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Oral history interview with Henry Strater,  
1973 September 28

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Henry Strater on September 28, 1973. The interview took place in Ogunquit, ME, and was conducted by Rbert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is reel 1 of 1, Side A. I didn't think that I was very clear on my—in the conversational tone.

HENRY STRATER: Uh, I was pleasantly surprised rereading that original recording.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay. [Audio break.] This is a second interview with Henry Strater at Ogunquit, ME, and this is September 28, 1973. Uh, Mr. Strater, I think you wanted to say something about your having gone over that—the first interview we did, and explain, uh, something to people about that. And then we'll get into additional things that we wanted to do today.

HENRY STRATER: As recently as last night, [phone rings] I went over—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Audio break.] But you—you were going to describe that first interview. Uh, what you—something, you made some comments on it rather.

HENRY STRATER: Uh, as recently as last evening, I went over the copy of the first interview. And although, I rambled as garrulous person of 77 and a half is apt to do, I think the first half of it was pretty well organized. Then the latter part, I didn't follow a chronological order, and for that reason omitted some, uh, parts of my career that were, uh, probably as important as the ones, which I did mention. And, Bob, I think we might, at this point, pick up those omissions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: As well, there are certain areas, certain times you didn't talk about. One was, I think, the late '30s you wanted to speak of, right?

HENRY STRATER: Well, yes. I jumped from my, uh—from my painting out in the Verde Valley of central Arizona on to World War II. I—I'd like to say that in regard to these, uh, five winters I painted out in the Verde Valley, that I went out there primarily on account of my first wife, Maggie's asthma—asthma. She was a very, uh—she suffered her whole life from asthma. And we originally went to Santa Fe and Taos.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because those were artist places, is that the place?

HENRY STRATER: They were art—art colonies, and she thought it would be a little too cold for her there, and she went on to down to Phoenix. Then I drove 2,000 miles around Arizona finding a place where it'd be good for her and where I could paint. I didn't care for, uh—I liked Santa Fe and Taos, but I decided not work in any artist colony. I had always been in, um, art centers in—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —Madrid, and Paris, and 8th Street in New York, and Ogunquit. And I decided I wanted to paint, uh, far away from any other artists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were Santa Fe and Taos like then?

HENRY STRATER: Well, they were—they were artist colonies and attractive, but I wanted to paint the West as I saw it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Now, they—Taos and Santa Fe at that time, they were either painting, uh, School-of-Paris paintings out West, or they were doing this old-fashioned stuff of painting Indians and, uh, cowboys.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And—and neither of those schools appealed to me at all. I—I had a feeling that no one had

really attempted to convey the feeling of the bigness of the Rocky Mountain Country. The Rocky Mountain Country is big country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, the old cliché, the great open spaces. Of course, they—and back in the days of Bierstadt and, uh, back in the period about 1860, there was a great deal of painting of that country in a different style. That was the, uh, period of the trompe l'oeil and very meticulous realism of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —drawing, and, uh, to my mind, no realism of color.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you wanted, uh, color?

HENRY STRATER: And—and I wanted to—I wanted to paint the West my own way with, um, with no other artists around and I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course, you'd had a lot of training in drawing.

HENRY STRATER: I'd had training in drawing and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you weren't going to apply it meticulously to the West?

HENRY STRATER: No, I was—well, I wanted to get the feeling of, uh—of the bigness of the west. And I developed a—a style that was completely new, uh, based on the fact that I would use buildings and, uh, human figures, animals in the middle foreground to give scale to the mountains. And because I was working in sunlight and had a strong feeling for—for sunlight, and color, and form, I was able to work out a—a new school of approach to the bigness of the western landscape. Those—I brought those paintings back to New York and showed them at the Montross Gallery in the spring of 1934. They were reproduced in all the, uh, national art magazines as a new treatment of the West. I remember one was the magazine, at that time, that had the biggest national circulation was the *Art Digest*, and they reproduced them. And of course, they were reproduced a lot around New York. And so, um, I did start a new, uh, school of western landscape painting because there were a number of artists up in—I had no contact with the artists in Santa Fe or Taos—but there were a number of the artists there who either saw my show at Montross Gallery or saw these reproductions—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —of these things and, uh, copied my style. Well, they say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. [They laugh.] What would you say you've done—gotten that was new? You just mentioned them—

HENRY STRATER: Well, this—this, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Inaudible] the middle ground.

HENRY STRATER: This—uh, I can show you in the next room a little painting, 14, uh—no, it's 12 by 16. And in that, most of these paintings were 30 [by] 40s, but I tried to see if I could get the feeling of enormous space and the bigness of the country on a little canvas, 12 by 16. And I did, simply through the use of color, and that scale, and this business of using buildings. And, um, sometimes they use buildings, sometimes animals, and all, using them in the middle distance to give scale to the mountains.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because the—the things in the middle distance themselves seem to be very far back?

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that itself throws into—to emphasis the size there.

HENRY STRATER: And I would, uh—I would, uh, generally get on top of a hill in order to get a sweep of distance.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now with color, uh, how—how did you operate?

HENRY STRATER: Well with color, I operated, uh, on the general—on the general theory that your—to get distance, you need a violet-gray and you—because with—with distance, you get a, uh, violet-gray.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And more vivid colors here in the foreground too.

HENRY STRATER: And then, of course, the color in the foreground was strong, and I'd gradually—I'd gradually go off into the violet-gray. And the same thing then when I was dealing with the sky, I'd bring the—the top of the sky close, and take the horizon sky away, and get a lot of distance.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that—so—

HENRY STRATER: Of course, at that time, I was doing nothing but landscapes. Now, some of my—some of my friends and families have been pushing me this summer and this autumn to, uh, do more landscapes. Well, I go through phases. I have all my life. Sometimes, I concentrate on landscapes and I'll paint mainly landscapes for several years, and then I'll get, uh, on a kick on painting portraits and figures in the studio. Then I was, uh, in the period before my heart attack and, uh, my heart attack was in, uh, '66, and for six years before that, I did a tremendous number of still life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: I can't do still life now because, uh, I always painted my flowers, and birds, and crustaceans, the lobsters and crabs from life. And none of those three elements keep very well unless they're refrigerated [laughs] with the result that I would paint—I would paint still life, flowers, like I'd work eight hours a day for three or four days while the flowers lasted and be so—so completely exhausted at the fifth day. All I could do would be to sit in a chair and look at the wall.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: And so it was pressure painting, and I just am not up to that sort of pressure painting anymore. I, uh—I can get a model or a portrait sitter and work three hours a day and they come back the next day. But I'm not up to this eight-hours-a-day painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you suppose you've, uh, gone in phases of subject matter?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I think it's simply that is, uh—I don't want to get bored and some—some artists can go for long their whole life painting the same sort of thing day after day and year after year. And, of course, that's an advantage because their work gets so thoroughly tight that that has an advantage. I—I have never liked to be tight on, uh—I don't think of myself as erratic, but I'm a person who likes, enjoys variety. And in all phases of life, I've gone in for all kinds of sports and—and different—painted different places and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

HENRY STRATER: That's why I'm not bored here. I've been—this is my 54th year of painting and I'm—I'm—I'm happy as a lark painting. I've never gotten bored with, uh, painting because I vary it. I work one period for several years at—at figure painting, then a phase of, uh, of still life painting, and a phase of landscape.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you couldn't call yourself erratic if you spend several years in each phase.

