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Oral history interview with Robert Dash,
1974 September 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Robert Dash on September 22, 1974. The interview was conducted at Robert Dash's studio in Sagaponack, New York by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PC: PAUL CUMMINGS

RD: ROBERT DASH

PC: It is the 22nd of September, 1974. Paul Cummings talking to Robert Dash in his studio in Sagaponack [Long Island, New York]. Now, you were born in New York City, right?

RD: Yes, the year 1934. In Manhattan.

PC: Did you come from a large family? Are there more?

RD: There is my brother who is eight years older and who is head of the Department of Physics at Seattle Hospital. I'm third generation American. Schooling was mostly at home because I was ill. Mostly tutoring. Very haphazard and very sketchy and somehow I ended up in the University of New Mexico.

PC: What kind of tutoring? What prompted that? Was it a terrible, terrible illness?

RD: Oh, many of them.

PC: One thing after another?

RD: Yeah, starting at the age of six months and this went on forever.

PC: Well, whereabouts did you live? You said you are third generation. Where did the family spring from?

RD: The original stock is very, very mixed and it is a totally mixed bag. As far as the European history goes, it's French, English, Austrian, German, Hungarian, Russian and a lot of religious intermarriage so that both parents were half Catholic, half Jewish. This made one not quite noble. Way back there was a French Countess, Countess du Dash in 1850. Wrote a book called *Memoire Dasche*, and that's all I know about her. At one time the family name was spelled "Dasch," at one time "Dashe," and at one time it had a petit "du" before it. There's a branch of the family that's on my mother's half sister's side that's in St. Louis, and on my father's side is a large branch which we lost track of that went to Oklahoma. I don't even know what their names are. Otherwise we were New Yorkers. And I couldn't wait to get out of it.

PC: Why?

RD: I never liked the city.

PC: Really?

RD: Never.

PC: Even though that's where you sprang from?

RD: I think a lot of New Yorkers have this feeling that the city is to be avoided and to be used as a utilitarian structure and then you leave it as soon as you can. I think Henry James said something about, "No gentleman of taste would ever live in one." Of course he did all the time. I've been living out here, I believe it's nine years now, I'm not really sure. I think since '66. I go back perhaps maybe twice a year, three times a year and find that there is nothing that interests me in the city at all. I go back for a museum or a friend's show or for a movie which I can't get out here only to find out it is not very good. Mostly the way I live my life out here is that I have friends come out on weekends.

PC: Well, what was it like growing as a child and not going to school and having tutors? Did you have childhood friends?

RD: No, no. It was a very isolated childhood. My first interest was music and I studied the piano from age four to sixteen with the intention of being a concert pianist.

PC: Who did you study with?

RD: I studied with Augusta Gottlieben and Lee Wolf and then I was supposed to study with Isabel von _____ who was teaching at Curtis and decided not to. Augusta Gottlieben and Lee Wolf were very good imitators of Pachati and Scarlatti schools. I don't know which. Alexander Scarlatti, the Scarlatti family. I don't know which. But I was also writing poetry and painting, but mostly in a kind of stupor as the result of drugs and things like that. Then I thought I'd try acting. My father was an actor. But I didn't particularly care for that. Then when my brother went to Los Alamos working for the AAC there, I visited him and it was a shock because I think it was too abrupt a shift from the City, although we had a country place near Tuxedo where we went on week-ends throughout the year, summer and holidays. It was an incredible shock and I hated Los Alamos. The first time I had ever been in a kind of regimented structure. People walking around with name tags and numbers, and everything newly built and people were from every part of the United States. And of course, I had no business being there. So the only way I could get out, I hired myself out as a fire watcher. I found that I was on a horse for the first time -- ten hours the first day. And I think I was the first fire watcher in the history of the forest service to be lost. And I was lost. I was stationed at base camp with an Indian named Chris who disapproved of me entirely, particularly when I opened my pack and out came cans of spinach and packages of Herbert Tarletons. All decadently Eastern. Actually, I fell off the horse, not to be moved for days.

PC: What was your brother's name?

RD: James Gregory.

PC: What provoked the interest in music and art? Were your parents interested? Was it around the house?

RD: It was there. It was there. My father was a great opera buff. Also it was a way of giving me something to do because I was more or less house-bound. Mother played the piano in the usual way of somebody being trained to play a few things at parties, and Dad sang. He had a good voice and still does. I was quite absorbed in it. I used to sometimes write my own compositions which were mostly after Debussy and Ravel -- smudgy, blurred and not interesting. But it did basically give me something to do in all this idleness. It was music and fiddling with painting and poetry and a lot of reading.

PC: What kind of reading?

RD: Well, my dad used to read me to sleep with Kipling and Shakespeare. I used to be terrified by them. He'd march up and down the bedroom reciting "Gunga din" and Mother used to peek in and see me bolt upright against the bed with eyes open and she thought I enjoyed it. I was terrified. And my dad would leave with a very pleased look, leaving me shaking. The first novel I ever read was *Hatter's Castle*. It was in the library. But the first major thing I read was _____ which I immediately lit into, thinking, "Well, here's another bedridden fellow." And I couldn't quite pronounce all the names or get all of it, but it calmed me a bit. So that formed the basis of my childhood. Then as I got better at the country place I did a lot of gardening. So it was rather solitary. I didn't get along with my brother very well. The disparity of years, and I was not capable of associating with any of his friends and I had none of my own. It wasn't a dismal childhood. Looking back, I think it was a marvelous preparation for living the country life alone and in one's work.

PC: What part of Manhattan did you live in?

RD: Washington Square. They are still down there on University Place. Which I suppose gave me a kind of rural feeling, really, I mean there are so many bailiwicks. All the time I lived in New York I never lived above 14th Street. So uptown was really quite unknown to me. Uptown was for parties, galleries, museums, but one didn't live there.

PC: It's another world up there.

RD: Yes, exactly. There's a tremendous neighborhood quality to New York. New York is, I think, a connection of a series of small towns. And, if you live in a certain area, there is the dry cleaner, a grocer, a butcher, and neighbors. So I think that also gave me a great preparation for living in this small town, which doesn't strike me as odd at all. It's exactly similar.

PC: Just that there's more grass than concrete.

RD: Yes.

PC: Well, how did . . . ? You know, it's interesting, the poetry and music and the painting. Why do you think the music proved the first main interest?

RD: My father had a very large collection of opera records. Also a large collection, I don't remember what label

they were on, of Alfred Cortot. Who were the other pianists? Oh, Padrewski, of course. But more of standard popular classical discs of that time. And then there was this piano here, a 1914 Chickering, which was in the house and was a very mysterious object to me. I wanted to touch it.

PC: See what happened.

RD: Yeah.

PC: So it became part of an adventure?

RD: Yeah, I mean the adventures I had were within walls. This was one of them. I had a lot of animals as a child, but they also would become very ill. So the piano became an extremely alluring object, and it was something I could manage.

PC: Well, what about poetry? When did you start writing poetry?

RD: I think every child scribbles. I think my parents were very good in that way because, with a perpetually convalescent child, there must be something they can do and so everything was encouraged. I think that's really the reason. I think every child has poetry in him. Every child growing up writes three to four good poems then they blow the scene or continue. There's more in them, or there isn't. I had eleven in me which were all published. Oh, stacks of poems I'd written which I don't think were good at all. But eleven were published.

PC: Well, what about New Mexico? How did you come to get into college with the placement exams, and having not gone through regular . . . ?

RD: That I don't remember. I think I just applied. I don't think they . . . it was such a strange place. You simply went there. I think perhaps, I don't remember, just a reference that my brother was in Los Alamos was sufficient. And I think they wanted Easterners too. I don't remember being asked anything.

PC: How did you decide to go to college or was that just sort of the thing to do at that point?

