. Did you get other reactions to your work there? For example, publicity, or awareness?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I did. People were very much interested. I was quite active in the church in those days -- still am -- but back then, of course, I got national recognition

ROBERT BROWN: Through what? Through the Episcopal Church family?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, I mean I was known in the Episcopal Church, but outside of the church, I don't know. Anyhow, I had two exhibitions over at Columbia University.

ROBERT BROWN: Mainly of your liturgical art?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. And then my work got into national publications like the Living Church and The Witness -- those are national publications of the Church. And then at this time I started wandering around talking in these various Episcopal seminaries. The thing that started that off was that a friend of mine was ordained to the Diaconate here in Boston -- no, he wasn't ordained then. He was a student at the University of the South, in Tennessee. He belonged to what they called The St. Luke's Society, and he invited me down to give a talk in Tennessee. This was back in the 50's.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that go?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I was scared to death, because I had all kinds of pictures of the South -- I mean, necktie parties and all that sort of stuff. And the trains and the public weren't exactly integrated. So I decided to go down by air. I'm not very fond of air travel . . . I'll go if I have to. Back in these days it was the time of propeller planes. I took the plane down and got off, I guess it was Nashville, or maybe it was Chattanooga. I was picked up by the seminarians and taken off to "the mountain," as they call it. I stayed there for a week or so and gave talks on liturgical art, meaning, and so on. From that I got a series of talks in different Episcopal seminaries.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you mainly talk about, by way of art? What did you try to express?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The use of liturgy, I mean the use of art in liturgy. Saying that the use of art was more or less the visual expression of the liturgy, and that it was part of the teaching apparatus of the Church.

ROBERT BROWN: This was something that had not been stressed previously in the Episcopal Church? This was something of new interest?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, sort of renewed interest.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you give lectures with slides? Or did you bring a bunch of your drawings?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, I had slides and I had an exhibition. It was very well received. The St. Luke's Society invited me down for two purposes -- one to give talks on liturgical art, the other one -- this was before the days of integration of schools in the South -- in order, by my presence, to dramatize the point the students were trying to get across.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was that there should be integration?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. There should be some Blacks in the schools.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that go, do you recall?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. It was rather dramatic. The following year they stressed the idea that they wanted to get some Blacks into the theological school. The school at that time refused to accept the idea, so as a result, about a third of the student body, I think, and about a third of the faculty resigned. That included the dean of the school. This was quite a sacrifice, but they meant what they said. About four years later came the decision of Brown V. Something-or-other, the landmark decision of the Supreme Court in 1954.

ROBERT BROWN: You were aware when you went down there that you were being brought in as a presence, a Black person.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. They made that abundantly clear. [Both laugh] And also I was aware that I was scared to death.

ROBERT BROWN: Were they quite protective and solicitous of you while you were with them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I couldn't ask for better treatment. When you speak about "Southern hospitality," that wasn't a myth. I stayed at one of the professor's homes because there weren't "any other accommodations." And there weren't any other accommodations, so far as the dormitories, etc. were concerned -- any visiting people would have to stay at the homes of the faculty. They treated me royally. As I look back, I see that it was an act of courage on their part. At the meetings, when I went in to deliver the lecture, everybody rose as a mark of respect. They respected me as a person, and also they recognized me as a scholar. I was afforded all the due courtesies, etc. One incident that then impressed me: The airport is a considerable distance from Sewanee where the School is located; a drive of maybe an hour or so. A couple of seminarians drove me back to the airport, and they wanted to stop off at a restaurant halfway down, to have something to eat. I said, "Oh, don't worry, I'll get a meal on the plane." They said, "No, we what to do this." So we stopped at this restaurant. One of these young men, from North Carolina, went in and talked to the proprietor, to explain to him that there was a Black person with them. The proprietor said, "Well, no, can't do anything about it, the customers are here." So the seminarian came out and he was steaming. He said, "You know, we'll pray for the guy and cuss him out, so we'll do both." Anyhow, we went to the Chattanooga airport, and they still insisted they wanted to

eat with me. I said, "Gee, don't bother." It didn't quite dawn on me what they were thinking of, in a way. They insisted, so I said, "OK, fine." The three of us sat down in the lounge in the airport with a sandwich and a soda for the three of us -- two whites and one Black. I got on the plane, and it didn't [Speaking very slowly, emphatically] dawn on me, really, in a sense what they were doing. I got off the plane in La Guardia in New York. Then it hit me -- they were expressing their particular idea of making a public demonstration. Probably one of the reasons why they could do it with me was because up here in Boston, I'd been used to working with people, with white people, and from my point of view, all I saw was just a person who happened to be white, or happened to be Black; and that was about it. I didn't have -- I still don't have -- the sense of race consciousness per se. All I see is somebody who happens to be white, who happens to be Black; it's just a means of identification as far as I'm concerned. If somebody makes me conscious of the fact that I'm Black, then I know I have a problem with that particular person. Because then that person doesn't see me but sees a symbol of me. So I have a problem there.

ROBERT BROWN: Until you went South, by and large, people had not seen you as just a symbol, just a Black symbol. Your impression was that most of the whites you met regarded you as an individual?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes! I mean, that's the reaction I had -- one is conscious of the fact that one is white or one is Black; that's obvious. But it's just a matter of identification rather than symbols. At least that's the feeling I had.

ROBERT BROWN: Later, say, in the 60's and all and 70's when Black consciousness picked up, did that alter your attitude toward whites at all?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, no. The other people were changing. As far as I was concerned, that was the attitude I had all along. I think probably one of the reasons for that is because I always lived in what you'd call an integrated neighborhood, for the most part. So that was my early impression. The only time I became racially conscious was when I went down to Washington in 1929. Then, of course, I was hit with official segregation. That made me racially conscious in the negative sense. That was a traumatic experience, and a poisonous one. So, it took me, from 1929, a long time to get over that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why had you gone down there -- I think you may have told me . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The rector of my church had some relatives down there, so I went down with him to visit Washington. He was a Black person.

ROBERT BROWN: It took you a number of years to overcome . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. That experience of official segregation

ROBERT BROWN: When you came back here, your friendships, whether they were with white or Black, were on an individual basis.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Of course, what happened when I did come back from that experience, all the white people that I knew prior to that experience, the relationship was the same. But I had a mistrust of future relationships. It took me a while to get over that. Fortunately for me, I went into the Museum school, and the tradition amongst artists, as a rule, is that they see you as a person, as an artist, and your racial identity is just that -- just identity. Just like somebody is tall, short, fat, lean or whatnot. There's more of that kind of spirit amongst artists. So that was the kind of spirit naturally that pervaded the Museum school, so that helped me to get over the thing. After a while I got so that I could accept people as is. But the foundation had already been laid in my early experiences of living in what you might call an integrated neighborhood. Which I think is rather healthy. If you're living in isolation, it's very difficult to get out of that. I think that's what happens, because we have these various ghettos; and the ghetto doesn't necessarily have to be in the inner city. People out in the suburbs are just as much isolated as anybody in the inner city -- or probably more so, because of a subtle kind of a thing. People in the suburban area are not aware of the fact that they're living in isolation, in a sense. Until they come into a city or come into a situation. And then, since they've had no experience, they don't want to experience, they want to back off.

ROBERT BROWN: Surely, in recent years, with the younger Blacks and whites, you've come up against this race consciousness, haven't you? How do you advise them? How do you deal with this in them? Because they're young, they say they've grown up only in a ghetto-ized or suburban-ized situation -- unlike you.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, I'm dealing with it, in a way. That's one of the things that this educational project is all about -- saying what your heritage really is.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a project you began in the late 60's.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. See, the thing for us to do is to find out who we are, to begin with -- not what we think we are, but who we really are, as a people. That, I think, is extremely important, because we've been brought up on an Anglo-Saxon myth, in a way. The significant part of that myth is that it has a certain foundation in history, but it's only a partial story. If you look at the American colony, you find that it was made up of various European people, various Indian people, and various Black people. So the story is that the United States started out as a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural thing from the beginning. So if you understand our roots, you have to understand it from that particular basis. That's what that particular project is all about. And that probably is an outgrowth of my earlier experiences living in an integrated folk neighborhood. As a matter of fact, actually -- integration isn't a goal to be achieved, it really exists. It's a kind of myth that we have to "achieve" integration -- we already have that. The problem we have is in enforced segregation -- the cutting off of certain segments of ourselves from other parts of ourselves. That's the problem that we have. And that's because we've been brought up on this sort of Anglo-Saxon myth that everything has to be absorbed into an Anglo-Saxon concept, and so forth. Integration means absorption.

ROBERT BROWN: So, in the case of Blacks, many, many Blacks don't want to be so absorbed. Is that correct?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Well, you see, nobody does, in a certain sense. In a certain sense they can't be. Absorption is one thing, integration is something else. Integration we already have. For example, in looking at myself, if I want to talk about "my people" and if I want to be really honest about it, then of course "my people" include Blacks, include Indians, and include Europeans. All of these people are part of my ancestry. Actually, as far as this country is concerned, whether we like it or not, we're all of us are, happily, blood relatives. We don't have a racial problem in this country, we have what you might call a family squabble. [He laughs] You might say, that is literally true. A white person might say, "Well, gee whiz, I don't have any Black ancestry at all." And I would say, "Maybe you don't. But I have some white ancestry." That's the story.

ROBERT BROWN: In your educational project, have you tried, then, to pass this around among the Black community and the white community? And particularly in the Black community, in what way have you tried to do this?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I've tried to pass it on to the community -- PERIOD -- in which some are Black and some are white.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you get the word out?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE This particular project I'm working on now, I haven't distributed at all because I'm trying to complete it. But part of it is . . . there's a set at the audiovisual department of the Boston Public Library, and there's another set down in New York, and I have the third set here, which is the master set. When I get the thing completed, these institutions will have a complete set. Then I'll proceed to the problem of distribution.

ROBERT BROWN: Have you, though, apart from the whole project, have you discussed and shown parts of your visual material and discussed your ideas with individual . . . , Say, people are very militant; how do you approach that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I haven't seen very many of them. I've run across one or two people who are very military, and I say, "Hey, listen" and I try to tell them the facts of life, things as they are. But most of the time I talk about the concept and ideas and so on. Like persons like yourself, and people who come. So it goes on, bit by bit, a sort of word-of-mouth kind of thing. In other words, I sort of put the idea in people's heads and then let them develop it from there. At least give them a point of view so they'll see something they haven't quite seen before. And, to practically all the people that I talk to, it seems to make a whole lot of good sense. And they say, "Yeah, you've got a point there." The general reaction on this project and the concepts and ideas is that approaching in this way, nobody is left out.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by that?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I mean, in the project everybody is included. You have the Europeans and the Indians and the Africans, and they all define themselves as being part of this particular, one picture.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you look into their roots -- show how they are together?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE You see, our roots are here in America, through the Indians. And our roots are in Africa. Our roots are also in Europe. But they're our roots. For example, the Benin bronze is just a part of my tradition; it's a part of the tradition of everybody that's here. The same thing is true of the Indians, of the Eurasian, etc. You see, it's a different concept as to what our roots are.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean when you say a Benin bronze is part of the tradition of the Indian and the white as well as of the Black?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE The Benin bronze is one of the creations of the Benin people in West Africa. And those are part of the roots of myself, you might say. But, because of the nature of the thing, it's part of the roots of everybody.

