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**Oral history interview with Ferol Sibley  
Warthen, 1981 September 3**

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ferol Sibley Warthen on September 3, 1981. The interview took place in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Just anything at all.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Ferol Sibley Warthen. This is August—September 3, 1981. Provincetown, Massachusetts. Robert Brown interviewing. You were born in Ohio, or at least raised in Columbus, Ohio?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I was born in South Dakota, in 1890. May 22nd.

ROBERT BROWN: And were you raised out there as well?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I moved from there when I was four years old, to Virginia, down near Petersburg, Virginia, and we lived there until I was 10. Then I moved to Ohio.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family in business, or what were they?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Farmers.

ROBERT BROWN: Farmers.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Farmers, yes. And going to Ohio, we lived near Marysville for a year, and then my father moved to Columbus, Ohio, and that's where I had my early education.

ROBERT BROWN: And even when you were, say, in high school, were you interested in art?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. The art teachers, who were good—good teachers in those days [laughs], were interested in their art classes, and they were interested in me. And it was probably because of their interest that when I finished high school in 19[0]8, I had the scholarship to go for three years to the Columbus Art School, which was an established mid—Ohio art school.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you describe the way they taught art in high school? [00:02:02] What were the courses like?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I think we just had a certain amount of time given in the week. Say, maybe—maybe three-quarters of an hour of time on Fridays or something like that [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: What would you do, some drawing or watercolors?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Drawing or watercolor. I remember doing watercolor, on Chinese rice paper, of flowers—a flower or something, and that's a vague memory, but—

ROBERT BROWN: These teachers—as you recall, your teachers were good teachers?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. They were interested in art, and I think, in vacations, they probably studied painting in some form. I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you begin painting? I mean, in school vacations or weekends, would you be drawing or painting?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, uh, I took painting lessons when I was, oh, just probably 15, maybe younger, of a woman who taught copy-work on Saturday mornings [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Copy-work? Now, what was copy-work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: We took a lithograph and measured off, and did a drawing and then a painting from that lithograph.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find that pretty tedious?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, I think I liked it. [Laughs.] I didn't know any better. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: You were learning to paint in oils?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, that was just watercolor.

ROBERT BROWN: Watercolor.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, watercolor. Yes, and I think, at that time, I did do a head, which was very popular, of the princess of Holland. Holland—queen of Holland. Yeah. So that was an accomplishment.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. And when you went to the art school in Columbus, can you remember what, more or less, the ropes you went through there were, the curriculum? [00:04:04] Did they start you out with very basic—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes, we had basic drawing from cast for the first year, and still life—

ROBERT BROWN: Was that pretty effective, drawing from casts?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, we learned how to measure the—and get the actual results, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: You had to be very precise, did you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, yes. Good training for the eye [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Did you work on anything in pencil?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Charcoal, charcoal, charcoal. Then, probably, the second year, we went to life drawing. Had the nude model, and drew from life. Also, we had watercolor from still life the first year, and we had a design teacher who taught us design of—for—what? For book covers and—what would you call that? Oh, I can't think now, but it's—

ROBERT BROWN: Ornamental design?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, ornamental. Decorative design. And we had clay modeling, which was very good. We had a good teacher. Taught us how to model in clay, and make the armature, and after the head was modeled, to cast it in plaster.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. So you worked from a model, from—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, portrait, heads.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you remember who some of those teachers were? Do you remember some of the names?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, there was a Mr. [John E.] Hussey, who taught drawing and the modeling. [00:06:06] And Alice Schille, who was a well-known watercolor painter, who exhibited in New York and went abroad every year, every summer. She exhibited also in Philadelphia, and she not only did watercolor, she was an oil painter and did portraits and children, and was well-known in Columbus. The Schilles were well-to-do people.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you really enjoy art school?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: What would you do in summers? Continue drawing or painting?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I painted in the summers. Then we always got—I had a girlfriend who was working at the same sort of thing that I was doing, and we would try to get our paintings together for the state fair, which was very important [laughs], and to get prizes at the state fair, which we did. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What did you submit, what sort of things?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, landscape and still life, as I remember. Maybe some figures. Maybe someone had posed for us. I don't know.

ROBERT BROWN: But you continued to work at your art during the summer? I mean, you really were pretty much immersed into that.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, there wasn't anything else to do. We didn't get jobs in the summer at that time [laughs]. [00:08:00]

ROBERT BROWN: The teachers at the Columbus Art School were pretty progressive, or how—as you look back, were they—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. They were—especially Alice Schille, because she had had—she had studied with William Merritt Chase, and was a—

ROBERT BROWN: And Chase was considered a pretty progressive painter at that time, and teacher, was he?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh yes, he was tops. You know. He was prolific, and not a tight painter, but a loose brushwork, that sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was considered the newer way of doing things.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I guess so. Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you, when you were in Columbus, fairly aware of what was going on, say, in Chicago or New York? Were there magazines, or would your teachers talk about—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It was very local. Very local.

ROBERT BROWN: How—were the classes pretty small?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, small classes, sure. Oh, I guess maybe six to 10, something like that, at a year.

ROBERT BROWN: Did most of you think you'd go make your life as an artist, or what were your plans?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: You don't plan too much at that time. You just go along with it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What did your family think you might do?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: They thought, of course, it was good, I guess, to be an artist. Although I think my father would rather—at that time, he didn't say anything, but later on he wanted me to go to the university, do something a little more serious, I think. [00:10:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think he felt art was a rather frivolous activity, or just a pastime?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, not as important, we might say. Something that's not frivolous, no, I don't think so. But they were always pleased, as a father and mother always are, I think. [Laughs.] As usually—at least my family were. They were pleased with what I was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have any brothers and sisters who—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, I was the only child.