RD: I think it was a way of getting away from New York, and I really didn't know really what I wanted to do, and I don't think the idea of not going to college was in the air then. I think one did believe in it then.

PC: Did you have any other thoughts besides New Mexico to go to?

RD: No. I wanted to get as far away from New York as possible. I dimly liked the countryside -- I couldn't quite understand it. I mean for a year I didn't find any view in New Mexico, because I had been used to finding views through buildings and in the country through trees and suddenly to be presented with no buildings, no trees. You had this odd feeling, "Where is the view?"

PC: Right. You went all four years there or not?

RD: I don't really recall.

PC: How did you come to study anthropology?

RD: I don't know that either.

PC: It was just one of those things?

RD: Well, English was a bore because I had read everything. Science was out except for perhaps the biological ones and they weren't strong in it. The idea of finding out about a life other than my own -- anthropology -- was very much there. It seemed to be the most exciting thing and it offered also an opportunity of again getting away, this time from the university and out on a dig. Little did I realize the boredom associated with pot shards and all the rest.

PC: I know. Little shovels and brushes and bits and pieces.

RD: Yes.

PC: That University is in Albuquerque, isn't it?

RD: In Albuquerque, yes.

PC: How did you like Albuquerque?

RD: Awful, awful. When I was there it was one long highway. From the air it looked like a gigantic ruined pueblo

with quite a bit of new building. It was very military. There was Sandia Air Force Base, Kirkland, and a lot of new "adobe-ish" houses on the outskirts. Incredible colors. And everybody, of course, had to have a lawn, some of which had to be shoveled out of dust during the storms. There were lawns with pink flamingos and at that time they still had black boys with rings for the horses, and windowboxes; they were quite awful. There was an old town part of Albuquerque that I lived in which was still nice, but basically the city was very strange. And yet it was manageable.

PC: You know it is not all that big. It is strung out.

RD: Yes.

PC: It's thin.

RD: Very.

PC: How did you like the University? This was kind of your first public educational experience.

RD: Well, I didn't. I was very sleepy and didn't make classes; fiddled around. And there were a whole bunch of us Easterners that were just terribly, terribly arrogant brats at the University. I mean single-handedly we could have destroyed the University. I remember one friend of mine almost got Charlie "the Bird" Parker elected for class president before anybody knew who he was, and everybody was going down to Juarez on week-ends and coming back with a gallon of Oso Negro gin and nodding in classes. We were very frightening. It was easy to make grades and get through. Graduation, I remember, was in a dust storm. Quite an experience, too -- in the football stadium.

PC: Were you involved with the Quarterly?

RD: Yes.

PC: How did that come about?

RD: I started as an undergraduate with Kenneth (Flash); I think he's at Indiana now. I was also an English major even though I didn't want to be. I started working there as student help and then I began holding down what was considered a full-time job. It only required a few hours a day. I became an assistant editor. Then the magazine under that aegis folded. I had left. That was interesting because that was one of the first contacts I had with New York. I don't remember the date of it, but we had a poetry section and an art feature in each issue. For the poetry section we had eight to ten poems of a poet that had not been discovered, either American or German or French (we did french colonial poetry, too) or a painter, and we did de Kooning once. I think it was the first time de Kooning had been reproduced (not very well, in black and white). It was done by the University Press outside, and that was very exciting.

PC: How did you find the material?

RD: We were one of many, many literary magazines and it was known by poets and writers. We have had John Dillon Hesban who then was at Tulane. I think he still is. He was the poetry editor and would scout for us. Many people on Guggenheim grants would be in New Mexico for a year. Richard Wilco (Wilbur) was there. I don't remember who else offhand, and they would recommend people. There was no problem. John Dillon Hesban discovered Shirley Ann Grau and we published her first story called "The Sound of Silver," which then she retitled "The Black Prince," which became the lead of the first collection. I can't remember how it came. We published a for the first time. We were the first to publish in English, and that was more logical because the legislature of New Mexico at that time was still in Spanish and English. A great many people on the campus knew South American literature, and so the connection was very direct.

PC: How did you like the experience of working on a publication?

RD: I wished it were less boring. I liked very much working with a writer on short stories and suggesting cretin changes going back and forth. Those were the thrills that you waited for. The rest of it was proofreading and galley copies and hand-mailing these I think the edition was fourteen hundred, running through a very messy old machine, getting ink all over everything and having trouble with the post office because you didn't put the five copies going to Las Cruces, New Mexico, in one pile. And there was kind of deadline tension and things like that. Actually, I didn't mind too much doing that. It was mostly the fact that you had to sit in an office under the cottonwood which, even in airless, windless days would have its leaves turning. You thought your life was slipping away. You were really doing nothing. I mean the thrills that were involved in discovering something were few, very few. You got so that your submission manuscripts, you know, . . . certain people we call "repeated offenders" who had no business sending manuscripts. And we got loads of manuscripts from Midwestern ladies, postmenopausal, who discovered visions at the bottom of their garden and wrote about it.

And then your standard New Mexico poet who is always writing about sunrise over the Sandia Mountains and how the Indians were so wonderful.

PC: What was it like because, you know, from New York you moved out to a city that did have Spanish and some Indian influence and quite a different way of living? Were there things about that that interested you? contrasts?

RD: Well, it took me three years before I stopped wearing suits. I'm actually very slow. I think all my life I have been protected by a kind of vast stupor. It has been my insulation because I am affected by things in ways that I am not even aware of. Because I still had no direction really. I was wandering around feeling out and sensing things more than really perceiving them. There was a New England lady, I never can remember her name. She had a great library, book store, not a library, in Boston. She sort of acted like Virginia Woolf and I can't remember the dates -- I think it was 1820 or 1830, she ran into a tree one day and got a black eye and she wrote in her diary, saying, "I saw it, but didn't realize it." And I think I was somewhat like that. She was quite marvelous. I really think I was wandering around like that, the way I was lost, half off this horse. I think one is protected that way.

PC: How long did you do the forestry?

RD: Oh, just eight days. We were about thirty miles from base camp in Bandelier National Forest. I don't know how long it hadn't rained. Chris the Indian and I were supposed to go back to base camp. Your stay was eight days. And I was very cocky by then and said "Why don't you just scratch the trail in the dust and I'll follow it." He was very eager to do so and just took off. I decided it was such a nice day I would just tie the reins to the pommel and rest. I was still smoking my Tarrytons and putting them out with a bit of spit in your palms so no forest fire would ensue. The trail got narrower and there was a tree fallen down across it, at which point the horse started to gallop and I tried to untie the reins. I just held onto the pommel and swung over the side and got this smashing blow on the head. About two hours later I woke up; I was still on the horse, but I didn't know where I was. And I wandered out on the Via Grande Road near sunset and this car passed. It looked full of Indiana school teachers and I stopped them with my hand in my best Gary Cooper. One lovely lady said, "Yes?" I found myself saying -- I didn't realize how stupid it was -- saying, "Ma'am, I am a forest ranger and I am lost." And she said, "Oh dear," and she offered me a hard-boiled egg. I waved her aside with, "We don't eat, we don't smoke, we don't do nothing, we just ride." So she got back to a phone somewhere. They sent out a truck from base camp to take the horse and me in disgrace back there. The next day I was demoted to road crew, shoveling gravel against the street. I quit.

PC: That was too exotic.

RD: Too much.

PC: You said as a child you were painting. Were you painting . . . ?

RD: The first one, I think I did, I am not sure (my mother brought it out a year ago) when I was nine. It's quite obvious that I had looked at because I do remember the cut glass vase in that painting. We do have that, but the painting behind the table we didn't have. It's an oil. My brother had painted.

PC: Oh, really?

RD: He painted extremely well, He gave it up. I think his whole desire was to have facts at his disposal and I have never cared for them very much. I think this has continued throughout our lives.

PC: When did you really start working at painting?

RD: Yesterday. Yesterday, tomorrow.