ROBERT BROWN: At least as an art form, do you mean, that people are aware of?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE A lot of times they're not aware of it. Because they don't know about it.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean by the roots Black people . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, it's part of the American culture.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it's within the Blacks who are here, who are part of the culture?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. You see, what I'm saying is, America culturally speaking is the result of an Afro-European culture on top of an Indian base. This is where all of our roots are, for everybody. And for us to understand ourselves, we have to understand all the different parts of ourselves. Because all of these things have an influence. The Americas in general, the U.S. in particular, are a tremendous repository of Africa tradition, which has an influence on every person who walks around here. We're influenced by the music, by the way we walk, and everything like that. And the same thing is true as far as the Indian is concerned. These are sort of living traditions which are continuously changing and moving, along with the European -- one should also say Eurasian. These are living things which influence every single person here. It isn't a case of saying to a person who's Anglo-Saxon, "My roots are over in England and that's it." Because he's influenced by everything else that's happened. To understand that, you have to understand these different aspects of ourselves.

ROBERT BROWN: You tried to express this in your art for the last 15 years or so?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, in this particular project I've tried to show that, through a slide-tape presentation kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean, your own drawings and paintings . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE In my own drawings and paintings, I've done something specific, like some of these drawings showing African ancestry. But that's something that's specific for a particular isolated aspect -- I mean, to bring this particular point out. For example, I've been working on five drawings I have to do for Brown University where I show the European, Chinese, Hispanic, Black -- there are five, I can't think of the other one. Anyhow, five ethnic groups. So I'm making drawings showing some relationship of the traditions, etc, as background for each of these five drawings.

ROBERT BROWN: This is for what of the University?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE This is for a group of Afro-American studies. They have a sort of pageant each year. They want to raise funds, to give the thing some financial support. So I'm asked to make these five drawings. That's something that's more or less highly specialized, in a way. But it does go on the same theme that I've been working on.

ROBERT BROWN: This slide-tape presentation -- these are slides of what?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE My drawings. You see, the way this particular project functions, there are three sets of talks, 24 talks in each set. The first one deals with the Indian. The second one deals with the African, and the third deals with the Eurasian. So I have to have . . . about half of the slides for these talks have to be my own drawings. What I do, I write the text, I make up the drawings, then I make the slides and I do the recording. That's why it's taking so long to do.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the other illustrative material? Do you pick from art objects, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Art objects, and also from books.

ROBERT BROWN: In 1968, the Boston Athenaeum published a booklet, so I assume this was a much earlier stage, of course in this work, called "The Cultural Heritage of the United States: A Rediscovery."

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. That's what you might call a position paper.

ROBERT BROWN: In which you've stated many of these things?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get some reaction from that, and other people became aware of . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. Usually the reaction has been that this is something we need and want. I've talked to teachers and they say that they recognize what this is, and they say, "This is what we need. When do you think you'll be able to get going with it, get it out in general distribution?" A lot of teachers know what's going on, and they feel as though the kind of stuff that they present -- the material is partial and incomplete. They say that the thing I have makes a whole lot of good sense.

ROBERT BROWN: Is what they have, perhaps, "Black Pride" or the English story that doesn't show that we're a pluralistic culture?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Because it seems to me you're trying to stress the pluralism of this society.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That we all share a common experience.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE You know, we use the term "melting pot," which is untrue. A melting pot assumes that everybody is sort of made alike, becomes alike. But that doesn't happen. And it probably never will happen. It would be better if you looked at the thing as like a salad, something like that. There's a certain individuality in each element in that particular salad, yet the salad as a whole represents a unit. That's really what we have. The exciting thing about it is that our inheritance is so rich. That's the real tragedy of segregation -- that we cut ourselves off from each other, and cut ourselves off from the gifts that each of us has. And because of the fact that all of us are interrelated literally -- you might say by blood -- in cutting off one part of ourselves from another part of ourselves, we hurt ourselves. In other words, for example, I probably have a dim view of the people in South Boston. But the trouble is that if they're cut, I bleed. If I'm bruised, they're hurt. The unfortunate part about that is that for the most part none of us realize that, but it does happen. [Spoken slowly, with emphasis on last phrase.]

ROBERT BROWN: Could you explain that a little further?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, by that I mean this: We are part of each other. So anything that happens to any part of us, we all feel. But the thing is, we think that we're doing something to somebody "over there" who's different from me. Actually what we're doing is doing something to ourselves through that person. So if we do an injury to that particular person, we're hurting. And if something happens to that particular person, we feel it. That probably accounts for, you might say, the extreme and sharp pain that a lot of us feel. We're thinking we're doing to somebody else, but it's happening to us. That, in my opinion, is the real tragedy. Instead of enjoying each other, all the gifts that we have for each other, to make the whole thing a much richer experience. This country has an enormous opportunity. We have all the technical power and so forth, and we have one of the richest inheritances of any people throughout the whole world. If we wake up to the fact that we can share it with each other, we could have a cultural renaissance around here the like of which the world has never seen. That's the thing you ought to stress.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you see any signs of that happening?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Bit by bit. And of course what I'm trying to do in this particular project is to present the idea. Some people say, "Do you expect to see this in your lifetime?" That isn't my responsibility. My job, as I see it, is to put the idea out there. If it gets picked up during my lifetime, fine. If it doesn't, well that's OK -- my job is to get the idea out and let others carry it along -- people who have more expertise than I have.

So that's my feeling -- I feel there's wealth, extraordinary wealth that's all around us, right underneath our nose. That part of us that's over there in South Boston -- there's an extraordinary history of culture. We had a little taste of it when the Irish Book of Kells came up in the Museum not long ago. And then, of course, the Scandinavians. All of that can be shared. You get a sort of cross-pollenization. If we spent time doing that, it's a lot more fun and a lot richer and far more practical.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this giving a spur to your art work, do you think? Have you been in the last few years painting a good deal, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No. It's something which I've been doing all along. When I first started out doing the life of Black people, all I was doing was just telling a story; presenting this particular aspect.

ROBERT BROWN: But now you've been doing some illustrative, graphic depictions of this to try to . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, on the project -- the thing that started me off there on this project, the concept started way back in high school, oddly enough, at the Museum of Fine Arts.

ROBERT BROWN: Really. In what way?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, you see, I practically lived in the Museum, and I found that about one-third of the Museum space was devoted to Asian art. I didn't like it. I said, "What in the world have you got all this stuff for?" Then I stopped to think. I said, "Now this is an important Museum. A third of this space is devoted to Asian art." So I said, "You take yourself by the seat of your pants and go there and find out what in the world it's all about." I kept going back and back and back to the Asian art until it lost its strangeness. Then I started looking into some of the religion, etc., to get an understanding of some of the background. Then it sort of opened a gateway. From then on, I was able to look at non-Western art just for itself. Not from a depth of study -- understanding it all; at least being used to it. Then I started to see that for me to understand European art, I had to look at its background, which happened to be Asian, and African. Because all these things sort of moved around. That started me thinking. In other words, I got myself out of what you might call a Graeco-Roman prison. A Graeco-Roman prison which is, incidentally, a creation, more or less, you might say, of the 19th century, at most, maybe the 18th century.

ROBERT BROWN: As you look back over your life and your career, there's a great deal of continuity.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. What I'm doing now is not much different than what I've . . . it all hangs together, you might say. I've been pretty consistent. This particular project I'm working on is just part of the same thing. You see, one of the things I'm finding out -- something which is perfectly obvious, so obvious that you don't see it -- is that you only have one Story of Man. For man to understand himself, he has to understand all parts of his story. It isn't so much a case of the Blacks in Africa, or the Chinese in Asia, or the whites in another part of the world. It's a case of what were we doing in Africa, what were we doing in Asia, what were we doing in Europe, what were we doing in the Americas. It isn't a case of looking "what were those people doing there" but rather "what were we doing there." In other words, it's all a part of us. Looking at it from that point of view, such things that we have as national boundaries and fighting over territories, etc., make a lot of tragic nonsense.

ROBERT BROWN: At this point you're also disillusioned by regular institutions, aren't you? Like the Church?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I'm not disillusioned in it, but I'm critical of it.

ROBERT BROWN: It's been some time since you've done strictly liturgical art? You do some, I know -- in a small way, your linoleum prints.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh no, I'm always doing it. I'm doing these church bulletins, and [He laughs] that's a continuous operation and it ain't small! [Laughs again] I've been doing that for about 30 years, serving about six or seven parishes. Which means that continuously, maybe somewhere in the neighborhood of around 3- or 4- or 5,000 people are looking at the stuff every Sunday. I mean, that's a continuous operation.

ROBERT BROWN: As I recall, this extends all the way from your native Plainfield, N.H., to here, right? You do work for them, don't you?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I've done some work. Right now, they're serving a parish out in Portland, Oregon, a couple in Michigan, one down in Washington, D.C., three around here; but it varies. So this is a continuous operation. No, I'm not disillusioned with the Church, but I am critical.

ROBERT BROWN: Of what?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I'm critical of our sexual position. This, as I said before, is an outgrowth of several historical things. But I'm finding out something else in my examination -- that we have a certain element within us, certain basic things, like human sexuality, which is older than any of our cultural institutions; older than the Church, older than nations. Because it's part of the nature of man. We have over that certain cultural institution. But we're all basically human beings. But what we do with the body, for example, we put a uniform on it. And by putting a uniform on the body, then you're able to establish different classes, and so forth. Sometimes that uniform can be rather fatal, when you have series of armies. Because what you're doing, you're destroying uniforms, but actually underneath each uniform is the body.

ROBERT BROWN: And the same with sexual restrictions, and all that.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

[END OF THIS INTERVIEW]

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH A. R. CRITE
SEPTEMBER 10, 1980
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT BROWN

ROBERT BROWN: This is a continuation of the interview with Allen Rohan Crite. The date is Sept. 10, 1980, at his home in the South End, Boston, Mass.

