



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Henry Strater,
1971 October 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Henry Strater on October 8, 1971. The interview took place in Ogunquit, ME, and was conducted by Robert 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. In 2017, this interview was retranscribed; the interview transcript was reconciled with its previous version.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is October 8, 1971, an interview with Henry Strater at Ogunquit, ME, Robert Brown, the interviewer. Well, first I'd like, if you would, to say something perhaps of your childhood, anything particularly that you think might have led to your career in art. But almost anything in general.

HENRY STRATER: Okay. Well, the earliest event of my life, I—of which I have no memory, was that when I was six months old the house in which my parents were living burned to the ground and, uh, my father—one of the few things he managed to get out of the house was me. I was six months old and I'm very grateful to him. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Okay.

HENRY STRATER: That he thought more of me than he did of the family silver. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: I grew up in Louisville. We lived on Second Street originally and when I was a little baby, then we moved to Third and St. Catherine Street, Louisville, and, um, my father had two brothers. One of them lived right across the street from us and my uncle had married one of twins. And so there was a group of myself and a cousin, Edward Strater, who was less than 12 months apart from me and then his two first cousins on his mother's side, the Courtenay boys, Erskine Courtenay and Jim Courtenay. And the four of us grew up. Um, we were all—12 months would have put a blanket over the four of us. They lived—we all lived, um, right across the street from one another. So we were the nucleus of the Third and St. Catherine Street gang. [Laughs.] The four of us grew up together. And there are two of us still alive. This is Jim Courtney and myself. My contemporary. And in those days, of course, there were no automobiles and you could play on the streets. The streets belonged to the children. And my earliest recollections were the first, first, uh, automobiles chugging up and down. They were [laughs]—they looked—they were known, known as horseless buggies and they would go at the tremendous street of about 15—10 or 15 miles an hour. If they went 20 miles an hour they'd be arrested for speeding. There were very few of them and we owned the street. The children owned the street. We'd play shinny with a ball if we had one, if not with a tin can, and shinny sticks. And Louisville at that time was very, it was very—still kind of country. Big city. Even at that time it was a city of 300,000. I think about the time I was born it was the tenth largest city in the country. Because Louisville, you know, was the old—it was the gateway to the west and to New Orleans. And at the time of the Revolutionary War and after that, of course, they—all the migration westward was by flatboats down the Ohio River. And Louisville owed its importance to the fact that there was a rapids there. Not really a falls but a rapids. And they had to, they had to debark—people who were coming from Virginia and Pennsylvania and all the eastern states had to debark at Louisville and build themselves some new flash boats on the other end of the falls. Then, from there on, they'd go down to St. Louis and Natchez and New Orleans. So it's one of the oldest cities west of the, of the mountains. And Kentucky, of course, was I think the 14th state. Kentucky, West Virginia were the first states west of the mountains. So it has an old background. Audubon, of course. That was his headquarters way back in the—about 1812. There was not much interest in painting and art in Louisville. Louisville was always kind of a Presbyterian and Baptist place. Great many Scotch Irish there that come over from Virginia and a good deal of that feeling—again—the whole tradition in Louisville was for literature and secondarily music. The Center for Art when I was a child was upriver at Cincinnati [inaudible] up there. But not much interest in painting. And I went to the public school at Second and Hill in Louisville, which was a very fine school. The school system of Louisville when I was a child was one of the best in the world. There were several famous educators there. Reuben Post Halleck was the principal of the Louisville Male High School and he was nationally famous as an educator. And his graduates of that high school were—and they went to places like Yale and Harvard and Princeton, Wisconsin, Michigan, and, uh, and Notre Dame. Those are some of the colleges that mostly they went to. They had a very high percentage of Phi Beta Kappas and summa cum laudes. They were students. And famous—um, and there was a famous educational experimenter there. Uh, I'm trying to think of his name. One of the most famous educa—educational, um—

ROBERT BROWN: Not John Dewey, was it?

HENRY STRATER: No, this was another man. I may think of his name later. And he believed in the principle of, uh, quality rather than quantity. He had a school there and would only take 16 pupils. My oldest brother was one of them. So the educational standards were very high there and that applied to this little public school I went to, Second and Hill in Louisville. And, of course, as for early interest in art, why I dabbled around with pictures like every child will. Uh, in my preface to that book of 24 drawings that was printed in Portland in about 1962, I said as a child I showed the same atavistic genius that is common to, uh, children the world over. All children can draw to a certain extent and I just had—I was interested in writing and drawing when I was at school. In high school—I went to high school two years in Louisville and then I went away to Lawrenceville and I was—to have been there. I was a very—I was always a top student and I should have finished Lawrenceville in two years but I had an illness that set me back a year. Those days, of course, they didn't have the medicines they have today. The summer before I went to Lawrenceville I picked up typhoid or para-typhoid. They never knew which it was. And the only treatment they have for that in those days was starvation. And they kept me flat on my back for two months living on bouillon. I can remember at the end of two months when I had a soft-boiled egg and toast I sent up a feeble cheer. I was, I was healthy. I was healthy. I, uh, played in the street in Louisville until the automobiles—well, the automobiles were just taking over about the time I got through. Yeah. But we'd play shinny and we played football in the backyards and baseball in vacant lots. You know, and I was, I was a fairly good runner. I used to run the—I used to run the 220 and a quarter. I was never an outstanding athlete. I was pretty—but I was always a good athlete. And the only—over the—I hurt my—I got a bad, very bad spinal injury and a bad injury to my knee playing football a month after I got out of bed with the typhoid fever. [Laughs.] I went away to Lawrenceville and I didn't know a soul over there. Big school. Four [hundred] or 500 boys. I was a complete stranger. I'd read the, I'd read the books about Lawrenceville written by, oh, the—by Johnson, Owen Johnson. I don't know whether you ever read those—

ROBERT BROWN: No.

HENRY STRATER: —books. But he, he wrote these famous boys books about Lawrenceville called *The Tennessee Shad*. And those books attracted all the boys of originality from all over the country. We had the most original crowd at Lawrenceville I'd ever known. And, and at that time Lawrenceville stood at the top of the heap athletically, too. But they were—it was a school where they did not regiment you and repress individuality at that time. Now, today it's just another Ivy League preparatory school but in those days a rough diamond was appreciated. And they were very powerful and individualistic boys. And a lot of them made their mark as writers and—as writers and artists and all—Reginald Marsh, who is undoubtedly one of the great American painters of my time, he was there at Lawrenceville with me. And, uh, Richard Halliburton and all sorts of characters. But I, I went there a complete stranger and no medical report or anything. Second day I was there two boys came around with—carrying a football and with football sweaters on and they said, "Do you play football?" And I said, "Sure." No mention of the fact that—and the school had no record of the fact that I had been in bed two months with typhoid fever, flat on my back. I went out and played football. And they were short on tackles. And I'd always played end but they were short on tackles. You know, and I weighed about 100 and—I weighed about 120, all skin and bones, and flabby, and I was playing against some of these kids that weighed 190. I got murdered. [Laughs.] Such is youth.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Yes.

HENRY STRATER: Well I—so I got a couple of lifetime injuries out of that. But I have participated in sports all my life because I think it keeps you healthy. I've done a great deal of big game fishing from, from about 1929 on. And that got me out on the ocean and wrassling big fish. I caught about 300 fish over a 100 pounds on 'rod and reel, which is enough to satisfy the worst game hog, I think. It was work. Ranging up from 107, 100 over pounds. And most of them caught right out there. The biggest fish I ever hooked, the biggest I hooked was in 400 yards of that shore. Tremendous big one, tremendous big tuna. And so you never know where you'll find the—there was this friend of mine, Lancing Holding [ph], 'he'd been in Rickenbacker Squadron in World War I. He was a very adventurous sort of fellow. He got killed in 1940. But he was up here fishing with me. And I said, I said, "Denny, we ought to go, we ought to go fishing some time." I don't know where I mentioned, the West Indies or something and he said, "Good God, man," he said, "you've got better fishing here than they have down there." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] [Inaudible.]