PC: Yesterday.

RD: One never feels one had begun.

PC: Well, I mean you keep working at it.

RD: My first show was in '60, so I guess I had been doing it before. But when I came back to New York I was 26 or 27 and then I went to Italy for slightly under a year. When I came back I was working for *Arts*, then *Art News*. First *Arts* and then *Art News*. During that time -- I can't remember which period -- it was a very hair-raising time as I was reviewing during lunch hour, working full-time at day, and then painting at night. I lost thirty pounds. And I was then working just totally abstractly. Abstract Expressionism was my academy as I think it really is now for a lot of people. And the paintings, I think, are very poor. I don't think I have more than three from that period. They were poor in the sense that they were wildly imitative of everybody but nowhere was the signature of my wrist. I was even painting with toothbrushes to get effects. One day I painted a painting of three girls with their

knees to their chins wearing dark blue sunglasses on this island that looks like a desert island with a palm tree. It was like the return of the Muses. Then I began hitting Realism. That painting up there is '59 and that is invented. As you can see, variations of this large one I've been working on reflects that too.

PC: How did you get into Abstract Expressionism?

RD: How could anybody do anything else in New York? It was the most thrilling, wondrous thing in the world, and it also was open. Anyone could. It was terrifically exciting and warm and inviting. You had none of the forbidding qualities that go into the professionalism of painting today.

PC: For example?

RD: Well, there weren't that many galleries. Big money hadn't hit. The party circuit was still going and everybody went to everybody's, invited or not.

PC: And cheap wine and whatever.

RD: Yes. And Tuesday openings were thrilling. You went everywhere. And if you wanted to paint, sure, go ahead. It was like that. And one just dove in and did it.

PC: You know, I am curious about all the magazines. How did you like reviewing for the art publications?

RD: In the beginning I did. Very much.

PC: How did you get into that?

RD: Well, as I remember it, it was a friend of mine from New Mexico, Connie Fox, and she had a friend who then owned Arts whose name I don't know. I don't know if I ever did. And she told me that they were looking for a reviewer and I applied. See, there again anybody could do anything. And I was given three galleries and I didn't know what was up, that this was actually a competition, because in each gallery I went to the director would say, "Well, someone has just been here." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about that. I am supposed to review this show." And they would haul out the same canvasses. Absolutely didn't know what was going on, that this is some kind of trial. And I won; they liked my reviews. I don't think I was a very good reviewer because I was either overly enthusiastic or overly caustic. Middle ground didn't exist.

PC: How much do you think you can do writing those fairly short reviews?

RD: Oh, I think it is a terrible disservice to yourself and to the artists involved. At the end of it I wanted to make some kind of almost tearsheet at the end of the art magazine listing the reviews and if, let's say, it was a show of paintings, to check mark first show, second, third; number of paintings; subject matter; polished or not; and give a kind of almost graph idea of it. Say nothing, give it stars like they used to give movie reviews. Must see, don't miss, skip it. The verbosity involved would be so tortured in these condensed reviews where much of the information has to be supplied, that your adjective content was of necessity tortured, and you would end up making these paradigms of impossible prose that were unreadable to you yourself three months later, and illustrative of nothing at all. Other than that, I wanted not only the tearsheet, but every show must have a photograph. That will do it. I found it disheartening but very necessary because reviews were very important to everyone. I don't remember what magazine, but some other reviewer got sick and I had to do thirty-two reviews in ten days. That was just so silly.

PC: I mean you can't see one thing from another.

RD: Packages of photographs, tearsheets of this and that, and so forth. No one is served well by this at all. And yet you have a feeling, what are you going to do? Someone has worked for two years and they are having a show. What are you going to do? I think I would prefer having now a newspaper on art. Something very casually, quickly written. And I do think there is room for it.

PC: Unpretentious.

RD: Yes.

PC: Say this is what is happening.

RD: Almost gossipy, with news of the Realto if you wish. Bla-Bla's just done this. "Oh, Bob Dash is doing tennis paintings. Let's wait and see, wow!" Or something like that. Or, "Rumor hath it that Bill is taking up sculpture, hmmm." Whatever. But you make it calmer, less poisonously professional, because painting is up to one, sculpture is up to one. No one asks you to do it and no one will tell you to stop. It's totally elective and I think should be treated as a private endeavor.

PC: The fact that the thing is interesting.

RD: Yes. I am amazed that anybody wants anything. Why? A house is quite complete without paintings, without a sculpture. You don't eat it; you don't need it. It really isn't anything. And by no means am I on the side of an architect who feels that a painting on the wall is a wound in his house. I do wish that a calmer, chatty quality return. Not mendacious by any means, but just more relaxed.

PC: Well, it may happen because the temper of the times has shifted so much.

RD: It has shifted, but it is almost becoming -- going into a kind of putting art in kind of obliquity where you have only one major newspaper with reviews in it which are very, very slanted. They are almost thesis things and nobody is being served. And there are magazines that review shows two months later or only selected shows, and the possibility of favoritism and nepotism is very very much more apparent than in the old days when almost any show was covered. Actually they all were. Even certain vanity galleries which we all know, it doesn't have to be mentioned, they were reviewed. One line, but they were reviewed. I think it is fairer, too.

PC: But there is no magazine of record at this point since *Art News* shifted its whole policy for example. Do you think those things . . . you said that lots of essays and reviews are written about art here and there. Do you think they ever do anything? Do you ever see a response from this?

RD: Yes. Yes I do. A response is generally that I am afraid the world does today exist in the confines of the media and gossip. If the name is bruited about or heard often enough.

PC: Then it becomes real.

RD: It works. Whatever is said as long as it is said. It is very curious because, let me see, last summer for example, since I am a member of this community very, very solidly, we had the Southampton Hospital drive and the theme of it was the '20's and they asked all the wheels of this area to model clothes. It was quite horrendous and Sergio Valenti said, "Look, I am 84 years old and I can't do this anymore." Someone said, "Get Bob Dash," So I had to shower and shave and stop work and go to this place and be dressed in a white suit and so on -- just like Gatsby. Knees knocking, going down a ramp before all the people. Maggie McNellis reading off the credits and so forth. I mean it is just absolutely

PC: You were being an actor, right?

RD: Yes, and turning around and spotting a few friends, and chancing a wink to sort of get the audience to realize that there is a heart beating underneath this cloth. And the next week I came out on the "Beautiful People" list. Well, I had also had an opening at the Benson Gallery and what do you think everybody was talking about? "Oh, you made the list!" What list? I didn't even know about it. Then a week later Eugenia Shephard did a piece on the Riviera and my father called me up and said, "What is this about you painting pears?" I said, "Just a minute. The dogs were barking. What did you say?" He said, "Well, I'll read you this." And after they finished with a long description of Estee Lauder's new house in France, ". . . a large living room dominated by two green pears by Long Island's Robert Dash." "I don't understand this. Send me the clipping." Then the phone started ringing, "Hey, you made Eugenia Shephard's column." Painters and poets. It was just so silly and I said "I'm trying to calm down about this; I'm not thrilled." And they said "pears" and I was trying to figure out . . . I know she's got five or six paintings. I think Shephard's secretary called up her secretary and said, "What's in the living room?" and she said, "A pair of Dash's," because I later found out she had brought over two. And then I said to John Ashbery, "Don't you think I should write to Eugenia Shephard? This is the second time I've been in her column. The first time was okay, but I don't like it." And he said, "Forget it." Now for the serious articles, I don't know. I just had a large piece in *American Artists*. I didn't know about this magazine and I had mixed feelings about it and I've gotten more response from that than anything else. I didn't know about it. I had never heard of it before. So I don't know, it is that old idea -- as long as they keep talking about you. I mean like other things are happening. This garden, which I was very pleased about, is going to be in the Royal Horticultural Society at the end of December. I wrote a three-thousand word piece on it. It is the second American garden they've done after Dumbarton Oaks.

