



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with James Edward
Davis, 1971 August 10

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with James E. Davis on August 10, 1971. The interview was conducted at James E. Davis' home in Princeton, New Jersey by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PC: PAUL CUMMINGS

JD: JAMES DAVIS

PC: It's August 10, 1971, Paul Cummings talking to James Davis in his house in Princeton, New Jersey. Could we start with where you were born and some kind of family background and how you happened to come to Princeton, and so on? We don't have all of that.

JD: I'm a hillbilly from way back, a hillbilly from West by God Virginia.

PC: From where again?

JD: West by God Virginia. Most people seem to confuse Virginia and West Virginia as the same thing. And I tell them that they are very different. The Virginians look down their noses at us. We're the unfashionable Virginians. And I always make it clear that I am a hillbilly.

PC: Where were you born, then?

JD: Clarksburg, West Virginia, on June 4, 1901. I had my seventieth birthday this year so I joined the Methuselah club. Now as to how I happened to come to Princeton: One of my great, great, great, great-grandfathers (I don't know how far back) was John Horner. He was one of the six white men who first rode in here on horseback when Princeton was still a wilderness. He had a pottery down here at the other end of town, the east end. It's still called Jugtown after the Horner pottery. He made the bricks for Nassau Hall and gave some of his land to Princeton. My father's mother is a Horner. She was always talking about the Horners and she always wanted somebody to go to Princeton. My branch of the Horners had gone West after the Revolution and they settled in western Virginia. They lived in this little town called Lumberport. There were so many of the Horners out there that they tell a story about one Christmas (they were all Baptists) they had a Christmas celebration with a tree and lots of presents for everybody. At the Christmas celebration they were giving out the presents -- John Horner, Mary Horner, Jimmy Horner, Paul Horner. Finally some old farmer in the back piped up and said, "Cut down the damn tree and give it to the Horners." That was typical. They were all over. So I think that's the reason I came to Princeton. Now on my mother's side the family names was Holmes. They were Scotch-Irish. My grandfather Holmes had gone to China in the 1960's. Actually his brother, who was my great-uncle, had gone before that as a missionary. The Chinese world had been opened up. So my great-uncle wrote and said, "Come on over. You can make some money over here." So my grandfather went over. This was during the time of the Tonkin Rebellion. So I was then afterwards always brought up to consider . . . my grandfather Holmes said, "A Chinese gentleman is so far superior to any other human being that there's no comparison." And the more I have learned from taking George Rowley's teaching in Chinese art and everything I have come to the conclusion that he was quite right. Chinese painting is still my favorite of all of the arts of the past.

PC: That's interesting. Did you go to school in West Virginia and then come to Princeton?

JD: I went to grammar school in West Virginia. And then my father didn't know anything about the schools in the East. Our Presbyterian minister had gone to Princeton. Two of his classmates had opened a school in Pennsylvania near Pittsburgh -- Kiskee at Saltsburg. The minister's son was a close friend of mine. So when it came time to go away to school the minister's son was going to Kiskee so I went along with him.

PC: What was the minister's name?

JD: Turner. I've forgotten the minister's first name, but his son's name was Harold Turner. So we both went to Kiskee. And ever since I've always been glad that I never went to a fashionable Eastern school.

PC: Why?

JD: Well, since then I've taught at Lawrenceville and I've had students from all the other schools around. Kiskee was wonderful because there were no pretensions, no snobbery, no anything. I don't think I learned anything except people. And they were wonderful people. It was noted for turning out the best football heroes in the

country. I think in my freshman year here at Princeton there were five captains of major teams throughout the country I had gone to school with. I roomed on University Place here and all these great apes would come to call on me, would look me up, and all my little freshman friends would say, "How in hell do you know all those great people?" That was the way it was. Anyway, whereas I've never been to a Princeton reunion Since I live here my motto has always been to get the hell away from here instead of going back, but Kiskee has a very special place in my affections. Well, anyway, I had never had any art training at all except that I had always drawn on my own.

PC: Did your family encourage that? Or they just let you do it?

JD: Strangely enough, they did. As I look back I think the reason they did was that an uncle of mine -- my mother's brother -- did not turn out very well. He made pretty much of a mess of his life. And from what I could gather, he did a great deal of drawing. My mother and grandmother had a charcoal drawing probably of a Landseer The Stag at Bay or something like that. Anyway he had a talent for that sort of thing. But they insisted on sending him to West Point. Which was a tragedy. He left West Point I don't know under what circumstances. He came back to Clarksburg. My grandfather by then had come back from China and had a general merchandise store. Anyway, something happened and he went to California, as everybody did in those days, to get away. Anyway, I think the family all felt that if he had been allowed to follow his natural bent that it wouldn't have been such a mess.

PC: He was pushed the wrong way or something.

JD: Yes. So they were always very careful not to oppose me in whatever I wanted to do. The kind of drawing I did as a child was to copy Harrison Fisher girls, covers for Cosmopolitan and so forth and so on. But I always had this idea in the back of my head that I wanted to be an artist. When I came to college here at Princeton actually I had failed Latin, which I hated. And I had not had trigonometry. I failed Latin on the examinations. I got through physics somehow or other. But I had to come up here to summer school to take Latin and trigonometry, I think, to get into Princeton. The great Mr. Morey was chairman of the department. Of course in those days he didn't make enough money as chairman of the department and teaching here and so forth to support his wife and son. And he and this other man, who was a mathematician, had a summer school at 15 University Place (where Scott Fitzgerald had roomed in his freshman year). It was used for dormitories in winter. Mr. Morey and I became great friends. I played tennis. Mr. Morey played tennis. In the afternoons he would take me down and we would play tennis. As time went on he became the closest thing to me as a father who I never knew outside of my own family. He was wonderful. So that was how I happened to come to Princeton.

PC: Did you intend to follow the fine arts curriculum when you came?

JD: No. I didn't even know there was such a thing. Because, as I say, at Kiskee you didn't talk [about art] although there were two teachers, a man and his wife -- he was a teacher and she painted a little bit; they were the housemasters of the school I lived in. I can't think of her name to save my life. Anyway, I was still just copying pictures for the yearbook there at Kiskee of things I liked already. But I had never heard about courses on the history of art or anything of the kind. I had entered Princeton as a Bachelor of Science student because I didn't want to take any more Latin. Oh, and also I was scared to death of taking physics because with physics at Kiskee I had a drag with the professor and he just let me through. Well, that flap was terrible. Anyway, I entered as a B.S. student. And it was a great tragedy. I was just hopelessly lost with all these courses in mathematics and science and so forth and so on. They drove me crazy. Well, Mr. Morey was my advisor. He took me over lock, stock and barrel. In two weeks he taught me Latin so well that I could take the freshman course the next year (I had avoided it the freshman year) and got through it with flying colors.

PC: How did he do that? That's fantastic!

JD: Well, he was amazing. It just makes me furious that Latin shouldn't be taught that way to everybody. He was a genius. Of course he was a very abrupt person. He scared to death people who didn't know him. Coming up to University Place on a day just about like this, I was going along the street and as I got close to 15 University Place, the first voice I could hear was this voice booming Latin. As I say, he was a formidable person but if he was on your side he was just fabulous. He took me over in my sophomore year and I began my whole career in the Department of Art and Archaeology. I'm appalled today Those really were the days of giants. Mather was the museum. And Bert Friend. And Freddy Stoleman.

PC: Was Rowley teaching there then?

JD: No. Rowley didn't come here until after I came back from Paris in 1925. There was no Oriental art at all then. Ernest de Wald wasn't here yet either. Oh, there was the famous Howard Crosby Butler then, too. He was the great archaeologist who excavated Antioch. He taught me in my junior year the course in ancient art. He was fabulous. He had excavated Antioch. There were very few of us in the class in those days. He had purple hair. Also, he was the master-in-residence to the graduate class. He took quite a fancy to George Forsyth who is now

at the University of Michigan. He and Beitsman were moving (?) the Byzantine monastery at Mount Sinai, he for Michigan and Beitsman for Princeton. At the moment I think they've split up. I don't know what happened. But anyway

PC: Where did he get the purple hair? That's fantastic.

JD: He was fascinating. Well, that's what everyone wanted to know. We'd all sit watching and when the sunlight would come through in the afternoon, damn if he didn't have purple hair -- oh, a tinge of violet, I'd say. The story was that, during one of his last important times excavating at Antioch, he was stricken with some fantastic illness. He was dying. All the Western doctors couldn't save him. There was no hope for him. One day this strange witch woman came and said that she could cure him if he would drink a brew that she would make. Well, it was too late, nothing else could be done for him. He was hopelessly ill, dying. So he drank the brew and was cured but it turned his hair purple. Anyway, it's a good story. Well, George Forsyth and I in our junior year took our first European tour. Butler was going to meet us in Paris and show us around and so on. But when we got to Paris we learned that he had died. Let's see, who else?

PC: That was your first trip to Europe then, wasn't it?

JD: Yes, in 1922.

PC: How was that?

JD: It was wonderful. The only thing is that it was right after World War I. In Berlin it was awful. Everyone was starving to death. Coming from a strict Calvinist Presbyterian family, I had never touched anything alcoholic, not even beer, never had seen anything. Not even beer was allowed. Well, we drank champagne every morning, and at lunch, at dinner. We brushed our teeth in it. To this day I can't stand the taste of champagne. It makes me sick. Vienna was magic then. We went to Venice, Paris, and we had already gone to London and Scotland and so forth and so on. It was just the grand tour. We had lots of fun. You see, in those days -- in 1922 -- everybody had to go abroad. So when I graduated in 1923 from here there was no place to go. Somebody advised me -- I don't know why -- to go to New York and go to the National Academy. Why I do not know! In 1923 and 1924 I lived in New York at the Allerton House on, oh, Forty -- ? -- what is it? -- just below Grand Central. It's still there, isn't it? On Lexington?

PC: Right.