HENRY STRATER: Then I didn't—where I had a leg—leg injury early in life, why I left—threw me into swimming, and I've done a tremendous amount of swimming all my life. I used to swim in the cold water here that averages—in the summertime it'll run from about 56 up to 62. I used to swim a mile every day for years. I've softened up now. I'm getting older. But I kept that up for years. To the rock over in front of the art museum there in Narrow Cove. You can only dive off it at high tide because there are rocks under it. But I used—18-foot dive. I used to go off there all the time. I used to 18-foot dive in water. It was only six feet of water between

you and the rocks but it was kind of fortifying. [Laughs.] Get a thrill afterwards.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: So I've been—I've kept my health fairly good. I don't get as much exercise now as I should but I get, I get a lot of exercise when I get out painting landscapes because you have to fight the wind and all. Well, to get back to the record, I went, um, I went away to school, Lawrenceville, and academically I had a breeze there because the—I was a top ranking—I was a top ranking student because compared to Louisville male high school, one of the—this was a cinch. And, but when I got to Princeton, my first half of the freshman year I was working—I was working for the *Princetonian* at—they had a job as editor that was open to a freshman and, of course, you couldn't get on a varsity team in freshman year at Princeton but you could get on the *Princetonian*. They had one job open in the fall of freshman year and there were 31 candidates for that job and I won the competition. So I was working probably five or six hours a day for that job at the *Princetonian* but in spite of that I got 98 on a math exam that term, which is fair. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Good. Or did you have ambitions to be a writer at that time?

HENRY STRATER: Yes, yes. I am very back and forth between wanting to be an artist and wanting to be a writer. And I was editor-in-chief of the newspaper at, uh, Lawrenceville. That was a weekly. And I was editor-in-chief of that and then I contributed stories to the literary magazine. Then at Princeton I fooled around a little writing up a play for the, uh, Triangle Club. I never finished it but I got acquainted—that's how I got acquainted—with Scott Fitzgerald, became a good friend of his. He was a junior and I was a sophomore. And you better cut it off just a moment.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

[Audio Break]

HENRY STRATER: Yes, as I was saying, at that time I got to be a friend of Fitzgerald. I was going to—I was going to write a play for the Triangle Club. I just got about halfway through that and I lost interest in it. I was interested in lighting. And I got—I was a good friend at Princeton with some of the older, some of the older—I mean, the juniors and seniors. Because having been the first editor of the *Princetonian* as a freshman, why that took—got to be in touch with the older, older classes. And, uh, to—I was a very serious young man. I am not quite so serious now. Maybe—I think I'll live longer not being so intense. But people, past interviewers ask me now on TV or newspaper interviews, uh, what led me finally to make the decision to be an artist rather than a writer. And I developed a stock answer.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: And that is that I decided that I would rather spend my life sitting in front of a beautiful woman than a typewriter.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: And there's more truth than humor in that.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

HENRY STRATER: And I have—of course, in the course of my early life I did know a great many writers who have since become very famous. Scott Fitzgerald and Bunny [Edmund] Wilson at Princeton. And I met John Dos Passos in 1917, in World War I over in Paris. He was in the Red Cross. And then later on, in 1922, at Ezra Pound's studio in Paris I met Ernest Hemingway, who had just come over to Paris as a foreign correspondent for the *Montreal Star* and who—Ezra Pound—Ezra Pound asked me to do drawings for the addition of his first cantos. I think it was 14 cantos that was being published by William Bird of Three Mountains Press. And through Pound I got to know James Joyce. Got to be a very good friend of his during that period of 1923, '24 before I came back over here. And Hemingway and I were close friends for 13 years until I made the social error of catching a fish bigger than any he had ever caught, [laughs] which did not lead to a quarrel. Hugh Downs on the *Today* show said, "Did this fact that you caught this big fish lead to a quarrel between you and Hemingway?" And I said, "No, Mr. Downs, merely a cooling off." [Laughs.] But we exchanged letters over the years and when I heard he was out at Mayo's in pretty poor shape I wrote him a nice letter and I got a very nice answer from him. He obviously wasn't up to, um, it was—the wording was his, as though he'd written it with his own hand, but evidently some nurse, or I don't know whether it was a nurse or Mary, or someone had written, written it down for him. And I was—I felt a very deep sense of, sense of loss when he decided to terminate it. Well, to get back to Princeton. Um, that first competition I had 31 men for that job. I really had some high-class competition because the—there were 31 of them after this one job. And the man who ran second to me in the competition was David Kirkpatrick Este Bruce, who later on was head of the OSS for France for Eisenhower. The

OSS in World War II. And then ambassador to France, ambassador to Germany, and ambassador to England. Finally retired and they called him out of retirement to stick him with this dirty job of negotiations with the North Koreans over there. So I had some competition. And then one of the men became president of the Union Theological Seminary and another one ran the New York *Herald Tribune*. That was Robert Cresswell. Another one was, um—another one became head of the biggest bank down in Houston, Texas. So I had some real, real competition to overcome.

HENRY STRATER: Well, what was your, uh, job as editor? Did you get to do a lot of writing yourself?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you—in those days they only had six editors in each class and they had six competitions, three for freshmen in the fall, winter, and spring, and three competitions for sophomores. And the candidates just about wrote the paper. [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Everything except the editorials. Because—and then after you got on the paper, why, you had some easy job like being football editor or wrestling editor or something like that. [Laughs.] The main work was getting on it. But I was active at Princeton. Some people—the more conservative wing of the college I think felt I was overactive because in—they had the club system there and in the fall of sophomore year, uh, David Bruce and I had a friend who was a rough diamond. He had been in the Navy and entered Princeton at the age of—much older. He entered Princeton at the age of 22, after he got out of the Navy. And he was quite a character and rather—he wrote. And we felt that we would not be able to get this mutual friend of ours, this rough diamond into any of the clubs at Princeton. And, um, we didn't know quite what to do about it. And we finally decided that we just wouldn't join any clubs. So this thing—this—so—and that was the origin of the celebrated clubs revolt at Princeton in 19—in 1916-17. Was purely a personal thing that Dave Bruce, who was my best friend, and I decided that if we couldn't get this rough diamond friend of ours in a club at Princeton, that we didn't want any part of it. Then others joined us in this movement and made a, sort of a social crusade out of it, which was not our original idea. It was just a personal thing. And it developed into a terrific brawl that brought newspaper men from all over the country, this club reform, and of course, it just started in a mild way and it worked up and before it was through we had juniors and seniors resigning from upper-class clubs to join this crusade for democracy and, uh—as a matter of fact the club system at Princeton was probably not half as bad as the fraternity system in a lot of other colleges. But we were young and not working.

HENRY STRATER: Yeah. [Laughs.] Would you have sort of a rebel reputation then thereafter?