Today we wanted to discuss for a bit what you called your educational project, which began about 1968 and which, among other things, resulted in a publication by you sponsored by the Boston Athenaeum. Would you like to begin talking about that educational project?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. This publication by the Boston Athenaeum came out in 1968, I think. It's called "The Cultural Heritage of the United States; a Rediscovery." Actually, it's a position paper. What happened was, I was on the Board of the Children's Art Center, here in the South End, at 36 Rutland Street. I thought of having a series of exhibitions dealing with the cultural heritage. At the time I thought of it, I thought of having four exhibitions -- one would be Indian, then African, Spanish and English. This would be a series of exhibitions of artifacts and so forth. Then I was going to write a little paper which I planned to run off on my press, the offset press that I have. These papers would be distributed during the course of the respective exhibitions. To explain all of this, I had to write a paper to the Board, which I did. The publication by the Boston Athenaeum is an edition of that original paper. It's what you might call a position paper, therefore.

The concept which I had was that the cultural heritage of the Americas -- the United States in particular, since we live here -- is Afro-European culture on top of an Indian base. And that was why I had these exhibitions -- one would be Indian, another would be African, another would be Spanish, another would be English.

ROBERT BROWN: Would these exhibitions include your own art work?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, they didn't. These exhibitions at the Art Center were composed of works, artifacts, etc. of the respective cultures. It was quite an experience, because, for example, we went to the Peabody Museum in Salem -- I had been referred there by Mr. Whitehill; he happened to know the Director there. The Children's Art Center curator was Miss/ Mrs. D----. We went up there to see if we could negotiate a loan of materials. Then we went to the children's Museum and gathered together the respective materials.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they have at the Children's Museum? Some artifacts?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. There were quite a few. The Children's Museum had rather an extensive collection of a lot of things -- probably a great deal more material there than a person would ordinarily think. Because when you say "a children's museum," you think in terms of diminutive because of a child; but that isn't quite the best criterion to use, because the material can be, and in this case was, relatively extensive. The thing about the Children's Museum was that the material was more available than at the Peabody Museum in Salem, because the latter museum was somewhat concerned about security; some of the material they had was of course quite valuable -- I found out somewhat to my surprise that some of the beaded work, for example, for an Indian chief probably had a valuation of a few thousand dollars and was probably almost priceless because it couldn't be replaced. So it gave me an interesting sense of value.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to borrow things from them?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. And also from the Children's Museum, and other things brought in from other sources. Then I wrote up a little paper of around 10 pages, which I illustrated, and ran it off on my press, for free distribution. I think . . . I don't know how many I ran off. I'm rather exasperated because I may have one or two copies of those papers still left and I've guarded them jealously

ROBERT BROWN: Was this mainly for children, for a young audience?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Mainly for everybody but it was for a relatively young audience, because it was confined to the Children's Art Center. There were four exhibitions, and this went on for about -- I think it was during the year '68-'69; it may have been a little earlier than that, because the publication of my paper for the Athenaeum was 1968, so I guess the exhibition was '67 or '68.

ROBERT BROWN: What effect did the exhibition have that you came to know?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, people were interested, and it followed a different approach. It gave me a genesis for the idea of developing this thing into a more permanent form. It was out of that that this "magnum opus" that I'm on now, this educational project developed. I used that as my base -- the four papers I wrote for each of the exhibitions: the one I wrote on Africa, another one on Spain, one on England, and another one on the American Indian. My first idea was to make up a series of slide-tapes -- maybe two or three for the Indian, two or three for the African, the same number for the English and Spanish. Then I decided to combine the Spanish and English and make that "European" rather than just those two separate countries, because I realized that more countries than just Spain and England were involved in the European colonization of the Americas. Then that developed the idea of just having three sets of talks. As time went on, I figured I would need to put a limit somewhere, so I

arrived at the figure of 24 talks for each group -- 24 each for Indian, African, and European which I changed to "Eurasian."

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of audience did you have in mind?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I had in mind basically a children's audience, but the talks are arranged in such a way that anybody could benefit from them. That meant I had to make slides for each of them -- I had the capability of making slides, also of recording. That means that at least half of the slides had to be my own drawings, because that would give the sense of direction, the point of view I wished to express. That's how it started. Then I knew the headmaster of St. Luke's School in New York City, an Episcopal school attached to St. Luke's Chapel -- a part of Trinity parish, at least it was; probably still is, though it's an independent parish now. I knew Father Weed [?], the headmaster there; and I used to go back and forth to New York a lot, so I told him what I had in mind, and he said, "Fine! Let's talk to the teachers." So I did. They more or less agreed to accept the project, as a private project. That was rather good because that gave me an audience. And also at the same time I know Mr. McNitt [?], the head of the Boston Public Library, and I talked with him. Then it developed that the audiovisual department of the Boston Public Library was involved, headed up by Mr. Pelletier. As I proceed to develop my project, I developed three sets of each thing. I had one set at home, another set went to the audiovisual dept. of the Boston Public Library, and another set went down to New York. Each group -- the Library and the school -- paid me for the materials on a "cash and carry" basis. As I completed each thing, I would send the items up and they would reimburse me for that. So in that sense they kind of helped me a little bit with the support, but the bulk of support, of course, comes out of my own pocket; I'm not funded. People have been getting after me that I should get the thing funded. Maybe at this late date, I might; I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Is the project continuing? You're still adding additional talks?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. I'm trying to complete the talks. You see, I've written the text for the entire set. As far as the present status is concerned, the Indian section is completed -- slides, tapes, recording, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: Let's take this one at a time; what were you trying to get across in that Indian section?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Maybe I ought to explain in general what I was trying to do the cultural heritage, as I mentioned before, as a European culture on top of an Indian base. So therefore to understand that, to understand ourselves, we have to understand our base, to understand our roots. Therefore, the talks dealt with the Indians -- it was more or less a survey approach to the Indians, and also a survey approach to the African, and to the European or Eurasian. In the Indian, I deal with all the American Indians, from the Northwest Indians all the way down to Tierra del Fuego in South America. Then I point to the fact that we're tied to the Pacific cultural basis because of them. So that's what I've done. Now, to understand the Indian base, I mention three things; cornflakes, potato chips and cigarettes. That gives you an idea -- the use of typical American themes with of course an Indian source. Then the government of the U.S. is based somewhat on the Indian Confederacy. So I bring these matters up. What I try to do is to present, to show people that we have different Indian nations, different Indian peoples, languages, and so on. That is our base, because the Indians were here long before anybody else came here.

With the Africans, I treat Africa as a whole, I don't separate Egypt from West Africa, which seems to be the common thing to do nowadays; or it used to be. I think there's a bit less of that now. I deal with West Africa as well as East Africa. These are all the survey approach. In Africa, I go back to the beginning of man himself; because, according to present scientific thinking, man emerged as man in the African continent. I've completed all the drawings for that but I haven't completed the recording and the slides.

ROBERT BROWN: In the drawings, you try to illustrate the history that you talk about in your text?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a way of making it more graphic -- getting the points across more emphatically to your audience.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE And I treat the whole thing as a story -- I mean, it isn't "history." For example, we're going to study the Passamaquoddy, and the Iroquois, but I treat it as a story and I'm continually referring back to the fact that we have to study this part of ourselves -- the Indians, the Africans, and the Europeans are all part of our selves. That's the thing I continuously stress in this whole series. That what we're really doing is studying "our story" rather than "history." I do that on purpose, to give a sense of relevance. Because if you say to a child, let's say, about the Assyrians, or the Greeks, or Romans, or the Benin peoples, or the Shawnees, etc., the reaction is, "OK, so what?" But if we look at these people QUOTE as part of ourselves UNQUOTE, then it's a case of what were we doing here, or there, or whatnot. It gives an entirely different kind of picture.

ROBERT BROWN: You must have, over the last 12 years, gotten some reaction, or perhaps quite a lot, from a

number of children.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes, I've gotten quite a lot of feedback from children -- more or less indirect, because I get this through the teacher. They're very much excited about it. I keep sort of preaching this gospel [He laughs] almost every chance I have. And the usual reaction is that it makes sense. One of my reasons for doing this -- it's part of a discovery on my own part, in a way. To recapitulate a bit, I practically lived in the Museum of Fine Arts from the days of my youth on up, brought in a baby carriage, you might say, or a stroller. And I practically lived in the place. One thing that used to puzzle me was that so much of the area was set aside for Asian art, and I didn't think too much of it. It didn't look Greek, or Roman, or European; it looked kind of strange. Then, during my high school days, I thought, "Now, a good portion of this museum is devoted to Asian art, so I'd better take a look at it." To really sit down and make myself go ahead and look at it. I did, and it's one of the best things I ever did. Because it sort of got me out of what you might call a Greco-Roman-Mediterranean prison, which seems to be formation of our educational system. By doing that, I started to get a different sense of background. Then, for example, I'd look at Greek things, or Gothic things, and find that these things are influenced by something on the other side of the continent. It gave me a chance to look at non-Western forms of art, not as some strange exotic kind of thing but, rather, that made good sense and was a part of myself. Some of that thinking hasn't gotten across. For example, I have a book here called "Great Architecture of the World" and the first chapter is devoted to what it calls "the exotic world," the exotic world being China, India, and part of Africa. There is only one chapter devoted to that, and all the rest is devoted to Egypt and Greek and Roman, then you go into the basilican type of stuff, then Romanesque, Gothic, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: You discovered this Asian culture when you were quite young. When did you begin to look at American Indian or African art? Somewhat later, or . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes, somewhat later. It's a continuous development. And of course I've gone on to look at Polynesian and Pacific art, etc. One of the results of this business has been that, for example, there was a program on public television called "The Tribal Eye." It was an interesting program. The thing that surprised me, in one sense, and saddened me, too, was the fact that I was acquainted with [Speaking with emphasis] every single thing that the program presented. That was encouraging to me, from one point of view, but it saddened me from another point of view, because I felt that the information which I had should be standard information for everybody. So, in a certain sense, that's really what I'm trying to do in this particular project.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, you felt that that program was still treating those as exotics?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I didn't. It didn't treat these things as exotics, it was quite sympathetic, very understanding. But my feeling was that the material which was presented would be unfamiliar to most of the viewers, and my feeling was that the material presented should be standard information for the American audience. You see, our history as presented is rather isolated. I mean, we have, for example Columbus discovering America in 1492, then we have

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[TAPE 3, SIDE 1]

[TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

ROBERT BROWN: You aim to get away, in your educational program, from the conventional story with European focus.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Could I ask once again, though, when did you first see African tribal art?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I've been seeing that right along -- that is, I visited the Peabody Museum over at Harvard, so I've been acquainted with it for quite a long while. But it was somewhat remote for me, in a sense; I didn't quite get the relationship between myself and it.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember what your first reactions to it were?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It was interesting; strange -- but [He laughs] you're asking me a question about my reactions maybe 40 or 50 years ago. But I do have some watercolors that I made -- I think it was a figure -- that goes back to the 1930's, so there was some interest. There are several things going on -- maybe I'd better separate them for clarity. Because you see I have this project, the educational project, and what I'm trying to do is get out of this Anglo-Saxon mythology that we have. Because the impression that one gathers is that you get the Pilgrim Fathers coming over in 1620 to found a new nation, etc., and it's an Anglo-Saxon story from then on in. But as you look at the American Colonies, and I'm not just referring to the Eastern seaboard but the development of the United States, you find here of course German Moravians, French Huguenots, different

European peoples here. And then you have the different Indian nations -- you have to remember that the Indian peoples are just about as different as any similar group of people. And then you have the different Blacks come from Europe as the Ibos, and so on. So they aren't all alike either. What we have is a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic thing from the beginning. We usually think of the "melting pot" idea of immigration -- as far as the United States is concerned, usually thinking of them in terms of the migrations of the 1840's and 60's and thereabouts, maybe up to the turn of the century -- forgetting that we had a heterogeneous population here prior to that. That's what I'm saying in this particular project.