PC: Oh, really.

RD: Yeah, yeah. And I am very pleased with that and that somehow helps too this idea of having created an ambiance and an environment for your work and so forth.

PC: Your garden is very famous. Do you use it in any way? I mean does it appear in the work?

RD: Usually at the end of every summer I think I don't want to paint a flower this year, and I usually bat out about seven paintings, which I did again this year. I don't really use it, no. It is very necessary to me because I am nonsporting. I never go to the beach. I take walks and the only physical exercise outside of painting is

gardening and I love it. It is a way of thinking out loud, actually about painting -- proportion, mixture of things, changing. I mean it is very similar to painting. And it illustrates -- the same thing with painting -- the unlimited possibilities in a small area, because the garden is very small. I mean you can stunningly create the new composition by just slight movement or clipping, the same way you do in painting, wipe out, and so forth. I've got practical reasons, too, because I have a very large vegetable garden this year and I have a freezer and I have been freezing stuff. Well, I just love it.

PC: How did you find this place?

RD: I saw it from the road. I only wanted a place on either of the two most rural areas out here and despaired of finding it, and one day this place was on the market. It was a barn no one wanted because it was too close to the property line. It was too barns actually. One 1740 and one about 1850. The small section . . . well the whole thing had to be moved which was against anybody getting it. I liked it. It was very cheap. I didn't know what I was going to do with it. Then I found out that the people in the front had and went to Ireland instead and then in Ireland they wrote that and then came here and then figured out the idea that I would move the two shacks. This is after I lived in one. That was a milk house and had been used by migrants. I stripped the oilcloth and everything else off the walls, whitewashed it, and lived very, very happily one summer with just a gallon or two of water I got at the store and kerosene lights and safari grill that works with paper. The farmer next door let me take all the tomatoes I wanted. So I lived off Dinty More beef stew and hamburgers and tomatoes and instant coffee. Housekeeping was very easy -- just open the door and let the wind blow it out. It was very lovely. And then I got the idea that . . . I found out that the barn could remain in situ if it was used as a studio, non-living. Then I decided to move these two houses and connect them and make the living area there. That was the solution.

PC: What do you mean leave it here but non-living?

RD: Well, as a studio it is considered non-living.

PC: Right.

RD: And the living area is back there which is far enough from the property line. Then three or four years later came additional trouble because the other section of the barn, the younger section, is still too close to the property line even though I wasn't using it. It was attached to here and was just wide open. The larks were nesting in it. And I thought I would sell it; I thought it was worth more money but no one came up with the cash for it. I found out if I detached it even one foot that was legal. It was an incredible hassle.

PC: These are all local variances, regulations?

RD: Yes. And I moved it as a three-sided structure just where the pond is and it stood there and then I sort of got my "building-itis" back again and decided to move it to my other acre and make a winter studio -- snugger and smaller, which would provide me with a different view. And I thought a good emotional shift, moving from one place to another every six months. Very refreshing for the work because, generally, every six months I go through a survey and haul out the work and start ripping up, destroying, saving. So this worked out very well, putting the garden and this house to bed and then moving to the other one. Then in the Spring I move back.

PC: How do you use the landscape around here?

RD: I don't think I do very much. I work from photographs. Solely. I am a very lazy sketcher. I am not after vague or ephemeral moments of a transitory effect. I don't really carry a camera around. I'm just after the most salient features. For a time it was relatively exact. Three years ago I did nothing but the roads around here, feeling that the space was, as is happening, getting impinged upon, chewed away, that perhaps America's only open space is the highway and that, perhaps, is America's real still life. So they were rather accurate in their thirty-five mile per hour signs on the paintings and so on. Also it seemed to represent most quintessentially the quality out here in the winter, which is this marvelous curving road with nothing on it. Maybe a flag in the cold fluttering a way there and then one car and the telephone lines and that is all.

PC: As opposed to July and August.

RD: Yes.

PC: Something else again.

RD: Quite.

PC: Do you go out on a photo safari once in a while or how do you find things that you want to use?

RD: No. Well, I have been taking photographs for years and I have a pile of them there divided into interiors,

figures, roads, houses, landscapes, and one other category, I can't remember what. And basically very few of the photographs are terribly new. I shuffle the deck and return to old scenes.

PC: So you could start tomorrow using a photograph that is six to seven years old?

RD: Yes. I just made a sort of ping pong paddle square with the panel backed with something that will stick, and the photograph is pinned on with four drafting pins. It is held in the left hand and I just glance at it to get myself going and then I forget about it.

PC: So what did that serve, as a kind of a basic . . . ?

RD: An aide-memoire, that's all, to get things in certain kinds of positions. But then things are moved around. The house goes out and clouds inventively pile up or dismally do not, and so on.

PC: So that one really can't look at a painting and say, "Oh, I know, that's across the street."

RD: Sometimes you can. Sometimes it just has that look of a very definite piece of area and more than vaguely familiar, But where?

PC: Right.

RD: There are a few places that I painted -- a bridge which was as exact as I had ever wanted to be, I suppose. Only one painting I did (in my last show), was the curve of this road looking towards the Montauk Highway, I mean going towards the Montauk Highway with one figure and one dog. That was a big one. Now the way that came about, the tree doesn't exist. I made that one up, the most massive thing there. The figure was lifted from another painting and the dog was just stuck in because there were a lot of Labradors here and I needed a spot there. The painting was started in the spring and it went through an autumn and a winter. I think it is called *Spring Walk*, but it is no season. It is just basically the season of the road and the idea of walking itself. The reason why these titles come out is that one gets tired of other titles.

PC: You never studied painting with anybody, have you?

RD: No.

PC: What about drawing? Do you draw a great deal or not?

RD: Sometimes I go through drawing fits, tear them up. I have drawers full. But the process of painting involves drawing and very often I have throwaways -- I mean my procedure is not terribly constant and I just go for it immediately. This is what I learned from Abstract Expressionism, just plunge right in. And then sometimes there is a small painting to the side of it. Sometimes there is a sketch I do in the process of it. It is simple. But there is no specific procedure except that the initial thing is done by the photograph, which means now we do field, now we do figure on road, or car, or house. But the light is always made up.

PC: Color moves around?

RD: Yeah, I mean this large one may be autumn, maybe not. I don't know. I am just blocking it in. It is on the other side of Saggaponic looking this way. But that strip of water could be any one of the ponds out here. It is not necessarily there. And I also chose that place because it's got handsome foliage, second growth cedars and berry bushes and so forth, and no mountains; it is just rolling a little bit. But basically it is just rather similar the way the land goes here.

PC: What Abstract Expressionist painters interested you?

RD: Oh, de Kooning. He was the one that taught me that paint does everything, and paint is art, the wielding of it, the manipulation of it; what it does. And paint is your deciding factor. I don't think anybody else interested me. At times I was moderately interested but the interest did not stick. De Kooning is always satisfying even when the painting may be weak. There is always such a hand involved and in such a weighty, theoretic manner, that he has always intoxicated me. It is like, oh, I don't know, the opera singer who is quintessentially the singer's singer or something like that. I don't know, even when they are speaking it is interesting. It doesn't matter what they are singing or what they are saying.

PC: One can't look at your paintings and say that you are influenced by de Kooning.

RD: No, but I was, and I tried it. It was a difficult act to follow.

PC: He would agree with you.

RD: Yes, yes.

PC: I notice you have yards of records over there. Do you listen to music while you work?

RD: Yes. I have two things I listen to; the radio canned news station ad nauseam and I mean ad nauseam. You realize by four o'clock in the afternoon you have heard fifty-two times the fact that an outbreak of boredom occurred in Milwaukee. I think I got used to having that on from my last studio, which was on Elizabeth Street off Houston and it was so noisy that the only thing you could do was block it out somehow. So there had to be radio or various music -- mostly piano music. I cannot work to opera. I listen to it, get too involved. Piano music becomes a white noise. Mostly the romantic, obscure romantic. I just stack them up and sometimes, though, I just play the same record over and over. That marvelous thing at the end of the machine where it just goes back on again.