JD: An awful place! It gives one claustrophobia. And took the bus all the way up to 110th. I loved New York. But all I did was do the antique. Which drove me absolutely out of my mind. While I was at Princeton I drew for The Tiger from the very beginning. And I became famous -- shall I say the only time in my life -- for the beautiful "Davis" girls that I drew. I did the covers for the Triangle Club. Everything was finally the combination of studying the Greek vase painting, the linear quality of those. And then there was a little course in freehand drawing. Billy Park gave it for those in architecture rendering very impressionistic. My style was very Aubrey Beardsley. To get advice I asked many people. Among them my cousin, John W. Davis and his wife. By then John W. Davis was J. P. Morgan's lawyer and had been Ambassador to England and knew everybody in New York. They were very kind to me and insisted that I go to see their friend Charles Dana Gibson who had married one of Lady Astor's sisters. I was very impressed and went to see Mr. Gibson. I had always admired his pen-and-ink drawings of the Gibson girls for the life of that time. I took with me some of my Beardsley-type drawings and so forth. He said, "You don't need to go to school. I didn't go to school either. You don't need to go to school. You're already advanced. You just keep on. Don't go to school." Well, as I think of it afterwards, that was rather carrying it a little too far. Fortunately, I didn't take his advice. After my year in New York [inaudible] promised me through Professor Chapman, who taught French here, and his wife, who was Parisienne and, I believe, was a cousin of Morisot. He was a painter who did a lot of very dainty nudes running around in the bushes in the twilight and so forth. I was real impressed. I had never met a real foreign artist. Here was this great big enormous fat man with a great beard. Well, he had taught at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris. He was no longer teaching there. Bourdelle was teaching sculpture there. He advised me to go there. I followed his advice, went there, and just simply joined a non . . . you didn't get criticism -- but I went into life class, portrait class, and especially the croquis class. At the beginning of that year I had a little studio on rue Madames just adjoining the Luxembourg Gardens. But I hated the winter so, in the rain and the dark that I went to -- oh, George Forsyth was coming back from Asia Minor. He wrote me and we arranged to meet in Venice on the first of March. I wanted to get out of Paris and the rain. Well, actually there was more rain and more cold in Italy than any place else. When I came back to Paris I moved up to a little hotel just across from the Academie. By this time I was learning more about who was who and I discovered that everybody was studying with Andre L'Hote. Everybody!

PC: Before we get into him, how did you get interested in Aubrey Beardsley? Because that was pretty unusual at that time, wasn't it?

JD: Well, as I say, I think it was the connection with Greek vase painting, the wonderful quality of the line, the

decorative quality. I have somewhere . . . I think you all have

PC: Yes, there are a lot of them.

JD: No, I think I gave those all to the museum here, a portfolio of some of the earliest drawings and some of my Greek vase painting type things, which went then on into the Beardsley style. Well, I really had my own style but it was a combination of Beardsley and Greek vase painting -- closer to the Beardsley -- the emphasis on the line. There was a very strange thing in connection with this. The only time in my life that my eyes ever bothered me was at the end of my freshman year. A classmate of mine had trouble with his eyes. He came from Montclair, New Jersey. His family said, "The best oculist in New York is Dr. So-and-So." I've forgotten his name. "You ought to go to him." So on this recommendation I went to this doctor in New York. He examined my eyes and said, "It's very strange. You have excellent eyes. But you have no sense of perspective whatever. To explain what I mean to you, if you drew or painted you would have the figures and everything fine in line and lots of decoration but you would not know what to do with the space behind them so you would just hang curtains with a lot of decoration." That's exactly what I did. So he gave me these exercises where I would look What do you call these old-fashioned things with two pictures, one on one side and one on the other? And you put them together? Well, you exercised your eyes so that, say, a parrot was on one side and a birdcage on the other. And you finally got so where you would put the bird behind the cage rather than in front only by exercising the muscles of your eye. Well, now we got to Paris the next year, or two years later, I've forgotten which. I didn't learn a thing at the Grande Chaumiere. Though I did meet a lot of interesting people. One of my best friends was the famous model, Pearl Carmen, who was supposed to have been Rodin's model for Eve. She was a broken-down old hag then. And wonderful. And I met the model Kiki and people like that, and the other students, American and foreign. But I learned that everybody was studying with L'Hote! So by the end of the year and after I'd been to Italy and so forth, when I came back I went to study with L'Hote. At that time he was introducing . . . I think L'Hote was the greatest teacher I've ever known. Or maybe Moholy Nagy later. Moholy was always wonderful on technical things. Andre L'Hote had that combination . . . he was the best art historian and critic I ever knew. He introduced you not to dates of anything but to styles and what made them styles and so forth and so on and taught me to see how the Italian Renaissance introduced the three-dimensional concept of space in painting, which before that had all been two-dimensional; and then how Cezanne took the three-dimensional concept and made it fuse into the void around it. It was just a revelation. Also with the emphasis on Cubism, though it was sort of the last gasp of cubism. But he taught me how to model on a flat sheet of paper until it would almost come right up to the surface. And I remember when I came back to this country after that first year -- I had been with L'Hote for just a few months -- I went to see my oculist. He examined my eyes and he said, "This is the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen. You had no sense of perspective whatever when you first came here. You now have one of the strongest senses of perspective that I have ever seen." Now I never understood who was more responsible, the oculist or L'Hote, or what.

PC: It's an extraordinary combination that they both happened simultaneously.

JD: Yes. Well, I had really polished up line in my student days. I couldn't go much further.

PC: I'm curious about who were some of the other people you went to Princeton with that were in your classes or that you were friendly with as far as students go?

JD: Well, among the students one of my closest friends was -- well, I really didn't know him too well until afterwards. I think I just knew him slightly. I did know him. You see, I came back after my first year abroad -- the guy who was teaching drawing here had died so they wired me -- I was in Venice at the time. "Would I consider teaching the freehand drawing course here?" It appealed to me so much to earn a little money for a change that I came back here. So that I was teaching some of my ex-classmates -- George Forsyth was taking my courses. Let's see, who else? And, oh, I think Egbert. He was a class below me. Anyway, he was in the graduate college. He was going to be an architect then. Later as time went on he became one of my closest friends here. He retired just a year ago. He was always one of the most scintillating people I've ever known. He and Forsyth were the two that got Frank Lloyd Wright down here to give a series of lectures in 1931 or 1932. Wright later told me that if it hadn't been for the money that Princeton gave him that year -- he was just back from Japan after doing the Imperial Hotel -- he said, "I couldn't get a job; I don't know what would have become of me. I lived for three years just off the money that Princeton paid me." Forsyth and Egbert were just instructors in the School of Architecture. Well, anyway, those two stand out as especially close. There were many others. That year I lived at the graduate college. George Forsyth was rooming with Bert Friend and Freddy Stoleman and he moved . . . no, he was rooming with somebody downstairs and he moved up there and let me have his room with another faculty member downstairs.

PC: It must have been kind of strange teaching your schoolmates in way, wasn't it?

JD: Well, you know, it was wonderful because at that time when I left here the great modern artist then was considered to be not the Douanier Rousseau but that other Rousseau that did everything almost like a

photograph.

PC: Oh, yes, Theodore Rousseau.

JD: Yes, Theodore Rousseau. In other words, they were just at the point where realism was the height of everything and the modern movement had not penetrated. Well, here I came back from Paris just up to my neck in all the latest ideas. I'd gone to all the big exhibits; I was up to my neck in Cubism and what not. Since they were my classmates they just ate it up. And because I didn't convince anybody else but even later I did find this with Mr. Morey and, well, all of them. And then when I went into the business of light and films and everything, I knew they disapproved and some of them came and said, "Well now, this is all very well; it's fun to go around and do all this, but when are you going to get back to your serious business of painting?" In other words, they had trained me and if I was going to be foolish okay but they knew that I would come back to painting.

PC: Yes. At some point

JD: They were wonderful to me. As far as my classmates went they were And Egbert always . . . he went on into very intellectual and so forth and so on. I never was an intellectual. I never had the slightest

PC: There were no real studio classes at Princeton then, were there?

JD: Well, that first year -- in 1925 -- I did manage to have life drawing. I would hire students. That was only for the graduate students. I remember we had the class on the third floor and Mrs. Loomis, the secretary, came up to see me about something. She was used to opening all the doors and rushing into everybody's office. She opened the door and there was a male model in the nude. She nearly fainted. But anyway, I think that was the first; it was not until later that the creative arts -- that was, oh, in the late 1930's. And that was non-credit. And still is. Mr. Morey fought it. He said, "Look, the university is no place for any kind of a professional school. If you're a doctor or lawyer okay you come and get your rounded training. Then you go to a professional school. I will not have one here." He didn't even approve of the school of architecture. I fought him up one side and down the other. And in the end I came to agree with him.

PC: Really? It shouldn't be a trade school?

JD: No. I've seen too much of the ignorance Well, to me so many of the moderns if they knew their art history they wouldn't be trying to be That stuff has been done to perfection; they make these awful caricatures of it, as Picasso and so many of the rest of them do when they turn to the primitive. They just don't know their past.

PC: You went to Lawrenceville at one point?

JD: I taught there.

PC: How much time did you spend in Paris? Was that occasionally? Or for a period of years at one point?

JD: My first view of it was that summer in 1922. Then I came back here to finish my senior year. Then somebody advised me to go to New York to the National Academy. I don't know whether or not that year was wasted. Maybe it wasn't. In the spring of 1924 I went again to Paris. I was there during the summer and fall of 1924 and 1925 clear up until September; it was two summers. It was almost a year and a half. I then came back here and did my share of teaching. The more I taught the more I realized that no, you need more of L'Hote. You need to finish that; you started it. Okay. And since my family had so kindly staked me to it -- it was really my graduate work. So I went back the following June. As soon as college was over, I was dying to get back there. And then again I stayed for two summers until September of 1926 -- or 1927 I guess. I came back to New York. Then I felt . . . by that time L'Hote had been saying, "You must exhibit. You must exhibit. You are ready to exhibit," etc. etc. Which I did not do in Paris.

PC: For any reason?

JD: No. I don't know. It just didn't interest me to. All I wanted to do was to finish my training and get back home. Oh! That was it. That was another thing. I loved the French. This was the peak of the expatriate thing.

PC: It was a wild place.