HENRY STRATER: No. I, uh, I'd say exactly—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's called a concentrated period, isn't it?

HENRY STRATER: I think the proper term would be cyclical.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Because that's quite a long time.

HENRY STRATER: I work in cycles. I work in cycles, and this—these western—westerns were, uh—western mountain landscapes were, uh, five or six-year cycles.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Well, now, you mentioned in the '20s how—or when you first began, you were thinking of being a sculptor as well as a painter. And then you mentioned earlier, uh, how there were sculptural qualities in your painting. Well, I see them in these western paintings too.

HENRY STRATER: Yes. It's simply—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This—

HENRY STRATER: —when I paint here—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —body of [inaudible] quality—

HENRY STRATER: —in Maine, I get the shape of the rock when out there, I was getting the shape of a mountain or a hill.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you—you do think of yourself as simplifying those, uh—these features of the landscape or simplifying the features of the figures in the paintings of the 1920s and [19]30s?

HENRY STRATER: Well, the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: They have a smoothness to them.

HENRY STRATER: —out west, uh, the artists that have painted out here have said, Well, the problem with painting a hill or a mountain out in the arid areas of, say, Arizona, the Rocky Mountains in general, is you have these light-colored hills and mountains with dark trees, uh, kind of spotted all over them so that it looks like, a little like the cloves in a ham and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's good.

HENRY STRATER: —that was the problem at first, how to handle this, uh, cloves-in-a-ham look of a lot of those hills, particularly the hills rather than the mountains—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —that would be in the middle foreground. And I finally—I finally worked it out and I worked, uh—worked it out by using them as arranging them in contour lines. And I would not dot them in realistically.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: I'd make chalk drawings of contour lines on the hills and run these—and run these, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Trees?

HENRY STRATER: —trees—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —and shrubs. Then even in the foreground, I'd use the old railroad-tracks perspective idea, and all this rabbit weed, and small vegetation, sagebrush, things like that. I'd—I'd run them. I'd try to keep it from being too obvious, but I'd make, uh, chalk—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —chalk lines like, uh, railroad tracks disappearing in a distance, and I'd spot these things along there. I even did that in one painting with a herd of white-face cattle. And I laid the herd, the, uh—I did one painting in which I got the feeling of those white-face cattle out there. You see them. You drive along and you see them half a mile away, a big herd of them.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: So, I painted them that way, yeah. I had them way back in the painting about a half mile away. But I still drew the chalk lines in perspective and spotted them along those lines, so as to get perspective with the—with the cattle as well as [laughs] the rabbit's weed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] In other words, you weren't attempting to be realistic, uh—

HENRY STRATER: No, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You just wanted to—a scattered effect, is it, out there.

HENRY STRATER: I had a wonderful experience. One time, I was, uh—I was painting, uh—I was doing a painting in which this, uh, side of the mountain was fairly close. It was only about, uh, a mile away, so it was almost middle distance.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, the—this cattle rancher who owned that range came along, and he said, "My, you have done that realistically," and he said—uh. And then he pointed to a place in my painting. He said, "You know, there was bad snow here six years ago, and I remembered getting all my cattle down this side of the mountain, uh, in advance of the snow." And he pointed out exactly where he brought it down. And I was laughing to myself because I had moved the position of that mountain about [laughs] about a half a mile in the—in my painting in order to get a better composition. But it looked so realistic to him that he—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —he thought that it was—he thought it was photographically correct. It wasn't. I'd—I'd, uh, pushed elements of this painting that were interesting to paint. I'd kind of pushed them in together.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What, to you, is a good composition, or what was then a good composition?

HENRY STRATER: Well the—my ideas of a composition are the same as they were when I was doing, uh, nonobjective paintings experimentally in 1923 in Paris.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: It's, uh, based on largely classical, uh, but it's no mechanical theory like the—the flying square or anything like that. It's no mechanical theory. It's simply, well, you can put it down to taste—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —taste and, uh, you start out with a rectangle and then work in from it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, what do you—

HENRY STRATER: The rectangle—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What's your goal?

HENRY STRATER: Hmm?

ROBERT F. BROWN: What's your goal in this composition?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I—it's not always the same. One of the—one of the finest paintings I've ever done was a painting called *On the Terrace*, I did in about 1927. And in that instead of having any object in the center of the painting, I had, uh, four different corners. And this—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —the center of the painting is just a blank, but, uh, brick terrace, but it comes off. Your eye first hits the most important—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —important figure and then it travels around. And it—that was invited to the, uh, Corcoran Biennial in about, oh, 1928 or '29, and it's always been considered one of my fine, fine paintings. It—it's just the opposite of a portrait where you naturally get the person's eyes in a commanding position.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But if you look here at this *On the Terrace*, here first, you look at the upper—in the upper right-hand corner, there's a figure in yellow and then down below it is a second minor matter, those blue Chinese delphinium. Over in the left-hand corner is a little—my little daughter, aged about two and a half, and then there's a distant landscape up in the fourth corner.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: So, your composition can be any—any sort of, uh, sort. It can be centralized or—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you want it to be peaceful, or tranquil, or busy, or what when you're—?

HENRY STRATER: Well, some—sometimes it's dynamic, sometimes it's—it's, uh, quiet. I tend to—I tend to paint the—the quiet. I intend—I—I tend to paint things quiet, they're quiet rather than dynamic but certainly painting

certain, uh—some of my paintings are quite dynamic. Certainly, these—these two recent ones, the *Tennessee in Green* and *The Purple Cloak* both—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —both dynamic, but those are simply, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —simply heads-on, head-and-shoulders portraits.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Well, here, I'm getting off—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

HENRY STRATER: —off the track again.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, why you—this western period then, was it an important to you or was it—

HENRY STRATER: It was very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —an exceptional one?

HENRY STRATER: It was very important in this sense. That just as in the—as I—at one time in Paris, along about 1922 and '23, I associated with writers to avoid being influenced too much by my fellow, young artists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And here, I deliberately got myself away from 8th Street and all my, uh, friends at the Art Students League, all that crowd and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you find happens to you when you're around artists too long?