ROBERT BROWN: I gained, I gained more and more of a rebel's reputation. And, of course, that was the fall of 1916 when all this anti-club furor was going on and, of course, the leaders of this anti-club revolt were all prominent in the—in my class because David Bruce was a class officer and I was the, I was the first man on the *Princetonian*. And then Dick Cleveland, who was the son of President Grover Cleveland, he joined into this, as one of the leaders. And Sam Lloyd, who was a very brilliant, uh, who was a very brilliant student—we had—and then the upperclassmen, like Scott Fitzgerald and people like that, started resigning from their clubs, just lines up [inaudible]. [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, we had a real, real donnybrook, which was cooled off when the more serious thing came along of the growing involvement of this country in the war in Europe. And, um, I was in a unique position, curious position because my family were rather globetrotters. And particularly my grandmother, who was a widow of a snuff manufacturer, George W. Helme of Helmetta. And this—as I said, my grandfather, George Helme, was a captain in the Confederate Army. Decorated for bravery and left for dead on the battlefield at Shiloh. And so it's ironic that later on, when I was an art student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and studied sculpture under Charles Grafly, that [laughs] Charlie Grafly asked me to pose for a statute he was doing of General Meade for—I believe it was—I believe it was for Gettysburg. And, um, he asked me to put on General Meade's uniform, which I did. [Laughs.] And here was the grandson of a Confederate infantry officer posing in General Meade's uniform with the news media. [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when I say my family were globetrotters and they—we all went—my father took all of us to France in 1914, the summer of 1914, and so my grandmother could get—go down to Vichy, France, which was considered a great treatment for arthritis. And we were down at Vichy and I was trying to learn French, uh, at the time that World War I started. Well, I had been raised out in Louisville and people pretty much thought that wars were a thing of the past and, in fact, there hadn't been any major wars, you see, for a long while. There'd been the Boer War and the Russia Japanese War and the Franco Prussian War but there hadn't been a really big war since the Civil War in the US. And we all lived, were living in this dream world that war—that wars were a thing of the past. And suddenly this thing burst on us and, uh, my father gathered the family together and

managed to get us through Paris when we—French troops were mobilizing and we just barely got across the Channel to England. And the timing of that war was—if you remember, it started between Serbia and Austria, then the Russians came in on the side of the Serbians, and then the Germans came in on the side of the Austrians and then France came in on the side of the Russians. And Belgium's neutrality was guaranteed by treaty but the Germans invaded, invaded Belgium and then finally England came in. Well, we were—we managed to get across the Channel and we were in London at the Charing Cross Hotel, which is the upper floor of the Charing Cross Railroad Station. And I would go out on the balcony there overlooking the railroad station and here would be, up in one end, a bunch of Germans going back, going to take a boat, train to the—cross-Channel boat that went to Holland and Germany and another group, they were going to go across to France. And a very quiet—and those fellows had all been working in the same hotels in London, the French mostly chefs and the Germans as waiters. And as an American kid, why, I was appalled at the thought of these, these, um, people being—these young people being hauled back by their governments to kill one another just because of the emperor of Austria and the czar of Russia had called out their armies. And it just didn't make sense to me at all as a boy who's been raised on the streets of Louisville. Because these same—I'd been staying at a hotel down in Vichy and the German waiters and French cooks, the same thing in London, and it—you know, it didn't make sense. And I just said to myself, "By God, if I were one of those young fellows I would just say no and not go. And I had this idea firmly implanted in my brain. And when I got back to Lawrenceville, I had one year at Lawrenceville left, and I used to talk about this. And the other boys hadn't been through an experience like that and they just said, "Oh, the war's boring. Forget it." And, uh, the same thing in my freshman year at Princeton. Incidentally, in between my, um, end at Lawrenceville and my beginning at Princeton. I worked for a whole year on the newspapers down in Louisville. And that was quite a—a whole summer. That was quite an experience. There was a big polio scare that fall and the colleges didn't open up until about six weeks late. So I had the whole summer and part of the fall to work as a cub reporter in Louisville and that was quite a, a very valuable experience. And I was thinking at that time I would come be a newspaperman. And I—that was a very fine experience because newspapers did not have a big staff and I was—I not only covered police courts but I was put on all kinds of other work. I worked for the old *Louisville Evening Post*, which later on expired. But later years when I had given four exhibitions down in Louisville, the first one about '36 or '37 on through to one as recently as 1963. The same men that I had competed with for stories were—by that time they were running the paper, [inaudible] journal. [Laughs.] And they—oh, they gave me wonderful—every time I had a show down there they gave me a wonderful spread. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this first time you were in Europe before you went, uh, your last year in Lawrenceville and then going to Princeton. Were you at all into art or what sorts of things seem to have been interesting to you when you were in France?

HENRY STRATER: Well, yes. I mean, of course, I went to the—I went to all the museums and all that. And our family—the first time they hauled me abroad was when I was seven. At the age of seven I had the experience of standing on top of a high hill in Norway and seeing the midnight sun. Because the—I, uh, the whole—of course, travel was very primitive. That was in 19[0]3 and we traveled in the northern part of Norway by two-wheeled carts. So—and I remember climbing up the—climbing up the castle in Edinburgh where Bruce scaled the wall. My brother and I figured we could do it, too. [Laughs.] So I had been to Europe a number of times with my parents who—they were pretty much globetrotters. But this experience, this experience of seeing all those fellows go off to slaughter one another affected me pretty deeply. So when we got back—so when President Wilson—I came—when President Wilson was running for reelection, why I got—I was rushing around supporting him as a young political—like the 18-year-olds who had just gotten the vote. On his slogan of—and he got reelected on the slogan that he kept us out of war and then within six months he put us into it. And after this background that I had of anti-war feeling for two or three years before, I was very outspoken at Princeton against us going into the war and I was in a very solitary position. You take the young people now who are against the war in Vietnam, there are a great many of them. And I was very much alone. There were only two or three or four others of us in an enormous university that felt the way I did. So I was very much of a lone wolf. And at the same time I wasn't—I didn't want to just stay in college. I, uh—there was this general excitement of—so I—there's this other fellow who was against our participation in the war, and myself, tried to get in the—it was a very exciting thing. Was the Red Cross in Russia. And we tried to get into that and that would have been very interesting if we had been in it because [laughs] it—those fellows that were in this Red Cross, um, American Red Cross [inaudible] to Europe, of course, got caught up in the Bolshevik Revolution and they had quite a hot time of it. [Laughs.] And they had to finally get out of the country by way of Siberia. They turned us down on account of the fact that we neither spoke Russian. And then there was a Red Cross outfit going to go to Mesopotamia and I tried—we tried to get in that and—unsuccessfully. And that bunch got caught at [inaudible] you know, with the British that were surrounded by the Turks. And they all got back eventually so [laughs]. So I finally ended up at the American Red Cross and I went over to France in the—along about June 1917. And that was before any of the troops went over. And I had an interesting, I had an interesting time over there, although I ended up in a funny position attached to the Belgian army. What happened was that this bad knee of mine, I was stationed down at in Ornans, that's up near the Swiss border, and with this Red Cross training outfit. And I had a Sunday leave and I climbed up the side of the cliffs where Courbet had painted some of these famous