PC: Over and over and over.

RD: Yes, and that provides a kind of climate while the painting is going on and sometimes the painting is done just entirely to that record.

PC: Do you think the music has an influence in any way?

RD: I am sure it does. How, I don't know. I find it energizes. Very definitely.

PC: You know, I am fascinated by the fact that you never did attend an art school or study with anyone. Do you feel any loss because of that?

RD: No, no.

PC: Or find an advantage in it?

RD: Yes. I think that probably the period of the art school may be over, I don't know, maybe. do very enormously reassessment, I think people too. If this wasn't around New York City I'd say yes, art schools. But with the number of galleries and museums open and the possibility of coming into contact with painters, going to their studios, this is not necessary. I think you learn by doing and plunging in immediately. I think art schools keep students as students.

PC: Too long.

RD: Yes, and also there is a very severe dislocation of the aesthetic when you are involved with seeing other people's work all the time.

PC: How do you mean?

RD: That you are rather unable to focus on what you are doing.

PC: So it is confusion.

RD: I think the aesthetic is dissipated. I'm not against it.

PC: You have never taught, have you?

RD: Yes, but very, very briefly. I taught at Southhampton College two or three years ago. Then studio visits. I was supposed to teach at Berkeley. Actually I am sorry I didn't do that because it was just at the time of the riots and I was quite interested. But I felt that I couldn't take off a year from here or the building I wanted to do and so on. And I just turned down a teaching job at the School of Visual Art because of the difficult problem of transportation to New York, parking two dogs with the kennel. Actually I would be losing three days. I need to get ready to do it and need to recover from it. I think that your student in your urban area, I mean your New York area in particular, seeks out what he needs and finds it.

PC: Do you go to galleries a great deal and museums?

RD: Oh, sure.

PC: Did you work out a program?

RD: No.

PC: Or things that you wanted to see?

RD: I think you are psychic or you are an aesthetic or some kind of litmus paper and what it adheres to is what it needs and will find itself. And then I work seriously. I am not afraid of ripping up, destroying, nor am I afraid of failure. I plunge in and start another one. It is all a process. Very much like gardening. One plant dies, you plant another. Your life doesn't hang by a painting. There are actually in paintings no peaks. There is just a continuum. You just go on that way.

PC: I am curious about your six month switches that you mentioned before. Do you work on just the paintings?

RD: All of it I know.

PC: Everything.

RD: Yes, and then play them one against the other and I

PC: How long does that take in terms of time?

RD: Oh, it takes two weeks at a time. Probably it should take longer. Too ruthless, but I really never have liked the idea of a painting cooling in the racks for several years. I do a few that way, but basically when a painting is put away on the rack, it gets too darn cold and it is very hard for me to start in again. Generally I scrap it. Keep the canvas, take it off the stretcher and use it again.

PC: Oh, I see, so that it becomes a weaving of all sorts of sources.

RD: Yes. Basically it is a narrowing of vision, making yourself just learn from yourself.

PC: How much work do you do in the course of the year?

RD: I don't know. A lot. I don't know, I mean I have had a show every year since '60, I think, and sometimes two. I don't know. I don't keep count. It sort of doesn't interest me. So I really can't answer that. I mean the gallery just took 98 paintings. They go back to '64. I have just ordered twenty 60 by 70 stretchers and then I found ten up on the rack. Actually, I do know in a way. Let's say twelve 60 by 70's during the winter out of which there maybe four or five. There are some days I work on three in the course of the day.

PC: Do you work on paintings for a long time?

RD: Sometimes.

PC: Some of them happen quicker than others?

RD: Oh yes. Some are known as "gift" paintings. They just fall out of the brush. You have that feeling, "Oh, God, did I do that? How did that happen? Thank you." Thank you, but don't do it again. I do about two a year like that which astonishes one. You want to take a walk.

PC: Yes, where would you walk in the winter?

RD: Well, I like the beach.

PC: You go to the beach in the winter?

RD: Yes.

PC: I see. No swimming, though.

RD: Well, the Atlantic is behaving just like its own green self. Very . But generally my walk is daily down to , about twenty minutes. Very quick.

PC: Do you have many friends around here who are painters? Who do you see?

RD: No. I prefer people who are verbal and literary. I can learn from them. I don't particularly want to talk about gallery stuff. I am not interested. It has always been my premise that if you are good you will be in a good gallery. Although it may take time. Then when I moved out here, I probably lost about five years because I was out of touch. Didn't make the party circuit, etc. But I wanted to do my work here. Actually the last few years in New York I wasn't getting around much. I didn't want to. I think galleries are very open to quality and maybe you will flounder around being in some wrong galleries for a while. But I think it is worth the risk.

PC: Why don't you have any art friends? Don't they interest you in any way?

RD: Well is now on my list because I would find a good student I was sort of giving lessons to. You know, he

doesn't need it. Getting interested in sculpture and I suggested to him, well, that's the best thing, and see whether they would be interested in taking him on and perhaps getting Christian's assistant so that you learn about and the methods very quickly. And so he has and that's the better way from the school.

PC: Well, it is the apprentice idea.

RD: Yes, and that's fine. Only one of the students I had at Southampton College has sort of made it in and he respects my prose. I see him once a year and he shows his work. That's enough. In the course of the summer I will go to about two or three painter parties and generally find I am talking to a poet.

PC: Well, you are a great friend of and that whole group of

RD: A young poet from Rochester, just had some poems and poetry and I have six poems in and then I read poetry a lot.

PC: Who do you read?

RD: I suppose what is called the New York School. Oh, I think I am more catholic than that. I am pleased this place has worked out very well, because poets seem to write poems here and I find that very exciting. They dedicate poems to the house or the dogs, sometimes to me and so forth, and they are put on the walls like paintings and they become intensely visible and readable. A poetry book on a cocktail table is bullshit. No one will turn its pages.

PC: Yeah. Why is that, do you think?

RD: Poetry is very frightening. It is language at its highest pitch and it is probably I think the quintessential art and people simply do not manipulate language that way. It is hard work and you can't tell the plot of the poem at your next party.

PC: seven line poem oh, you did?

RD: Yes. I read a great , do you want to hear it? No.

PC: Do you read other poets or older poets?

RD: Yes. Well, the winter reading I think is somewhat programmed. In the winter life doesn't vary so much from the summer life. I get up usually about a half hour before dawn, and I don't like to let anything get in the way of work, so every Sunday I boil a dozen eggs and keep them here in the refrigerator so there is no cooking and I have an electric coffee pot that is set the night before. So it is wake up, biscuits to the dog, a whole grapefruit, two cold eggs, a cup of coffee and we start with the rays of dawn.

PC: Do you work in the morning best do you think?

RD: Yes. but I also like night which I got used to in New York. Generally I'm up early so I get the paper, at about eleven lunch, very soon after a nap and then back to work. I walk at about three or four and then it's deciding if I am going to work at night or read. And that's the day.

PC: What do you read these days?

RD: Well, this summer I got to reading too much. I just finished the *Memoirs of the Emperor*, which has come out, which is quite splendid. I am thinking about getting back to Emerson's *Winter* and I picked out some other books that I want to get back to. I think I will reread *Middlemarch* which I read two weeks ago. It was a book I never wanted to end. I think it is the greatest novel of the 19th century. And then I get the *Times Literary Supplement* and books that are not even reviewed. There is also a very good book store around, Southampton Book Store. And so there is a lot of rummaging there which I do on Monday when the girls come to clean and I get a whole handful of stuff. And then I don't mind thrillers at all and mysteries.

PC: Is that kind of relaxing?