HENRY STRATER: Well, you naturally, uh—any group of artists—any group of artists, uh, no matter how individualistic they are, they inevitably—inevitably have a slight influence on one another. Uh, you take, uh—even very strong and individualistic painters like, for instance, my friend Kuniyoshi. In later, uh—in later life, he was a great buddy of Shahn's, and you could see a little Shahn influence on Kuniyoshi, and a slight, um, Kuniyoshi influence on Shahn, and that—that happens.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And you'd sense it and you'd be fearful of it, or you'd say—or resentful of it, or what?

HENRY STRATER: No. I just, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You talked about this—

HENRY STRATER: Uh, I'm a very—I'm a very—in some ways, a very easygoing person, and I don't want to let my easygoingness, uh, extend into my painting. And I've always, um, always tried to stick to my own—my own particular aims. And this was, uh—well, this was getting out west, I got the—I got this New York subway a little out of my lungs. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: When that—these years, you—while you didn't mention at all in the first interview, after you came back about '38 down to World War II, you'd said you wanted to talk about [cross talk]—

HENRY STRATER: Yes, I do—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because you've done some—

HENRY STRATER: —and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what you'd consider finest paintings then.

HENRY STRATER: I—I came back to—those were the years when I lived here in Ogunquit 12 months of the year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And they were not productive in—and I would say about 1938 to, uh, Pearl Harbor. They were not productive in—in the quantity of painting because I found that living here 12 months of the year, I got involved too much in civic things. I, uh, was on a committee that got Pearl Harbor dug out, and I became a trustee of the New York Hospital. And, um, I got—I helped—I helped elect a reform governor. That [laughs] was my only, uh—I went into—I went into state politics briefly for a couple of months, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Well, it was a new experience in life—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

HENRY STRATER: —and new experiences, I think, always broaden a person.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, you were painting only occasionally though?

HENRY STRATER: And—and I was only—I was only painting about half of the time during those three years, but the ones I did were very good. Now, this—the—I did the *Checked Cloak* [ph] at that time and—and, uh, and critics think it's one of my finest all-time paintings. That's the—the one of my first wife.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Now, that—I did that at that time and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What did they admire particularly in this painting of 1940?

HENRY STRATER: Well, it is—it is a very powerful painting. And the—the realism of it and the uncomp—it's about the most uncompromising, uh, power, uncompromisingly powerful painting that I could have done. The, uh—and the handling of that, the form under that *Checked Cloak* and the hand in the book, the whole thing. Of course, it's not flattering to—to my, uh, first wife 'cause it's very severe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But it's—I have, uh—it is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why the totally neutral background? That's to call all attention to the form itself?

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And this is one extreme of my painting, that very severe—of course, this is in style, it's like things I was doing there in 1922.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, um, the—and, of course, it's influenced a little by the—the dry treatment of the western landscapes, uh, dry and severe treatment of them. The other—the other facet of—and that shows, of course, my training as a sculptor and also the, uh, echoes of the severe Spanish style.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And the painting that shows the influence of the School of Paris would be the painting *On the Terrace*—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —which is—in which the bright, the brushwork is—is lighter, with a lighter touch to the brushwork, and there's more atmospheric.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: And, um, so, in my painting all my—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

HENRY STRATER: —life I would say, there's been a certain—



ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —going backwards and forwards between the, the American—of course, the strongest element of my painting is just American realism.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And then there's a touch of the Spanish severity and of the French lightness.

ROBERT F. BROWN: About American realism, what do you mean exactly, would you say?

HENRY STRATER: Well, uh, possibly, I belong to the same general—the same general schools as George Luks, artists like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean looking at the everyday—

HENRY STRATER: Although I never studied with any of, uh—of that group, yet, I was influenced by the same painters that they were. For instance, my neighbor up here, Walt Kuhn. He was in Ogunquit for years and years, and I never was influenced by Walt Kuhn. But I was influenced by the same people that Kuhn was, and so there's a certain, um, slight kinship between my work and the work of Walt Kuhn. And, um, and that's true—that's true, I think of—you can find often that when, uh, painters of the same generation have a somewhat kindred way of painting, that it's not necessarily because they influence one another, but they—they admired and were influenced by the same, uh, masters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: The masters ancient or—or contemporary.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, these—these Spanish, uh, your Spanish contemporaries you met in Spain, Sorolla and Zuloaga, were very important influences, weren't they?

HENRY STRATER: Well, uh, they were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in terms of—

HENRY STRATER: Zuloaga was important to me, only my painting never, uh, followed his, uh, style at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: He was very important to me in the course of drawing he laid out for me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And that was a magnificent thing to do for, uh, just a young American artist who crashed in on him and, uh, he often—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what about Sorolla, now, who was—

HENRY STRATER: Now Sorolla—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a simplifier and painted murals?

HENRY STRATER: No, no, no. Sorolla was very much like Zorn.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: He painted in a—

[Side conversation] We'll be right in.

Uh, he—he—painted in a very high key. Painted figures swimming in the nude in the water and, uh, it is—it was something that didn't interest me at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I wasn't influenced by any of the students there at the Royal Academy. They were all painting in high key and this, uh, almost like a—a snapshot color photography.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, they were doing it awfully well. And Zorn never interested me. But, um, at the same time that I was working in Spain, I was spending hours studying the work of Zurbarán—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —and Velázquez, and Goya, and El Greco. Well, they were right next door in the museum there, the Prado.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And I spent hours studying, uh, all those four men in the Prado and then I'd make trips down to Toledo and places. And so, that had a tremendous influence on me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: More so than Paris, would it?

HENRY STRATER: Well, in Paris, of course, the same thing, I would—in Paris, I had the whole range from—from Picasso back to, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —back to the treasures of the Louvre.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, a young artist learns more from studying the old, modern masters than he does from his teacher.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

[Audio break.]