Now, as far as the Blacks are concerned, when I went to school in 1925, I remember going up to Boston Latin School sojourn for about a year or so, I picked up this book, "Maury's History of Ancient Peoples" -- I don't know why I should plug that book [Laughing], but it did make a very lasting impression on me.

ROBERT BROWN: For what reason?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE What it did was to inform me rather clearly that the ancient peoples that we were going to study -- of course the people around the Mediterranean basin, all of these were more or less white people, who were the progressive peoples; there was a civilization over in China which was interesting but irrelevant; and of course as far as Africa was concerned, Africa south of the Sahara didn't exist; and of course the Americans had no existence at all, had no relevance until discovered by the Europeans -- I was asked to study that as part of my history. In other words, I was studying a history of civilization in which I was a guest, not a participant. The effect was devastating. My reaction was, "Why in the world should I study this stuff? I have no part of it . . . ? Unfortunately, that idea still is prevalent. I remember not too long ago a friend of mine who is white was dealing with - - she worked in a nearby church, youth work -- a Black girl who was brilliant. She asked the girl why she didn't study history. The girls reply to that was, "Why should I?? It has nothing to do with me." She was still alien.

So, what I'm doing in this project is to correct that sense of imbalance, because our heritage is a little bit more than the Anglo-Saxon heritage of Great Britain. It has to be considerably more than that. As a matter of fact, so far as the Anglo-Saxon tradition is concerned, its purpose, or its role, you might say, in the story of the United States is that it acts as a sort of means of communication between the disparate peoples who are here. For example, we have Swedes, Poles, and so on, and the common theme between them, as well as the Indians and the African peoples, was the English language.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you suppose that in the 1960's or about that time when you began this project, you first became proud enough of being Black to want to tell about its background, the background of Africa?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's interesting that you ask that because in the 1960's I was already 30 years into that. One of the things about that: people who are non-Blacks [He laughs] -- I use that expression -- have the impression that Blacks being proud to be Black, this particular phenomenon came into being in the 1960's. That isn't quite correct. Probably what happened in the 1960's was that other people became aware of the fact that Blacks were proud to be black. That's what happened. Several things had been going on. For example, going back to this particular story of myself, in 1925 the kind of indoctrination which was being presented to me was the fact that I as a Black person had no history, no heritage, no nothing you might say. About three years prior to that, in 1922, the papers were full of the discoveries of King Tutankhamen's tomb. I remember in particular a headline in one paper -- the Boston Post maybe -- informing people that the Egyptians were not Negroes. In case anybody got any funny ideas, they'd correct that right away. [Interviewer laughs too] Which is a little bit ironic, in a way, because if you look at portraits of Tutankhamen's mother, she looks like any good-looking Black woman you find on any street in Boston or Cambridge or whatnot. But the propaganda, the doctrine was to inform Black people they had no history or anything. A lot of them didn't buy that; I didn't buy it. But the difficulty was, I didn't have any scholarship to back up my position. That scholarship wasn't exactly lacking, but it was in a sense esoteric -- you had such people as Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, and other historians who were writing furiously. But their words hadn't gotten into the popular area. Also, the picture of Africa in those days was presented as an Africa of Tarzan of the Apes thing, or motion pictures which showed wild animals in Africa, and Africa as a place of man-eating cannibals, etc. And then too, most of Africa was under the control of colonial powers. What the Blacks did to counter-act this propaganda, which was reasonably effective, was to have "Negro history week" -- they had these pageants, about Ethiopia stretching forth her arms, and that sort of stuff; they'd get stories of Black kingdoms, and wealth, and so forth. Which was regarded with a certain amount of seriousness by the Blacks and probably a certain amount of amusement by others. Because other people regarded us as sort of dealing in legend, mythology, fairy tales, to make up for the lack of the history which we didn't have.

So the change that came about was that the second edition of the European civil war commonly known as "World War II," the luxury of colonies became a burden no longer practical. And you have, then, the emergence of Black nations, and then a resurgence of interest in the Black peoples. And you have this declaration -- I mean, people got a little fed up. And you actually had this idea of negritude put out, I think, by Senegal, and this whole approach. There were other things -- the impact on the art world of African tribal art upon such people as

Picasso, etc. So, there were some noises going about. And all these had some impact.

ROBERT BROWN: As you talked just now, I think of your illustrations of spirituals and of liturgical ceremony, beginning in the 30's, where the Blacks are the actors and actresses. Perhaps, as you look back, was this your expression of Black dignity, of Black involvement in the church and in spiritual life?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Ye-e-es. [Somewhat tentatively spoken] What I was doing there, back in the 30's, was dealing with the Black image, you might say, on three levels. One level was the documentaries of Black people in the city.

ROBERT BROWN: The well-known paintings that you did then.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. The purpose of that was to present Black people just as people, ordinary human beings. The presentation was, you didn't see a Black person at all, you saw a social problem -- either a sharecropper in the South or the jazz Negro of Harlem, and nothing in between. If you're going to deal with a social problem quote, unquote, the first thing you have to remember is that you're dealing with a person. But the humanity was sort of lost in the cracks there, somehow. So, one thing I do is just simply present the life of people, ordinary people; and these particular paintings have turned out to be rather historic because the district, the areas which were painted have gone through drastic changes, through the obliteration of streets, the neighborhood, etc.

ROBERT BROWN: Including your old home.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. The other thing was the illustrating of the spirituals. There of course I was dealing with the hymns of Black people but presenting them as being part of the world-wide religious musical literature. I did that because I felt that certain aspects, the message of the spirituals, were being lost; because when you get spirituals mixed up with such things as "folksongs" like "Ole Black Joe," presented as a spiritual by one of the well-meaning in the 1920's and '30's, you have a problem.

The third thing is that in the liturgical drawings -- those of the Mass, the story of the Way of the Cross, and so forth -- I was telling the story of man through a Black figure. In that area, you might say, the Black people went beyond racial parochialism. Now, there's a literal aspect of the liturgical drawings -- why I used a sort of Catholic medium -- was that I went through a sort of personal "Oxford revival." If you're acquainted with the story of the Episcopal Church . . .

ROBERT BROWN: Yes.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE . . . you probably know what that means. So, I found that the Catholic expression -- Christianity as a viable medium through which to depict spirituals, etc. . . . That was my background. People were speaking about "Black is beautiful" in the 1960's as a sort of spark, and I'd been saying that since the 1930's. At the time when I made the drawings, there were areas of controversy. People asked me, "Why do you make them Black?" "Well, it makes a good composition," and let it go at that. [Laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: You felt that Black people were part of humanity and you might as well use them as any other to illustrate, say, the Mass.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: To white people particularly, you had to say, simply, "Well, for compositional reasons."

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing again] I say that partly to be facetious, partly being sardonic, and partly getting the message across. I think I got the message across in one way, because my liturgical drawings are used by the Episcopal Church on a national basis. The Episcopal Church in this country, of course, is predominantly non-Black; while the Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church is a part, there is shifting to being non-white. The same thing is true, I think, as far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned. Which is going to be rather interesting as time goes on because it equates experience as a whole, because it will probably be non-European. Which might mean a sort of readjustment in thought processes, especially in the Protestant part of the Church because the Protestants have been more European and think of the whole Christian experience in those terms, and the whole world in those terms. It might take a bit of readjusting to , you might say, geographical realities. This project in a certain sense probably addresses itself to that, too. What I'm trying to do is to present the story of the United States against a world-wide background of which it is a part rather than the sort of isolated frame of reference that we have today.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the present state of your educational project?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, right now I've completed the Indian section -- I've completed the text, though, for all

three sections, and the Indian section is complete so far as the slide-tapes and recording are concerned. For the African section, all the drawings are completed but the slide-tapes are completed up to Talk No. 15 of the African section. The Eurasian section -- I say "Eurasian" on purpose because it deals with part of the Eurasian continent, and I'm treating it that way -- the text is completed, the drawings are complete up to Talk No. 15; I'm working on that now. And the tapes and recording are completed up to Talk No. 6.

ROBERT BROWN: You project some 20 talks in each section?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Twenty-four talks in each section. So that means that right now I have about 10 more talks to finish so far as the Eurasian section is concerned -- slides, tapes and recording. That means that I have approx. 800 more drawings to do to complete it. I would estimate that at the present rate I hope to finish the thing in a couple more years.

ROBERT BROWN: Are these being used, some of the parts that are completed, by school children and other people at the library in New York?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. It's being used in New York; in the library it's in the audio-visual department and is available for circulation, and that's on a limited basis, since they only have one set. What I hope to do, the Lord willing, when I get the whole thing done . . . my main project right now is to finish it. Then I can sit down and see what can be done about making it available. It might have to be modified in form -- it might be put into a filmstrip kind of thing, which might be a little more compact than the slides and tapes which I have now. But my policy is to make do with what I have and get something "in being," then I'll have a chance to make modifications. But I can't modify an idea which doesn't materially exist. So that's my present state of development right now.

I've learned a lot in this project. My own point of view has changed radically.

ROBERT BROWN: In what way?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, one of the things that has happened -- and this problem might be the newest thing that I'm sort of preaching about, if I can use that expression, is that we think of history -- our story in statements and which seem to be more or less unrelated one to the other. In reality, as I see it, all of us are in everything that takes place on this planet and has taken place. And so things are not unrelated to each other are closely related to each other. So, when it finally boils down, it isn't a story of white people or Chinese people or Black people or anything like that. It's a story of one people. We won't understand ourselves until we understand all the parts of ourselves.

This makes what goes on in the world extremely painful in many ways, because we might think in terms of Communists or this people or that people, and want to destroy this, that or the other and we think in terms of "first strike," whether we can survive that, etc. The thing is we're [Speaking slowly and emphasizing each word] doing this to ourselves. It isn't "the Russians over there" or "the Chinese over there," it's part of us over there. When we wake up to the fact that we all of us are one people, then we'll probably stop doing this to ourselves. Because the hurt that we administer to other people in a certain sense is painful because it hurts ourselves. In other words, if the Chinese or the Russians or any of these other people bleed, we are hurt. If they're cut, we bleed.