paintings, like Burial at Ornans and all that. And I slipped and went down the side of this, uh, rock face and I really—this bad knee, I smashed it up so badly that I had to be carried back into town. It was an amusing experience because I was in—well, of course, I was in very bad pain. But I managed to slide and get down to this road and I was stuck there because my knee was all hopelessly mangled and out of joint. And this old, this very sturdy-looking old peasant came along with his very, very handsome peasant girl, I thought. I thought she was a peasant. She was very good looking and very sturdy. And I—my French was only fairly good and I had a little pocket dictionary and I looked up dislocated. And I, so I finally said, ""*Genou deboiter*", meaning knee out of joint. And they—so this old boy, this rugged old—as I thought, peasant—asked me to—he motioned for me to put one arm around his neck and I was supposed to put my other arm around this girl's neck. And she was young and rugged. And I was—you know, the American idea of gallantry and all of that. I thought": well, now I—that's—that's nothing to do at all to, to let a woman carry you". And somehow or another, just with one arm around the man's neck I managed to hobble back into Ornans where I collapsed in bed. And later—[laughs]—a couple of days later I discovered that this was the mayor of Ornans and his daughter. And this beautiful girl came around to see me and laughed her head off and everybody concerned gave me the razz for me refusing to put my arm around the neck of this beautiful girl. [Laughs.] She was rugged, too. That is how—well, that will give you an indication of the kind of young man I was. But miss a chance like that. [Laughs.] And she came around and I was laid up there for about a week and she came around and gave me French lessons. This French doctor, village doctor, came around and he nearly killed me because he said that it was just my imagination, this knee was not dislocated, and that he will—he would prove it by straightening the leg. And he put his entire weight on it and I passed out cold. And later on, when Colonel Blake of Base Hospital Number Two—they sent me up to the American hospital in Paris, which had just been opened. They'd just opened this base hospital up to—I think that was—I forget where it was. Was up in Paris. Was a big French hospital, been take—handed over the Americans. And Colonel Blake was just organizing it as Base Hospital Number Two. I was a patient there when the first fellow wounded in action in the American Army in France in World War I was brought in. And Blake—I was lucky because Blake wasn't too busy. Colonel Blake, he himself operated on my knee and he was one of the most famous orthopedic surgeons in the US. And so I was very lucky. And he—after the operation he said, "My God, young man, what did you do?" He said, "I never saw things ground up so inside of a man's knee joint" in my life." He said, "How could you have done that just with a fall?" Then I told him about this French doctor, French village doctor and how he had tried to straighten the thing just by forcing. And he said, "My God," he said, "that fellow ought to be drawn and quartered." "Well," I said, "now, Colonel Blake, I think that the reason he was in the village was that they'd send him back from the front. He'd been killing too many French soldiers." [Laughs.] When I was—I was on crutches. I was in the hospital quite a while. There's a fellow next to me that had a bad cough, a sergeant, and they eventually moved him to isolation room. He had TB. I guess I picked up some of that because I had a pretty bad cough for a couple—two or three years after that. I picked up a little TB here. Never got into my lungs, I don't think, just the bronchial tubes. But I was in pretty bad shape and Colonel Blake wanted to ship me back to the US. Well, of course, the Red Cross was a—what you would call a paramilitary organization, and particularly in World War I they were the—they were not as—it wasn't as strictly controlled by the military as later on. And so I just took a chance and jumped [laughs] before they could ship me home because, my God, I was embarrassed. I—here I'd been a pacifist and come over and to go back to the US with no more war service to my credit than falling down the side of a cliff [laughs] was just very humiliating. So I—then I ran into a fellow named Huck Kilty [ph] who had bad eyesight and he had wanted to get into the American Army and couldn't get in. He had joined the French army. And he was from Anniston, AL, had this very thick Alabama accent and see, see this—to hear this Alabama accent coming out of this French uniform is really funny. [Laughs.] And he kind of took care of me and found me a room in a hotel and I was in very bad shape physically because I'd left the hospital before I was discharged and I was in pretty, pretty poor shape. And at that time I guess there were some spies around Paris and somebody stole all my military papers and my money and my passport and everything, which I had had in a money belt and I'd taken off to try to take a bath. So I was in trouble, trouble, trouble. Then I had a lucky break. There was a colonel that had come across on the same boat. We'd come across before the transports were running and on a French civilian liner and there was a lot of torpedoing going on at that time. And this—if there are submarines around it brings out a lot of concerned passengers. [Laughs.] And one passenger I got to know happened to be the commanding officer for the whole Red Cross for Europe. And I got in touch with him and I said, "Look here, I don't want to get shipped back to the US. Can't you find something for me to do to stay over here?" And he said, "Yes." He said the, he said, "The Belgians are in terrible shape." They'd been driven out of all of Belgium except about 10 miles of it up in the corner near the coast. He said, "We've got a lot of refugees. Um, and if—we got—" he said, "We got two batches of about 600 of each of them. We need anybody we can get, whether they're on crutches or what to look after them." So he said, "This is Captain Grove of the Belgium army. He's in charge of this operation and you report to him and he'll be able to use you." So I did and, um, I was with Captain Grove taking care of these refugees probably until just, just before the armistice when I managed to get assigned to a unit that was up in the war zone in France and then along came the armistice. When the armistice took place I discovered immediately after that, that my brother, who was a first lieutenant in the American Army, three years older than myself, was only seven miles from me. And I got hold of a bike. [Laughs.] I rode over, [laughs] rode over to see him. And I had to decide what I wanted to do the rest of my life. You know, when an armistice in a world war comes like that, suddenly the whole, whole thing is different, you know. No longer any shells exploding or

bombs going off and you can stand up straight, look around, and the world looks a little better [laughs] to everybody. And there were two million of us over there in France at that time, the, you know, the American Expeditionary Force. They had two million. And suddenly—of course, they employed some. They employed some of them to send them up and occupy the whole West Bank of the Rhine and—but there was no airplane travel at that time. The only way to get them over there—it'd taken two years to get them over there to France and mass shipments, it would take them about a year to get them over and it's going to take them a while to get them back. Meanwhile, they were on the necks of the French civilians and they were getting in fights with the French soldiers and getting into trouble and making a nuisance of themselves generally. So to keep them busy, the Army organized these divisional football games and baseball teams and track teams and anything to keep them occupied. And if you wanted to go to the, uh, to a French college you could do it, anything of that nature. And I went to—so in December after the armistice I went to art school—had a month's leave and went to art school in the *Coeur de Dragon* [ph], Paris, the famous old Académie Julian. And after a month of that I decided I'd rather spend my life in front of a good-looking woman than a typewriter and [laughs] I came back to the US and went to the Art Students League in New York. And being young and full of it, I was going to be a painter and sculptor, both, and I went to night school up at the, um, night school up at the Beaux-Arts school. That was a school run by architects in New York to train sculptors because they needed, they needed sculptors for the, um—you know, in connection with buildings. So I went to this free night school, the Beaux-Arts, it was up on the east side somewhere. And morning and afternoons I went to the, uh, Art Students League. And that was when I met, uh—of course, I had known Reggie Marsh in Lawrenceville but then I got to know Alec Brook [ph] and Peggy Bacon, Kuniyoshi and a host of—Isabella Howland, a host of artists that continued to be my friends all my life. Some of them are still alive now, contemporaries of mine. I met them all at the League at that time. And that—

[END OF TRACK]

ROBERT BROWN: Hello, hello, hello, hello. Okay.

HENRY STRATER: Ask me first about the—

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, about the Académie Julian.

HENRY STRATER: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: I wish you could, uh, say something perhaps about—you were there only very briefly but, uh, could you say something about the teaching, uh, what it was like?

HENRY STRATER: Yeah. That was, um, it was interesting because it was entirely different. The Académie Julian was—because it was located in a very—most picturesque spot in Paris, the old *Coeur de Dragon* and it was a very old school and old traditions and they—I started right off drawing from the figure. I didn't—and I have the, uh, [laughs]. I have the first drawing I did there. It's over at the museum—incidentally it's over at the Museum of Art. It's framed up, a laborious charcoal drawing I spent a week over a figure. And we would draw—draw or paint from models. But it was the old classical school. And they had these old traditions there. They, uh—you had to pay so much for your easel and according to the rules of the academy, if I would go back there now and want to work there from a model, I wouldn't have to pay for my easel twice. The other thing you had to do was you had to take the whole crowd down the street and, uh, throw out treats for it.

ROBERT BROWN: Ah. This is an initiation.