HENRY STRATER: And to get back to the period of 1938-1941, uh, also at this time, I did some landscapes and one of them was a large, large canvas. I don't have the dimensions right here, but it was, um, I'd say, about 70 inches wide. And this was a panoramic seascape of the Nubble Lighthouse at York, ME. I did this painting for—as I mentioned at that time, I dabbled briefly in Maine, uh, politics. And someone at Augusta asked me to do a large painting to go over a mantelpiece in some, uh, public building. They said they couldn't buy it, and they didn't have the funds to buy it. But if—if I would do something, uh, of that nature and lend it to them, they would be delighted, so I did. And the—just at that time, um, Phil Beam—who I did not know at that time, he was at the Department of Art at Bowdoin College—was, uh, commissioned as a committee of one to choose two artists to represent the state of Maine in two exhibitions being organized by the International Business Machines Corporation. The president, the, uh, original first president of IBM, Thomas Watson Sr., was very much interested in painting and had quite a collection. And where he couldn't very well, uh, glamorize a time clock or an adding machine, he was—he was using IBM funds, uh, for American art. Fortunately, his interest was in contemporary American art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh—and he organized two shows: one to be at the New York World's Fair, and one at the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. These two world's fairs took place in, uh, 1939, 1940. And the—the plan of the shows was to have a—a museum director or a small committee of museum directors in each one of the 48 states choose two outstanding artists from that state.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And one of the artists would be shown in New York, another in San Francisco, so there'd be 48 paintings, one each—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In each place, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —in each place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And so, Phil Beam chose, uh, Stephen Etnier who is a very fine artist, and I'm proud to claim him as one of my lifetime friends, a very fine artist, and myself to represent the state of Maine. And this painting

—this big painting is, let's say, about—oh, it's—I think it was, uh, 76 inches wide or something like that. Anyway, it is over six feet wide.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: It was ideal for a big show like that. And it went out to San Francisco, and they had a—a popular vote of people attending the exhibition. The balloting extended over a year, 12 months. [Laughs.] And this painting of mine won second prize and, uh, I was awarded a very handsome, large medal. And then the painting was—the paintings were sent on a tour of museums in this country, and down in South America, and various places in Europe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: IBM got out quite a handsome book about it. And that painting is still in the IBM collection, of course, out in Chicago. And at the time, I was on *The Today Show*, about—almost about eight years ago, I guess. I—I wanted a large painting to hide the clocks in *The Today Show*, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —IBM sent it on from Chicago, and it was hung covering the clocks. [They laugh.] And let—there were some other paintings of mine in that show too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But this painting, you felt was, uh, a very good one?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, it was. It was—it was a very interesting painting because remember I had just concluded, uh, five—five or six years of painting distance and expanse.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I transferred the technique of the western landscapes to a lighthouse in Maine—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —and I—I got a tremendous feeling of space and distance in this painting of the lighthouse. And, uh, it's quite different from the earlier painting of the same lighthouse, which I did in 1926, called *Nubble Lighthouse November*, in which I was getting the grimness of approaching winter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: The one *Light Southerly* was painted in the summertime, and the *Light Southerly* does not, uh—the light doesn't mean the lighthouse. It means the ocean expanse was—was the way the ocean looks when you have a light southerly wind.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And it was that light southerly wind that you get in the summertime. So, so much for—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, this expansive mood though or expansiveness in your paintings continued into the—to war—up to World War I.

HENRY STRATER: Yes. Now, the painting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and World War II.

HENRY STRATER: —the painting immediately behind you to the right is also one I did at the—during that period. And that won a prize down in—at the Four Arts down in, uh, Palm Beach, FL, later on. And that—that is a, uh, a standing portrait on a small canvas. It's a 23 [by] 14 called *After the Ball*. And that, uh, is—shows the—my lighter style of painting rather than the—rather than the heavy one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you relate that more to the, uh, School of Paris atmosphere?

HENRY STRATER: More of the School of Paris, but the interesting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That you distinguished—

HENRY STRATER: —thing is that I painted these two very different paintings within a year of one another. *After the Ball*, which is very light in treatment was painted only a year after the *Checked Cloak*. And you see the—?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Once is very more—much more simplified and severe.

HENRY STRATER: Yes. And I, uh—well, even this summer. You know, I—I—I could show you two paintings that I've done this summer: One—one in the lighter, lighter, more, oh, what they call free or plastic style. And then others, which are decidedly linear and hard-edged like—like that one of holly above the mantelpiece.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: My natural instinct is towards hard-edged painting—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —but my style—the way I work on how is I start with a very free drawing. It's just, uh—I just chalk in very freely, and I start with a light wash of color, almost like a watercolor, and I gradually define it more and more. The fur—the further I carry a painting, the more hard-edged, and severe, and sculpturesque it becomes. So, some of these paintings of mine and that are a little lighter—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Such as this, uh, *After the Ball*?

HENRY STRATER: Such as that, they simply have not been carried quite as far as the—as the more hard-edged ones.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you think you achieve in these lighter ones such as the *After the Ball*—

HENRY STRATER: Well, it's uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —as opposed to—?

HENRY STRATER: —lighter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think, is it more, uh—

HENRY STRATER: Gracious, more gracious and, uh—of course, when I was an art student at the Pennsylvania Academy, the whole thing the paint—the art students wanted to do is keep a painting loose. And in the—to a certain generation of American artists, that is the epitome of painting, to keep it loose. That is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: —I mean kind of freewheeling brush—brushwork.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Brushwork, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: Well, now, the—the whole tendency in the young generation of realistic—of American realists is, it's a very—it's a very severe, hard-edged realism.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: In other words, it's taken me 50 years to have a proper following, but now, I have it. And, um, I find at the present time, the biggest following I have of my painting is of the young generation, um, a young generation under—under 30 and, uh, and under 25. Because the, uh—so, I am not against the younger generation. They are—they all like my work and—and they all say, "Mr. Strater, you paint it the way it is." And I have a more enthusiastic following among these, uh, college-aged, young people than I do among my own, own generation or the generation of my children.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you, uh—do you feel that when you carry it through to this more severe and simplified, hard-edged, as you called it—

HENRY STRATER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that is more like it is as opposed to the gracious one—

HENRY STRATER: Well, the way it is to me—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you think it's that you've—you've gotten more deeply into something?

HENRY STRATER: Yes. To me, the world is not a vague place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.] And, uh, I see things quite clearly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And then that's what I like—I like a clear horizon better than a, uh, a hazy one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you like to look the world. You had this brief flirtation when you were in Paris with, uh, abstract art?

HENRY STRATER: Well, uh, to me, I wanted to find out what was in it. And I discovered there was a good regime of—or what you might call regimentation in—in, uh, in the creation of design.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I learned a great deal from it. But I considered it only an exercise, and that's why I destroyed all those things after I, um, after—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you with, uh, contemporaries then who tried to defend it? Do you recall—

HENRY STRATER: Oh, well, it was, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —talking to them at length?

HENRY STRATER: —at the time, I was in Paris. The year that I worked at these abstracts was the year after I'd had a [laughs] very realistic, plain painting hung in the [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I figured that maybe I can learn something by doing these things and I did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: I learned a great deal about, uh, about the construction of a composition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why did you destroy that?