And that's true all over the world; that's true in the city. This is the one thing I'm finding out -- that this planet is a very, very tiny, small place, and we all of us will have to do one thing -- we're going to make it together, or we ain't going to make it! That's the one abiding thing which I'm finding out.

The real tragedy is that we put up all these one against the other, and we don't have a chance to share ourselves with ourselves. We miss out on the whole wonder and the beauty and everything else that exists. I'm finding out there's one story -- there's one story of mankind in all these different areas. I read these papers on human sexuality that I'm sort of playing around with, it still is the same story -- that we are dealing with ourselves; we can't possess each other -- we can't own each other. Because to try to own another person means that we lose that person and lose . . . [Sentence concludes in midst of interviewer's having to sneeze]

[END OF THIS INTERVIEW]
[CONTINUE TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

ROBERT BROWN: Today, we have Susan Thompson here too, and Robert Brown continuing as interviewer.

I want to discuss with both of you the joint project which you began last year, 1979. We've gone over many aspects of your career, and we talked most recently about your educational project that began in the late 1960's. So today -- I don't know which of you wants to begin talking about it -- could we discuss, Mr. Crite, the joint project which you have been carrying out with Susan Thompson?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE OK. It's something like this: Susan Thompson is an accomplished fabric artist. I became acquainted with her work when she brought it to the library -- the extension library at Hall at Harvard University. She brought in a sample of her work which happened to be a fabric, which had a biblical story. I was duly impressed. As a matter of fact, I had known Susan for about a year before this and I was aware vaguely that she did have some kind of interest in art. She did visit the studio quite a lot and we had quite a few discussions. But this was the first time I really had a chance to look at anything she did. I think she had a macramé in her office; she worked in the Afro-American Studies Dept. at Harvard University as a receptionist. This particular day in March 1979, she brought this fabric in. The thing that impressed me was her use of color and design; it was more or less reminiscent of Persian miniatures in some ways, only blown up quite large. The first thing that I thought of as I looked at it was that I felt sort of sorry, because if it had happened several years ago, there were these liturgical art stores which could be used as an outlet. At any rate, we got started. I asked if she had any more of these things. She didn't exactly -- I think she had one or two other things that she had given away. Anyhow, she started to work; I gave her studio upstairs, because that's one of the things she needed -- to have a space to work. In the apartment she had were two teenagers, her husband and herself -- four adults in a six-room apartment, at Harvard.

So she came over and started to produce more and more work. Then I thought it might be a good idea to try something like a joint project. I did drawings on leather and then she did the cloth work. We found we were quite compatible in many ways. Then we started off doing some liturgical things.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you work out the leather and the cloth?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Allen did the drawings. As you probably noticed, all the features are Allen's; the cloth work is what I did.

ROBERT BROWN: Can I ask now, had you been doing this cloth work, and macramé, for some time before you met Allen?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Ye-e-es, but not to the extent that I'm doing it now. It was nowhere near as intense, there was no goal to doing it except that

ROBERT BROWN: Had you just developed this interest on your own? Had you had training at all?

SUSAN THOMPSON: No, not in this. It started when I was very active in the community, at my children's school. I was the parent who did the stage sets and costumes for a play, and plays, that were being held there. And for one play I had so much fabric left over, I just wondered what could I do with this, what can I do with all this? And felt it's not something you can use just for every thing -- like to make a dress or curtain out of felt. So it led, it was kind of an evolution of sorts, one thing led to another.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, now, back to the joint production, do you want to go on with that? You just said that the faces are Allen's. You were about to say something, Allen, about the liturgical themes.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. First, we found out that we worked very well together, I doing the faces and then she doing all the cloth work. So these were experimental pieces. They're in one sense because they have a double signature. So, after we did that, then we thought that, because of some exhibitions coming up, it would be a nice idea to design a chasuble and a frontal. Of course, I'd never done a chasuble before in my life; neither had Susan. At any rate, it was a strange experience for me because I'd designed chasubles in my liturgical drawings; but it's one thing to design one but it's another thing to see one in actual "operation."

So we went over to St. Stephen's Church. There was a Miss Helen Morton there, who was very knowledgeable in this business; she made sets and things like that. I had worked with her a long time ago in designing a frontal and a chasuble, but all I did was to design it, she did all the work. But this was a bit different; Susan and I were going to work on this thing together. They gave us a summer chasuble, a green one, and that served as a model. Susan made a white chasuble out of ordinary cloth, just to get the idea, the feel of it. Then we went to work on the design; I designed it. I did the face part, then, and the figure -- a small Christ figure -- in leather. And Susan did all the rest. So we had made our first chasuble, which was hard enough.

Then we made our first altar frontal. That thing was horrendous, because that was a huge thing, relatively speaking. But Susan had done large things before on her own -- I think there's one hanging upstairs as a matter of fact; one of the pieces was almost four by five feet. The altar frontal was about three and a half feet wide, but around six feet. Anyhow, we got it done just in time for the exhibition.

ROBERT BROWN: Where was the exhibition?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE At the Episcopal Divinity School, over in Cambridge. The exhibition was interesting because it was made up of three parts: that is, Susan's panel, which she did on her own, there were several panels by

this time, and my drawings; and the joint pieces -- the chasuble, the altar frontal, and a few other pieces.

Since then we've had a show at Brown University commencement exercises. And we're scheduled to have a show out at Gordon College, out near Beverly, I believe, some time next year.

The whole experience is rather unique for me in many ways, that is, in having her here. While she doesn't live here, she is here spiritually, you might say. But I'm working in close collaboration, and this is the first time I have ever done that. It's been quite an experience for me because I'm learning a great deal. And I presume that Susan is getting some input herself. I'll let her tell that part. [Laughing]

SUSAN THOMPSON: OK. This has been very exciting for me. How people, when they saw this liturgical work when it went on exhibition, they had never quite seen anything like it before; it was something so new. But it was so well-received that people just kind of opened up to us, and they liked the work a lot. It just spurred me on. It all has been an inspiration to do more work, reach a little higher. And Allen has -- I don't know what I can say about him. His mind is always working, always thinking of things, always solving problems. Everything we do, there's a problem involved that we have to solve if we're going to complete this thing. Just seeing how he works, and comes up with solutions, has just been a tremendous inspiration to me. Using what resources we have -- all the time, it's not possible to go out and buy what you'd need -- but using what we have, we always come through somehow.

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of problems did you see solved?

SUSAN THOMPSON: [Long pause] Think of something! [She laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: I was thinking that if we could take an example, we could describe something -- like that altar frontal: what did it have on it? What were decisions you had to come to?

SUSAN THOMPSON: The altar frontal consisted of a middle piece, which was a Madonna and child, and two large angels on the sides. The problem I encountered with this was, I didn't quite know -- rather, I didn't know until it happened -- that when you sew leather on a stretchable material like we used, which was knit, somehow the leather is inflexible, and the knit stretches; so when I sewed it, it all buckled in. This was a real problem that had to be fixed before it could go on exhibition. Fortunately a friend stopped by from New York who was a seamstress, and she showed me some ways, what I could do to solve the angels buckling in on me like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why were you using leather? Can you tell, Mr. Crite?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I used leather for drawing purposes. And I could paint on the leather. It was experimental. That's why I used it. And on the smaller pieces it worked fine. And even on the larger pieces -- they have one large piece downstairs -- it worked OK. But then, I don't know anything about material, what will stretch and what won't. So both of us were experimenting around with that. On the chasuble it worked out all right, because -- [Turning to Susan] I don't think there was any trouble with that buckling, was there? [She says no] But the altar frontal, that's a huge piece of cloth, so there were some problems with that. As Susan says, she had this difficulty with an inflexible material on a flexible material, so this friend came up and showed her how to do it. And the altar frontal had to have a backing; so there was all of this involved.

Some of the other things we have are, for example, when Susan does something on her own -- which she does, most of the time -- she might make a composition and we'll sit down and discuss it and make a few suggestions here, or there, a modification. But if it's a matter of drawing -- for example, one particular panel she made, called "A Summer Promenade," which is on exhibition now at the Afro-American Masters Art in Residence exhibition at the Center, a part of Northeastern University complex -- one way you solve that -- a young man and a young girl walking down this particular path in a garden, he has his hands around her -- is to use our huge mirror. We stand in front of it and pose in the same way as the picture. So Susan can see what happens to hands, what happens to bodies, etc. Then, with that kind of information, go back to the panel. We do things like that.

There are a lot of these various items. I will say this, though -- Susan has done this to me: she has sharpened my vision, made me very conscious of things I should have been conscious of before, in a way; or probably had been at one time but now a sort of renewed vision. Then of course it's opened up a whole new discipline for me -- the area of cloth, use of cloth. Susan has, coming into this, a very, very good sense of design and composition, which is invaluable. You can train a person to be a very good technician, so that the person can draw excellently and so on, but the person just remains a technician, won't be an artist. An artist is a person with a sense of design, a sense of composition. That person can be trained as far as techniques are concerned, but this thing that Susan does have is basic. She's an excellent artist. I make no bones about that, and in my opinion it's important.

I mentioned, downstairs, Lois Jones, a graduate of the Museum school about two years before I came to the school. She is a successful artist, with an international reputation. She's a very good friend of mine. She's black.

At any rate, I've been telling people who've come to get the support of my judgment on Susan's work around here Since I'm looked upon as the "patriarch" of artists in this area, which means almost that, if I say anything, it sounds like an ex cathedra statement, come from on high almost. That's other people's judgment, not mine. [All three laugh] So there could be some influence. If I say, for example, that Susan's work is very good, that immediately disposes a person to think along those lines because I've suggested it. Even though a lot of my friends aren't professionals, it would be a professional judgment which would indicate some bias on my part.

I've been telling Susan that her work is and that my judgment is supported by other people. And they say, "Oh yes, of course, but you put the suggestion in their minds." [All laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: What did Lois Jones come to say?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Lois Jones said the work is good; that she's a very fine artist. And Lois Jones came upon this work "cold" and without any working over by me.

ROBERT BROWN: [To Susan] How do you approach your work? "Cold" or do you have ideas in your mind when you lay out these compositions?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Hmmmm Usually I get an idea and it just kind of comes out and it seems like I'm compelled to try to bring this idea to fruition. Sometimes I'll work all night basically to get what I want. When I see Allan, I'll bring it to him and show it to him, get his feedback, see how he feels about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Are you working in fabrics at that stage, when you're planning it out?

SUSAN THOMPSON: I draw a quick sketch. I'm not the draw-er, and I don't like to spend a lot of time at it, I just basically get the form I want. From there I go to the cloth. So I bring it in to Allan to get feedback. This is where he's invaluable. The studio space is good and everything but the feedback that he gives me -- comments on how I could make the work stronger, or . . . you know, what I could do.