ROBERT BROWN: The only child. Were most of you students at the art school women, or were there quite a few men as well?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, we had both boys and girls. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were there three years?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, three years.

ROBERT BROWN: By the last year, what were you doing? They had a progression, didn't they—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, your work was more mature. More, more—well, I don't know. I guess it was better. If you were doing life drawings, you knew more about your drawing, and your drawing was better, or your painting. And so. And then we sent work for competition for the scholarships to the league the last year, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: The school has any connection with the league, or this was just a common thing to do?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think it was just a thing to do, if the students wanted to do that. No, there wasn't any connection, I don't think.

ROBERT BROWN: By your last year, were you also doing oil painting?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. Yes, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you like that medium?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Yes, of course. [00:12:00] Oil was—

ROBERT BROWN: And what about printmaking? Had you—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No printmaking.

ROBERT BROWN: —had any experience?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, no. No print—we didn't know anything about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. And in Columbus, were there any—could you see collections there? Were there museums or private collections that—where you could look at art?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, not much at that time, no. There is a good museum there now in Columbus. But not at that time. I don't know, I guess what we saw, we saw privately, probably.

ROBERT BROWN: But you couldn't, then, have seen very much—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —artwork? So what you learned was through your—what your teachers—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: We were naive, I guess. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Would the teachers have you over, or let you see their work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. There was a teacher, Mr. Folly [ph]. I remember him. Had a studio, and he was considered a professional artist there, and he was teaching oil painting, and he did have us come to his studio. So we had elegant contacts that way. [Laughter.]

ROBERT BROWN: Then you competed to go to the Art Students League?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: You were able to go there, then, were you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, yes. And my girlfriend, who was painting with me at that time, too—Columbus girl—we both went.

ROBERT BROWN: What was her name?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Amalia Ludwig. L-U-D-W-I-G. She was a good painter. And uh, so we had a year together in New York then.

ROBERT BROWN: What year did you go to New York? [00:14:01]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: 1910.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you start out by studying at the league?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Studying life painting with Kenneth Hayes Miller.

ROBERT BROWN: And how long would you have to work on a painting from the model?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think we worked a week on the—oh, now there's something—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Well, we were talking about the Kenneth Hayes Miller life painting class, and you said you had worked on such a painting probably for a week.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: A week, yes. It was a life model, posed with colored draperies, which was unusual for me. I'd never worked that way to—and he wanted the color.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he stressed color?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, he stressed color.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he talk very much, Miller? Would he—in—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, he was not—he was a—a sort of a tight sort of man, I would think, as I remember.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you remember his stressing?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Design, I think. You know, the design—well, I don't know it's—

ROBERT BROWN: Did he want you to paint in great detail, or just fairly general?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, he was for detail. His own work was quite detailed. Do you know Miller's work?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It is, isn't it? And—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: We used to—my girlfriend and I didn't care for his work, but his teaching, we thought, was good. We'd make fun of his rounded, bulbous—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. Those are almost a trademark of his work, aren't they?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. [00:16:02]

ROBERT BROWN: And you—but did he want you to paint, for example, facial expression, and be fairly exact?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, no. No, no, not that way. It was a broader sense in that. And he took us to the Metropolitan Museum. And there, he liked Giorgione, I think, and Titian and those people, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I guess so. [Laughs.] We were learning.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a very authoritarian teacher, or was he quite gentle? Or—you said he was sort of tight.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Well, you—yes, you'd say he was—I don't know what—this is awful. [Laughs.] A gentleman, yes. Not too much of an authority, you know. He didn't—he wasn't an egotist in that way. But I think he had principles in painting that he maintained.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What were some of those things he stressed to you? You said he mentioned—he would emphasize design and color.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, the drawing, the design, and—well, the color. He arranged the drapery on the stools next to the model, so that you had an array of color there, different colors, to put together, and I think that was his interest in getting the student to relate color, I suppose.

ROBERT BROWN: You were forced to it there, weren't you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, we—there it was, so you had to work from that. [00:18:03] And—well. It was in contrast, really, to another teacher there who worked from life, and they were usually done just in browns. Sepia sort of things.

ROBERT BROWN: In paint?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: In paint.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was that teacher, do you know that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Gee, I don't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Bridgman, maybe?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: [Laughs.] I wasn't going to say. Bridgman, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Who wasn't interested in color at all.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, no, just the drawing, you know. No, I didn't want Bridgman.

ROBERT BROWN: No. You wanted the colorist? You liked better.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: True.

ROBERT BROWN: Then, after you'd done, say, your week's painting on a model, would there be a criticism session, a crit?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: As I remember, yes, there was criticism. Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it, as far as you remember, a big step to move from Columbus, from the art school, to the league? Or was the competition from—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, no. I was disappointed. I thought that New York school would be more advanced than it was. We'd had all of that in Columbus, practically. [Laughs.] And so it wasn't a big step, no, but it was continued, and with different people, so it was a good experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you describe some of the other people you studied with? You mentioned, I think, William Merritt Chase. You got to study with him.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah. Yes. He was in the afternoon class on portrait, and I remember an incident when he said—I was painting the side profile, you see, and he said, "Be careful when you paint an ear. [00:20:04] Don't make it look like an oyster." Pass that on. [Laughter.] And it is difficult to paint an ear. Who wants to paint an ear [laughs]?

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a pretty—what was he like as a teacher?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, he was jolly, I guess.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he very demanding?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No. No, he just came because he was a teacher [laughs], I think, and expected people to study, because he was the teacher, and that was it. That was his job.

ROBERT BROWN: Now what did he stress, as you recall? What was his emphasis?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I don't know. I don't really remember.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were at the league, then, for what, a couple of years? You went to courses—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, two years. At the end of the first year, they gave a prize of \$100 for the best painting, and a student of the Miller class got that prize.