HENRY STRATER: Yes. [Laughs.] But it was a very conventional old school and, of course, males only. And they'd sing bawdy songs and they'd [laughs] [inaudible] and razz the model pretty royally. [Laughs.] It was no-holds barred on the conversation. And the students were all ages and quite a—I was the first American there and then two men, two more Americans got leave from the Army and came in there and studied before I left. I was there a month. But it was—then, of course, the art students leave when I went there. I was in 'Bridgman's class and he was very different, of course. Bridgman was a master draftsman but a little—with a style of drawing that was not adapted to getting portraiture, anything of that kind, but was adapted to being able to draw anything. He was famous as a—for drawing the hand. And his—he had a regular formula for it. He said there are five positions in which you can draw the hand and he taught you to draw those five positions. And as to the individuality of the hand, 'that didn't interest him. But he was a master draftsman of that type. And, but it was part of—that was part of my education. I went to—before I was through I went to a number of different schools and my idea of study, which I'd followed, was to stay at one school only as long as I felt was necessary to learn what they had to teach me. I did not want to learn the—copy the style of any other artist. I didn't want to—that is the average tendency in an art school, is you pattern your style on the style of the teacher. And in every school there's one dominant teacher and he—his pupils tend to follow his lead and copy his style. Well, I

only wanted to learn as much as I felt was of value to me in any one school, then I moved on. And I learned certain things in that month at the *Julian Académie* and then I was at the Art Students League two or three months and I learned, I learned something about drawing there. I learned something about sculpture over at the night school of the Beaux-Arts in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the teacher there then?

HENRY STRATER: Probably was no teacher there.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh.

HENRY STRATER: I—there was no teacher there. It was just the—I learned there from the old, from the older students. And, incidentally, in any art school it's true that you learn more from the other students than you do from the teacher. So then I—because hot, hot weather set in and I remarked to this very beautiful blond with long hair next to me, sitting next to me in the class, [laughs] that, "It was awfully hot." She said, "Yes, I'm going up to Maine next—in two weeks." Well, I said, "Maine, that sounds wonderful. I've never been there but I hear it's very cool." I said, "Where are you going?" Well, she said, "A place called Ogunquit. There's this art school up there." So I had a, um, cousin, second cousin who had married a very good artist. He was older and his name was Harry Hoffman. He was part of the Old Lyme, the colony down at Old Lyme, CT. And he painted very well in the style of the French Impressionists. He was the first artist ever to paint under water, the undersea. He was on Bibi's [ph] first trips and Harry did his painting of undersea reefs sort of thing at—I went to him for advice about summer art schools and he said, ""There's a very good school up at Ogunquit." Um, he said, "It's a good school." He said, "I could recommend it." So I came up to Ogunquit and that first time was the summer of 1919. I fell in love with the place and I'd paint every morning in class, the school, and then I'd paint outdoors in the afternoon. About, just before supertime I'd go for a swim and I started diving off that high rock in Narrow Cove. And so my love of Narrow Cove dated back to them and that's where the museum is now, right down there in that meadow. Of course, Ogunquit was very simple in those days and there was quite—there was quite a crowd up here. Some of those, some of those ones from the League were here, Kuniyoshi and Niles Spencer and Brook was not up here that summer, Alexander Brook when he was, uh, here after that. Isabella Howland. Um, and, of course, there were many other artists that had been here one—I believe Hopper was here at one time and George Fellows and, of course, Rudy Dirks was here. I could reel off the names. There was quite a bunch of famous cartoonists came here, too. It was a—quite a colony of famous cartoonists that would summer here. So it—and at that time the roads were so slow between here and Boston that the only people on—Boston and Worcester and—were people who came here for the whole summer. We weren't overrun with day trippers the way we are now, of course. And so it was—it was three hours from Boston instead of an hour-and-a-half. [Laughs.] And Woodbury, who had been up here for many years, first—he had first come up here by sailboat. So, but it was—it was a flourishing art colony and a great many artists of different schools. It wasn't just one little clique of artists who painted all things the same way. They were artists here of all different schools. And the place had beautiful natural beauty. I became known among the art students as "Rock-a-day" Strater because every afternoon I'd go off and sketch the rocks. And I was not interested in painting the surf or just the, um, waves or—I was interested in the rock formations. Of course, I was still doing sculpture at that time and I was interested in the sculptural shape of the rocks. And curious that in the last few years I've gotten back to my first love, the rocks. Painting, my marine painting—in my marine paintings, the ocean's just background. The important thing are the rocks. I don't just use the rocks as another splash of dark paint. I paint each rock as this sculpturesque, sculpture shape and I tried to get the color, too. Well, from there I went in the fall to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, which was a very fine school and I spent a whole, uh, I spent a whole year there studying with sculpture with Charles Grafly. And they had several painting instructors, they would alternate them. The one who interested me the most was, uh, Arthur B. Carles, C-A-R-L-E-S. He's, he's a very fine artist. You probably know his work.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, mm-hmm.

HENRY STRATER: And he encouraged my more original and adventurous paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. How would you have described those at that time?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I could show you some—they were—well, they were on the order of this painting *Tennessee* that I did. They were a little on the, uh, I think Expressionist side. I tried all sorts of experiments. For instance, one I covered the painting entirely with black and then I brought the lights up from the black and I was trying all sorts of experiments. Rather along the lines of Expressionism. And the same time that real—instinct towards realism of mine and towards sculpture was always reasserting itself. Then I—and I met a very attractive girl in the sculpture class, Margaret Connor, and we were married in June and went to Spain. And—

[Audio break]

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, you were—had a—just talked about your time studying painting and then sculpture at

the Pennsylvania Academy and your marriage and then setting off to go to Spain with your—

HENRY STRATER: Oh, yeah. I married at, um—I married Margaret Connor, who was also a student under Charles Grafly and we sailed to Spain on a boat that landed in, first Naples and then Marseilles. And we entered Spain romantic fashion up near the—this independent nation of—there's a little in—Andorra. We crossed over the border in the back of this horse and carriage. It was the only transportation to cross the frontier, the frontier between Spain and France because it had been closed all during World War I, which had lasted from 1914 to 19—through the end of 1918. And this was only, see, this was 1920 and they were just really getting communications between France and Spain getting opened again. And I was in—I was there in Spain nearly a year and saw very few foreigners, only three or four other Americans, including one at the consulate and one American dentist and one American artist who had come over there from Mexico. And those are all—the only Americans that were in Spain. There just weren't any. And very few French and English. I was so busy with my honeymoon that I didn't, I didn't study Spanish very well and I had to get around Spain on very poor Spanish and my French, which was pretty good at that time. I went to Ignacio Zuloaga. I crashed in on him up in northern, in the Basque, the Spanish Basque coast, asked him if he'd take me on as a pupil and he said, no, he didn't take pupils, but he gave me very fine advice as to how to pursue my career. And that—the story of all of that is in that copy, which I gave you, of *American Artist*. I wrote an article about drawing and it's all in there. His method of learning to draw was to get a big role of wrapping paper about 36 to 40 inches wide, a great, enormous role of it, suspend it on a roller above a piece of building board about three feet by five feet. And 'you'd roll that down and thumbtack it, make a life size drawing in 15 minutes, cut that off, throw it on the floor, do another. And it was a wonderful way to learn to draw large. And I did that, I pursued that all at—for six months. And it taught me more about drawing. And those little drawings that are now in the collection of the Museum of Art at Ogunquit and also the Museum at Harvard, the, um, um—

ROBERT BROWN: The Fogg?