ROBERT BROWN: Is there a certain goal that you have in mind when you do something, like in "A Summer Promenade," did you want to express something?

SUSAN THOMPSON: I wanted to express that feeling of -- you know, when you're in love and you just enjoy being with someone, it's just good. Everything looks light -- you're just happy. There are periods of time when you're just happy. I wanted that to come through -- you're just happy being with that person. I think the picture conveyed -- it's what I wanted it to do. Sometimes we tend to go along working and forget that there was someone very special or there is someone special, but we're not paying that much attention to them at this point, we're focused on other things. I think we constantly have to renew that thing that just brings us joy.

ROBERT BROWN: So you came to it with certain ideas of color? Did you talk about color expressing . . . ?

SUSAN THOMPSON: The color came as I worked along. Oh, this will work, or this is not good. Maybe I'll do this. That's how I play, just playing around. And Allan always encourages me. If I come up with an idea, he'll say, "Well, go right ahead." It doesn't matter if it's right or wrong or anything like that. There's no form, no set thing I have to do; he just says, "Go ahead." I like that style of operating. [She laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: And he can comment on the drawing, like you said when you pose to get the figures right.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Sometimes I'm a little off. And he'll point out to me, and I guess this is how I learn. At first I was having people not grounded, on the ground; they seemed to be floating on air because of certain drawing deficiencies, I guess. He told me that [She laughs heartily, remembering this] your legs are always right below your head, not a little off to the side; and I can't break people's arms by [They all laugh]

RB; So, anatomy and all that sort of thing.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: When you do religious themes, how do you get into those? Do you work from Allan's long experience with liturgical themes? Do you try to put yourself into the position of the audience, the congregation, or . . . ?

SUSAN THOMPSON: No. Usually I'm influenced by something I've heard at church, or something I've read in the Bible that just strikes me. Like the picture I'm doing -- I'm still working on it -- I was really hit by a parable. Jesus likened a rich man getting into Paradise. He said it's very difficult, and said it was like a camel's trying to go through a needle's eye. I thought that was so funny -- somebody to come up and this big old camel trying to get through a little bitty needle's eye. That's kind of what prompted me. It was a funny story to me and spurred me

on

ROBERT BROWN: What did you do?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Well, I have the composition -- a very wealthy man, he's got his wife there, he's got his camel, and his possessions. And further over, there's an angel and it's holding a needle. I guess the angel's saying to him the same thing Jesus said -- that you can't come in with all that stuff; you have to just come in alone. That was essentially the message of the picture.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That was interesting about that camel. Susan brought the rough draft -- on cloth -- and I never would have thought of an angel and a needle in all this wide world! So the story itself is interesting. One of the archaeological things about it: when Jesus told the parable, the eye of the needle wasn't exactly the needle you should think of -- like a tailor's or a seamstress, but rather some kind of a structure, a narrow structure through which a camel could go but couldn't go through if it was fully loaded. For the purposes of the parable, as far as we're concerned, our interpretation of the "needle" is something else. But it sort of emphasizes the force of the parable a great deal more in a way. Then Susan's coming up with the angel and the needle was extraordinary. We had a lot of fun. We worked on it -- I made some suggestions about angels' wings and a few other things; so the thing is being developed.

ROBERT BROWN: You felt that using the angel really enforced the feeling that, as we go to the after-life, the angel expressed that much more than if you had tried to indicate a man

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes, that celestial

ROBERT BROWN: That brought that right home to the viewer.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE She does that, she always comes up with something kind of surprising. That's one of the exciting things about our working together. We work together as one, we almost think alike. For example, I remember one time I went down to one of the supply stores downtown and saw some gold thread. I said, "Gee, I'd better get this gold thread." So I did. At this time Susan was working in an office. I came by the office with this gold thread and said, "I just picked this up." She said, "Oh, that's interesting" because she had been to that same store the day before and thought about it. That's the way things have been going. There are always surprises. One time I remember, she came in -- this was early in our working together -- and she said, "Now Allan, promise me you won't laugh --" I said, "OK." She had something behind her. She pulled it out -- it was a portrait of me. It was a tiny thing, very expressive, and had my characteristics. [Laughing] What can you say?? So, every once in a while she comes in and says, "Now Allan, close your eyes." "All right, what now?" [He laughs] "May I open them?" "OK" and she pulls out something. She hasn't disappointed me yet.

ROBERT BROWN: In that little self-portrait which surprised him so much, what were you trying to express, do you think?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Him. I just wanted to see if I could capture what I think is essentially him. It was a little joke, in a way, it was so tiny, but yet anyone looking at it could guess or would know what it was supposed to be.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean his size or shape or the way he stands or . . . ?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. It's a small piece. It's him at his easel.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe I should ask in private, what do you think, see in him? I mean to say, what is . . . [rest of sentence drowned out by passing car]

SUSAN THOMPSON: Well, I guess I could tell you what I'm so impressed by: his intellectual genius, artistic ability, so nice and kind and gentle that he would even worry and take up his time, you know, with someone that . . . [Gives up, laughing] I don't know what he thinks. But yet he saw something, and he's doing everything he can to help me grow. That's never really happened before. Usually, if a person is important or has a reputation, you have to pay for it; you have to pay for the knowledge -- they'll sell it to you. But for someone to take their time like this is highly unusual.

ROBERT BROWN: Apart from the financial thing, it's better, isn't it?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes, because it comes out of the heart.

ROBERT BROWN: And it comes regularly, then, you collaborate on these . . . ?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: [To ARC] Why have you extended yourself, do you think? Giving of yourself for nothing?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Why? Well, it isn't exactly for nothing, in a way. In one sense it's rather peculiar, I suppose, because I don't exactly regard myself as "helping" Susan in one way, though I am. She's become a sort of part of my life. [Long pause] It is an unusual experience for me. I think she isn't a "friend" but she's a part of me. Like a family. You see, I've never married, don't have any children, legitimate or otherwise. I say that facetiously and seriously, too. But my experience with Susan is just like I have a grown daughter with me, so she's become that close to me, even closer than there; it's a very unique experience. One which is inexplicable, because I've never had anything like it before. I suppose in one sense it might be something like this: You see, my mother and I lived together, so I've never been alone. She died in 1977. I came in contact with Susan in 1978. While at first Susan became a very good friend, I mean she came in fairly often, and we discussed drawings and paintings, etc. and she started absorbing the place. And then after this year-long relationship, she brought her work. Apparently this thing all seemed to be designed by somebody other than ourselves. That was the way things will be done. Then when she came in with her work, I did something very unusual: I opened up the house for her and gave her space upstairs because that was something she needed. By her being established upstairs, her presence here was established. And so there came a sense of continuity which had been broken by the year's absence of my mother, and has been continued by her.

A lot of other people, and some older people -- for example, one of the professors over at Harvard University, she happens to be a woman, and I told her about this relationship. She said, "That's one of the best things ever could have happened." Susan has supplied that sense of continuity. We're a part of each other; we function as one person -- in many ways. There have been a lot of parallels in our lives, and both of us have this very strange sense -- as though we've been through this before. What they call a *deja vu*. That's how it is. We think alike in many ways, though we are different persons, but the two of us together seem to make a completion of one individual, one spirit, one something.

It's been a learning experience for me; I'm learning all the time. Susan does absorb things from me, so I give her everything I have, best as I can. But it's a mutual learning experience -- I'm learning all the time, learning new ways of seeing things, new visions, becoming acquainted with a different discipline. So it's been a very enlarging and enriching experience for me.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you talk about what you'll be doing in the future? Have you got any ideas or goals you're working toward? Or do you just let things happen?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Laughing] Things are happening. Things are very thoroughly designed and very well planned, not by us. [Laughs heartily, almost uncontrollably]

ROBERT BROWN: By what, or whom?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE We wonder. You see, for example, it goes like this: Susan came to me to show me her work. Then she started to work on a composition, because the first annual exhibition of women artists was coming up, at the Afro-American Master Artists-in-Residence program at Northeastern. It's a juried show, so Susan got into that juried show, first crack out of a gun. By the time that had taken place, some other shows were coming up. There was a jazz show coming up, and also I think over at the Harry [?] Tubman Gallery. So Susan got going on that. Then I was invited to exhibit over at the E.D.S. As a result of that -- there were prizes, and we started doing these joint works. Then there came this thing at E.D.S. -- The Episcopal Divinity School -- so we got some stuff ready for that. The chasuble and altar frontal were for that. Then, out of that . . .

[END OF THIS SIDE]

[TAPE 3, SIDE 2]

[TAPE 4, SIDE 1]

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE We got a commission to do a piece, a panel that she's working on now; she's sold a piece out of that. Then we both of us got a commission to do a stole. Then, we were supposed to do something for Brown University -- make a banner; but that didn't go through. As a result, however, an exhibition was substituted for that, so we got stuff together and went down and had an exhibition at Brown University. That's how it's been going. For example, we had a show in the summertime, a collective, at the piano factory building. A person came up and saw Susan's work who had a gallery in Atlanta, so she wants Susan to take part in a show sometime in the spring of 1981. Gordon College called up and said, "We want to have a show of you two people at Gordon College," also around February. So, when I say these things are . . . [Hiatus in tape for a few seconds]

ROBERT BROWN: Can you continue to talk about what you will be doing in the exhibitions that are coming up for you, Susan, and for both of you together?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, that's how things have been developing. Then of course as I said before, everything is very well planned but not by us. Because things seem to be developing as though there's some sort of master plan. Susan was very much interested in Lois Jones, wanted some samples of her work. Then I found Lois was

coming up to speak at Suffolk University. Susan had been working on a nine-to-five job, then she decided to make the plunge and give up the job to devote more time to our art. That isn't quite a total financial vacuum, in a sense, because she's working on a commission right now. Therefore the break from the financial status of a job to working as an artist per se, means the full impact of that hasn't been felt yet. And it probably will be softened and possibly might be considerably softened as time goes on -- hopefully, hopefully.

ROBERT BROWN: This commission that you have, what is that for? Another religious article?

ROBERT BROWN: No. Some people saw a piece I had done, at an exhibition, and they liked it very very much. They wanted something like it but with slight modification. So they asked me if I could do it. "Yes, I can do it; I'd be glad to do it." So I took on this commission and am working on it now, and hope to . . .

ROBERT BROWN: What is it? What is the subject?

SUSAN THOMPSON: The subject is a mother braiding a child's hair. She's sitting outside, on the steps. And, for some reason, a lot of Black women are particularly struck with this, because it takes a while to comb our hair, especially if you're braiding it. And often your mother sits you on the floor, where she can reach you, and she combs and bushes your hair, and she braids it. And, because our hair is thick, you just have to sit there while she combs the snarls out, or whatever. Most of us had to go through that -- somebody had to comb our hair. They identify with that, and they like that piece very much. So this is what the people wanted and this is what I'm giving them.