RD: Well, I think it's my way of traveling. And we trade them. Packages arrive through the mail. We talk on the phone that this one is England, London, English garden party, Paris, boats. Then the Russians. Good books. Deep reading. I like biography the most. And then, of course, I keep on reading garden books that are probably the most awful written things.

PC: Why are they?

RD: Oh, I don't know, but it is pretty bad.

PC: They are as bad as art books sometimes?

RD: Worse. They're worse. Lots of sillies write it, including West who is not unknown to say about a plant: "The dear things don't like to get their little feet wet."

PC: You are kidding!

RD: No. And then the snobbishness coming out: they simply don't understand why people grow privet and you say, P.S., some people are poor and cannot afford. Edward Himes is a very good writer, but he hasn't written very much. Christopher Lord is good and so is Scarlotti or the landscape artist Russell Page. He doesn't do it anymore. Marvelous. And then I like nineteenth century garden books because they are funny and they've got steel engravings, or whatever they are called. And then I just got *Mrs. Greeves' Herbal*, which is in two volumes, just been released.

PC: How is that?

RD: Very good.

PC: Yeah.

RD: I don't know how accurate. Anything that grows has its use and so she is kind of marvelous hat way.

PC: You have an herb garden and everything.

RD: Yeah. Well, this year I have changed the garden into an herb garden, but there are herbs all through the garden. I don't know exactly what form the herb garden is going to be. Both the herb garden and the vegetable garden will be in *House and Garden* in the February issue. It is not done for mendacious reasons; it is that if you have a garden, you have to be very generous with it. Really more than art, it is what people want to see. If you have a garden you are supposed to have it open. I don't quite why.

PC: Do people do the tour?

RD: Oh, yes. I was asked to open it -- the house and the garden -- for tours, which I don't mind doing too much because it's one way I get out of the place.

PC: You just leave them?

RD: Oh yes. It's funny because the last tour was for St. Ann's Church and I left with a Brazilian family to go sailing and when I came back there was one lady still here -- and there were, I think, six or seven hundred people on the tour. I would never go on a tour. And I said, "Who was here?" And she said "Everybody was here. Mr. de Kooning was here." I said, "What?" "Mr. de Kooning was here and he said, 'Gee. Bob hasn't had me over here in two years.'" And I realized like not seeing painters, I hadn't had him over in two years. And he wanted to see the garden.

PC: You know, people who live outside the city have a lot more time to do things.

RD: No, no. I have no time.

PC: There are too many things to do? Do you ever make notes about your own paintings? Do you ever write about them?

RD: Sometimes I do. I am very, very bad about it. I have some notebooks. I have this big red notebook and I haven't turned a page in I don't know how long. I don't know why. I just don't. One year I started doing sketches of all the paintings that left the studio with some comments. Then I reread the comments and they don't make any sense. They just specified as art reviews. I don't know what I meant then and so I don't. Sometimes what I do is I jot down things on the wall to keep me going. "Give sloppiness a break" and things like that. "Nature is not a public utility." I don't quite know what that means.

PC: That sounds like Robert Moses. Did you formulate any ideas about your paintings, why you do what you do, about use of colors, space or ideas or particular . . . ?

RD: Oh, I do from time to time and I do it with great reluctance because it is always in the process of change. The nice thing about painting is you don't have words. It is just what it is. Take it or leave it. That is what I meant before about a more relaxed attitude about art in general. It is gratuitous, and I think one is very privileged if one has the talent and desire to do it. Most people do have it. Most people don't have the desire to do it and if people like it that's terrific. If they don't, it is not very enjoyable, but so what. You are not doing for those people. You are enjoying it because you are a painter. Wallace Stevens said in an essay about an obscure painter, he's a

. He's doing it while he is making shoes . I do believe that his aristocratic is rather remote. This is why I am not terribly in favor of lithography.

PC: You have done very few prints, haven't you?

RD: Yes. I want to do . . . I've never done one in all the colors I want, but I think I just want to do that and stop. I've done the series of gardens in black and white and one color and two prints Autumn in black and white. The black and white Autumn and then I did a silk screen for the North Shore Tile Garden Association, and that's it. I did some color to . It is rather embarrassing because I don't care for the unfortunately

PC: I meant to ask a bit about the . Did you show before Jill Kornbler?

RD: No. It seems as though I did. When Jill took over the Gallery was still called the Gallery.

PC: Oh, right.

RD: And she had called it that for years, so it's basically .

PC: How was Jill in those early '60's?

RD: I don't know. I don't know; I mean I was unaware of things basically. We didn't at all. I think as sympathetic souls we would and she was changing her sights and or whatever and I don't think she approved of the things I do tell me that she wanted this or that, and we were not on really friendly terms at the end. It was a difficult time. I wanted to leave for some time. And Frank said no. He was a very good dealer .

PC: Then you were for a while?

RD: Yeah. We shared a lot with Jill. True friend, I don't know. Had an with

PC: How did that come about?

RD: Through Osborne. I didn't and shared in Munich.

PC: How did that come about, the European thing?

RD: John , a courageous man. I think I have some paintings. I don't particularly like them. I mean I thought they were at the time, but a few months later. And the Germans liked it very much. They like gloom.

PC: Was it a successful show for you?

RD: Oh yeah, sold out.

PC: Really? I wonder why . . . ?

RD: I mean they were OK paintings. does. I don't know whether the painter is the judge. work he is the critic necessarily. I think perhaps only time itself and time I guess is a combination of critics and paintings.

PC: That is an accumulation of . . . ?

RD: Yeah and there are some paintings I look back on and they embarrass me and then the next year they don't, so I don't know. In a way I am hesitant about talking about my own work as far as liking or not liking goes.

PC: I am curious about, for example, the exhibition you had in Germany. You are not one of the Americans who has really been working abroad. Have you shown abroad since then much?

RD: No. I'll be in a group show in Paris in January, February, I think it is, at a friend's gallery. C. Graham on the and that will be basically the Fishbach stable painting with . No, I've never wanted to anyway. When I had the show in London the review said "native born talented" which in might be proud or Whistler perhaps, or that. Also saying how curious -- these landscapes might remind us of England, even though I shoed a lot of paintings of Central Park.

PC: Another view.

RD: They can say what they want and I'll do what I want to. Then you find out that you pop up everywhere. A month ago I had a letter from a fellow named Kenway in Newton Hole, Vermont. He has a painting I did I think in Vermont, which I think had been . Now he wants to see more. So they are around.

PC: You were Graham. You did a couple of shows with them, didn't you?

RD: I think three. I'm not sure. No, two.

PC: Do you find that with you that they do that much different of a job or is it . . . ?

RD: Yes.

PC: They do?

RD: They do.

PC: Yeah.

RD: I think perhaps the best thing is your situation in the gallery as far as its composition is stable the painters grow. I think Fishbach has a formula which is absolutely superb. Just about half minimal conceptual and half realist. He has a very good balance. Very good.

PC: So its contrast . . . ?

RD: Very definitely and very quickly you know what to expect. And lively, a younger group and more dynamic. It's kind of a . . . A gallery must have showmanship. Once the painting is in a gallery it is a commodity like anything else, and it is shown with honor and excitement or it dies. I mean the quality can be disregarded if the dealer does not present it properly.

PC: Oh sure.

RD: Badly hung, poorly lit, the atmosphere itself of the gallery.

PC: Bad walls.

RD: Yes. Then it becomes just pure business, and generally your galleries in New York are poorly run businesses.

PC: That's true, even some big ones.

RD: Yes, poorly run. Horror stories I could tell you, but they are beside the point, catalogues not getting out in time, photographs not available, paintings lost. One gallery shall be nameless, came time for the Whitney Annual (I've never been in it yet), I to one of them here. It was in the basement. They kept walking around it. They thought it was the wall. They couldn't find it. So I wasn't in that Whitney Annual.