HENRY STRATER: —Fogg, of the little girls and those gypsies. They were some small drawings that I did at the end of that period. The big ones I threw away but the, uh—I did a few small charcoal drawings and, and those were among those. Then I did those drawings in the afternoons. I shared a great big studio with a young Spanish painter, um, Carlos Saint de Juan [ph], who I met up in—on Darwa [ph] during the summer. That's a sardine-fishing village. It's been a place where artists go. And I painted up in, on Darwa. Some of those paintings are still extant. That was the summer of 1930. And I met him and I shared his studio, his enormous studio in Madrid with him and a Spanish cartoonist who made his living drawing for the Spanish equivalent of the *Rear* [ph], somewhat like *Playboy* magazine. He also, he also did on the side these beautiful drawings which were known as Goyas [ph]. They were known for—as Goyas and they were, um, beautiful pen and ink drawings. The fellow was a master draftsman. And about a half of these were frankly pornographic and he sold them to private collectors. [Laughs.] They would come up and go through these things. But then he did marvelous ones of bullfights and all and he did a caricature of me which is—I was draw—working on one of these drawings and, unknown to me, he was doing a caricature of me and it's priceless because it's the picture of a young—a young [laughs] Yankee done by a young Spaniard. And it's in, in the Museum of Art of Ogunquit now. It's a pencil drawing and a peach. Then in the mornings I'd work at the Royal Academy and that was free and the director—I got in there as a student simply because this Carlos took me there and said, "This is my—" with much bowing and scraping said, "This is my very great friend Henry Strater who has come all the way from New York in North America to do us the honor of studying with us." The director bowed and, um, I bowed and I said, "Frankly, Carlos, I want to pay the tuition." And he, Carlos said, "Don't mention that in Spanish. The director will be insulted. You are the guest of the king." Well, this [laughs] was the last year, I had that—they kicked out the king. He was the last. He was the one who was devoted to racing cars. [Laughs.] They kicked him out. So I guess I was the only—and before that the Yankees had been very unpopular in Madrid on account of the Spanish American War. They were, uh, [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Why had you gone to, uh, Spain to, uh, study?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I was a great admirer of the work of El Greco. I went primarily—a set period of American artists were great worshipers of El Greco. After I got to Spain I fell in love with the work of Goya and also a Spanish artist named Silverá [ph] and, um, but especially Goya. And I liked Greco, too. I still do. And El Greco is a magnificent painter. But Goya interested me even more and I—the Royal Academy at that time was—the instructor was a man whose work I didn't particularly care for, uh, Seralya [ph]. But Seralya had just had a stroke and he was inactive. He only came in once. So we were free to paint as we'd like. We had this enormous school and models and only 17 pupils. One was a, um, from Manila. And a number from South America, two Mexicans and the remainder from—who were government appointees from different provinces of Spain. So it was a fascinating experience and it got me completely away from the current fads in America and the current fads in Paris. And I think that's another thing that made my work distinctive because, of course, at that time there were not—no other Americans in Spain. And I think that tended to differentiate my paintings from my contemporaries also, that Spanish background, on top of the fact that I worked as a sculptor as well as a painter. And when I went back to Paris—and in 1922 one of my paintings was accepted to the Salon d'Automne.

It was a large painting, about, I'd say, oh, about 50 by 40. It was a nude with a fox terrier. There was a good deal of light and dark, black and white pattern, and there's a nude with a very white skin, black hair, against a background of a gray wall and a dark—piece of dark, a big, dark chair, that oak—big, dark, oak chair she's sitting on. So there was this pattern of light gray wall and dark oak, her black hair, her white skin. And then to add to the black and white pattern I—she had this black and white fox terrier who was underfoot and I painted a black and white fox terrier sitting beside her. And it was quite different from everything that was in the Salon that year because the whole fad was Cézanne. Everyone was doing apples and there were hundreds of paintings of apples done in the manner of Cézanne. My painting was more like—well, more like an early Manet or a—more on that order. Um, and so it was—so it stood out and attracted a lot of attention. I remember at that time Ignacio Zuloaga, my former—well, he—I did not study with him but he laid out this course of drawings for me that was tremendously useful. And I remember he came to that salon that year and he said, "Everywhere I turn I see Cézanne apples, Cézanne apples, Cézanne apples." He said, "What is this? A salon or a cider factory?" [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: And that was about it.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] Well, you were studying with, uh, with Vuillard at the time [inaudible].

HENRY STRATER: I worked in, independently in Paris and I also worked with Vuillard. I didn't work long with him. Maurice Denis. Vuillard at that time was considered a third string painter. And the people underestimated his work. He—the school was run by Maurice Denis, who you probably never heard of. At that time he was the fashionable painter of Paris, Maurice Denis. And Vuillard was simply, simply [laughs] augmenting his income a little by teaching there. But Vuillard was magnificent. He was very old-fashioned in manner. He was very much the old-fashioned French *maitre*. He had very conservative manner and dress but his painting—he was the only one of the Impressionists—he had the Impressionist touch and the Impressionist brushwork but he was the only one of them that dared to use black. The others had all, the others had all given up black. And when they wanted to mix black they'd mix brown and blue or blue and alizarin or something like that, which is, after all, ridiculous. And he taught me how to use black. So I wasn't—didn't work there long but I learned something of value. And I've always used black now. I use black mixed with cadmium yellow to get—you get a beautiful rich green that way you can't get otherwise. I'll use black mixed with red to get a very deep, warm brown-black. I'll even mix black with a pure blue, like cobalt blue, to get a little—to—you can get different—you can get all sorts of tones with black but it's 'the most difficult color to handle, the most difficult pigment to handle at all. It's a, uh—well, to get along with it, then, after—about the time I—after I exhibited the *Nude With the Fox Terrier* in the salon I went down to the Rapallo that next winter. I met Hemingway at Ezra 'Pound's salon and a lot of those others of the, of that group, Joyce and Brancusi and all that group. I worked down in Rapallo that winter in Florence and went—visited all the hill towns of the, um, the school of north Italy, Florence, and Siena, Perugia. And at that time I did a lot of watercolors. The one behind you is one of them. And then I painted, I did a lot of head portraits of my wife and two [inaudible] girls that were staying down there and two of Ernest Hemingway, one full face and the other profile and his, and Hemingway's wife. And I fortunately preserved most of those works because they were small. I was very ruthless in eliminating my big paintings. I—just after I got to Paris from Spain I did a lot of big nudes. I didn't preserve any of those, not even the one that I—went in the salon. But I did preserve a lot of these small ones. Then at that time I did illustrations for Ezra Pound's *Fourteen Cantos*. There was a black and white drawing and this was a limited edition published by William Bird, the Three Mountains Press. He also brought out *Great American Novel* by William Carlos Williams and the first book from Hemingway that was published, which was a short story. Hemingway, by the way, went to Spain the first time on a—he had a map of Madrid which I'd drawn on a paper napkin and telling him where to find a certain boarding house where all the bullfighters stayed in Madrid. And he did and that was the beginning of his Spanish association and the bullfighting thing. I didn't care for bullfights because I never, I've shot a few deer in my early days and some birds but I'm not much of a killer. And I, I didn't—

ROBERT BROWN: During these several years you were working pretty much on your own? What was your—uh, what would you say you learned or what was your relationship with the various writers and others that you have mentioned?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I deliberately—I deliberately chose the company of writers rather than painters because I knew I was at a very crucial, critical stage. The stage when you're just leaving art school, starting to work independently is a very critical stage. And I didn't want to be looking over other artists' shoulders and I didn't want to become a Cézanne imitator or a Picasso imitator. I wanted to do my own work. And by disassociating myself from the other young art students and associating with young and old writers, I was able to maintain a more independent attitude in my own paintings. And I think it paid off. It slowed me down a little on recognition because my work was not following any popular current vogue but in the long run it enabled me to stay with my own interest in painting, which was to work towards a sculpturesque form. I'd—by that time I'd given up the sculptures because you couldn't travel around and do both things at once. And—but I wanted to get

sculpturesque. And then I wanted to get rich, full color. My idea of color has always been like a major chord in music. And I've tried—my best paintings you'll see that in them, a—major chords of—like a full note that is spaced between the reds and when I get a green I try to get a green that is spaced equally between a blue and yellow. So you get a major chord of the green, the, the yellow, and the blue. It's, so it's like the difference between a major chord and a minor chord on the piano. And, um, I feel that so much—well, so much of that work was being done by the imitators of Cézanne and the imitators of these other Impressionists, Renoir, and all was—to me they—I'm a great admirer of those artists, like Cézanne and particularly my favorite was always Matisse. But I preferred major chord color through these—what I would call minor chords.