JD: As I say, I came just between the peak of the Hemingway period and before Henry Miller. It was from 1922 -- but the time when I was there everybody -- the expatriates -- was leaving this horrible country. They were never coming back here. But I, on the other hand, the longer I was there the more I loved the French, etc. etc. but the more I felt I cannot feed off of this _____. Now in this country things would infuriate me but I understood it. I don't know -- I just felt I was too much of an American and I couldn't feed off the French. So I decided to come back and go to New York and exhibit, go into the art world and see how I could do. In 1927 I came back. I had a

little studio on either Ninth or Tenth, I never can remember which one, between Fifth and Sixth. I don't know if the building is still there. I lived down there sort of half in the Village. I never liked the real Village. I had my first exhibit about this time. And oh! The Museum of Modern Art was opening.

PC: Yes, in 1929.

JD: And, you see, all these people, Alfred Barr When they were moving from the Hechscher Building to downstairs on Rockefeller Center while the new building was being built, Alfred once called me in, "Come on in, Jim, and help me." It was the Bauhaus show. Alfred and one or two other people and myself worked on it. I didn't do much. But that was typical, you know, the do-it-yourself stage.

PC: Yes. Now they have a union there. And they're having a strike next week or something.

JD: Finally I had my first show on my own in 1929. I was on Tenth Street for three years, 1927, 1928, 1929. I just decided to rent a gallery and put the exhibit on myself.

Oh, this was a mistake I made in one of those other things; I think the Anderson Galleries had just moved to 57th Street.

PC: Yes. Because they had moved at one time.

JD: It seems to me that I saw the John Marin's first at Stieglitz's 291 Gallery at the old Anderson Galleries on Park Avenue. You see, when I came back here I found a whole new world. The painting that everybody was doing was either Cubist or European and so forth. Everything here was exciting and moving. But when I got in there and saw my first Marins I thought, "My God! That's the only thing I've seen that's really American." That was my first -- whether it was Well, anyway, they had moved to 57th and Madison when I gave my show in 1929. I just hired the gallery, paid \$300. It was a wonderful guy who ran it -- I can't think of his name now. He later had a little gallery of his own. Anyway, the first day at the show, who should come into the gallery but Arthur B. Davies, with Mrs. John D. Rockefeller and Miss Lily Bliss! I nearly fell over. Again, it was my cousins who knew Mrs. Rockefeller. They each bought something. Arthur B. Davies invited me to come down to his studio at the old Chelsea and see his pictures. Of course I had no idea what was going to come out of those three -- the Museum of Modern Art and all that. They were all three very nice. I was impressed. I think I made enough money on that show to pay my expenses. I've never done anything like that since. Now do you want me to continue with this? I think this is one thing that is quite interesting to me. I didn't know any of these people until then. Of course I had heard of the rich Mrs. Rockefeller. The daughter used to come down here for dances and proms and so forth before she was married. And I think John D. Rockefeller 3rd was just a few classes after me. But anyway, it was Davies that sort of interested me. My first impression of him was that he was a little bit sour, mean -- not mean, but a repressed Presbyterian minister. He invited me to his studio. And I went. He had this fabulous great big studio there. I was seated right by the entrance door to this enormous studio with the door closed into the hall. I was sitting there on a little hard chair. I noticed right beside me this great big pile of watercolors or drawings dumped down there, no mats or frames or anything. When Davies started to put up these big, you know, nudes who were chasing each other around and undoubtedly was trying to sort of add a little of the modern veddy, veddy superior old-fashioned and so forth. But the strange thing about him was that this Presbyterian severity all of a sudden would vanish and it was sort of like Pan peeking out a you. And then that would disappear and the Calvinistic He baffled me completely. Well, finally when he was changing pictures I just thought, I'll see what's here. And they were the most beautiful Cezanne watercolors I've ever seen. They are now all in the Lily Bliss collection in the Museum of Modern Art. Well, that nearly upset me, threw me. I couldn't look at anything. Now I wish I They were all those fabulous things.

PC: Stacked up on the floor.

JD: So that I think is worth repeating, to find all this on the floor.

PC: At that point what you really intended to do was to set up as a painter in New York and continue painting and exhibiting and being involved with things that way. Of course, the Crash came along in 1929 and all the world changed.

JD: That's right!

PC: So what reappraisal did you make at that point?

JD: As I say, I'd had my first show. I lived for two years on East Eighth Street, or Ninth Street. Then this friend of mine who was in the real estate business, Douglas Sullivan, who had all the richest people in New York as his clients, he had a client who bought a house on Turtle Bay, 230 East Forty-Ninth. This guy, a young fellow, had millions and he wanted only two downstairs floors. He wanted to be sure that he didn't get anybody on the top two floors that he didn't like and didn't know and couldn't manage. So he said he would take the bottom part if Bob Lindsay, this friend of mine, would take the top floor. So he said, "Why don't you go take it?" Well, I took one

look at Turtle Bay and the terrace on the top floor overlooking the garden. It was fabulous! So I said, "Sure." And we even got one of the graduate students in architecture who was working with one of the big architects in New York. He was also going to take it. But he had two floors. Then I had two or three shows. There was the SPR Gallery I think when that was on Forty-Ninth Street. And then in 1932 I think it was the Museum of Modern Art had that show of "Murals by Americans." Oh, Alfred had included me in one of the first shows they had in the Heckscher Building of "So Many Americans Under Forty" -- Gorky and God knows who else was in it. And they showed one or two things of mine. Then after the Museum opened, it must have been in about 1932, they put on this show. There was so much excitement about the awful murals of Diego Rivera and the murals for Rockefeller Center. So they got this idea that they would invite a number of American artists and lithographers and photographers that they thought could do better. They were invited to send in samples to some architect's office -- I've forgotten who. So I sent this one that I had done of Three Bathers. It was about six feet high and four feet wide and sort of applied Cubism. It was four male bathers. It is now over here in the Museum on Prospect in the Library which is used for No, they didn't show that, but I sent that over as a sample of my work. That was it. Then, if they okayed you, then you were supposed to do three small panels and an enlargement of one. Well, this cousin of mine had married an American who had lived in England a great deal. They were living in New York then. He was the head of the first of the shatterproof glass companies, which was an English company. He came to me and said, "Jimmy, do you know that you can draw and paint on these sheets of plastic which are between two sheets of glass?" Well, Bert Friend had sent me a copy of Frank Lloyd Wright's Princeton lectures. My feelings were hurt because he was always running down painting and sculpture as decoration, easel stuff; and the importance of using modern materials. And I thought, here's a new material that I've never seen before and let's see what you can do with it. So I decided okay, for the Modern Museum I'll try something new. So I did mine; they were athletics, boxing, swimming, and track. Billy Adams -- that was his name -- had them made up for me, the small ones. The big one weighed a ton. Of course it was the worst exhibit they ever put on. It was just awful. They practically closed the show because some of the Ben Shahn things were caricaturing the Rockefellers. The whole thing was

PC: Yes, notorious.

JD: Well, anyway, that I think was in 1932 and the Depression. I had never made any money and I just thought I couldn't ask anything more from my family. So I told this friend of mine, "I can't afford to stay in New York any longer. If you want to stay here okay." He couldn't afford it by himself. He rented it to Philip Johnson. Philip moved in with all his modern furniture and so forth. And I went back to the hills.

PC: When did you go to Lawrenceville? And how did that all come about?

JD: I went home. I was ashamed to say that I had to live off the family again. My brother-in-law, who is a doctor, let me have the floor over his office, which was actually in my grandmother's old house and our house where I was born and raised was right next door. I lived there for a year and taught a summer (there's my teaching coming out again) at the 4H camp at Jackson's Mills where Stonewall Jackson was raised. He was born almost right around the corner on Main Street from where all my family, the Horners and the Davises, lived. And that was a wonderful experience, these farm boys and girls and everything. And I discovered that I'd been chasing around Europe going to Brittany and Provence and everywhere looking for . . . and here was the most beautiful landscape I'd ever seen. That had a terrible impact on me. This was it. This was something I could thrive on. But I was broke. I felt I would have to do something. So in the fall of 1933 Morey -- no, Shirley Morgan -- the head of the school of architecture at Princeton, wired me, or called me, and said that the guy in charge of freehand drawing (which I had taught before) No, no, I'm ahead of myself now -- that is a later story. It was Mr. Morey got hold of me and said that Princeton had finally beat down old Dr. Abbott who was head of Lawrenceville School and just laid down the law to him that they send so many of their boys to Princeton and they took courses in the department and they were not trained and that Lawrenceville must do something about giving them some training in the secondary school so that they would not be entirely ignorant. Of course, Dr. Abbott nearly had a fit. He didn't want an art department. So he said, "Well, who shall I get?" They said, "We've got just the right guy for you." Of course they wanted to get somebody from their department. And I had been trained on both scores -- the art history and the practical -- so they recommended me. There was a famous football player, Shad Davis, who had gone into architecture. He was a great football player. He got mixed up and they got him. They thought he'd be safe. I was an artist and they didn't want . . . I don't know what happened, but Shad and I both appeared. Shad didn't know anything about drawing so he took the art history. And the kids just took him for a ride. They knew he didn't know what to do. Well anyway, I had a very select group the first year and it went very well. But I hated Dr. Abbott so that . . . he was just awful. He would bawl his teachers out at meetings. He was one of the last of that old English rule by rod and terror and so forth and so on, although he wasn't English I don't think. The story is that at some faculty meetings he'd attack some of them and they'd faint dead away. Well, I used to think, let that old So-and-So Oh, he was so afraid of me as an artist that he wouldn't put me in any of the dormitories or give any other duty except to go to my classes. I lived in the lodge. Well, I saw my advantage. It left me free. And the whole atmosphere of the boys school was just horrifying of that type at that time, though Lawrenceville is an excellent school. Well, anyway, I don't think I would have stayed. But at the end of the year Dr. Abbott died. A new man came in. He was from Andover. He was a

wonderful guy. I stayed on with him; I stayed on for two more years. But by that time I had to have all the different classes, all the forms. Then the headmaster called me in and said the thing had been a success and he wanted to have it for the lower school, the little kids eleven years old.