PC: Unbelievable.

RD: Now I can laugh about it, but then I was so disheartened. This is so pointless.

PC: That's terrible.

RD: It's just like going in to get a Ford at the local Ford dealer and they can't find the car and you don't get the car.

PC: Do you think that there is any literary influences or overtones in your paintings because of your reading?

RD: I hope not. No. I do think this is about . . . I think that it's high time that the idea of a painting be eliminated. They are intelligent in a way that is different from a normal communicative intelligence. I think actually to paint you have to know everything -- because I think everything goes into it and that the moment you paint you have to render yourself just a vehicle or vessel for the thing to come out, but it is a summing up process and you must be able to channel it through that. It is almost like the four-line poem that the poet writes for that year. Everything has gone into it. And I think the same thing is probably true in painting.

PC: How do you mean that you become a vehicle? Does that mean in terms of, you know, there is some other source or other force or something that puts it together and you just apply it or . . . ?

RD: I think probably, since you are dealing with reality, I mean the reality of paint as paint which is abstract is a reality of the painted thing is not abstract that everything is in it. I could have at length on it and I said to I couldn't think of the reasons at this time. It seems to me so self-evident. But the painterly intelligence, although filled by other things, is a definite intelligence. I don't think anybody would really disagree on that.

PC: Well, have your paintings supported you?

RD: What was the last job? Oh, from time to time I had to do some French translation. I garden for people; got into that for the last nine years, ten years, since I've been out here, painting. Which is always a hazardous

undertaking, but I think it is less hazardous in the country for two reasons. You are like a farmer. They don't have money except at certain times and painters don't. But then one's needs are less and are generally seasonal, if you wish. There are usually some sales made and then that immediately goes to canvas and stretchers, that sort of thing.

PC: And the garden provides.

RD: Yeah, yeah.

PC: So in some ways it is much more practical in the country.

RD: I think it definitely is if you can stand the loneliness and the solitude. Two different things, but both awkward. One lesser.

PC: When you lived in New York did you do many paintings of the city?

RD: No, very, very few. I think I have three. I wasn't interested in it. I did the studio where the City is seen through the window. There is one at the Brooklyn Museum. It was the last painting I did then. But the city is unfriendly.

PC: When do you think you found yourself as a painter in terms of . . . ?

RD: Never. I hope I never do. No, that's impossible. There are periods, but I don't think one ever does. I mean it is quite obvious that I have a recognizable quality or style, but I think if I found myself I'd stop. I'm not interested in that. It's like last winter, how the tennis series came out. I've always wanted to have the . . . in fact, if one has a program -- in other words if you had the figure and a pride as natural as anything else, be it bird, cloud rock or whatever. Well, as a house, no, that wasn't a house. What was the reason . . . ? I don't know; I don't know. Anyway, I went to the Georgia Association and took some photographs of four friends playing doubles, tennis, and just sat there with that dumb feeling you have when you realize you are one thing and they are another. That tennis has just never interested you and isn't this all boring, what are they doing to themselves. Back and forth and back and forth. I couldn't do what they are doing. It doesn't interest me. Then I realized what did interest me was what was going on. The thing itself. And I began taking some photographs of them. Then in November when I moved to the other studio, I started doing some small work for an exhibit about tennis. That came to thirty-five paintings and the figures looked as if they had always been there and I also know a lot about tennis and I don't know anything about tennis. I remember there was some funny fellow who came here who had a boat in Newport or something like that. Somebody brought him over on Sunday. Never got his name. He looked at the tennis paintings and he said, "Of course, you've been to Forest Hills." And I couldn't think why I should be in Forest Hills and then someone gave me a high sign, and no, and he said Wilmington or whatever that is, Wimbledon, yes. No. I wouldn't know "all love" if I saw it. I don't know what those things are. Someone explained it to me and I forgot and that came out. Now I can view that as a group of paintings, as a group of paintings. I know they are solid. There isn't a clinker in the bunch. I think the group is being shown at in Philadelphia. They, for me, represent a kind of major breakthrough into solving something I wanted to. I feel probably my vocabulary as a painter is coming sort of full circle with this large landscape that refers back to the '59 one by accident.

PC: How do you mean coming full circle?

RD: Well, I always wanted a full vocabulary in painting so what's in it now constructs the civilization; automobile, roads, interior, exterior. I've done some nudes. I don't care to pursue it; it doesn't interest me too much. Figure is flowers, landscapes and so forth, and a Fuller brush, if you wish.

PC: What about the nude? What does it lack?

RD: It's not that interesting. It just isn't. Maybe it's just because the time isn't here for the nudes. It may come.

PC: Do you paint series generally?

RD: It seems to happen, but even though the series is going on, I am not aware of it until it's over with. Again my dumbness or natural stuporous quality. Like this last two months I thought I wouldn't paint the garden and they just kept popping out. But I wasn't really interested in what I was doing because I was really aiming for this last, large, big painting of the season.

PC: Have you done many things with panels?

RD: Oh, yes.

PC: You have? Do you like that idea?

RD: Yes. But do you know why that is Bernar show at the mark. Oh, I just love that. So marvelous and I wanted the idea of panels and I also wanted the idea of the painting that articulates others that is meant to be a standing screen, just took the legs off so that you can unhinge part of it and see part of it and I did, I think, two versions of that. One is a four-panel screen that stands on the table and so on. When I say I have done many, maybe five, but it takes a long time. But it is also something I can't force. I started doing one earlier this summer, had to scrap it. It didn't work out.

PC: Are there earlier painters that interest you? You know, eighteenth, nineteenth century or older?

RD: I have always liked , I think because he is did what he wanted

PC: Sometime. Yeah, yeah.

RD: Donet, but it depends on what time of day it is. I mean I find that years ago I used to have the art, you know, the large art books here in the studio. I never looked at them, although I have a postcard collection on the walls. I think that all the time without my knowing about it. I believe in that kind of

PC: Are they cards you have been sent or ones you bought or picked out.

RD: Yeah. No, they have been sent. I was up in I like it. They are mixed . There is a picture of me sitting outside of what -- one year old.

PC: But there is everything. You know, there are figures and nudes and landscapes and clouds and buildings, photographs.

RD: There's a map on one side. I think this all I think it is a way of keeping the art fresh. But I mean, there is no favorite photo or painting or one that I'm aiming for or one that I would paint if I could emulate or even hope to cope with or equal. No, I think at a certain time, how long a period lasts, one sort of seals the door and you become your own gallery.

PC: Well, that's what I meant before when I said about finding something. So it's a continual process of looking or finding or making.

RD: Rummaging. That's the word.

PC: You paint in oils, don't you?

RD: No, acrylics.

PC: Acrylics?

RD: Purely acrylics, non

PC: Really. Very interesting.

RD: They don't look like acrylic.

PC: Yeah. I know. I was just thinking that. Why is that? What do you do to them?

RD: I don't know. That's the whole burden of what piece in *American Artist* is an all acrylic. why I don't have that "acrylic look," I don't know. I tried them as the article says and I and didn't like them at all and then was forced to try them here while the house was being built and I was working with the guys and I had no time to wait for drying and so I started doing that. I think perhaps because I had no inhibitions about it. Thought that the work was totally disposable. I just wanted to keep the wrist loose and working. Now, perhaps I overcame certain of the blocks that I had and they turned out all right. And now I find they are entirely satisfying except that they don't smell as nice. That heady "turp" aroma is missing from the studio.

PC: But you have come to the point where you can do anything you want with it pretty much.

RD: Except in pastel and I don't work in pastel. I find it works well on board, paper .

PC: They do have some material blend in to don't you and mix in with it?

RD: I think so.

PC: But you have never really painted that way, have you?

RD: No.

PC: Have you had any commission over the years for particular things ever to do?