ROBERT BROWN: You did? Wow.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: [Laughs.] I was happy.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: And that meant, then, my father and mother were willing to have me go back for another year to the league. And that year—I don't remember, really, very much about, but I think I painted there with Kenneth Hayes Miller in a life class. [00:22:00] And I don't remember about the afternoons, really. I just don't remember. Not too important, I guess. But it was good being in New York City.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, why was that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, because I could see exhibitions, and I could— I, at that time, I think I sent to some exhibitions. I sent to the—I don't know, maybe I have that later on. Later, I—then, when I went back to New York, in 1919 and 1920, I exhibited then, at the National Gallery, some paintings that I had done in the

meantime.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember any—when you were a student there, do you remember any exhibitions or any works, paintings, that you saw that made quite an impression on you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well I think that—yes, I was able to go to the Armory show in 1913. See, I was there then, the second year. And that was a big, important show. I have here—I can read this.

ROBERT BROWN: What is this? Various things you—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: "Return to the Art Students League. An interest in figure composition and groups." Yes, I remember I did some paintings that I had seen in the park, some small paintings, a group—people. [00:24:08] Those I did not in class, but while I was there in New York. Then I had paintings exhibited in the National Academy, fall and spring, and I exhibited in the independent show, and I saw the Armory show. And there was an opportunity to see museums and galleries. The Aldas of Chicago bought an oil painting of mine from the Academy show, and I received a scholarship tuition for the next year, but I didn't go back.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned the show of the independence. What was—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It was independent because you didn't have a jury to pass on your work. Everyone who wanted to pay five dollars, I think, could show. It was that independent.

ROBERT BROWN: Where were these things shown?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm. In the Armory, I think, the big Armory building there then. It was a big show.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know—were you getting to know some more established artists by this time?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I don't remember that I was, really. No. I had friends there in New York, I guess, I knew.

ROBERT BROWN: The Armory show itself, did you go there with friends? And did you go there several times?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: To the, um—[00:26:01]

ROBERT BROWN: To the Armory show.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Armory show, yes. Went several times, and that was really a very important exhibition. And I know some of the boys that went to the art school and the league, although they weren't going to school, really, at the time. They were working for the Armory show, and they were excited about selling paintings there to other people. And it was—that was exciting. Well, it was—I saw the first, of course, Gauguin, a big Gauguin painting, and French paintings, and the first van Gogh, of the shoes. [Laughs.] That was impressive to me. I thought, who would want to paint shoes? But it was an interesting painting. You know, that was very worthwhile, and I always boastfully say now, "Well, I saw the Armory show." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: You should. Would you spend a bit of time looking carefully at the paintings?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I think so. Yes, yes. It was a new thing to us to see some of the French paintings, although And um—I don't think we appreciated them, I think that Cézanne was shown there then, too, and I don't remember too much about that. Which I should have.

ROBERT BROWN: Because ordinarily, in the commercial galleries, you would have seen more conservative work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. Yes, the galleries were showing work that was salable, you know. It was a different thing. They were in business. [00:28:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were there any of those that you particularly—were your particular favorites to go back to of the commercial galleries? Were there ones that you went to fairly frequently to look?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I can't think of the name. Oh, yes. We went to—well, that was part of it, to see everything you could see at that time. And Duveen, I think, was one of the names of a good—you know, and important gallery, and—I can't remember.

ROBERT BROWN: So you didn't—what was it, after 1913, you didn't go back to the league then?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No.



ROBERT BROWN: Did you stay on in—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Columbus.

ROBERT BROWN: —New York for a while? Oh, you went back to Columbus.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Back to Columbus. My father said, "Well, the university is right here. I think you better go to university." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he still thought you ought to have more substantial training [laughs]? What did you think you wanted to study? Did you want to go to university?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, yes, it was all right. It was in the neighborhood, practically, and all I had to do was to walk a mile to get there, to the campus. And I majored in art, because I'd had that work, so I got credits. And I think I got my degree, then, in three years, I think, something like that. Didn't have to—

ROBERT BROWN: So you—at the university, you simply took more painting courses?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, and—well, it was more for teaching.

ROBERT BROWN: Art education?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, education. [00:30:00] That was my degree, B.S. in education.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy studying that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It was all right, sure. Not exciting, but then—

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughs.] What was the emphasis in that? What were they—how did they train you? Did you go into classrooms and train a bit?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh yeah. Oh, well just like any university class, of course.

ROBERT BROWN: No, I meant did you go out in the schools and practice teaching, things like that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. Well, at the end, yes. The last year, I did have to have practice teaching, and I taught in a high school, and I taught design. We made—had a project in a form of needlework, and we made a tray. They had to design the tray, and stretch the canvas or whatever they were working with, and do the needlework, and then we made a raffia frame around it. That was part of the craftwork. So—and in the beginning, before getting into that project, we had to do the brushwork design, you know. Design it. So that was, that was all right.

ROBERT BROWN: And you found you had the patience to teach?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. I liked the girls. It was in—a class in high school, and they were all girls there, and I liked doing that, but I didn't want to continue teaching. I didn't think I knew enough, really, to go ahead with it.