ROBERT BROWN: That's familiar, but it also must have been a time, when you look back, you were really close to your mother . . .

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: . . . and of necessity it took time, but on the other hand it meant a lot . . .

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: . . . a time to be together. For other people this is recalled, too.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Sure, sure. You could talk. And at the same she's moving your head this way, and that way, and . . .

ROBERT BROWN: And in your designs -- I think I've seen some of them -- there's also a recollection of the Madonna and Child in some ways. There's the mother, a dominant figure, cradling the child, a very protective quality, feeling, to it, too.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. That's Allan's influence. When I first came in contact with him and his work, I noticed the beautiful Madonnas and his love for Madonnas kind of opened my eyes to that mother and child relationship which is so strong. You see mothers struggling to get on the bus and they have their baby carriage and the baby and . . . sometimes I just wonder: what possesses a mother to do it. This other human being she's got to carry around everywhere she goes. What is that? It's love. And it just kind of opened my eyes, everywhere -- mothers and their children at church, down the street, everywhere you go. But I never had seen them in quite that light before.

ROBERT BROWN: That theme you think you're going to stick with? Beyond the commission, maybe?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Well, I dig relationships PERIOD -- the mother-child, I dig man-woman, siblings, friends. Because it's through relationships that we get to know love. And this is so important, and that message . . . [Tape is momentarily halted; then resumes]

ROBERT BROWN: We were talking about relationships that make friendship and that express love.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Oh, love -- yes. And also our relationship with God. These are things that interest me a lot at this point.

ROBERT BROWN: I'm interested how you're going to express that? How have you been expressing the relation to the love of god?

SUSAN THOMPSON: I think this is the liturgical part, where of course Jesus, as far as I know, said it all. But you can always reiterate. And his life was love, a life devoted to man, and teaching, so we might know happiness, that we might see the light, that if we love each other, there will be happiness, There will be joy in our lives. I'm very interested in Jesus, I love Christ; and this is reflected in my work, I guess. And Allan does too, as you can see -- all his work reflecting the life of Christ, the Apostles, all the Biblical people.

ROBERT BROWN: He of course is a great help there, isn't he, because of his experience with depicting not just Biblical themes but trying to express love and other more symbolic things. Your depicting the angel and the needle, I can see how that would excite him . . .

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes! [She laughs in agreement]

ROBERT BROWN: . . . a powerful symbolic expression. [After a pause] What do you see as your future role, Mr. Crite?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, as far as this relationship is concerned, the only thing that concerns me about it, in a way, is a purely selfish one, is that I want her to continue indefinitely. But I'm not making any plans for it, because "things are being planned," as it were. The thing that I want to do or hope to do is happening anyhow -- that is, each of us in a certain sense would like to see whatever we're doing extended in one form or another. And in a certain sense I have established a certain niche, if I can use that expression, and I've accumulated a certain amount of experiences. So what I'm doing is to these experiences or at least make them available to Susan, and then she'll take them and carry them on in whatever developments may take place. So I'm engaged in a certain work so far as my educational project is concerned, but in one sense it may sound a little selfish that I'm engaged in a very important work and that work is Susan. And I consider that it's one of the most important things that has ever happened to me in my life. [Voice is emotionally charged in foregoing sentence] So in one sense it's like a father and a daughter; the father sees in his children certain things, he gives them certain things, and then they take these things which he's accumulated during the years and they carry it on in their own way. While I don't have a biological family, I do have a family in another sense and Susan is one of my daughters, you might say. Then I have a few sons, and some of them are rebellious [He laughs] and ornery [Laughs again]. And I have a whole lot of grandsons and grandchildren. It's something like an African village -- the elder is the elder of the whole village, and he has a relationship to the whole village, and he represents a tradition which the village carries on. He remains with them no matter what happens, even though he may not be physically present. So I suppose there's a little bit of that in what goes on here. That's what's going on. It's difficult to explain, it's like a family relationship, a very close and intimate one. It's a learning experience for both of us, and it is an experience that we're going through.

ROBERT BROWN: You're not formally teaching each other, it's not theoretical. Before this, Mr. Crite, you would have commissions and the like. A lot of the things you did were more planned out, weren't they, than now? This is experiential, or whatever the word is. You see, you have your educational project; you have -- going way back early in your career -- done secular things, too. Susan mentioned "The Summer Promenade" and things like that; you have some of those yourself. Do you see yourself doing some secular themes, like reflections on the community, showing people doing different things, sort of to express the non-religious aspect of life, too?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. Because I want to do whatever I want to do, whatever it is. [Laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: That's conceivable, in other words -- that you might go into that as well.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. I want to do a nude, and that's what I'm going to do. There would be a point to it, but I would do it.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE It's kind of interesting in one way. I have the usual problem of separating secular from religious, because there isn't any such separation as far as I'm concerned. We do work together. In a scene like the "Promenade" and some other scenes, there's a certain amount of collaboration because what I do is point out things, and then she has a question, and we solve it. It might be a question of drawing. But then she has an influence on me, like in braiding the children's hair, that was something I hadn't noticed before, and then I started looking around. There is this element of parallels. For example, I did documentaries -- I still do -- and Susan does documentaries; like this woman-and-child business. Then, of course, I did a lot of "religious" QUOTE UNQUOTE Biblical themes, and Susan, prior to seeing me, did a lot of that. Then the liturgical things which I do, that's the only part which might be slightly contrived, in a sense, because Susan has been introduced into liturgical art. There, she'd have to have an interest and she has a great deal of interest, and that cannot be contrived. I think that could be justified as a parallel.

There are one or two instances I would like to bring out which speak a little bit about the uniqueness, I think. For example, Susan did some work in a little-theatre group in New York, designing costumes. Well, about 40 years ago, before she was around, I was working with a little-theatre group in Boston designing scenery. I've lived in museums, practically; Susan hasn't, exactly, but she's had some unique experience like guided tours at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for instance.

Then, in regard to family relationships, her father-in-law studied for the Episcopal priesthood at the then Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge. He decided to go into something else but later on his daughter-in-law worked on an altar hanging and a chasuble which is used in celebrating Communion at the same school. It's these kinds of things that go on, and on, and on . . . [He laughs]

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. And Allan showed me his mother's sewing kit upstairs, and here she's working on these liturgical vestments. I guess she's in the altar guild?

ROBERT BROWN: And here you are, doing things, years and years later. These parallels, particularly, I guess, at the moment of discovery, make your relationship even more powerful.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. Allan and my dad are the same age, born the same month, within the same week. [She laughs] I don't know, it's just so weird.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Yes. [Voice sounds choked]

SUSAN THOMPSON: And he has always been very close to his mother until she died. I had never really been away from home, either, until I moved to Boston. I talked to my mother and father every day on the phone -- they lived in Long Island and I lived in the Bronx, but I talked every day. There was never a time when I was "away," really. So, when we came to Boston, it was like I was away. Allan kind of filled the gap for me.

ROBERT BROWN: Is your family, Susan, sharing in this a bit?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. In fact my mother-in-law came up and she visited here and she saw a show that I was doing. She was so impressed. She's so happy that this is happening to me. And I guess it's a surprise, in a way, because it happened so fast, like a blitzkrieg here. [Laughing] A lot of friends can't believe that I've only been out here a year, because of the amount of work, and so many things that I've participated in, that I don't believe it either.

ROBERT BROWN: Your friends are not particularly artists, are they? Are they friends you've had based on family acquaintance?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Some of them are artists. This artistic thing runs in my family -- brothers, uncles, cousins, they're all involved in the arts. But my friends are everybody.

ROBERT BROWN: You hadn't consciously studied art in New York?

SUSAN THOMPSON: No, no. I just took it for granted. I guess that's where my insecurity lay, in a way. Because you had to go to art school, you had to -- the whole bit -- and then Allan came along and said, "Oh no, you don't, you have it anyway."

ROBERT BROWN: You sensed that, didn't you? [To ARC]

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Because your own training was very careful and planned -- number of years in school, and so forth.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE What was happening in this instance is that she's getting a very intensive art experience, because when she comes here to our studio, she absorbs everything that's here. She's under very intensive training -- I hesitate to use these expressions because it sounds like a master-pupil relationship; it's more like collaboration of two artists. The only difference is that one has been in the field a little longer than the other. I guess it's sort of like a Renaissance arrangement -- the senior artist would have several masters with him. Like Verrochio had people like Leonardo da Vinci in his studio workshop. It's something like that. So Susan is being exposed to a very intensive experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Compared to what you had in art school.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Oh yes. Far more intense. and there is a certain amount of acceleration. Sometimes I wonder about it myself -- she works hard; she doesn't fool around. All you have to do is look around and see how much work has been done.

But going back to this unplanned-well-planned experience, things go step by step. I mentioned Lois Jones. she's a graduate of the Museum school, in 1927. Then she went on to fame and fortune -- went to France, received quite a few honors over there: exhibitions, the Medal of Honor. She's been down to Haiti [He pronounces it "Hy-tee"] and to Africa. Some of her things are in the palace of the president of Senegal, and I think Haiti. She's a very important artist. She came to Boston to give a talk at Suffolk University. Susan had been interested in looking at her work, so this was a good chance for Susan to meet her. Something had happened prior to this -- Susan gave up her nine-to-five job, as was mentioned. She had no idea what was going to happen. We went down to Suffolk University and Susan had a chance to talk to Lois Jones.

Later on, the next day, I had to give a talk at the Museum of Fine Arts and Lois came in for that, scolding me for

not telling her the day before about it. Anyhow, Lois, Susan, and another artist, Rene Westbrook [phon. sp.], a sculptor, all came. We all sat in the Museum's Members Room. And Lois talked to both these younger artists at length and in depth. Well, now, I am important in a way -- I hesitate to say this, as far as Susan is concerned, because I represent a role model. I'm a senior artist and I've been around and I have a reputation of sorts; I'm looked upon as a patriarch, et cetera. These folks have sort of conned me with Lord knows what. I feel uncomfortable with it, but anyhow [Laughing] that's their judgment, not mine. [Susan laughs] Anyhow, that has been of some importance. Now Lois comes along. She's a woman, Black, a successful artist, and serves as an important role model for women. Because there aren't too many role models as far as women are concerned. I was very much impressed with that, it hit me like a ton of bricks, what all this meant. and Lois was very much impressed with Susan's work. She told me later on that she's a very fine artist. She came to the house here, and really gave the work a once-over, and very thoroughly. She had some areas of caution -- about the use of gold in some ways, for example. The upshot was, she wanted slides of Susan's work and is planning to write an article about her and, as a matter of fact, about the two of us.