PC: Oh, starting all the way through.

JD: Yes, start all the way through. By this time I already had an assistant. I was fed up. I knew I couldn't do it any more. So I said, "I'm sorry. I'm leaving." So I went back to West Virginia. I'd no sooner gotten back there than . . . I loved it there and to hell with teaching ever again. And at the end of the session, I think it was in late August or early September I guess this was, Shirley Morgan, who had headed the school of architecture, got hold of me and said that the man who taught the freehand drawing had died in Ireland, and they didn't have time to get anybody else, and I was the only person who could walk in and take over. I said, "Okay. I'll come just until you get somebody else." And I went to Princeton.

PC: Okay. Let's turn it over.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2]

PC: Okay. This is Side 2. Anyway, here you are back at Princeton. When were you at the Institute of Design? Was that before Princeton?

JD: No. That was in 1936. Time marches on.

PC: Yes. Okay, so you were back at Princeton.

JD: I was only going to stay until they could find someone to take my place. Again I got trapped. It was about this time that the department of art and archaeology -- or rather Mr. Morey -- he had snubbed the creative arts program, which had Roger Sessions as the composer, Blackmur for poetry, and I've forgotten who all the other were for all the different arts. But none of them knew anything about painting or the visual arts. Dean Geddes was in charge of it and he didn't know anything about the visual arts either. But they finally prevailed upon Mr. Morey to add somebody in the visual arts in spite of his dislike of having any actual training. But it was non-credit. He said, "Well, if you're going to have anybody, it's got to be Jim Davis." Because he thought I was the only one who could do it in the way he would approve. Well, as I say, there's nobody in the world who I admired and loved more dearly than Mr. Morey though we did fight on that point. So I had that added to me. Also I was now hired by the school of architecture. I think I had all four years of undergraduates, two years of graduate work, and now to have this other thing dumped on me. Again, I was in the situation of hiring more people.

PC: Yes, but you had a lot of classes.

JD: Yes. Every day until three o'clock in the afternoon. Well, that meant I had to hire help. I hired two graduate students in architecture. I would give the lecture the first hour, demonstration and lecture, and get it all going, and then turn the class over to them. I couldn't have handled it otherwise. Now the creative arts was free and no credit and I enjoyed that more than all the rest put together. Though I must say, having taught and known now so many architects, sculptors and painters, etc. etc., I find by far the most congenial almost always are the architects.

PC: Oh, really?

JD: Yes. They're more broadminded. Their interests and everything are usually [broader]. Again that point in the professional school is so very limited. So very few of them know anything about art history, too. Well anyway, this was really somewhat of a chore. Each year I'd say to Shirley, "Look, hurry up and get somebody else. I just can't do this any more." Then in the early 1940's somebody gave a lot of money for a series of lectures here that were to be published. They were to get practitioners in all of the arts, top people, to give lectures in each field. None of them knew anything about painting but they did know about Grant Wood. He was the big name then. So at every meeting, "Jim, don't you think we ought to get Grant Wood?" I just made up my mind, only over my dead body. I thought, if we're going to get anybody, we're going to have John Marin.

PC: Had you known Marin by this time?

JD: I didn't know him but I always went to see his shows. And Stieglitz was so nasty. And every body said that Stieglitz kept Marin out of the way, that he didn't want anybody to know him. And nobody knew him. The few people that had ever known him said that he talked in the fourth dimension and they couldn't understand word he said, or that he wouldn't say anything.

PC: Great mythology, yes.

JD: He was just a myth; nobody knew anything about him. Well, at a meeting I mentioned Marin. Nobody had heard of him. So I thought, well, damn it, I'm going to find out where he lives. I got a student who lived up on the Palisades someplace and knew the area. "You look in the phone book and find out about him." So when the student came back after that weekend, he said, yes, his phone number is such and such, his address is such and such, and so forth and so on. So I sat down and wrote Mr. Marin a letter and invited him, as I had been instructed to do, to come and give a talk at Princeton on the creative arts and so forth and so on. I received a letter from the old devil saying that he had appeared in public twice in his life and that something happened to him; the audience baffled him and he came to a dead stop. He said that the only way he could do anything was to sit around with four or five congenial people and have a little palaver. Well, I just whooped! I thought, good for you, Mr. Marin. I still can't go to lectures anymore on art. The only person I ever could listen to in late years was Panofsky. He was fabulous. But they just drive me up the wall. I wrote Marin a letter saying, "Good for you, Mr. Marin! I agree with you entirely." I said actually there are only a few people who are really sensitive enough to get anything out of anything. The rest of them all go just for the name. (I didn't say that to him.) "So, if you will come, I will pick only four or five of my best students and no faculty." I don't know whatever made me say that. Oh! I know. Because I knew they would drive him crazy.

PC: They'd keep asking him long questions or something.

JD: So I said, "Good for you!" [Inaudible] So to my great amazement he said, "Well, if you think I can give you anything, I'll come." So he did. That's where Cleve Gray came in. He was not in the club yet and eating at commons and I thought it would be more interesting for him to see how the people in the club sort of, you know, the faculty groups the freshmen and sophomores in commons. I met Marin at the station. I have never known anything like him. He talked my ear off telling me all his family problems as though I were . . . I'd say, "Mr Marin, would you like to see the campus or drive around?" "No." Then he'd tell me all his problems. Oh! Mather, to give him credit . . . the only Marin in the museum had been given years ago -- Mather did pick out things as head of the museum. The only Marin in the museum had been given several years ago by Mather. So I borrowed it from Mather to bring out to have something of Marin's there. Mather said, "Well, that'll be interesting. Yes. I've got a lot of questions I want to ask that man." I said, "I'm sorry, Dr. Mather, I've promised that there would be no faculty present." He said, "Well, I guess I understand when I'm not wanted." And the next day I ran into George Rowley and he had run into Cleve Gray's roommate who said . . . I invited him because he wrote a great deal.

PC: Who was that?

JD: Oh, he doesn't write any more. I can't even remember his name. Well, anyway, during this session, after Marin got going, I was sitting about where you are, and Marin was sitting over there. And this guy had dropped down on the floor there and was scribbling things. I thought, oh my God, he shouldn't do that with Marin here. It'll stop him cold. So when everything was over I said "What in the hell were you doing? You shouldn't have done that. It might have made him self-conscious." He said, "I just couldn't help it. Do you realize that that man spoke pure poetry all the time. I've never heard anybody in my life do such a thing. And I had to get it down." And he did. I didn't realize it. Well anyway, that was the way I met Marin and had the creative arts. Marin and I became great friends. You see, by this time the war was coming on. I used to keep saying to Shirley, "Look, I can't take it any more." Oh, I know, you see I was dying to get to work on . . . I was just beginning to get interested in light and plastics and . . .

PC: Yes. Why don't we go into how all this started now -- the film, and photography, and that whole thing? In looking through your papers in the Archives of American Art, there's no preamble. All of a sudden, boom! Here are little sketches for things. How did it come about?

JD: Actually it goes way back to my Triangle Club days or even beyond that. My tennis. I was always a frustrated dancer. I remember in prep school once on the way to school I stopped off at a music shop and got a pair of castanets. That was my first year there. They gave a vaudeville show in the, oh, in the big auditorium -- not the big auditorium -- but in a room where there's always a professor up on a little platform at a desk and all the students . . . the study hall. They had this vaudeville performance. I was going to be a Spanish dancer. One of these old professors that had gone to Princeton, Dr. McCall, Scotch Presbyterian too, he had been a gymnast here. He was presiding at the desk that night. I got up in this Spanish costume with my castanets and went flying around. I'll never forget his horrified look -- "Is that dancing?" In going over all my old things my Spanish dancer turns up in every form until finally it's in every doodle. Just let me sit down and make a doodle and there's going to be a Spanish dancer. It's amazing. Then in 1922 I was head of the dancing chorus -- they put on a production called Espaniola. I was too big to be one of the girls so I led the dancing men. And the drawing for that is the most whirling thing you've ever seen. I was going like mad. But anyway, as I went along with my painting I kept trying to express more and more and more the idea of athletes and dancers in motion. When I came back in 1929, one of the first things I did was to go to The Nest, the famous black place in Harlem and have dinner. Everybody would lead the Charleston. And so on. Everything began to go faster and faster and faster. And everything seemed still too frozen. Also, I was interested in my plastics. I think it was in 1941 I had gotten my Spanish dancers and my rhumba dancers going as far as they could go in purely representational form

though I was beginning to do the sort of thing that would suggest the time element, move some of the colors into the background so that it would have motion. I was more and more frustrated. In the winter of 1941 and the war was on -- or was it 1942? I can't remember. Anyway, I was coming up for the draft by that time. I had a wonderful letter, in fact I think the most beautiful letter Marin ever wrote to me, about his son John Junior who was to be drafted. It was the most beautiful letter I ever read. The whole campus here was being taken over by the Army and Navy for officers' training. And almost everybody was leaving anyway. In the early winter I had an acute gall bladder attack. I was rushed to the hospital in New York and operated on by a wonderful surgeon. After the operation, while I was recuperating, the doctor insisted that for I don't know how many weeks I was to lie down every day after lunch and rest for an hour. There was a couch in my other studio which was on the top floor and faced west. Well, that was hard for me to do -- not to do anything. I had gotten a sheet of transparent acetate plastic to cover a watercolor instead of glass, which was too heavy. And I dropped this on top of the radiator. Oh, before that I didn't know a thing about photography but I had a box Brownie camera which took all of my mechanical ingenuity to load it and press the button. Mind you, this was in the 1930's before the guy at Massachusetts Institute of technology invented the stroboscope. I've forgotten his name. I would get one of my athlete models to get in the big studio room which opened to my living room and black out the room, put a spotlight on his body which only illuminated him (the background was black), and I would lash the Brownie to a tool. I would tell him, "Now you do such and such a movement in tennis or in running or in this or that." And I would just open the shutter and look and close it. When it was developed there was no figure there; there was just these almost transparent shapes of time-space; the most beautiful things I've ever seen. Everybody thought they were silly. Well, okay, they just fascinated me. On this particular day when I was lying down and bored, the sun hit this piece of acetate. I looked up at the ceiling and, God! There was this reflection there! It looked just exactly like one of my time space photographs! I couldn't believe it. I went over and touched it and it began to move. My God, that was just fabulous! So then I took the Brownie and put it on the floor and would photograph it. It was the most beautiful thing you'd ever see. Then I'd go over and change its position and take another photograph. Then I would show this to people and say, "These light reflections look like time space." They'd say, "I don't get it. They're very pretty. But I don't get what it is you're talking about. They don't look like anything but a pretty reflection." In 1945 Edgerton's book came out on the multiframe photograph. My God! There was one of a badminton player, the famous one. And it was identical with the first light reflection I ever took.