ROBERT BROWN: They expected you to cover a broad spectrum, did they?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, yes. I think when you teach in the high schools, you pretty well have to know a routine. [00:32:05] I wasn't too crazy about it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Well you finally went back to New York, then, in 1920. By then, you were determined to be on your own, freelance. What did you end up doing? I mean, when you went back to New York.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. When I went to New York, I looked in the newspapers, at the ads. [Laughs.] And what I could find was embroidery design. I thought, well, that's related. And so, first, I got a millinery shop, and I designed hat bands, I think, or something of that sort. That didn't last long. And then—oh, I think it was some embroidery design for uh—I can't remember now just what that was, but it continued on a couple of different avenues of experiment, and finally it was with an embroidery house that was doing reproductions, I would call them, of the Paris flats that were bought. They'd buy a big—what they call a flat. It was a sheath, embroidered, or beaded, or machine embroidery. Everything was covered then. No one wore anything in plain colors anymore. [00:34:01] You just had to have everything covered. So this house was um—needed a designer to—not that I did anything original, but I, might say, adapted.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, you would look at pictures, or look at other work, or historical examples?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, we would take this flat garment, and lay it out on a big table, and put paper over it and make rubbings. And that would rub up a pattern, and then we would have to use a perforating machine and go around the outlines, and that would make the design so that we could stamp through that perforated pattern onto plain material. And then that would be turned over to the embroidery people. If they were hand embroiderers, it was put into frames, and if it was for the machine embroidery, it would be given to the machine people. It was an industrial sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Those original things that you traced, they were—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: From France.

ROBERT BROWN: —they were sent in from France.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Also, I heard that the money exchange, at that time, was such that they bought garments, those flats over there, very reasonably, very cheaply, and they reproduced them here in this country. And the dressmakers needed them, because they were made, then, for size 50s or whatever. You know [laughs]. So there was a—it was a business.

ROBERT BROWN: You didn't have—you didn't do original designs, then? [00:36:03] You simply supervised—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: —the procedure you just described?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did you continue—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Commercial work.

ROBERT BROWN: You continued doing that for some years?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Uh yes. I was in that, and there were two women I worked with. They had the business, and it was—you know, it was good. I got probably more money out of it than many people who were working day by day. And so I continued until—well, I was married in '25, and then I continued working in that field until '28—until 1928, and we moved to New Jersey, and I was freelancing [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: During the years, were you able to paint, or were you doing things like that on the side?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Hopefully, I did do some painting, but not as much—weekends, you know. I always thought, oh, well, weekends I'd have plenty of time [laughs]. Not always. But I was able to do some work, and keep up seeing New York.

ROBERT BROWN: Was quite a lot happening in New York in the art world—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —in the '20s?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yeah, sure. You've heard of the Stieglitz Gallery?

ROBERT BROWN: Sure.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I was there, too, but I didn't pay too much attention to what Mr. Stieglitz was talking about. It kind of went over my head. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, he would give lectures in the gallery?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He was always talking. A man who talked all the time. Interesting man, and he certainly had interesting exhibitors there. [00:38:00] Early, early people. He'd had study in Europe, you see. That gave him that basis.

ROBERT BROWN: What, for talking or for selecting? [Laughs.]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, no, no, for his knowledge of the gallery and of the people.

ROBERT BROWN: But his gallery was one of the most interesting at that time?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: His was the only original one then, you know, there, that I knew of.

ROBERT BROWN: The rest were simply—had salable things?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Nothing new to speak of.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, he was the new man, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: And after you went to New Jersey, it was a little more difficult to get into New York?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, yes. That was more isolated country. But I painted there. We had a large house, with quite a big attic when it was daylight. My husband was a painter, and we used that. And uh, so.

ROBERT BROWN: Had he been trained in New York?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Also at the Columbus Art School.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, really?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That was really where he'd studied the most.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you known him from Ohio?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, from Columbus. Yes. He'd been there in the school at the same time that I was, and then later, he went off to war. And then when he came back, he was in New York. I knew him then. [Laughs.] So we were married in 1925, and my only daughter was born in 1928. [00:40:00] And so, after that, life goes on [laughs]. Housekeeping. Just a housewife. How about that? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Well through the '30s, you were pretty much just a housewife, and painting when you could.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your husband continue to paint through the '30s?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, he had had a good position in Philadelphia—and we lived in Philadelphia part-time—with lighting fixture designing. And that was a big thing then. Banks and all of those buildings needed lighting fixtures, as well as homes. He had charge of the designing for this company. Then, on account of the Depression, they went bankrupt, so that let us out. And we lived through those Depression years in our New Jersey home, as best, you know from—without any income, except our small savings, for about three years. And then he got a position in Morristown, New Jersey as a museum illustrator, and then, from there, he went to Washington.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What was a museum illustrator?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: If you've been in a museum where they show dioramas, three-dimensional, he did those.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. It was a company in Morristown that made those?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I think the museum itself wanted them made, and they hired people who could do that work.

ROBERT BROWN: A museum in Morristown itself?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Morristown, New Jersey. [00:42:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Then about when did you go to Washington?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Let me think now. Oh, that must have been—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Nineteen thirty-five, then?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: And your husband, did he have a job with government that at all related to design?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, to his ability. He had painting ability. He was a painter, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So what part of the government did he work for?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, now. Gee, I just can't think.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Department of the Interior, wasn't it?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, that was one of them, probably. Interior Department.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it any connection with the government art projects of the '30s?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Um. Then, during the war, he was with the Museum of—oh, he'd had different—gee, I would have to supplement that.

ROBERT BROWN: But he could work—he worked as an artist then, when he went to Washington?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He worked as an artist, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And for the Department of the Interior and—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. And the hmm—War Department, I think, during the war.

ROBERT BROWN: And yourself, when you went to Washington, what did you—did you spend more time on your artwork, or—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I wouldn't say more. Some time.