ROBERT BROWN: The, uh, sculptural forms which are obvious in your paintings—

HENRY STRATER: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —in the, uh '20s, this—

HENRY STRATER: And [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: —this is an outgrowth of your having studied sculpture?

HENRY STRATER: Having done sculpture and my—I'm even—when I paint rocks now, if I'm puzzled by the shape of a rock seen by a distance, I'll leave my easel and walk down and take a look at the rock and see just what shape it is. I come back and, I'm not just painting light and shadow or getting the thing the way a camera gets it. I'm doing the shape of it. I'm, I'm—

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. Well, would you say when you're painting you're trying to, um, to, to be very exact, to distill certain things and, if so, what, what are you trying to—

HENRY STRATER: Well, it's not exactly so much—

ROBERT BROWN: —get at?

HENRY STRATER: — [inaudible] as form and—for instance, if I'm painting—if I'm painting you full-faced, every once in a while I'd turn, I'll walk around and look at the profile to get, so I can get a more full, you know, a full—and I do that. Or if I'm painting a person's profile I turn—I walk around to the side and take a look, so I get the form of it. And then I'm working for color, too. And my, if I work—when my work is all together, why, it shows a great variety because I've always been experimental in nature. And people complain that when I'm mixing drinks or cooking I experiment a little too much. But I do that in painting, too. I've been painting 52-and-a-half years and it can never become dull to me because I'm not repetitious. If I do the same subject four or five times, as I recently have with this theme of the temptation of Adam, where I use a dish or a platter full of apples to replace the conventional old fig leaf of van Eyck and Cranach and those people. And I've done the—or I've been doing these pagan goddesses which are nudes with blue wings and crimson wings and all. But every one of those are different and some of them are high in key, some of them are low in key. And that one over in the next room is entirely different from any other one. I can do the same subject a dozen times and the paintings are entirely different because I've fundamentally got an experimental mind and I like—every painting practically I do is a different experiment. And then there's—although my paintings have the same general style, a kind of a naturalism rather than realism, they vary a great deal because, my Lord, I've changed a great deal in character from the time I was a young iconoclast to now when I'm a more genial great-grandfather. [Laughs.] And my early work was austere because I was a little austere, as illustrated by the fact that I wouldn't put my arm around that beautiful mayor's daughter's neck even when I had a busted leg. [Laughs.] Now, I would—now, I'm possibly a little too free in putting my arms around necks of the opposite sex. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: When I—this might be tied in but, uh, you mentioned, uh, your, your, yours was naturalism rather than realism.

HENRY STRATER: I think—

ROBERT BROWN: Could you elaborate on what you mean by that distinction?

HENRY STRATER: Well, I think realism to a lot of people means the kind of realism you get with color photography and certainly my work has no relation to that. I, uh—it's based—my realism is based on a joy in nature and the way things, the way things look and I try to reproduce that joyful feeling with a blue sky and tree and rocks all give me and try to get the impact of that onto the canvas rather than just a photographic exactness. And a lot of my very realistic paintings are assembled. I mean, I will assemble the elements. In other words, they are constructed rather than reproduced. And I'll introduce elements from here and there and everywhere. That one in there, the *Venus Greeting Adam*, I painted entirely in my studio but I'd go out and look at the ocean and I'd get some girl in a bikini to stand against the ocean and just make little notes on it and get

the relationship between that blue and that shadow color on the flesh. The same way with that—one of the pelicans. I certainly didn't have all of those pelicans posing for me. The red post and the white post in that [inaudible] painting were actually two miles apart. If I feel like moving a mountain around and putting it in a painting—in other words, it's a constructed realism.

ROBERT BROWN: The base being it's a—your, the, uh, your expression of your reaction to something.

HENRY STRATER: Right. And the fact that I'm constructing. I belong this time—you see, in 1923 I did nothing but abstracts for six months and I threw them away afterwards because I considered them just a training. But right at about that place where I was—after working with Vuillard I did abstracts for six months just to train myself in compositional arrangement. And it's been a great benefit to me because I started painting not by drawing the thing but by making a constructed composition. And then I superimposed the drawing on that to—because the—of course, that's the way the old masters used to work, too. You get a composition.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. How soon did you start bringing in intense colors? Fairly early on, too? You started [inaudible]?

HENRY STRATER: Well, no, my colors—my colors started by being conservative, as you see, and just as the years went on I've become a little lighter in spirit and less austere and I've gone more and more for rich, rich, full color. Although some of my early work has that same rich, strong color. I could show you things I did in 1922 that—where I was using these red and blue backgrounds, you know, so things like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm. Well, did you—and in those years, uh, when you were with the writers, Hemingway and Joyce, were there things that you would discuss that had some bearing on your career or on your—on what you were painting?

HENRY STRATER: No. You know how young people are. You discuss everything. [Laughs.] Shoot the breeze. [Laughs.] We were all over the place. And I came back to the US in the winter of 1924-25. I had a studio on West Eighth Street in New York from 1925 through 1933 and back in those days West Eighth Street was not—hadn't been taken over. The Whitney Studio Club was there and very few commercial places. And there were a lot of artists there. Uh, um, Gaston Lachaise was in the same building as myself on the floor above and at that time he did this head of me in 1927, did that oversized head, 19 inches high that now belongs to the museum in Ogunquit. And then there were a lot of—my friend Alec Brook was over at the Whitney Studio Club as secretary and Kuniyoshi was up on 14th Street. But there were quite a gang of us. And a lot of the ones who came to Ogunquit were down and around that area. And I—of course, at that time I was doing mostly figure painting. I did those *Sisters G*, that big double nude that's over at the show in Allentown, PA right now, at this time, October 1971.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it a fairly informal relationship then, whether you were in New York or in Ogunquit?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I was in—

ROBERT BROWN: Wasn't high-pressured or anything?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, I was in New York at that time, uh, 10 months of the year and we'd come up here for a couple of months. And then 1926 I bought a lot up here and built a little house. And from then on we'd stay up here about four months. Then I'd be in New York eight months painting and I did a lot of still life as well as figure painting. And I—my first association was with the Rand Gallery way back, and I showed a few things there and then I showed some things down at the Downtown Gallery. At the time it was down on 13th Street. Edith—when Edith Alpert first started that. Then along about 1930, I got acquainted with Montross, who ran, ran the famous Montross Gallery. That was the first gallery in the United States that ever showed Cézanne. Montross had a beautiful gallery up at 59th just opposite Sherman's horse. [Laughs.] And I had my first New York one-man show there in 1931 and I had a total of six shows there from 1931 through 1940. By that time Montross had died and I made a mistake of not getting another gallery right away. They—after World War II several galleries were interested in my work but I went into a kind of an ivory tower period from the time of World War II on through to about 1958. I, um—a great mistake because I had these six one-man shows in the period of 1931-1940 and become well-established. And, but then I went through this phase of feeling that I would just go ahead and paint and let the public find me. Well, how the hell could the public find you with your work sitting in a storage studio? [Laughs.] Well, I, um—to get back to the period after '33, I went west in the winters for—from '33 through about '38. I went west and painted every winter out in the Verde Valley out in Arizona. That's a high mountain valley just south of Flagstaff and—cattle country. And I painted landscapes out there, a whole series of them known as my westerns. They were mostly 30, 40 paintings and I used buildings to—buildings or—I mean ranch buildings or animals, horses—to give scale to the mountains. I wanted to portray the bigness of these Rocky Mountains. And I think I succeeded in getting a great deal of the space and distance in these canvases. Again, it was form I was trying for but the form of a big country. Then I—in 1938 I stopped going west and I spent about three years living in Ogunquit winter and summer. And after the, um—meanwhile I

divorced my first wife in, oh, about '41 and remarried and divorced a second time about the time of the end of World War II. World War II I was, um, attached to the first service command of the Army and had—I was the liaison office for the Dimholt [ph], uh, for the Army First Service Command for the whole coast of Maine. The reason they picked me for that job was that in the '30s in summer I'd done a great deal of this big game fishing and caught a lot of these big fish and I was—they said, "Well, you are better known along the coast of Maine than anybody." [Laughs.] And I was, I was so well-known along the coast that I could do the job with stepping on less toes than if they'd sent some other officer along to do it.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh. [Laughs] What exactly was the job?