PC: That's fantastic.

JD: Later I got to know Moholy Nagy and I showed him these things. I made drawings of these things both ways, from the reflection and from the things. Moholy nearly went out of his mind over those. He used one of those in his book *Art in Motion* or something -- I've forgotten exactly. Anyway, I had my proof. But what was more fascinating . . . Also, I got sheets of acetate and found some kind of dye that would stick to the acetate and I painted in color on these sheets of acetate and then put them in a white background in a frame in convex fashion. And then I would put a spotlight over on the other side to illuminate it. It would go through the colors on the background and you would get their shadows enlarged and exaggerated and you'd see the two things through each other. Well, that was just fabulous. It got a sense of depth. One day, somehow or other, I wanted to move my spotlight. I picked it up and started to cross the room holding it up. And, my God, the painting came to life! The whole thing started to move. Well, it really was like a religious experience. As Harry Callahan once said when he took his first photographs he was so impressed that it was like a religious experience and he was hopelessly lost from then on. Well, the minute I saw that the painting could move, to hell with all the static things! My dancing blood came out. It was just fascinating. So from then on it was a question of coming out in three dimensions. Later if we have time I'll show you this and turn the spotlight on and see what happens. Then I could paint with light. In doing that you get the colors enlarged and everything but in addition you get these reflections going on all around everywhere. Then the next step was to put it behind a screen. You don't see what the objects are. I call them light interceptors or reflections and you see through the screen.

PC: How did the screen come about?

JD: Well, simply the reflections, what you see with the color shadow.

PC: Right.

JD: Everybody says, "Oh, my God, look at the reflections!" Well, then I thought how could I eliminate the object and its colored shadows or projecting colors and get only that? Well, there again comes in my training. In my last years at the college here I did try to interest myself in architecture but found I couldn't do it. Also my working with architectural students and architects I found that they stimulated me. So the first thing I got was architectural drawing linen and put it on the screens and behind by the light and so forth and so on. Well, that was just unbelievable. I'll never forget one day when I left this on in the other room up there. I had forgotten it was on. No, this was sunshine but I didn't know the sun was going to be all around. I went into the kitchen. When I came out these things were across the floor and up my leg. Well, I let out a yell. It really was mysterious with these God-damned things floating around. You felt as though you had opened a Pandora's box and all these fabulous things came floating out, the most beautiful things you've ever seen. Then the next thing was this is all

gone. As a painter I was used to getting everything set and then I could go drop dead and there it is. But in this I had to put on a performance. And for several years I did put on performances. I went, oh, all over from coast to coast and what not and put on these life performances. But something always went wrong, and I'm no public performer, and it's exhausting. And it's gone. If anybody had told me a year before that I would ever have anything to do with making films I would have said they were crazy. Then it suddenly dawned on me. You damn fool! Every step you've ever made since you started drawing sets you right straight into the film. And of course I had already in my thinking been coming to the point that the history of art really is nothing but the record of man's knowledge of space. And his early knowledge of space is limited only to extension, the ideograph, then to the area, or the plane. And that led clear up to the Renaissance until they began to add the illusion of three dimensions. Now we have exhausted that phase and Einstein has proved that time is the fourth dimension in space. And all of the static arts are obsolete. They cannot deal with the variable point of reference to both time and space. What is your medium, visible medium for recording that? Everybody goes to the film and watches the examples of the most abstruse Einsteinian concept and doesn't even . . . Well, it just goes to reality. Well anyway, I didn't know the front from the back of a movie camera. I just can't tell you what it still does to me when I take something like that, get it moving, and then turn the lights on. Then, you see, you have to add the element of sound, which is time element. When a thing moves its very psychologically disturbing if it doesn't make sound.

PC: Oh, really!

JD: Oh, of course If you would see the waves dashing up over you, or the wind moving the trees or horses galloping up and down and you didn't hear any sound, you'd go running to the madhouse. You would! Nowadays the two great arts are coming together. The sound or time arts are now having the element of space; they have to have multi . . . Which is interesting. What I'm getting at is that it was all so obvious to me -- the other was just frustrating. At last I could go back to the Triangle Chorus.

PC: Did it take you a long time to figure out how to use the camera? To do all the things you wanted it to do?

JD: Oh, my God, yes! I'm still an amateur. I don't have a great deal of technique. I would like to be able to afford a good cameraman and all the other things that go with it. But so far I have to . . . my eye has to be there. I have to do it. But I've learned those few things and how to vary it, long shots, closeups, medium shots, camera to get more variety. But really I'm a dancer again; that is the truth. The Princeton Triangle Club puts on a very good show. I always go to the opening. I know most of the boys and the guy who is training them. I take a lot of pictures of the show. So they wanted to come up and see the pictures. I showed the pictures. When it was all over I said, "Now I'm going to show you my own . And I showed

PC: You've done other things with a camera besides didn't you? A Marin film and . . . ?

JD: Oh, and they're the worst films in the world. I'm not a documentary film maker. Well, at the time I took those, I didn't know the front end of the camera from the back. Frank Lloyd Wright had come here during the bicentennial. They had a week or two weeks on Man's Environment. They had everybody from Wright to Gropius to Mies van der Rohe, all of them. They had a big cocktail party for the architects and the faculty and everybody. Wright was coming down the stairwell after going around and criticizing everything, the museum and the drafting room. He was just incredible. He came down the stairwell and a graduate student who has been working with me had done a big, a very bad, imitation of one of my things. Wright saw this, was very interested in it, and asked who did it. This guy popped up and said, "I did it, Mr. Wright." So Wright never went to the cocktail party. He got this guy aside and started questioning him, so this guy admitted that this was not his idea but it was mine. Wright said, "I want to see him." So this architect friend of mine who was with them ran to the phone, called me and said, "Get over here right away." Anyway, I went over and the old devil was just fabulous. He walked right out of the cocktail party, came over, and from then on we were great friends. I put on the whole show. And he invited me to come to Taliesin the next winter. I went. I took this architect friend with me. Everybody had told us, "Don't take a camera within the confines of Taliesin. He'll have it thrown out. Nobody can take any pictures." Also we went in February and I had been told that I would die of pneumonia in one of those upstairs things with nothing but canvas flaps. It's incredible. I insisted on getting a hotel room in Phoenix. Thank God I did. I left the camera at the hotel. Also, several people had told me that they had wanted to make a movie on Wright, had written to him about it and he didn't answer the letters. They said, "Would you ask him for us?" I did. He said no, he wouldn't let anyone do this. I took my first movie alone in the wilds of fall leaves on the water. I showed it to Wright. He was enchanted. So, after seeing that, he said, "Well, why don't you make the movie on Taliesin?" I said, "Mr. Wright, I don't know the front end of the camera from the back end. I'm just an amateur." He said, "Love can do more than . . ." He used one of those big phrases of his. This architect friend of mine said, "My God, Jim, you've got to do it." I said, "I don't know what to do." He said, "We'll both do it." He had his movie camera, too. So we went around shooting in all directions, stayed over a day or two longer. I didn't know what I was doing. I had never tried anything like that. I came home, edited it, sent it to him. "It's the best movie in the world." Then he invited me to come to Taliesin. The truth of the matter is he liked what I did and I wasn't going around trying to either pick things on or...Those are the most faulty films, both of them. I'm

ashamed of them but I did them. I came back from California that year after making Taliesin West. I loved California. I made up my mind that I'd had enough of Princeton, that I was going to move to California. Well, in the meantime John Marin every once in a while would say that someone wanted to make a movie on him. I would say, "Mr. Marin, go ahead. I think you ought to. It will be the first time that a really great artist had been recorded while he was alive." "Well, So and So, I don't know him, he doesn't know me . . ." While I was out in California I think I had a letter from John Marin Junior saying that some new people had been after his father. So as soon as I got back here to pack up and go to California I went to see Mr. Marin and to argue him into that he really should let some of these people do it. Again he'd say, "Those people don't know me. What kind of movie could they make on me?" Then he said, "Now you and I have been friends for many years and you have always been sympathetic to me and sensitive to my work and I think, even in spite of your shortcomings, you could make the kind of film that I would like." I said, "Oh, God, my friend, I can't do it. I can't do it." "Well, then it won't be made." I went home and I thought, I can't do it. I don't know how. Then I thought, well, if I don't . . . why does this happen to me? I don't know anything about how to do it. So I did it. And I just got it done in time. And it is better than the ones I did on Wright. Of course I learned from doing the two awful Wright movies. But as far as I know they're still the only ones he ever had made. Do you know of any other?

PC: I don't know of any others.

JD: It's too bad.

PC: Well, he was an incredible character.

JD: Who?

PC: Wright.

JD: They both were incredible characters. And I would say this: I think the only reason that I got along so well with both is that each one of them reminded me of one or the other of my grandmothers. Both of them were considered impossible characters. But I knew they were wonderful and I knew how wonderful they were. With Wright I think everybody was either looking for something to criticize or just fall flat on their faces. I knew he was like one of my grandmothers and I treated him as such. And Marin was like the other grandmother. They were both wonderful people. But most people just won't believe that they were as they were.

PC: I'd like to go back here a little bit. You've mentioned Moholy a couple of times. How did you get involved with him? Were you taught at the Institute of Design? Or what was that all about?