ROBERT BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But now it's, what, within a few years after you were there, you started going—studying art again, didn't you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. [00:44:00] You see, living in Washington, I was near the Phillips Gallery [Collection], and when Karl Knaths came down in 1939, to teach in the spring at the Phillips, I had gone to the gallery and saw one of his paintings, and I thought, well, since I'm here, [laughs] I might as well study. And so I went, in '39, I think it was, and at the same time, Angie Myrer, Angele Myrer, who knew Knaths here in Provincetown, came down to Washington to study with him. I thought, my goodness, that's wonderful. Someone had come down to Washington to study with him, you know. Well, it was, and we became very good friends, and have been always since. She's not living now, but the family. And that's the reason I'm here. Because then, in 1949, when we were living out in McLean, Virginia—that was country then, where we were living—my husband had a heart attack and died suddenly. And that was 1949. And that was January, and in November, my daughter was married, and so I sold the property we had there, and my friend Mr. Myrer was in the investment business, so he helped me sort of change things over. [00:46:03] They suggested that I come up here the next year, and I came.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, now, in the interim, did you study with Knaths for several years in Washington?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. It amounted to about—it was six years that I had the course that he'd had in the springtime. He was also there 10 years, so I went in for criticism the other four years, you might say. So I had 10 years there with him.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—under his instruction, did you change your style of painting at all?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I learned a lot. Yes, indeed. He was the best painter yet. [Laughs.] I would say he's the best painter, American painter. You know his book?

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now why do you say he's the best American painter?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, he understood his color. He used color, and he used it according to the laws of color harmony. And he used proportion. His design was done with proportion. He introduced me to the Cubists, and I especially like Juan Gris. And he—his teaching was very analytical, very good.

ROBERT BROWN: He got you to understand why—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Understanding.

ROBERT BROWN: —certain things worked and certain things didn't?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Would he—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Problems.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm, problems. Would he set you to working carefully on a few problems?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He had a marvelous ability to set up a still life in color, arrangement. [00:48:07] And for a week, we would have to work from that still life, in oil painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you find yourself working in a Cubist fashion as you studied with him?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Not as much at the time that I was studying with him as afterwards that I really felt that I needed to go into Cubism and understand it more. Try, anyway. He said, "You can't skip Cubism." [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But when you first were studying with him, you painted sort of realistically, is that right?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, under his direction, it wasn't so realistic, no. It was in color areas—sort of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like as a teacher? Was he—would he hover over you, or would he get you started and then come—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Everybody had their turn, you know, in the class, and the classes were quite large. I would say there were 25 people in the class. Of course, during a whole week, you had his time and—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't we, for a bit now, look at some examples of your work? And we're looking now at a watercolor, 1935. A landscape painting of Charlottesville, Virginia. And did you—in this work, were you trying to be realistic, or were you sort of interpreting what you saw? [00:50:02]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Representational interpretation, probably.

ROBERT BROWN: The landscape is rolling and all. It looks as though you're emphasizing the curves.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, it is. Line, I suppose. Harmony and line, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: Would this be painted directly? You'd be—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Directly, yes, on location.

ROBERT BROWN: On location.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: And that's all it is. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you'd do quite a few of these, and do them pretty quickly, I guess?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. They do not take long, no.

ROBERT BROWN: And another one from the mid-'30s. We're looking at a still life. This is an oil.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That is watercolor on cardboard, and done at my friend Hazel Slaughter's home, in the winter, in January. And we were very happy to have the fruit sent up from Florida, so we put it on a table and looked out at the snow. And it is definitely modeled realism. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's much more detailed than that landscape we just saw.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Well, I had that ability [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. Did you prefer the simpler—painting forms more simply than this? Was this just an—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I don't care much for that. I kept a certain amount of design in it. The black at the background, and the lines, but—well, I'd like to sell it, I think, and—what's your bid? [Laughter.] [00:52:13]

ROBERT BROWN: In this, there's careful attention to arrangement and placement of—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I think so. Sure. Light and dark, which gives space and roundness. It's as round as Kenneth Hayes Miller's paintings. [Laughter.]

ROBERT BROWN: Now, was this a little leftover from his teaching also, the color and the shadows and things of —

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I don't know. No.

ROBERT BROWN: That's something you may have picked up—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's what I've been—

ROBERT BROWN: —elsewhere?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, reading. Maybe Matisse. Who knows [laughs]?

ROBERT BROWN: Because he's someone you would have—you would have been familiar with those French—all those French developments by then, right?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I hope so.

ROBERT BROWN: Then came the beginnings—or studying with Karl Knaths. What we're looking at now is another—is a still life, right?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. That is in '39, when I started with Knaths. Now, I don't know the date on that. It could have been '40, or 1941, maybe.

ROBERT BROWN: But it looks as though you're changing pretty radically from what we've just seen.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Very much so. It's a division of areas and space, and black lines.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Knaths—did he radically—or try, really, to change your style, or did you just find that you took to his teaching?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I—

ROBERT BROWN: Changed accordingly?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —enjoyed his teaching. [00:54:00] It meant a new field of understanding for me. Understanding space relations, without going into modeling. All of that is flat on the surface, and yet I feel that there's a certain amount of space in it.

ROBERT BROWN: It was pretty ambiguous space, isn't it?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. It isn't, it isn't the old Renaissance down the railroad track. And there's an interest there in color opposition.

ROBERT BROWN: Such as what? Such as? What would be an example of that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: The opposition of the orange-red to the lavender, and then the lavender is brought to the front of the painting, and the yellow and the white contrast to the back. That's about all.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was done, what, to divide the canvas? To provide contrast and tension?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it's an innovation, I think, rather—the middle division of the canvas happened to have—which creates a problem. You have to get enough balance in the rest of the painting, so you're not conscious of that middle division. [00:56:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Because otherwise it would just split it—you'd have—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Cut in half.

ROBERT BROWN: —two paintings.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: That would have been taboo in the conventional teaching before that.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Impossible.