This means, because Lois will be giving lectures, that people will know more about this [He giggles] this daughter of mine, Susan. Which of course makes me very happy. And this goes into an article with national production.

ROBERT BROWN: Where might it appear?

SUSAN THOMPSON: It's a magazine called Black Art, comes out of California. It's such a good magazine; I was really impressed by it a couple of years ago. All the color pictures, a lot of color in there.

ROBERT BROWN: That will be a prominent platform for you. Allan, your role -- do you feel threatened when, after Lois talked to the two younger woman artists, you feared you might lose your daughter to . . . ?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE No, I'll hang onto her. [He laughs] No, I didn't. I was very much impressed. I became suddenly aware of the importance -- what it means for women to see other women successful in the professional field. I've become very conscious, fairly recently, of this whole area of female-male relationships; how women are put under male dominance and are given a great deal of support, even Biblical support -- the whole thing is patriarchal. And women are denied their rights as persons. I've become more and more conscious of that recently. And also of the amount of pressures that are put upon women by the society in which we find ourselves. So far as role models are concerned, there aren't too many of them; not too many in the area of the arts, either. An increasing number nowadays. The only early woman artist I know of is Vigee le Brun, 18th century French artist. Then Rosa Bonheur in the 19th century; and then Mary Cassatt, etc. So there aren't too many. So Lois represents an extremely important figure. She's a matriarchal figure. So you have a matriarchal figure on one hand and a patriarchal figure on the other. It shook me up; I was overjoyed.

ROBERT BROWN: New information, but you were overjoyed.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I certainly was. I see Susan taking part in exhibitions and, when I see her content and happy, that's sufficient for me. I get pleasure, infinite pleasure, in her happiness.

ROBERT BROWN: [To Susan] , can you recall what Lois Jones said to you at the Museum and when she came over here to Mr. Crite's house? could you describe some of that?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes. She expounded a little more about her work and what you have to do as a Black woman and a Black person to . . . if you have that kind of drive to succeed, you have to go a step further if you're Black. If you want to really get out there and make a name for yourself, do some significant work, be a part of history -- all that stuff. You have to have a little more drive, a little more incentive, you have to want to do it a little more. She talked of her struggle, and even the women-talk about relationships. Of her marriage, and how she was able to keep it intact; being a person who had definite goals, she seemed to know where she wanted to be, where she was going, and she knew what she had to accomplish. So, if you have a husband who wants his dinner promptly at six o'clock -- oh-h-h [She takes a deep breath, laughing at the end], it would pose a problem when you're in the middle of something, or you're off traveling. So she told a bit of that, how they did it, how they worked it out. This helped Renee and me, because we're struggling with the same thing. We have ties and responsibilities. I feel I owe my family something. I owe my family something of me, and I want to be a part of them. I want them to be a part of me. I don't want to forsake all for art; it's not in me to do that. But she didn't have to do it that way either. It helped to hear her. In any relationship, you have to give some, you have to take some. So it reinforced, I guess, faith in myself, just to hear of another person's struggle. And the fact that this woman with international fame and prominence would sit down and talk to us like that -- it really meant something. Because you figure "Oh well, there are these over there" And the encouragement she gave us. She let us know that it was going to be a struggle, but still you just have to struggle. That's all part of it. It was so good.

ROBERT BROWN: What about her critique of your work? Crite said it was very thorough.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you take it?

SUSAN THOMPSON: Oh, it was so good to have such a person come up and tell you what they think. A lot of times, when people look at the stuff, they don't really say what they think. They "like it" or whatnot. But she got down and -- I had found this gold material that had a very peculiar property in that it had elasticity to it, so that you could stuff it and mold it and when you look at it, it's like worked gold. But it reflects light in a weird kind of way, and she told me to be very very careful because it was harsh. I appreciated that. I could see it was harsh, but it still

ROBERT BROWN: You thought it was stunning; you didn't see where you might get in trouble with it -- or you hadn't until you talked with her.

SUSAN THOMPSON: I knew it was a funny thing, because if you turned the light down, you could see it one way as sunlight shone on it -- there was all this coming at you. So she just told me to be careful. She didn't say, "I wouldn't use it at all, just be very careful," because it did have a funny property to it. Well, I appreciated that! It made me see my own work in another way. But she didn't tell me not to do it. That's what Allan does -- he'll tell you to "watch it" or "hmmmmmm --" but never not to do it; go ahead, see what it will lead to, find out for myself that I made a mistake. That's learning.

ROBERT BROWN: That's the only way you'd learn; you just stop dead.

SUSAN THOMPSON: I think if somebody told me NOT to do something, I would just have to assert myself that way. [Laughs]

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE I found that out. [Both laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: You found what?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE [Still giggling] Well, I told her I was going to do something and for her not to, and she went part way and then went right on ahead and did it. I didn't spank her. I felt like it. [More seriously] At any rate [But both break down again in laughter]

ROBERT BROWN: I'll ask this question as an outsider. To what extent are you thinking in terms of Black themes, or as a Black element in all of this? Are you consciously thinking of that or not?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE That's a good question. Of course, I've been working on Black themes all the time. I'm not very conscious of it. All I'm doing is telling the story of man in terms of Black people. It's just the story of man.

ROBERT BROWN: [To Susan] How about you?

SUSAN THOMPSON: I'm very conscious of it, mainly because Black is my culture. Well, I'm influenced by all culture, but because I'm associated with black people, this is what is reflected in my art. I'm particularly interested in our spiritual heritage. All people have a spiritual heritage, but Black people in this country -- theirs is a little different, and it's very very very beautiful. And I think that one of the roles of the Black artist is to expound on this spiritual heritage. So that generations can grow to love what our forefathers loved also. It helps us when we can look back at the struggles of our grandparents, of our forefathers, and look at all they had to do just in order that we could survive. Slavery wasn't easy but it was faith: they said that their children and their grandchildren wouldn't have to go through it; that, I imagine, would keep the people in that condition that the hope that it won't be like this always, and it wasn't; it's not. I think art can reflect some of this.

ROBERT BROWN: Are either of you interested in jobs [?] that reflect the pluralistic nature of this ? Up here in Boston?

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE Well, from my point of view, as I mentioned a long time ago, I was doing things on three levels. One, the story of Black people in this city as I saw them; another one, the idea of the spirituals as part of the literature; the third, telling the story of man using the Black figure. I suppose in that particular aspect, the kind of thing I'm doing with is a kind of a link between something specific and parochial as far as racial identity is concerned to my faith and the general area of what you might call the pluralistic society in which we live. I'm finding as I go along that there's only one story of man and that we have to understand all parts of it. That the heritage of the Black peoples in the Americas is part of the heritage of the peoples all over the world. It is a part of our heritage in a parochial sense, but then it's a part of the heritage of all of us. All of us have to understand it. In the story of man there is a struggle all the way through -- the struggle of achievement, freedom, and so on. While there is the struggle to get free from slavery as far as the Black person is concerned, there is also the struggle to be free of that same slavery as far as the white person is concerned. Because both are bound into

the same thing. No one is free if anyone is not free. Freedom is indivisible. The difficulty that we have is that there's a kind of illusion that slavery only affects Black people, where as a fact all of us have been enslaved. I'm finding this out that as far as women are concerned today -- that as long as a woman doesn't own her own body, none of us is free. The importance of freedom of course is that once we become free we can proceed to enjoy ourselves. The enormous treasures which are available through that which has been under the custody of Black people as far as their traditions are concerned, is a treasure which can be available to all. And it's important that it be available to all.

And it's also important that it should be understood that it's part of everybody's inheritance. We can only keep a tradition when we're willing to give it away, or, rather, to share it.

Sometimes that worries me a little bit. Sometimes I hear some of my people [I'm using that word in a parochial sense] speak about "our particular heritage" as though it were ours and nobody else's. If we use that attitude, then it's going to become nobody's. This goes along with my whole relationship, in a sense, as far as Susan is concerned, I suppose, and our relationship with each other. An element of selfishness, in a way. I share everything with Susan in order for me to keep it, because the only way I can keep it is to share it. In a certain sense, the only way I can keep my life is to give it. And I'm overjoyed, you might say, and humbly grateful, that I've been given the opportunity to do this. With Susan coming along and my giving my life to her, I've been able to get a much richer understanding of it.

I think that can be enlarged into a larger thing -- taking in a whole people. I don't know if I've made myself clear or not.

ROBERT BROWN: We were talking about why a lot of ethnic groups seem to know only fragments of their culture, awareness of it. You felt there was some difference with Blacks.

SUSAN THOMPSON: Yes, Blacks are different in a way because, owing to the color of our skin, we could not be absorbed into this general population; we'd always stand out. We'd always be "the Negro," "the coloreds," "the Blacks." Apart from the rest of society. Last Sunday, at Harriet Tubman, the Third-World Women honored this 95-year-old lady, Julia Smith, who had been very active in the community. One thing that she pointed out: yes, we were enslaved but this should not be a stigma. Because we didn't enslave ourselves, we were enslaved by others; and this is their worry. It's not on us; it's on them. I think this is rather significant. That makes a difference, a real difference. We should be very very proud that we survived intact, still growing, generations coming along, a beautiful future to look forward to. Allan compared it, one time, to Moses bringing his people out. They came through; we came through too.

ROBERT BROWN: joy or surprising.

SUSAN THOMPSON: [Laughing] Oh, there's a lot of work to do, a lot of work to do.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE She keeps saying things that almost seem to sum up everything. I don't know what I can add to it. There is, I think, a theme that we have to begin to stress more and more. As far as Black people being freed from slavery and the theme of "let my people go," it's a case of letting all of us go, all of us have to be freed from this instance of slavery, because, as I mentioned before, it affects all of us, so that the burden can be dropped, as it were, from the shoulders of all of us. Because if you have a people in chains, that means somebody else has to have the other end of the chain. The chains ought to be dropped from the hands of both people.

SUSAN THOMPSON: The gaoler has to stay in jail, too, to watch the prisoner.

ALLAN ROHAN CRITE We all want "out." The psychological difficulty, I suppose, is because one group of people have been trained, brain-washed, into thinking in terms of one kind of relationship; the other has been brain-washed into the other -- the slaver and the slave. Both have to be freed from that.

The idea of being absorbed into the general community brings up the problem of integration. There's confusion in concepts of integration because people think of integration as absorption, that is, of being brought into the so-called mainstream; so that the differences between one group of people and another is sort of lost; it's sort of a general "soup." That isn't quite true. We've been an integrated society from the beginning -- probably abrasively but [Tape momentarily cuts off; ARC resuming] -- is, as we look at the American colony, there was a mixture of different European groups, different Indian groups, different African groups. All formed together to make this single society. That's been the nature of the American experience, and it's a very rich one.

[END OF THIS SERIES OF INTERVIEWS]

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