JD: No, I didn't know anything about Moholy except I had seen his work occasionally at the Museum of Modern Art and here and there and I had been reading about the Bauhaus. But of course the thing here was that, sooner or later, everybody comes through here to lecture. But by the time I was back here in my last years of teaching I couldn't go to anybody's lectures except Panofsky's. He was fabulous. But I had read recently Gideon's book *Mechanization Takes Command*, I think it was. I was very impressed. One day Labatut who was the critic for the school of architecture here -- also I think he was one of the three or four greatest teachers I've ever known -- typically French, that combination somewhat like the Beaux-Arts at its best, both good critic and good art historian. But anyway, Gideon had come here to give a lecture on his ideas and so forth. Of course he and Moholy were great friends. I was just starting into the movies and I had just bought my projector and movie and I had no salary and I couldn't throw money away. I was trying to pay for that. One afternoon Labatut called me and said, "Could he bring Gideon in to show him some of my work?" He didn't say anything about Moholy at all. Well, I was just getting going on it and had plastics on the wall, not many of the moving ones yet. I said, "Sure." I always enjoyed that kind of thing. That has always been fun here just simply because of the proximity here, everybody, all the great come through here. And, if you happen to run into one out of a million that is sympathetic to you or that you get along with, it's wonderful. Labatut brought Gideon in and also, to my great amazement, here was Moholy. Well, it was Gideon that I was hoping to hear from. Well Moholy went crazy -- "Where did you get this?" "Where did you get this?" "Where did you get this?" "Where did you get that?" He was writing all these things down. He had never found color. He painted in oils. There wasn't anything that would stick to the plastic. "Where did I get these dyes?" Etc. Etc. Etc. And all this other stuff. The light. Now my things were moving; the colors were moving. He and I just hit it off. Gideon never opened his mouth. Neither did Labatut, who usually talks his head off. I think this was in 1945. I was having my last show at Howard Putzel's -- no, he died that summer. But he had arranged a big show for December, 1945. He died in the summer. I was left high and dry and I had to go with Fred Price at Ferargil. Fred had been sneaking around for years trying to get me to come there. But I had paid no attention to it. Several people had said, "Don't go with Fred Price." I didn't know him well enough and I didn't care. I was with Howard so everything was fine. From the catalogue -- it was either at Howard's in the spring before he died; or for the show at Fred's -- they used one of my drawings called "Time Space Motion." Moholy immediately wrote me and asked if he could have a cut of that to use for that book of his, *Vision in Motion*. And then very quickly he followed that right up with an offer to come and teach at the summer school the next summer. I didn't want to go. But he offered me a fairly good price to pay for it. By this

time I just thought Moholy was wonderful. There are my four greatest teachers; L'Hote; I think he was the greatest teacher; Moholy, Labatut, and I can't think who is the other one.

PC: Morey?

JD: No, no. I'm talking about the greatest teachers that were more or less all over. Anyway, I went that summer. I was met by a guy who had been here as a graduate student in architecture. He was running the school. He said, "Jim, Moholy is very ill and I don't think he's going to live long." He told me that some of the people who were coming to teach -- what's the name of the guy at M.I.T. with the Hungarian name? Kepes. Kepes was one of his proteges and he was to come to teach but he couldn't get through from Canada because of some legal difficulties. So would I take Kepes's schedule? From eight o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. It was a hundred an ten degrees in the shade. I thought I would die. Really, I thought I would go crazy. I couldn't take it. And after about two weeks I thought, well, I just simply can't do it. Crombie Taylor was the guy that was running the school. I went to Crombie and told him. He said, "You'll have to speak to Moholy." So I did. "I'm sorry, Moholy, I just can't do it." And I left. It's still on my soul. I really didn't know that he wasn't going to live. That was in July and he was dead I think by October or so. But Moholy was just fabulous.

PC: I'm curious about some of the students you've had like Cleve Gray who you've known and have been involved with I guess for a long period of time. Are there other students who have kept track of you, or you have kept track of?

JD: Oh, not too much. Very few of them have gone into painting or sculpture. or anything of that kind. Every once in while somebody will turn up. I've been helping out at the new art museum. They didn't have enough personnel. I discovered that they needed somebody at the reception desk to answer questions and so on. I thought it would be good to get back. Nobody in the department now knows who the hell I am. They've all grown up and come in since all the ones I knew have gone. Joe Kelleher, who is director of the museum, was a graduate student here when I was last teaching. Win Fong is head of the department. He was George Rowley's prize pupil. I knew him as George's student. But the rest of them are all new. So I thought it would be nice to get back. Every once in a while at a reunion or something I'll be going out and somebody will come up and say, "Hello, Mr. Davis, do you remember me?" I'll say, "Oh, yes." They'll say I'm So-and-So. I'm director of Such-and-Such a museum; I used to take your class in I can't even place them. There were so many of them. They're in that sort of thing teaching here, there, or the other place, or are in museums. But hardly any

PC: Now what about Howard Putzel? He was your dealer for a while. How was he from your point of view? How did you get involved with him?

JD: Well, number one, Howard Putzel was simply wonderful. Of course I have the lowest estimation of gallery dealers and so forth and so on. I just wouldn't trust one of them around the corner. But he was wonderful. Well, the story is this. In perhaps 1944 . . . well, I was just getting these things out from the wall hardly, but I had some earlier ones that I had painted on flat sheets of acetate and then put two sheets, one over the other and I had a few little ones. I had some of these. I wondered, do you suppose anybody would be interested in them. Alfred Barr was a class ahead of me here. He was the class of 1922 and I was the class of 1923. He roomed with Ed King who is now at the Baltimore museum. Ed was in charge of The Bric-a-Brac. He had done the drawings for the year before. Now he was in charge of deciding whose drawings would be used in The Bric-a-Brac, that is, for different things like theatre, athletics, religious groups, and so on. I used to trot my little drawings -- getting very Beardsley then -- over to Witherspoon Hall where the two of them roomed together. So I met Alfred then. I knew him slightly but knew Ed King better. Then in 1924-1925, when I came back from Paris, for that one year in between sessions here Alfred was an instructor. He had gone I think to Harvard and had taken training under Sachs -- he had become Sachs's bright boy. But that year he had come here. He was introducing them into all the wildest of the modern from the critical-historical approach. And I was doing somewhat the same thing in the practical drawing thing. So we were in the same department and old friends and so forth and so on. Then when I went to New York to live I caught up with him again. He showed some of my stuff in those two shows. Alfred was always very wonderful to me. When I got interested in plastics and everything I told Alfred about it, he said, "Come and have lunch." He brought Philip Johnson along. We had lunch and I tried to expound my theories about plastics. Philip said, "That's not my dish of tea." I got so mad I thought I would split a gut. He just enraged me. So when these things came I decided to go and ask Alfred. I took a few in. He was very interested in these two sheet things. He said he wanted to buy one for the Museum. The only thing they did buy of mine, except for Steichen. He bought my very first things, those Reflections -- some of my early Reflections stuff right off the bat, the first show I think he ever had of abstract programs. Alfred said there were one or two people we could see. I think he mentioned the Baroness Rebay -- I'm not sure that he was the person who sent me over. In any case, whenever I did go to see the Baroness, there was a battle royal. That mad creature's chin I just hit bang! She enraged me and I enraged her. She did show a little plastic wedge. Alfred said, "Well, look, Jim, this guy Howard Putzel has been with Peggy Guggenheim for years with her Art of This Century and he has decided to open his own gallery. I think Alfred told me that Putzel had been the one who had collected the great Arensberg Collection in Los Angeles. He said, "He's going to open his own gallery and you might take your things over and

show them to him. He hasn't picked quite all of his stable." He said that he had -- oh, who is the German that everyone studied with for years?

PC: Hofmann?

JD: Yes, Hofmann. Hofmann was going to be one of his artists. I've forgotten who the others were at the moment. "But you'd better go over and see him right away before everything is fixed." So I went over to see Putzel. He was getting ready to remodel that gallery, the 67 Gallery I think it was, 67 East. It was one of those things where there's something downstairs and you go up a little short thing up to the 67 Gallery. So I found this sort of fat, pudgy, not at all physically attractive man, sort of nondescript. I showed him some of these things and he came to life. The more we talked the more I thought this guy is wonderful. The next thing I knew he said, "This is very interesting. Can I come down to see more of your work?" Almost immediately he took the bus down and I put on a show. Well, the more we talked the more I thought, this was a find really. He was going to have a show in the fall of his group plus certain people like Jackson Pollock who was still with Peggy. Oh, Jackson's wife, Lee Krasner, was his secretary there. I didn't even know that Lee was a painter. I don't know whether she was then or not. but anyway, he had his first big opening of this double group. He knew Peggy Guggenheim and everybody else. Everybody was there. Well, it wasn't that that impressed me. But Howard Putzel and I became really very good friends. He used to let down his back hair and tell me all these things about different people. I couldn't possibly tell you half of the gossip and what not that I learned. What I'm getting at is that he was one of the few people I would absolutely trust under any circumstances. He was a great charmer. In spite of his lack of physical qualities he could charm the birds off the trees. He knew everybody, too. A great friend of his was, mutually speaking, Marcel Duchamp. One of the last things I remember going to was a dinner party that he gave in a restaurant someplace for Duchamp and a few of his closest friends. I was so flattered because I was seated next to Duchamp static, static, static; even *The Nude Descending the Staircase* is the most static thing I've ever seen. But what I'm getting at is . . . oh, well, for one example . . . After I went with his gallery he took me over and I didn't have to bother about anything. Alfred Barr sent in a check for forty dollars for this plastic of mine. Well, you have never seen a bull baited . . . "That so-and-so, that Goddamned Museum, that's all they do. They get people before anybody knows anything about them and give them absolutely nothing, and so forth and so on, and then they say that they make them." Well, I was at fault. Finally I just had to say, "Now, look, Alfred is a good friend of mine and you're a good friend of mine, and I did make this arrangement before you were my dealer" Well, anyway, then he gave me my big show. It opened the week of V-J Day. It was the worst possible time. Nobody came to it. But that did not deter him at all. At this first show I couldn't yet set these things going and illuminating them. Also I saw his gallery for the first time. He did things like this: What was her name? Oh, I had never seen any experimental films. I hadn't taken to it myself. But he gave an evening of Maya Darin's film, one of those so-called poetic films. I just thought it was fascinating. Now I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. I thought she was fabulous. What I'm getting at is that he was doing things like that. There was no Cinema Sixteen or anything of the kind. And he was showing my stuff that nobody had ever seen anything of the kind. So he was going to give me my second show in December. It was to be everything. I was already realizing then, look buddy, a static art gallery is out for you; you can't show these things. But anyway, we were preparing this show. All I knew was that at last I had a dealer who I trusted implicitly and who could do something for me. Howard had told me once about going some place in Connecticut that spring for a weekend and being carried off the train. He had a heart attack and was taken to a hospital in Connecticut someplace. I didn't then know what I know now about heart attacks. But anyway, along in the late summer we got the word that he had died of a heart attack. Then immediately Fred Price moved in on me.