RD: I have, I generally turn them down. Like demanding, so I don't do portrait commissions, no. Some people wanted me to do houses. That was appalling, no. I think I don't like to do them for the same reason that some of the galleries I have been with wanted to put me on salary.

PC: You just try to keep it straight. Why wouldn't you want the salary since so many people seem to want that?

RD: I think that the gallery would of necessity feel they own you and be able to say, "We can't sell this." See how difficult you are making our life. I think it would be a kind of burdensome duty.

PC: Kind of hand on your shoulder.

RD: No. Or they would I think feel free to keep calling you up and say, "Hi, how are you doing," and I would rather not have that.

PC: So you just get paid when things are sold, then?

RD: Yeah.

PC: You've really not traveled much, have you? Italy, Mexico?

RD: No. Italy, Germany. Twice to the Caribbean, Mexico.

PC: Do you paint or photograph or sketch or anything when you travel?

RD: No.

PC: You just travel and not . . . ?

RD: Well, I don't travel well. I mean painters don't. They don't. We don't know what to do outside the studio. It's pointless.

PC: All that confusion and moving around.

RD: Well, it is not what you are interested in. I don't like not painting. I'm very uncomfortable when I don't paint. And vacations don't really exist for me. Now, I'll never go to the Caribbean again. I don't know what you are supposed to do there. I really don't. Aim for a bottle of rum and lemon, I suppose.

PC: Which you can do anyplace.

RD: Yeah, and gaze blankly at what? I think I may if this parisher coincides with winter dumps out here. If I hit a foul period where I know, I mean sometimes I hit foul periods and don't know I have, where I am some canvasses, then I might just pick up and go to Paris and wander. Wherever I go, when I go, I'm basically a walker, walk around.

PC: I wonder why so many painters walk a lot. It is amazing.

RD: I guess to keep the eyes clear, fresh. I think we are snoops.

PC: Yeah.

RD:

PC: It just astounds me how many of the painters I have interviewed say, "Oh, yes, I go for a walk every morning and afternoon or at night or, you know, to look at things."

RD: Whenever I go to New York the only thing I know how to do is walk. I'm exhausted. I don't know what I'm seeing, but I'm walking, and I can't remember, who was it, I think it was, what's his name, some abstract painter told me that when he got into the dumps he used to sit in Hotel lobbies and that was his way of walking, watching people. He also became a great authority on hotel lobby decor. I think he is each kind of a runner. He's a great authority on runners and palms.

PC: You were never involved in much of the clubs . . . ?

RD: No, I don't believe in groups, I don't believe in owning; I don't believe in anything like that. I'm an independent voter. You see the way I live my life in solitary. I have a hatred of that kind of stuff. I will not. I don't believe in it. I think it is perhaps as a result of this childhood which was so confined that I would not willingly get

myself confined again. And I am confined. So one of the ways I have tried to get myself unconfined, two houses, moving back and forth, not seeing painters and poets. That sort of thing.

PC: Do you have musician friends?

RD: I used to.

PC: People who are in other activities or things?

RD: Not anymore. I mean you can't sort of make jolly with musicians. Their latitude

PC: Why is that?

RD: I don't know. They are more athletic. They are in training. There aren't really, I mean the ones that I used to know, they can't stay up those nights you want to really stay up late and talk because they've got five or six hours of practice. They can't miss that. They worry about the physique all the time. They can't afford to . . . they are pianists, they can't get their hands scratched or the dogs become a little bit like knawl and you can't have that.

PC: Are you involved with the community out here?

RD: Yes, I am that in a remote way. It's like I just saw Charlotte Rogers who is one of the heads of the Bridgehampton Presbyterian church, which has the largest steeple out here, and I can see it from this window. Inside the church is a painting I did of the church.

PC: Oh, really!

RD: Was it tricentennial, 1650 something and I just saw because I don't play the piano anymore and the studio is cold here, so I'm offering it to the church as a practice piano. Things like that. I'm involved in Day Care Center. Always offer a painting to whoever wants to contribute and the money goes there. Then the latest thing for the Southport Environmental thing. I'm offering a large painting I did of as an added inducement to who gives the most money for the Southport. Then occasional art shows.

PC: How does the day care center interest you?

RD: Because I feel sorry for a black brother and his condition out of endemic poverty. Just as equal to and if this area can't solve this problem then no area in America can. More than half of Bridgehampton is black. Nobody really knows that. They are tucked away and they have a hard row to hoe. I think they are doing better now. It's very typical because economically here for the local population, black and white, there is no light industry. There are very few jobs.

PC: Yeah and the agriculture is very limited.

RD: Since became mechanized also things got to be so skidded. Now we have a very good black contractor, some black gas stations. Didn't have it before. And you see black help in the shops you didn't before. It's a very complicated black social setup. Some of them have been here before the Revolution. Some of them the Civil War, some of them migrants, some of them domestic help settled here and then a very, very rich black something to do with this area. It closed came from all over America to . So in this group you had the most complicated structure and they are almost all exclusive.

PC: So, you have all those . . . ?

RD: Yeah. They don't take as much time as they seem to. I mean it's . . . I think that in the American system I think the best thing you can do is to help with your best. Now my best is not money. My best is my painting and that should be freely offered. It is also a way of giving back to his area what this area has given to me. I think one has to do that. I mean like little charities that I can afford that doesn't mean as much. The painting will. That one almost automatically should do and does do. Happily so.

PC: Two simple things, art and life, right?

RD: I think so. I could go on forever. The talk in painting is on the canvas. There it is. You like it or you don't.

PC: Do you think that there is any . . . I was intrigued by this kind of critic-artist relationship. You haven't found anybody who writes about you frequently, have you? I mean some of the poets mention you in a few things, but . . . ?

RD: Garrett Henry has written several things on me. I think the American becomes extremely ambiguous.

Particularly so because of the feeding of favoritism or something like that. I formed a friendship with Peter Sheldow, for example. Because of that friendship, Peter feels that he should not write about me.

PC: Oh, really?

RD: I can understand his feeling. I know him very well. Yet on the other side, when both of us are gone, this will seem foolish. Now I very much admire Peter's mind. He likes my work very much, but I'm certainly not going to forego his friendship in order for him to write it.

PC: I always think that when you have relationships like that I believe the writer should do something even if it is partisan because if it is partisan it is generally much more interesting than

RD: I have that feeling too. I mean one of the interesting things about, let's say Rosenberg and de Kooning is that

PC: They go back and forth. Yeah, they go back and forth all the time.

RD: And I say, well, let's have more of that. The accidents and the errors will be much more apparent and several pieces people want to write on me in the future. Well, they are people who I don't know. Now, I have to do a heck of a lot of work to get them to the point of ordinary knowledge which means week-end after week-end. I am bored by this. So to forego it because I can't take it. Don't go to the gallery and review work and ask me a few questions. Well, this is not very interesting and it will come out terribly "high falutin" and I think ultimately with only a kind of red philosophic content. Preordained, prearranged scheme of things. It doesn't make much sense. I think that one's friends with whom one has a relationship and who one respects very much are quite capable of not liking your work and will say so by not saying so.

PC: Oh, sure, or say I prefer this to

RD: And they do. I mean I have this week-end after week-end with some poets who are critics and all week-end will go and they won't say a word and I know I've done a bummer and that's all right. I think that is fair and square. You have a respect for them. I do the same thing with them when they show poems.

PC: You've had some books of poetry dedicated to you, haven't you, here and there?

RD: No, poems.

PC: Poems.

RD: Quite a few. I do agree with you. I think partisanship is much more interesting because it is much more honest. The person who knows you is already in the middle of you and can, I think, give the cold reader more of an insight even to your errors. I mean your errors are more apparent to them. But they can be talked about in a less than condescending . There is a sympathy. I think that, say, you admire a . Some of my friends have put out several books I don't like, but I admire their and know that the next one will be a winner or .

PC: Well, it changes, you know.

RD: Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW

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