HENRY STRATER: Well, because I didn't consider them of any artistic value other than as training—as training for me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But I, um—well, I destroyed a lot of early work, a shocking amount of early work, because I had an inferiority complex. As a young artist, I figured, Oh well, I'm just a beginner here. I've only been painting a few years. This is just junk. I will do something much better than this. As a matter of fact, [laughs] I destroyed—the first 10 years of painting, I destroyed a lot of work that I could sell now for [laughs] a lot of money, and, um, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, what was your opinion of people—of say the Cubist artists that you—whose work you would have seen then?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, well, I—I listened to their—I listened to their sales pitch, and they listened to mine, and we would argue, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And—and a lot of my friends were Cubists, and—and we would argue the pros and cons. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you—as an American could you—could you agree with some of the—say the way Braque, or Picasso, or others, uh—

HENRY STRATER: Oh, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —defended their art?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I think Braque was a great artist, a great artist. And Picasso, uh, an artist. Picasso was, uh, more of a public figure, and he had, uh, a—Braque was a little ivory tower sort of artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And Picasso was very much a man of the world and knew how to get his work before the world.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And he had a great flair. Picasso had a great flair where he could do things with, uh flair, and rapidity. And, um, Braque was, you might say, almost a monk compared to the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When you were there, would you—did you have contact with these people? Did you try—

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I knew them—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to seek them out and get to know them?

HENRY STRATER: No. No, I didn't, but I—I came in contact with some of them. Others I didn't. Now, I got to know Brâncuși who was—he was the extreme, left wing of sculpture and a great—to my mind Brâncuși was a great sculptor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: I knew him and I knew some of them. Others, I didn't.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of course, you were still, uh, interested in doing sculpture at that time, weren't you?

HENRY STRATER: Yes. Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Interested in—

HENRY STRATER: —I—I had given up sculpture, but I appreciated it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

HENRY STRATER: And, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: So, I met—I met a lot of them, and some of them I didn't. And I was very lucky to—to study with Vuillard because Vuillard, at that time, was very underestimated.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But he was a—he wasn't— Vuillard was not appreciated until over 20 years after his death, simply because he was an Impressionist who dared to use black, which was taboo among the Impressionists.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He really wasn't picked up by the people who admired Impressionists, in the end, was he? He was picked up by—

HENRY STRATER: By the next generation.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the next group, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And he was a great artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: He—well now, to get back to the, uh, the—the chronology, that pretty well takes care of it up to, well, World War II. And I—I've previously given you some material on my, uh, work for the First Service Command in Maine during the war, the dim out [ph]. And after—after the war, as I've said, I concentrated mainly on, um, drawing, though I was painting also. And I had a studio at Gramercy Park. I worked there, and we worked there in the winter and here in Maine in the summer, and I did—I did quite a lot. I was working—I was working very hard and putting in, oh, about two-thirds of my time on drawing and about a third of my time on painting. But I was—I was working very actively. However, I came along to, uh, about the year—well, I'd have to look it up here when I had this show at the Laurel Gallery. Well, that was in—I don't know the exact date, but you

—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was a drawing show, right?

HENRY STRATER: Yes. Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I mean the late—

HENRY STRATER: In 19—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, the Laurel Gallery was best known for the graphic art and drawings, right—

HENRY STRATER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at that time?

HENRY STRATER: Now, um, I—I exhibited. I have six—I have six shows at the, uh, Montross Gallery in New York —

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —from '31. Uh, the last one was in 1940. Then after the, uh—after World War II, in this period from '45 on, I, uh, came up to the year 1950 without having had any show for 10 years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And that was largely because I got into this ivory tower frame of mind of figuring that the—the old—I don't know who it was who said that if you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. Um, I don't know whether that was Toto [ph] or—

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: —or his friend, uh. But if—if you keep mousetrap locked up in a storage—storage place, how will the world know it exists?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: And I was—I was much too ivory tower.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were mainly—you were doing a good many of these bust portraits and things there.

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Just very much on your own, for yourself kind of things?

HENRY STRATER: Well, um, I was painting. I was, uh—as I say, I was painting without exhibiting. I was exhibiting in group shows but after Montross Gallery—the Montross Gallery closed up in—during, uh, World War II.

ROBERT F. BROWN: World War II.

HENRY STRATER: I didn't make any active bid to get a new gallery. And—and finally, when I did get a new gallery, I went back to the Rehn Gallery where I have, uh—had had connections as early as 1926.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hmm.

HENRY STRATER: And John Clancy who had been a very young assistant to Frank Rehn in 1926 had—by then had taken over the gallery, and I've had a number of shows there since. But I went through a period of, uh, about eight years of not having a gallery in New York, and it was my fault for not going out and trying to get one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But I was, just as I say, in this ivory tower frame of mind. And I finally got going again on exhibitions, had the show of drawings at the Laurel Gallery in—about 1949.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This was the first time you'd exhibited drawings, wasn't it?

HENRY STRATER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: At least extensively?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I had shown them—I had shown some in connection with my oils, but I never had a show

of just drawings only. But then I had this—then this show of 50 drawings at the Laurel Gallery was circulated to 9 museums and, um, and university museums.

ROBERT F. BROWN: These are all figure studies?

HENRY STRATER: Uh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of a very loose—

HENRY STRATER: Most of them—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and free kind of a—?

HENRY STRATER: Well, those drawings were—the best of them were pen and inks, done with an ordinary fountain pen and with no pencil pre-sketch of any kind. That was—that was done with the bare paper and, um start right in with a—a fountain pen.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Of course, when you worked that way, why, you get one good one out of about five, but that's it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why do you think you want to do that then? Did you find it was a way maybe of loosening up?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I've always been fascinated by drawing and, uh—and I think that, well, figure drawing is the basis of all—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —everything.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: This, this, uh—what I have here, I don't know whether you've seen it or not—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —is a—is a—it was—this is 24 drawings that were selected from, uh, my best drawings. And this was put out in portfolio form by The Anthoensen Press in Portland. Anthoensen was considered the last of the great American hand printers. He did work for, uh, Chicago Art Institute, and the Metropolitan, and all that. I was very lucky to have—he spent a year on this, this portfolio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: This is a limited edition of 3,000. About 600 of these got destroyed in the fire up in Portland so, actually, it's about 2,400.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this is the same series that was exhibited at the Laurel Gallery?

HENRY STRATER: It's the same series. Well, the pen and inks are then the—some of the pencil drawings and early drawings like the ones I did in Spain in 1921 had been included.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I—I had included some early ones. But the bulk of it are these pen and inks are done in the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —in the late '40s. And [clears throat.] So this was—see, when I got this book out in 1958, that was when I came out of my ivory tower—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —and started exhibiting again, and—and I've been making up for lost time ever since, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And even having reproductions made of your work. [Laughs.]



HENRY STRATER: Right and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And published.

HENRY STRATER: Yes. And, uh, then when I started exhibiting again, I started having two and three shows in a year and all over the—all over the country at museums and, uh, universities, and—so at the present time, I can't say that I am behind schedule for my life because I've been painting 54 years, and I have had 54 one-man shows, which is enough for a lifetime.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [They laugh.]