PC: Where had he come in to all of this? You said he'd been sneaking around a bit before.

JD: I had known some people around here in the New Hope, Pennsylvania area. His two sisters lived up there.

PC: That's right. He had a farm somewhere up there, too?

JD: Yes. They all lived up there. And there were several people -- one a vice-president of the bank here, I can't think of his name, had a friend who was a painter. This painter had had a show at Fred Price's. Oh, and several people. I had heard of him. And, oh, another thing; I used to go in there all the time to see Arthur B. Davies's stuff. I found out finally that Fred Price was saving Arthur B. Davies for the day when he would become the most important, the great American artist. Which never happened. Well, anyway, in despair when Howard Putzel died Fred moved in. What was I going to do? I had all this stuff ready. So we made arrangements. He agreed to give me a show; the gallery would be emptied and everything would be delivered in such and such a day. So on the appointed day I got a truck and had all the things sent. Oh, downstairs he had this great big enormous space better than upstairs where he showed garden sculpture.

PC: Oh, yes. He did all that, you know, the Ferargil idea.

JD: He promised to clear that whole place. That was the only place that had enough wall space; and also that didn't have red velvet or something like that on the walls. You couldn't hang any of my things upstairs. He

promised to clear that space. Anyway, the truck arrived; the driver called me. He said, "This man won't let me in. He hasn't emptied the gallery." So I rushed to the gallery. There was Fred sitting in his plush-lined office stinking. It suddenly dawned on me -- I had heard some rumors . . . that he was drinking himself to death. Well, I just hit the ceiling, went mad. I can't handle situations like that. I go crazy. I would have murdered him. I called a friend of mine who is a very good businessman and knows just how to handle any situation. I said, "I'm going to murder this man. You'd better get up there and see what you can do." My friend went up there. I just got out of the place. We finally got Fred to get the stuff in.

[END OF SIDE 2]

[SIDE 3]

PC: This is Side 3, Paul Cummings talking to James Davis. Anyway, what was the final outcome with Mr. Price?

JD: Two things. Actually I don't think we spoke. We got the damned thing opened. Financially it was a total, horrible flop. The only good thing that came out of it was the fact that convinced me once and for all that I was through with the galleries; that for what I was going into now a static gallery was hopeless. That once things began to move and change, these things could not be shown in a gallery. And my solution was the film. That was in 1945. So I made my first film in 1946. Of course I was just crushed when I thought: here I've found the perfect art dealer in Howard Putzel who couldn't help but make a success of me, and he had died; and also I realized that, for my purposes, all of the art galleries were dead. So from then on I had no way of thinking except this one. And to this day, as I say, I think one of the reasons why these new people in the department of art and archaeology look askance at me. I'm always hearing that they make cracks about my favorite remark, which is, "If it doesn't move, I say to hell with it. It isn't modern."

PC: You did have an exhibition of some things around . . . at one point?

DJ: Don't mention that! So I said, "Never again an art gallery!" Almost immediately after the Fred Price affair Oh, one thing that came out of it; I had written letters to all of the plastic companies. A man came from one of the companies, looked around in horror and fled and never came back. But a wonderful woman, Dot Marler, came. She was the head designer for Rohm and Haas, the company that makes Plexiglas. She was one of these wonderful creatures. She came in, took one look and started screaming. This is it, you know. She made it possible . . . everything is my own. She made arrangements to have me go to the Rohm and Haas factory right down here on the other side of the Delaware -- I can't think of the little town. Everything was put at my disposal. They taught me how to machine it, how to do everything. Oh, she was fabulous. The only trouble was that nobody knew how to . . . there was never the architecture to go with it. Frank Lloyd Wright after he saw it then this was the sort of thing that was right down his alley. Actually, his architecture was not right for this but I've never found anybody whose architecture was right. Dot just fought up one side and down the other. But film then immediately began coming in. From then on I knew that that was my medium.

PC: How did Allan Stone ever find you? That's the thing that's so curious.

JD: One of my many nieces lives in New York. She and her husband live near the Guggenheim Museum. Her husband went to Princeton. He's in the publishing business. For a while he thought he wanted to be a painter. After he graduated from here he studied painting I think in Boston somewhere. Then he decided to give it up. He goes to all the galleries. That's his one passion. He never misses any show. And he's always reporting what he sees. One day he called me and said, "Uncle Jimmy, there's a new gallery near here. I've been telling him about your work and he wants to come down and see you. It might be interesting for you to have a show. You've really never shown your things properly in a gallery." I still think the Museum of Modern Art should have done something for me. But they never did. Anyway, he brought this guy down. And, oh, he soft-soaped me up one side and down the other he would do everything

PC:

JD: And everybody said, "Sure. Why this is fine." So I said, well, it's against all my resolutions. Let him see my films. That's where everything is. That's the full effect, and so forth and so on. Oh, another thing: my doctor had ordered me off the top floor of my wonderful studio. I couldn't take the stairs any more. And I thought it would be good for me to go back to New York again, my old home town. So my niece found me a little place up beyond

PC: What is her name?

JD: Mrs. James Geier. She lives at 4 East 88th Street. I moved to New York the first of July and immediately loathed it. The show was to be the first show of the season, I think, late in September. He wanted that because he thought everybody would be back in town and would be anxious to see the first opening. I told him that we'd need all this time to hang it, to have the gallery empty, and so on. "Yes, yes, yes." The show was to open on Monday or Tuesday. On the Friday or Saturday previously at the appointed time I went down to the gallery. It

was locked. I waited and waited and waited. Nobody came. I went back to my place and telephoned. Couldn't get anybody. I went back to the gallery. Nobody was there. This went on all day. I couldn't get anybody. Finally I think it was that night I got his wife. I've forgotten where she lived. She said, "Oh, Allen is in Washington this weekend. I don't know when he'll be back." I said, "Well, I really don't know." I went down the next day. Nothing. Maybe the show didn't open until Tuesday. But just at the last minute the day before, Allan turned up. Oh, in the meantime he had introduced me to a very good friend of his, a wonderful guy. And I got in touch with him. By this time it was so late that there was no chance of getting the show hung properly. He would hardly speak to me and I would hardly speak to him. But at the last minute this other guy and myself hung the show. And Allan sat in his office and wouldn't even speak.

PC: Who is the other fellow?

JD: Oh, he was wonderful. I can't remember his name. I never saw him again. If it hadn't been for him Allan was just impossible through the whole thing. I never did understand it until, about a year or so ago, I ran into somebody in New York, some young painter I think, and I told him the story. He said, "You're not telling me anything. I know him." He has some kind of phobia to destroy the egos of everybody he deals with. That's what he does with everybody. He takes them on, finds out what their weakest points are Is that true about him?

PC: It makes a lot of sense from what I know about him. You know, there's somebody else you've mentioned a couple of times and I keep thinking about him -- George Rowley. Did you get to know him well?

JD: Oh yes! George Rowley was one of my favorite people.

PC: I was just reading his book on Chinese painting.

JD: Have you got one of the early editions?

PC: Yes. No. [Not sure what he said.]

JD: Well, as I say, I knew George Rowley when I came back from Paris, in 1925 or 1926, I think, to be an instructor here. I lived out at the graduate college then. At that time Bert Friend, Freddy Stoleman and a lot of the other bachelor art historians who had taught me were living out there and George Forsyth Well, two new people turned up that year: Ernest De Wald and George Rowley. I've forgotten where Ernest got his training. I think he was taking over -- not just at first -- Mather's Italian painting; he did later. I think George had gotten his training at the University of Pennsylvania -- I'm not sure. He had been a prize pupil of this great man down there. George was his favorite student. They were just starting the Oriental department here. The two new members, Ernest De Wald and George Rowley, were living out at the graduate college. We all became fast friends. Actually I don't think I ever took George's course. But George, knowing my passion for anything Chinese, and knowing that I knew absolutely nothing about the history of Chinese art, took it upon himself to sort of point things out to me. It was just fabulous. This was not on a student-teacher basis; this was just among two friends. I think it was in 1926 that I went back for my last year in Paris. It was my last year abroad, I'm sure -- oh, in the meantime his old professor had died and his wife who was much older than George but they had been sort of closely connected, to everybody's amazement, George married her. Aunt Ethel. She was a fabulous character. Wonderful. But anyway, George announced to me that he and Ethel were to be in London -- wait a minute -- it wasn't my last year abroad -- I'm all mixed up. Well, anyway, it was one of the times I was abroad. What George wanted to in London that summer was to go to the British Museum and go over this mass of material, Chinese painting, that had been given to the British Museum but which had never been gone over and classified. It was all dumped down in the basement. Nobody had looked at it. It was a wonderful opportunity for him to study and try to date and decide what the quality was and so forth and so on. George said, "Now, Jim, you have such a good eye. My eye gets tired after so many weeks or months of looking at things and I don't trust my own judgment. When you come to London let me know and I'd like to take you down there with your fresh eye." I said to him that I didn't know the periods and so on. He said, "I'll take you around the British Museum and I will train you to spot a Ming from this, that, or the other until you're foolproof. I know you can do it. And then I'll take you down." When I got to London George took me around the Museum and gave me my spotting test. That's when I got all my training. I must say that now I'm a little rusty but I haven't lost my passion for it. anyway, then he took me downstairs and he'd just say, "What's this?" I'd say, "Sung." "Ming." He said, "That's amazing. On every one you have come to exactly the same conclusion." So that's when I learned Chinese painting. Then afterwards, when I came back here in the 1930's and in the 1940's, he and Ethel were here. I could always learn more. We'd get together. He'd show me new things. They went to China just at the last minute. He gave me that. I traded him a little pastel and pencil drawing of two ballet dancers in exchange for that. When the war came on I was coming up for the draft. Ed Cone, the composer, who was still a student, was coming up for the draft. Everybody told us that the Army and the diplomatic corps had need for anybody who knew any Chinese. At that time there was only one course given in Chinese. They have more courses now but I think it's still disgraceful. They pay too much attention to the Near East. So we got this guy to give us a course in Chinese. And George heard about our doing this and he joined us. He had never learned any Chinese. That was one of the last times we were very,