ROBERT BROWN: You wouldn't have done that?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, no. No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: But you took to that, and also to the reduction of forms, say, the flowers and the vase and all, to planes.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, that's true.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: —Blanche Lazzell's sequence of lessons.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Speaking of her lessons, the technique was what I was interested in and what she was interested in. The technique was originated by B.J.O. Nordfeldt in 1915, and she had known him, and a group of printmakers at the time, in Provincetown, known as the Provincetown Printmakers. Realized that Nordfeldt's method was adaptable to their use, and Blanche Lazzell not only what might be called perfected it, but used it for her purposes, and that is what I learned from her in the five lessons, you might say, of instruction. First, I did my own sketches and layout of drawing and design for the block, and then transferred that to the wood, and then cut the design and—with a stencil knife. [00:58:03] And then she showed me about painting the color on the block between the lines, and putting the paper on, in register, and that was the method.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Now what had attracted you to it? Had you seen her work at that time? Blanche Lazzell's work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I knew very little about the work, but Angie Myrer had seen—she, having lived here in Provincetown, knew the printmakers who were here, and they had been using several blocks for their color. And in this method, there was only one block used. It was an innovation, and an interesting procedure.

ROBERT BROWN: Was it more interest to you? Would save labor, would it? Not have to make several blocks.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's true, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there certain color effects—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: You could treat it more as a painting, and I had been interested in painting, and so it was probably, for me, a continuation—

ROBERT BROWN: And you could avoid some of the—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —of painting.

ROBERT BROWN: —laboriousness of several blocks and the like.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I don't know I—

ROBERT BROWN: Now, this—we're looking now—this is the first thing you did. Is this after you'd had your instruction with Blanche?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's the first one that I did with instruction. The block and the print are all one. [01:00:00] Without the block, no print.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And they're fairly equivalent, aren't they? They're different, but they're somewhat the same.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. The cut design is exactly the same. The white line is the result of the cutting, which separates the color.

ROBERT BROWN: And this appealed to you, this directness. You could color your block, and then put paper on it, and—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, it was a tech—

ROBERT BROWN: —very quickly—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —a technique that I thought was interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there something, anything especially appealing, in the separation of the colors by the white lines? Did that appeal to you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: After I had seen it accomplished. Yes, I think that's part of the quality of a print, is the use of white, which you don't get in a watercolor painting that is all brushwork without divisions.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, in this one, you uh—it's a recognizable building, the Wharf House, and on the other hand, the foreground and the background are simply a series of colored—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —planes.

ROBERT BROWN: —patterns. Planes.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It's Cubist.

ROBERT BROWN: And this then led to, occasionally, even more abstract work, such as the one we're—right here.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, it's more—*Fish on Table* is more complicated. [01:02:03] And it is, in the manner of the Cubists, somewhat like Braque, and the tabletop in contrast to the landscape space. It's a design, not a realistic type of painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Here, there are very strong diagonals.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Well that's—those lead back to the background space.

ROBERT BROWN: Very easily, very quickly. In those—the ones you were painting in the '40s, before you did these—the paintings, there was not ever as much diagonal movement.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No. No, I didn't know about it.

ROBERT BROWN: Here, you're—it's much more dynamic, isn't it, than—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: —those earlier things?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah.

[END OF TRACK warthe81\_1of1\_reel\_SideA\_r.]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —I guess, the petunia and bottle, with the landscape in color, the orange at the back, and the more blues and greens in the front to contrast. Well, Knaths had used the Ostwald color wheels to teach his painting color, and we used color contrast based on the wheel, and intervals. I don't know where it is. The intervals that were selected, I would say, were used as cords. And in that way, you didn't use the whole—he called this a piano, analogous to a piano keyboard, and you don't play the whole keyboard at once. You make your selections. And you have to make your selections in the color harmony. This was an Ostwald, published in—oh, the Germans published that years ago, so I don't know. I could look it up [laughs]. I didn't think about that.

ROBERT BROWN: Then when you were thinking of the orange to contrast with the green—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: —you would think in terms of that Ostwald color wheel?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right. [00:02:00] Intervals.

ROBERT BROWN: And the same would apply to some of the other—the objects we see in here?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: All of them, I've used that system—system, I guess I would call it. I really don't speak of it too definitely, too much, because most people think your color should come out of the sky or someplace.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm. But you found that the system really—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It's basic, as music is based on structure.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And structure—this had a more solid—there's greater meaning to it than just the colors you saw in nature. It had more meaning for you?



FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: You have to pattern them according to a structure, or a plan, or a harmony, and it works [laughs] sometimes, mostly.

ROBERT BROWN: It works in the sense of what, a good design, a very strong work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, it's a pleasing—to me—a pleasing balance.

ROBERT BROWN: After all, you're not trying to duplicate nature, are you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No. No, it isn't there. It's an interpretation. It's a painting.

ROBERT BROWN: Right. Which is something different from—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It isn't a slice of nature.

ROBERT BROWN: And a color block print is different from a painting.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, yes. It has a quality of the paper, the color, and the wood, and the white line. [00:04:01] It's even called white line print by some people.

ROBERT BROWN: What's another example we could look at to talk about?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, the small square up there is structured in probably a blue painting. The blue pervades. The blue goes through the painting, and the lavenders and the pinks are—well.

ROBERT BROWN: Sort of secondary?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Secondaries, yes, is what you say.

ROBERT BROWN: But then there are also the strong black angles, linear angles.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: The darks, you have to have to hold it, so it isn't anemic.

ROBERT BROWN: I suppose there is a danger, in some of these subtle colors, of their being anemic or weak.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, true. Too pastel. Too—all at the same rate, as Knaths would say. All at the same beat. Which is not good. You have to have a rhythm that has an extra beat to it. No, Knaths was a good teacher. Very good.

ROBERT BROWN: So it's really Knaths's influence which prevailed, in a way. [00:06:00] You learned the technique of this color block print—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. He didn't—

ROBERT BROWN: —from Lazzell, but it was Knaths whose sense of organization and design and emphasis—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right. True.

ROBERT BROWN: It pretty well meshed with your own. I mean, very well, didn't it?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: As he would say, you take from tradition, or the past, and add to it your own, hopefully. [Laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: You have present, in almost all your work, recognizable forms, at one point—one place or another, in them.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. They're all based on nature, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas Knaths sometimes just went utterly—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, he did.