HENRY STRATER: But—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. When you went back or when you went to Frank Rehn Gallery, was it, uh—what kind of public did it have, say, in the late '40s when you went back to them as opposed to the 1920s when you started with them? Were the—

HENRY STRATER: The same—the same kind of public. They—they are very respected. The—I would say that during my, uh—during my professional lifetime over the last 50 years in the—the top—see, there are only certain galleries that restrict themselves to American art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And the three top ones have been the, uh, Kraushaar Gallery, and the, uh, Downtown Gallery run by my late friend Edith Halpert, and the Rehn Gallery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And those galleries have been very respected by museum directors all—from all over the United States and collectors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: They don't have a—they don't go out for big attendance of the public, but they command respect, and they were galleries that had a great deal of integrity. So, I'm in good hands.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, um, I fell into good hands down in Palm Beach, too, because Mrs. Thieme, uh, the widow of the American artist Anthony Thieme. She's from, uh—she's from down around Gloucester, Cape Ann—Rockport, I think they called it there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Uh, she had a gallery in Palm Beach, um, mainly to exhibit the work of her, uh, deceased husband. Well, she showed, um, other artists there, and I had three or four shows at her gallery. And she's a person of a great deal of integrity and, uh—and I made a comeback. When I say a comeback, uh, a comeback from, uh—you stop showing for 10 years, and there's a whole new generation of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —art critics and all. So, I did lo—I didn't lose any ground on my painting, but I lost ground, uh, as being—oh, in terms of national recognition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But I got going again there and then—and, of course, I had always continued to show up here in Ogunquit. And I was—during the '40s, I—my younger friends persuaded me to take a, uh—take hold of the Ogunquit Art Association, and I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —I got that on its feet.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was that when you came—came to it? It has always been here as long you had come here.

HENRY STRATER: It had always been here, but a thing like that goes up and down. And it had gone—gone

downhill, and it was kind of a deadhead organization. And they persuaded me to go in and revitalize it, which I did and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What do you mean by that? You mean to, uh,?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to make—

HENRY STRATER: —inject some life into it, and bring some new—a new one out and got the—got new artists coming in there and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And put some zing and zip into it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And brought it back to life. [Laughs.] Now as you see, it's very much of a going concern. It's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, you—you first came here in 1919, right, as a student?

HENRY STRATER: Yes, as an art student.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, uh, you'd mentioned, to me at least, that your dad came up here some years to see you, but it—perhaps the most—the best known thing that you will have left here in Ogunquit is the Museum of Art of Ogunquit.

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Could you describe a bit how that got going, and was it all your doing, and what's—what your purpose there is?

HENRY STRATER: Well, that got, uh—that museum got going in the, uh, unusual way in that, uh, I had a lifetime friend here, a sculptor Robert Loro [ph], and he wanted to—or have a place where he could show the Field Collection, which was a collection that had been gotten together by a, uh, a group down in New York, an Ogunquit group.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And I had on my hat, uh—on my side, I had put in two years there putting this Ogunquit Art Association on the map. But I had become disillusioned with, uh, the politics of one of these local—the local art organizations where everybody's pulling in opposite directions. And I had, uh, quite a few, not many, but I own maybe 10 or a dozen works by buddies of mine. Oh, like Kuniyoshi and, uh, Alexander Brook, and a number of other artists that I had acquired by just, uh, buying something from one of them when they needed money for some specific purpose, or a gift from one of them, or a swap.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And those about— this time about, those fellas started dying off some of them, my contemporaries, and it—I wanted the walls of my own house to hang my own paintings, and it seemed a shame to have these. Some of them were very fine examples. It seemed a shame and a kind of dirty trick on my buddies in the—to keep those paintings on a rack in storage.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: So, I was interested in—in that. And then I had another incentive towards it. That I had put in a lot of time on some civic things like the hospital, and the, uh, library, and getting the—the Harbor dug out there and taking time on those things. But none of them was a memorial to my family. They were all memorials to somebody else. And I wanted to, uh—I wanted to—my parents had treated me very well, and I thought they deserved some kind of a memorial. So, it was a kind of mixture of all these different things and, uh. So, I got involved in this, and I have many times regretted that I ever did. Because I am a perfectionist and once I got involved in the thing, I wanted it to be done right. And I have put in too much time on it, but at the same time, it's a satisfaction because it is a beautiful spot.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And a beautiful place. But inevitably, friction developed in that because, uh, I had one idea, Robert had another. And practically before the place got started, we split up on the thing. And his collection finally wound up in the Dunaway Room at the Barn Gallery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: Because he was—primarily what he wanted was to do a memorial to, uh, Field who had been his foster father, and what I wanted was a—[laughs] was a memorial to my parents.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's reflected through the paintings you had acquired and—?

HENRY STRATER: Yes, and all that. And, uh, the original—my original idea was to build a home for the Barn Gallery, the Ogunquit Art Association.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, so, I was lucky that I didn't go on with that because, um, a local art—the history of local art organizations like that not only in this country but all over the world is that the—you get a bunch of artists on a cooperative, uh, art association. [laughs]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And there's always somebody who gotta hang the pictures, and he always hangs his and his friends in the best part, and— [laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure. Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And I thank god I didn't—I didn't get permanently involved in that. I'm delighted that I put in two years there at the Barn Gallery and helped revitalize it. And I think that, uh—and there were a lot of my friends there like Elliott Henderson who have done the same thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, [laughs] somebody's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —it's one of those things where somebody's gotta do the dirty work and be the goat—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: —for a couple of years, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was in the late '40s?

HENRY STRATER: —you're a goat, you're not a hero. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was in the late 1940s?

HENRY STRATER: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the museum, your museum—

HENRY STRATER: No, that was—no, that was in, uh, about '46, '47.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And then the museum kind of grew out of that. Um, and the museum, I—I took over the actual building of the museum. I got a—I went out and got the lot, and the lot was a place that I had always loved there in [inaudible] Cove where I used to swim.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And then, uh, I got hold of a builder from up North Berwick who—the whole museum was built

by, uh, a crew of three, this builder Jarvis Shibles, and one carpenter, and his son Bobby Shibles who was still in high school. Those three men built that whole thing. And I had a , uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: How—you wanted it to build out of natural or local kind of materials, didn't you?

HENRY STRATER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Timbers?