very much together. Then Ethel died. And shortly afterwards George married Joe Kelleher's wife's mother. The year I moved to New York -- I had bought a little scroll -- he had a show here of Chinese painting -- and I bought one. I sent it over to him when I left to find out what it really was. You know, these art historians will not -- "Well, it might be this, " or "It might be that." His wife's daughter, Joe Kelleher's wife, (she had a great deal of money) bought this enormous estate that is out here and filled it with all these wonderful things. Before I left for New York I went out to see them all. George and his second wife were there and he said, "Jim, I want to see one of your plastics hanging over the mantel there. I hereby commission you to do one of your Plexiglas things. That would be beautiful over the mantel and you do it." Then I moved to New York. When I came back I had this on my mind. The first thing I did was to do a big Plexiglas construction for over there. Just when I got it done George died of pneumonia. So there it was and I wasn't going to monkey with the Kellehers. If he gave it to them, all right. So what was I going to do with it? I gave it to the museum here in George's memory. Of course, as I say, I owe him a great deal.

PC: Have you gotten to know any of the younger filmmakers or people who've been around here making films or involved with film?

JD: Very few. Once in a while they'll have a program of student stuff. I've gone to most of these. But I find it's all in the manner of Ingmar Bergman and people like that. Nobody does any abstract stuff. There's never been any rage or field or fad or anything else for the abstract film. Now I think I have about five or six of the best films that I've ever made. They're ready, they're printed. But I'm so desperate for money; the cost of a music score is so great that it's impossible. Everybody says, "Why don't you get a grant?" Well, when you look and see who gets grants now from anywhere for film, it's either for a social problem or for these sort of underground surrealist, rather pornographic things. None of my type of thing. Nobody does it. And of course all the movie companies are falling apart.

PC: Have your films had any distribution around the country?

JD: Oh, yes. As long as Rosalind Kossoff That was the other thing I decided in my last years with art galleries. Even at Howard Putzel's and so forth. My God, you'd sit in there and watch how many people come in to see your stuff and who they are. You might just as well have thrown it out the window. Nobody sees them. Who are you talking to? Then they all sit around and say, "The public doesn't like art?" Well, my God, no wonder; they're out of date. It doesn't move. The public is right. They go to the movies. Well, sure. That's Einsteinian. When Rosalind Kossoff came along The first films I made were the Marin and Wright films. The Museum of Modern Art, Margareta, showed those privately over there. When I made my first abstract film, I tried to trot them around to some of those eight millimeter things that showed Disney things. Well, they just looked at me as though I were nuts. And I got so furious, I couldn't do it any more. So again I got a friend of mine, a good businessman, who wouldn't lose his temper. He took them around -- oh, first I went to Margareta and I showed her this film. I asked her, "Do you think anybody would be interested in this?" She said, "Well, I don't know, but you might take them over to Rosalind Kossoff who is the pioneer in experimental films." I just couldn't face it again. So I got this friend of mine to take it. When he came back he said, "She looked at it and said, 'Well, films are my business and I can usually look at a film and tell you right away whether or not it's going to make money or rather whether it will go. But about this one I haven't the vaguest idea. I like it and I'll take it.'" That woman has worked and fought up one side and down the other. She has always been wonderful. I can't tell you what it does to somebody who knows the art galleries and then look at their quarterly reports, Israel, France, China, Japan -- well the Far East, the sticks, these little country schools or churches; why you're really communicating to people. It's just wonderful. But, as I say, the bottom has dropped out of everything but it's not because of the medium.

PC: It's a national financial problem.

JD: Yes.

PC: Let's see, are there any people that we haven't talked about that you think we should that, you know, have been useful or influential, somebody that had done something extraordinary?

JD: I would say that Rosalind Kossoff has been the most helpful of all.

PC: She's really gotten films all around the world, then?

JD: Oh, yes. Well, I mean any good distribution -- there again the medium goes goes goes. I think I've just about covered everything and more that I've ever heard of everything that I've got in my notes, and more. God, you really got me going!

PC: What about the difference in still photography as opposed to the motion picture? Do you really feel there's that much difference?

JD: Oh, yes. I never had a still camera until

PC: That Brownie.

JD: Well, that really didn't count a lot. I never used the damn thing. Oh, when I'd go abroad I might take a few shots. I'd like to kick myself for not having taken a lot of pictures at the Grande Chaumiere and L'Hote's class and all that. It's all gone now. Anyway, I never used the damn thing until it came to the motion thing. But I never got a real still camera until after 1952; and I made my first movie in 1946.

PC: So you started the other way around?

JD: Yes. And the only reason I did it then was because I found it cheaper. For instance, before I'd shoot a movie, I found it was cheaper to shoot everything in stills to get the right exposure, and then also to see whether they look interesting enough. The motion enchants you so that you can't study them properly. So I'd take stills. So I never had a still camera until

PC: It's like making sketches in a way, isn't it?

JD: Exactly. Well, now I would do a scenario. For instance, this Crew man. I have done all these things, the still things, down at Crew. Then I have been taking them and I've been doing them in different ways beginning with certain things and then going on to other things, then taking croppings of extreme closeups. There again, I can't do usually the whole negative. I want to take parts out of it and arrange it with a long shot of the whole negative, or detail, or take things that seemingly are abstract but you don't identify them; and then little by little show that that's visual fact. Well, anyway, I'm always doing sequences. They're very valuable that way. But I couldn't think of taking, let's say, a portrait of somebody unless I did three or four different angles or what not.

PC: Have you done any work like that with a still camera? Or not?

JD: I do it all the time. Now that I'm so broke I don't feel like making any more new films because I can't afford to get five or ten good ones off the shelf. They're too expensive. So I am now doing sort of scenarios, as it were.

PC: Have you developed any kind of special theory about this, or concept? Or are they organic?

JD: Well, just as I say -- William James says that history is nothing but the record of man's struggles to find the ever more inclusive order. From that point of view, since the visual arts are the arts of space, the history of the visual arts is nothing but the record of man's struggles to record a more inclusive order of space. We are now entering one of the great new pushes. And this concerns every field. I am convinced of this, let us say, the empire which began to develop in Italy in the Renaissance when there were a lot of these little kingdoms here and there, then went into the Portuguese Empire, then to the French empire, and it came to its culmination in the British Empire; it's that single fixed point of reference of a perspective. Towns, all the cities are suffering, they're dying because of the center. Everything must move from a single fixed point of reference to the center, or perspective, or to the empire, or to this race, or to that race, to a more inclusive order. And the visual arts must move to a more fourth dimension of space. The other is through. Everything -- I don't care what you take -- sex, religion -- as Gide said, "The greatest enemies of progress are the family and the Church." Look at Ireland today. Incredible. Look at us today. But, as I said, in my own field I'm damn well going to choose the more inclusive order because I think that's the only way you have to go and to add anything. Otherwise you do as Picasso does -- make caricatures of all the styles of the past.

PC: In your papers somewhere you have a reference to Charles (Karel) Biederman.

JD: I think he's wonderful.

PC: Where did you ever find out about him?

JD: That's the only book in the art department at least at the time it came out. Well, Bart Hayes -- I got to know Bart when I was teaching at Lawrenceville. I had to go to these annual meetings of secondary school art teachers. drove me up the side of the wall. One of the annual meetings was at Andover. I met Bart there and we became very good friends. In 1948 or 1949 Bart Hayes put on an exhibit of plastics, the first one ever held, the best show I have ever seen. It was fabulous. Aline Saarinen was writing for the New York Times then. She wrote the best review and said everything about When she came to my stuff she said, "This does not deal With the familiar world around us. This is taking a single world" I've always said that. I know nothing about physics or science but I'm trying to express this wonderful new world that the scientist with his telescopes, bathyscopes, high-power mag Well, Jesus, I'm tired of -- I'm not tired of looking at trees -- I don't mean that at all. But this new world is fabulous. And that woman way back then said the whole thing. It's just wonderful. At that time Bart really put on a show. He gave me one whole great big room and I had the whole thing, the screen and everything going. But a few years later, somehow or other, he never seemed to take to my films. There has

been a cooling there for some reason or other. I don't know why. He was right with me enthusiastically with the plastics. But not with the films. One day, shortly after that wonderful show, he had come down to Lawrenceville; I think the meeting of the secondary school art teachers was held at Lawrenceville. Bart came down for it. And afterwards, as he often did, he came in to spend the afternoon with me. He mentioned this book of Biederman's. He said, "Jim, that book sounds like you. You've got to read it. Get it quick." So I dashed out and tried to get it here. Nobody had heard of it. So I ordered it. That's the only book I'd let anybody read. Have you read it?

PC: Sure. Yes.

JD: What do you think of it?

PC: It's incredible. He's an incredible guy.

JD: I think it's wonderful. I'm afraid at times -- I'm no word man -- I have to use his wordings. I think it's fabulous. The department here at that time didn't like it at all. I was just telling this crew man, "You go and get that book." Well, I'm glad to hear of somebody who likes it.

PC: Oh, sure.

JD: Where is he now?

PC: He was down

JD: How old is he?

PC: Maybe in his seventies, I think.

JD: You ought to go and do an interview. Give him my best. I think he's wonderful.

PC: Well, I think that more or less covers everything that I have.

JD: I think you've more than covered everything.

PC: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

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