ROBERT BROWN: —unrepresentational.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, it was of his time, his period. The others were going. But he also stayed with the nature that he based on. Maybe it would be only one thing that he would base—any painting that seemed very non-objective, he had a basis for. We didn't always see it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you occasionally, as in this one here, which is called—these curved forms. Have hardly

any reference to—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, I don't think there's any reference there. At least in the first print, there wasn't any reference to nature. And in that second and third print, I added to it, and put a little of that flower line in it. Otherwise, it's all non-objective, not based on nature.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you trying to do in this particular frame, which consists of swirling lines in the center and—[00:08:05]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I was trying to do a non-objective.

ROBERT BROWN: Just for the sake of it? You deliberately said, "I'm not going to make reference to"—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I'm afraid it was for the sake of it. Whether or not it was successful, I don't know. I've never, for the sake of it, tried to do another one [laughs].

[Audio Break.]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —the Boston Independence, and sold to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. They selected *Lighthouse #1*, and it was selected by Mr. Russell Allen. He was a collector at that time, quite well-known. And he presented it to the Boston Fine Arts, and then he also bought *Wharf House #6*, it was, and he presented that. So I have those two in the Boston Fine Arts.

ROBERT BROWN: This would be in the 1950s?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Fifty-two.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. So you had recognition quite early, then, for your—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. It was—those were my first prints after—after I had started. So—then I sent, in 1954, I think it was, to the Congressional Library, which was a juried show, and Werner Drewes, D-R-E-W-E-S, was on the jury. I was selected, and they bought it. [00:10:04] That was for the Congressional Library.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Werner Drewes someone you knew?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He was on the jury, and was knowledgeable in what I was doing. And I sent every year after that, and I never was accepted. So, you see, I was just fortunate [laughs] in that—in that Drewes was on the jury that time, and they bought it. So that gave me a little head start there.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Are you suggesting that sometimes people are ignorant of the technique and—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think so.

ROBERT BROWN: —they're puzzled because it doesn't fall in the mainstream?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. And periodically, ever since, you've been in prominent print shows.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I've been in other print shows, but I never got in the Congressional again. [Laughs.] They're very academic or whatever you might call it. Then, Angie Myrer and I had a joint show at the Smithsonian, courtesy of Jacob Kainen, in 1956, and that was in the department of exhibits at the Smithsonian. I think for two weeks they gave us, and we had, oh, about 10 prints each. And that was in '56.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you beginning, by then—were there certain people who were beginning to collect you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I guess they were—

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know some of the collectors of your work?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, individual people bought. They were not collectors. But there was a woman, Mrs. Nolte [ph], from St. Louis, who came here every summer. [00:12:02] She knew about prints, and so she bought small prints for wedding presents every summer. [Laughs.] It was encouraging, and a help.

ROBERT BROWN: After the '50s, there were other shows at the Smithsonian and elsewhere, weren't there?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Print shows you'd been in.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. The Washington Printmakers, I always showed, and they usually had their show at either the Smithsonian or another private gallery. I can't think of it now.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. What, the Phillips Gallery [Collection]?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No.

ROBERT BROWN: No, a commercial gallery.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: A club. You know, the club on I Street.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Have you gotten—through this, have you gotten to know a number of other printmakers?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, there are not so many. I guess. Well, fortunately, my granddaughter is going to carry on now with it [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: That's good to hear.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: She's, this summer, done a couple of nice-sized prints, and then there are a couple of small ones here that she did before this summer, so she has—she majored in her art at Maryland University. But when they leave college, all the equipment for lithograph and etchings has to be left behind, so this is a good medium to work in.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, you almost carry it with you. [Laughs.] So you think you may have founded a dynasty?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think so.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: [00:14:00] Yeah.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, he came to Columbus, Ohio, in—

ROBERT BROWN: We're going back to your high school.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: High school, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You had a teacher who was—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I took lessons from him that summer. There were watercolor lessons. We went out sketching.

ROBERT BROWN: And what was his name?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Fukawa Jin Basuke. B-A-S-[U]-K-E. He was in Columbus, designing a Japanese village. A bridge, and pools for a park, the Olentangy Amusement Park that we had in North Columbus, Ohio. And the high school teacher knew of him, and so she told me about taking lessons from him, and that was really very interesting. It was the first time I used a big watercolor brush, and areas of color in the misty Japanese method that he was using. So, it was interesting, and good for me, too, I think, that I'd had that.

ROBERT BROWN: Gosh, that pulls you away from doing precise or detailed work.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, that's true.

ROBERT BROWN: Because they worked in a very large—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, and he did—

ROBERT BROWN: —way.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He loved doing a little Japanese house in the mist, you know, and on the water, and trees. And very free, and very lovely grays. I don't have any of his paintings anymore. They've have all—I don't know, disappeared.

ROBERT BROWN: You took to that, and you did quite well, did you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, it was good. It was a good influence. It was part of me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe these sort of early experiences enabled you to move into new things from time to time.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Maybe.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, as with Knaths, as with the—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I hadn't thought of that. [00:16:00]

ROBERT BROWN: —block printing, as with—well, when you went to the Art Students League, you said that you and your friend learned a lot, and Miller was a good teacher, but you, at the same time, avoided adopting, as so many of his students did, adopting his figural style.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's true.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe you had, already, pretty early on, a—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, we were searching, really looking, searching, for something.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had something under your belt already, didn't you? You—the freedom that you just mentioned, this teacher.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Possibly. Possibly. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: So you'd pick and choose? You wouldn't swallow a whole—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No, I think I've always been critical. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Including of your teachers, if necessary?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: [Laughs.] I guess so. Yes. Not that it is always so good, but I don't know. It's—

ROBERT BROWN: You perhaps avoided, to an extent, the problem a lot of art students, who, for a while at least, look a great deal like—their work looks a lot like the work of their teachers.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You avoided that for some reason.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. I remember, back in New York City, there was Jerome Myers, who was a painter, always painted children with an organ grinder. And my husband said, "Why do you always paint the same thing?" "Well," he said, "they always sell."