HENRY STRATER: Well, getting the lights out, uh, getting the lights out all along the coast so that the submarines—German subs had us pushed right back on the rocks. They were sinking—they were sinking ships all the way from Key West up to Nova Scotia. They'd just surface out there at night and pick out an American tanker or something against the glow of the, uh, glow of lights along the coast. We had to get the lights out along the whole coast and I got a letter of thanks from the Navy. I think that's the only time that the Navy's ever written a letter of thanks to somebody [laughs] 'who was Army. But they did. They said I did a nice job getting the—and it was, it seemed like a simple job but most of the war industries were located around. And when it came to the dimming the lights on a plane that is, on a plant that's turning out 20-millimeter anti-aircraft shells, why it was a job. And then I had—well, for a thing like that, I'd got hold of these electrical engineers from Washington and I'd holler for help, for them to figure out a way so that the factories could keep on turning out the shells or building the ships and building up the shipyards without lighting up the oceans so that the ships that were already out there of ours were getting sunk. And it was kind of fun going—I'd go out at night in these little boats. We'd go out through the mine, contact minefield into Portland and make a survey of the lights out there. [Laughs.] Out there in the middle of the night. Kind of fun.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was quite an interruption then in your, uh, painting career, I guess?

HENRY STRATER: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: The, the—

HENRY STRATER: —everybody got interrupted. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, sure. [Laughs.]

HENRY STRATER: And then I—after, um—in the '50s I did mostly line drawings. I did drawing. I got on a kick of doing drawings. I did hundreds and hundreds of drawings. I went back to my drawings. That was the first time I've been on a big drawing kit since my studies of Spain. I did hundreds of drawings and, um, finally ended up by having a show of 50 of them in New York and this show was sent around to about a dozen, about a dozen places. Um, let's see, I've got it here, the number. Nine museums and university galleries. And the showing of drawings. And then I picked out 24 of them and had them reproduced in a portfolio down by the Antonson [ph] Press up in Portland. That was a famous old-time press that did all the work for the Chicago Art Institute and the Metropolitan Museum. He was the last of the great hand printers. And he did such a good job on this thing that I could barely tell the difference myself between my own original and—because he made these prints for this portfolio on the identical paper with which I had drawn the original. So that was—and, of course, I was painting during that period also when it was primarily a drawing period. And 1952 I gave up my New York studio and then Cynthia and I found a—spent six months of the year in Maine and six months in Florida. I figured if birds can do it, why can't I? [Laughs.] I—of course, I travel a little heavier than they do, about 40 paintings. And so '52 I got back to—more into my painting. And, of course, I still do drawings and what—I had a hard attack in '66 and I've recovered from it but my painting is freer than ever and I think I'm painting better than ever. The only joker is that my hand is not as steady as it used to be and I can draw as well as ever but I can't do those very controlled line drawings with pen and ink. I'm not quite steady enough for that. But you can't have everything.

ROBERT BROWN: No.

HENRY STRATER: [Laughs.] Now, um—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, it, um, now—is your routine now, um, more relaxed, freer than it's ever been—

HENRY STRATER: Well—

ROBERT BROWN: —here in Ogunquit in the summer and—

HENRY STRATER: I—no—I am—I'm less relaxed. I'm working harder and I don't have as much time for my friends as I used to and they—now that I'm 75 I figure that everything, every hour that the Lord gives me above the three score and—the allotted years of three score and ten is a bonus. It shouldn't be wasted. And I'm

working harder than I've ever worked in my life. More intensely. I count the hours more closely and I'm—for the first time in my life I'm living on a—I schedule everything. And I think simply because I feel very grateful that I'm getting a few years, few more years than the average and I damn well don't want to waste them. And I—for the first time in my life I'm using a calendar for every morning, afternoon, and evening of my life. And, of course, that tends to put me under a little pressure. I'm getting a lot done.

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible].

HENRY STRATER: And including, including some great big paintings as well as some small ones. I'm just getting a lot of work out. The last 14 months I've had seven one-man shows. [Laughs.] Which is quite a lot for a white-haired man of 75 and a half.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you wish—uh, or do you think—do you wish you would be, uh, to live, say, back in New York again?

HENRY STRATER: Oh, God, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Like that?

HENRY STRATER: I—no, I've got a—I've got a good setup here for painting and a good setup down in Florida. I'm in Palm Beach, which people would think there's a place where a person isn't able to work. But there's so many transients, people coming and going in Palm Beach and so many people down there that are on the make, that if you want to mind your own business and work, well, nobody even notices. [Laughs.] You can—my trouble up here is very different. I've lived here [inaudible] since—off and on since 1919 and I was very full of beans when I was younger and active in all kinds of civic things as well as my painting. And people still expect me to carry on some of these things and I just don't have the gas for it anymore. I can't actively paint and actively exhibit and still carry the load on a lot of these civic things. And that's—so I have—I'm under far greater pressure here in Maine than I am down in Florida. Because Florida, I haven't lived there so many years and I can be a—mind my own business and relax.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you say that in, uh, your painting over the years, has it been pretty much steady progress? Has your outlook changed considerably or—

HENRY STRATER: Yes. I, uh, my outlook has changed because I'm not so austere. Um, although essentially I suppose there's no real difference between that painting, *Venus Greeting Adam*, and the one I did in 1922 of the, uh, *Nude With the Fox Terrier*. They both have a slight touch of [laughs] independence, shall we call it?

ROBERT BROWN: Well—[laughs]

HENRY STRATER: Independent attitude. And [laughs] not being too hidebound. The *Nude with the Fox Terrier*, it was simply my response to a black and white pattern. And *Venus Greeting Adam* is an [laughs] amalgamation of Greek and Hebrew mythology, which amuses me. I hope [laughs] no one's offended but—

ROBERT BROWN: Is, is—

HENRY STRATER: —the idea of Venus coming out of the ocean, which was her traditional way, and, a plate full of apples and trying to beat Eve's time with Adam. I think it's an amusing idea.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, but it's no longer exactly the austerity of, of the earlier painting.

HENRY STRATER: No, it isn't. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: It's no longer purely just form and pattern and color.

HENRY STRATER: Sure. This is—because I'm having a little, I'm having a little more fun out of life. Getting a laugh. Some of my artist friends have said, "Henry, you shouldn't put these humorous—you're a serious artist, you know, serious. You're a serious classical painter. Your work is really classical and you shouldn't put these, uh, humorous titles on them." Now, I said, "When, when the day comes that I get so stuffed shirt about my paintings that I have to put stuffed shirt titles on them, [laughs] why—"

ROBERT BROWN: That'll be—

HENRY STRATER: —"I'll be through."

[END OF INTERVIEW]