HENRY STRATER: —the only thing—the only thing that was reasonable or, uh, feasible was cinderblock. And I figured cinderblock was—it was inexpensive and it made a good background from painting. You'll notice the walls in there, a lot of them were hung right on the cinderblock.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: All we did was to spray paint a little over the—that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And that whole—that whole thing was built for, uh—well, the Internal Revenue Service came in and estimated the—they estimated that it cost \$75,000, and when I told them what it actually cost, \$18,000, they were dumbfounded. But I put in my time on it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: I was the—I was the, uh, contractor, and the supervising architect. The designing architect was a very brilliant young fellow. Uh, he was a friend of John Laurence [ph]. He came up here and had this wonderful idea of a see-through.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —thing, and he, uh—he staked out the, uh, staked out the position of it, and gave me a floor plan, and—from—from the floor plan, the builder and I went ahead and did the whole thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I did the same kind of thing I did with the—at the hospital. I went around and got everything donated I could. The—this beautiful slate floor is in there. The slate was donated and the granite—those granite lintels, which of course, I copied from—I copied those from Egyptian and Greek tombs and temples. Those granites were the foundation of a Baptist church out in the backwoods. It's been moved and so. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well now, what you've got there, is, uh, your collection from your buddies as you call it?

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then you keep adding to it with, what—

HENRY STRATER: Well then—then—then we, uh, the natural beauty of the place, and all has attracted people, and we've had wonderful gifts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Of course, we screened them. We—we won't take anything unless it's up. Uh, the value of the gifts we had is terrific.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, one of the biggest, the biggest gifts I got was from the widow of, uh, William Carlos Williams.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Now, there again, we get back to Paris and William Carlos Williams was one of the people published by William Bird in the Three Mountains Press.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I got to know—I got to know them through Ezra Pound and William Bird and that—and that crowd of Paris in 1922, '23. And, uh, he had—William Carlos Williams had a wonderful collection of Demuth and—and uh, all those, Demuth and Marsden Hartley, their earliest work, some of the finest work. She gave us nine—nine things out of that collection. And then we had, uh, unexpected gifts from all directions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Does this happen, do you think, partly because people who have been fond and known you for a long time, and also people who have a fondness for Ogunquit? They, at one time or another—

HENRY STRATER: Well, it's—it's a little—

ROBERT F. BROWN: A little of both.

HENRY STRATER: —a little of everything. It's—it's mainly—I would say 60 percent of it is—well, it's growing more and more the museum and less me. Originally, it was friends of mine and, uh, people I've known over the years and—and—and then I can never tell where one of these windfalls was coming from.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, yes. Well, what do you think its purpose is now?

HENRY STRATER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What do you think its purpose is here—

HENRY STRATER: The museum?

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in Ogunquit? Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: Well, I—I'm very definite about that. I don't want that museum to be a monument to my generation of American artists, which I think is—is at first, I think it's the finest generation of, uh—I think that America artistic—we've had great artists here, uh, since—following colonial days. But I think it's only during my lifetime that this country has taken the world leadership in—in painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And my god, the—the variety of artists that we've got now of every different school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And uh, I—I figured let subsequent generations take care of their own—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —painting. So, I've limited the museum to the period, 1910 to 1980.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And that if you take the period of 1910 to 1980 and all the different shades of schools of painting in this country, that's plenty for one little museum.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sure.

HENRY STRATER: It only has four galleries.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, that you're saying—if it goes to 1980, you—you eventually will see some of the post-World War II, New York styles coming in, is that right?

HENRY STRATER: Well, uh, to a certain extent, but I think a small gallery like that should be homogenous.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And you—we can't—we can't show big paintings by Jackson Pollock and who, uh, who has a great deal of merit and all that. But my god, you can't—you can't, uh, try to show every school of the period in 1910 to 1980, or that place would just be a miserable hodgepodge.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. Right. Maybe this is a place that, uh, we could do a—to have you, uh, characterize some—some of the, uh, your fellow artists. If I could ask some—about some of them then perhaps you'll come up with some other names. Do you have some idea—

HENRY STRATER: Well, I tell you, I can—I could—I can say this. That my own, uh, preference among my

contemporaries is partly reflected in the artists that I've, um—that I've shown there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Of course, I'm—I'm not—I haven't acted in the unilateral way. I—I—I, uh, have other—other trustees and people working with me. And we kick it around.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: But I do have, of course, a major voice in it because I'm—I'm the one that's done 90 percent of the work over there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, let me ask about some of the artists who either were teachers or—were your contemporaries. Uh, you had mentioned before in the earlier interview, uh, you talked at some length about Bridgman at the Art Students League and his teaching method. But you only—you mentioned then briefly Arthur Carles at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, uh—

HENRY STRATER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —his paintings aren't very well known, but how would you characterize him as a man—

HENRY STRATER: Who Carles?

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and an artist? How—could you?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I think Carles is very well—he's very well known. Uh, he's certainly very well known in Philadelphia and he's—he was, uh, an advanced—in the advanced school of his day. And he was, uh, very good with me because he encouraged me to be—make experiments.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: I got very little from the other teachers, painting teachers there. I learned a great deal from—I used to take my paintings for criticism around either to Carles or to the instructor and sculptor there Charles Grafly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was he like?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, Charlie Grafly was, uh, a wonderful portrait sculptor. He could do wonderful portraits.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: He also did some monuments, and, um, and they weren't so good. They were monuments.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: As I—as I mentioned, I posed for, uh, in general need [inaudible] for Charlie Grafly.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: For the monument at Gettysburg. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, was your relationship with these teachers fairly informal, then?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, yes. Well, uh, oh certainly. They, uh, [laughs]—a teacher who's teaching art students has to have a sense of humor because art students are pretty, uh, you know, all air. [Laughs.] Well, my story I told you, [inaudible] having at one time wanted to do murals on the whole top of the Pennsylvania station will indicate to you how modest art students are.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. [They laugh.]

[Audio break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, maybe we could get back to, uh, you started with your drawing shows and then you

began to have once more a lot of exhibits at the Thieme Gallery in Palm Beach and with Rehn in New York.

HENRY STRATER: Well, that, um, I realized that, uh—that although I had continued very actively, uh, painting and drawing, then I had lost time on exhibiting my paintings during the—during the '40s. And I began to make up for lost time in more ways than one. The first was getting out this portfolio of my drawings, which was very well received. And then I followed that in 1962 by getting out a book of, uh, black-and-white reproductions of my paintings, um, the period—the period of, uh, 19—all these. I'm going to start 1921 through 1962. There were six color plates in that done by, um, the—that celebrated color printer Jaffe.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Jaffe formerly of VMM, later of New York. Now, on the subject of—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you—this is another way of informing the public of your work, right, this taste of—

HENRY STRATER: Of getting to the public.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: And I had the—I had, uh, gotten started on this idea of color reproduction of paintings way back in 1930—about 1935. At that time, uh, Boni started a series called *Living American Art* in New York. The idea he—he—he had been active with the Modern Library.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And his idea was to get out a Modern Library of American Art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And my friend Aleck Brook was on the committee to pick the paintings, and I was the one of the first group that were put out. And, uh, Boni had these—this *Living American Art* series done by Jaffe who did beautiful work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And two of my western paintings were included in that *Living American Art* series which was, uh, sold widely to museums and schools all over the country. Have you ever heard of that *Living American Art* series—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes, I have. And these were—

HENRY STRATER: Well, I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —color reproductions, right?

HENRY STRATER: Color reproductions.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: And I was in that. I was twice included in that, in the form of, uh, of—of western landscapes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you happy the way they reproduced?

HENRY STRATER: Yes, they came out all right and mine—and mine sold very well. One of them was a landscape. It wasn't one of the best. I picked it for its color, right, but it didn't have a distance in it. And the other one were some *Colts at Soda Springs*, horses, you know, landscape. But this was something that appealed to me a great deal. Of course, I have always felt that artists were at a disadvantage compared to writers. After all, I had been—I've had very close friends there in the writing world, uh, Hemingway, Joyce, John Dos Passos, Scott Fitzgerald, all those people. And I always felt that a painter really does one painting, he may ship it around to a dozen galleries, and how many people see it? An author writes a book, a hundred thousand copies, it's everywhere. And, uh, certainly those artists, the American artists of my generation that I considered the top artists of this century, top American artists of this century, they are not 1/10th as well-known as Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, and, uh, James Joyce, and people like that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: Or, uh. So, I've always—always had this chip on my shoulder on that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And I had—I thought this was a wonderful idea these color reproductions of paintings, to get them out.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And so, I, uh—I went along, and I put quite a lot of time with Charlie Boni working on this *Living American Art*, which was finally a flop. And then when it folded up, the—through them, I had gotten to know the people that ran the New York Graphic Society. They were a wholesaler, big wholesalers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And I went ahead and had done, oh, three or four of my paintings reproduced by Jaffe. And I sold them through the New York Graphic Society. So, I've probably sold 20,000 of those.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Always—some of my friends say, Well, nobody looks at the signature on the painting. They just buy the painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: Well I said, "At least I'd have the satisfaction of knowing that some 20,000 of those things have been sold, that people do like them, so I have some popular appeal." But then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where you ever concerned with what public was gonna see these things?

HENRY STRATER: Well, actually, the western—my westerns sold mostly west of the Mississippi.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were never interested in your things being known only by say, art patrons and fellow artists?

HENRY STRATER: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You wanted to go well beyond that?

HENRY STRATER: Yes. I—sure, I'm—I'm not a snob on that thing [ph]. I think that if, uh, my god, writers don't—aren't fussy about who they—who appreciates their books, why should artists be? [They laugh.] And I got a—I got a big kick out of, uh—I got a big kick out of any prize of mine being a, uh, voted prize.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, because, my god, if you're just gonna sell to collectors, why, how about the poor people? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that would mean more to you than the juried prize, to win a juried prize?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, oh, juried prizes, that's for the birds. Juried prizes, uh, depend on whose—whose turn it is to get the prize. It's—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Do you think this has harmed you in getting—climbing up the rungs of self-esteem among artists in America by not, uh, playing the ballgame of—

HENRY STRATER: Oh, yes, it has, but—but that doesn't—but that doesn't bother me because I'd rather keep my self-respect than—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this—getting back to these reproductions then, your publication, your own publication program of the '50s and '60s and through—



HENRY STRATER: Sure, that was through—that was through—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's part of it.

HENRY STRATER: —originally through New York Graphic and then, of course, those were these large-size reproductions—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: —the kind you see for sale in, uh, print and framing shops.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: And, uh, then, uh, when I started—when I started showing with, uh, Mrs. Thieme in 1960, I got a new idea. Meanwhile, I had put out this, uh—this portfolio in '58.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Mrs. Thieme showed her husband's work, her—her deceased husband's work in Rockport where she had a gallery down in Palm Beach, and then she'd occasionally show it elsewhere. He left a big volume of paintings. And she had a little brochure, just black and white, a little four-page brochure about, uh, Anthony Thieme, and she would have that at the exhibitions. And then she would also have another one, the same size of the catalogue of the paintings that were in that show.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: So that gave me an idea. And I went ahead and had a little booklet printed up. I have it. The first one I had was narrow enough, so it could go in a man's coat pocket or in a lady's purse. And it was simply some black-and-white reproductions of my work, and a short—a short biography. And that would be available at any one-man show I had and then I'd have a, uh, catalogue of the actual pictures on the side.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Well, that was a great success. So, the second time—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: —[laughs] I had it done, I had a—a color plate put on the cover. And these things originally, I just had, uh—the first one was a few hundred, and the second one with a color plate, about a thousand. And they got, uh, carried away, and everybody liked them. And this was something—

ROBERT F. BROWN: All right.

HENRY STRATER: —that I could use at more than one exhibition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And eventually, I—so then I gradually built up color, uh, plates and expanded the idea. And this one I have here in my lap, which is dated 1973 is about number—it's about number seven in the series. And each time, I've increased the—you know, the, uh, total—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And these things now are—are, uh, I think are more valuable to me than the big, big color reproductions of the *Living American Art* series, which are about the size of a watercolor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yes.

HENRY STRATER: And it would be—what would you say, 24 inches.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Twenty-four, yeah.

HENRY STRATER: But these little booklets go out everywhere and, uh, I have biographical data in them and. And then I've taken ex—introductions to my exhibitions and, uh, incorporated them in them and some of the better reviews I've had.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, they're admittedly, uh, self-serving, but on the other hand, they serve, uh—they satisfy one of your fundamental purposes, isn't it? Which is to make things people aware of—

HENRY STRATER: Which is to reach—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —your work.

HENRY STRATER: —more people.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: No, to reach more people—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Got it.

HENRY STRATER: —the way—oh sure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

HENRY STRATER: It's a, uh—it's an inexpensive—it's inexpensive. It's a paperbound book and which gets my work out to a lot of people that—that can't get around to seeing the—the originals. And every time I have a show, I have these available and then all I have for catalogue is just a little—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Well, now, on this 1973 edition, you have, it's a rather doleful-looking figure on the cover, uh, of this—one of the sculpturesque severe types of your painting.

HENRY STRATER: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I was wondering why, uh, you have that in 1973? Because so many of your more recent paintings, uh, are more atmospheric, more gracious, looser type that you've also had.

HENRY STRATER: Well, because, because, I think, that's one of my finest paintings.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: Now, maybe I'm wrong.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You don't wanna convey that there's just one Henry Strater mood?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because the reason is there, there is this mood—

HENRY STRATER: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and there's also—

HENRY STRATER: But I think this, this is—is fairly typical of my life's work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

HENRY STRATER: It's—it's sculpturesque and it's colorful. And, uh, it's—I—on my previous book, booklets, I always put in a new painting on the cover.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes.

HENRY STRATER: This time, I put on one that I thought was, uh, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's just an extremely fine example of a—

HENRY STRATER: Well representative.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yes. Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]