ROBERT BROWN: He said that sadly? Yeah.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: He always painted little children with organ grinders, and they were nice little paintings, and you enjoyed seeing them, and I imagine each one was individually a reliable painting. People were not cheated when they got that, but they got a painting just like the one that he'd always done. [00:18:02] And they always sold, I guess. But a lot of painters have repeated, and repeated, and repeated. Well, maybe they needed—needed to do that to get the income. Well, probably, fortunately, I have not been wealthy, and I've only had enough money to get along on. And so I have painted these prints I've done because I wanted to do them. Fortunately, I have sold some, because [laughs] I didn't object to a little income. And so, I mean, I really did want to do what I've done.

ROBERT BROWN: So each one you've done, each new one, has been a search, or an exploration of something new?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, and trying to put into work what I have acquired in some kind of background. However, I could have done better, I'm sure. Maybe if I had tried harder or something. Sometimes I work pretty diligently.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find it went better when you did work diligently? [Laughs.] [00:20:00]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Sure. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Steadily? Or are you the sort that could step away from it for a while and then come back?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No. Keep working. No—I don't know. There are always interruptions, of course, the way I live here. But I wouldn't want to live up in Truro, in the woods, all by myself. [Laughs.] I guess I enjoy people coming in too much. Telling me their woes.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Well, you seem to have kept a pretty sunny disposition.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I don't know. I guess I've been pretty severe in my life, I don't know. [Laughs.] Oh, I don't know. Things get better and better. And I have a great deal to be thankful for. Very—yes, it's been a wonderful life, really, here at 91 [laughs]. I wish I remembered more, and I wish I had written diaries or something, but I always thought, well, tomorrow is another day, and I'll remember today. [Laughs.] You don't. New York was really wonderful back in 1910 and '14, '10-13. Really. We walked everywhere. And in the '20s, I did, too, when I was there. Mm. I guess I was a workaholic, too. [00:22:00] If there was work to be done at the embroidery shop, and we had deadlines, I'd stay, get it done. I don't know. You hear so many complaints nowadays that people don't work. But—

ROBERT BROWN: And yet you have plenty of time, or you took the time, to go look at what was showing?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, not—I could have spent more time looking, I suppose.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy looking? You did, didn't you?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yes, sure. [Laughs.] You know, going to the galleries. The galleries are wonderful now, more than they used to be, I guess. I don't know. No, we went to the Guggenheim. That was a big, new way of showing things and paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you think of the—when the Guggenheim collection was first shown? You would have seen Kandinsky and—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Well, it wasn't something I wanted to do and follow, but it was good to see. And well, I just never did Kandinskys. [Laughs.] Although I think I missed the boat.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were always curious about new things as it came along?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, yeah, sure, and still am. I have a pile of books here that I got this year. And then, hmm—and then when I'd go to the Philadelphia Museum [laughs]. I want to do one of those someday. [00:24:08] Homage to Delaunay.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is your rough sketch?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, from the—

ROBERT BROWN: [Inaudible.]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —exhibition in the museum. So I've had a lot of enjoyment on the—in the time allotted.

ROBERT BROWN: This would lend itself—this sort of thing would lend itself quite well to the color block.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, very much so [laughs]. Or maybe that will be my next one, but as I say, it's kind of following along. It isn't original. She was original, you know—or he, too. Here are these. Aren't they good? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Now, why is it we like seeing those?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you tell me.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: [Laughs.] But we do.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Well, what about the colors?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: It's the color and—

ROBERT BROWN: The shapes.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: And the courage that it takes to do something like that, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Well the colors are not unlike your colors.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: No. No, they're not.

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly that system you talked about earlier is—there must be something like that in what lies behind these.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think so. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, that system. After a while, it sort of was embedded in you, wasn't it, so you didn't have to—you didn't deliberately calculate always?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's true, yeah. [00:26:01] But I relied a good deal on my notes sometimes, I guess. I don't know. Do it without being too obvious. [Laughs.] But you know, people enjoy coming in and seeing how these are done.

ROBERT BROWN: And you like explaining the technique?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I don't mind. Yeah, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: Or you said you like the technique.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah, I do. So, I haven't explained it to you yet, have I?

ROBERT BROWN: Not in any great detail.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: [Laughs.] Well, you take a pine block, and make a drawing. Get the drawing on the block. And on the line—no, you get your pattern. On the line, you take a—these are almost an X-Acto knife, but a little bit better. This is, I think, a Japanese knife. You cut it on the slant toward you. Turn the block, and cut against that line on the slant. See, that cuts out that little groove that outlines all your pattern. That's what gives you the white line. And then you—we'll pretend this is color. [00:28:01] Put the color on the block, with the brush, and put the paper over it and rub it with a spoon. And go—continue on until it's finished. That's all it is. Get a block.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Why do you use the soft wood, the pine, which absorbs some of the color?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm. That's the reason that people will see these blocks and some of them say, "I like them better than the print." Because the color does give a tonality to it that the print doesn't have. But the print, I say, has the white line.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. The white line has a liveliness to it that you don't see in the pine block.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: You wouldn't use hardwood? You use the porous pine wood.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I do, but Blanche Lazzell used a block that she got down in West Virginia. Mm. I've forgotten what she called it, but it's sort of a hardwood. Oh, dear. I don't know—I'm going to have something. Oh, dear. I'm awkward, to say the least. I was getting something that is not available. [Laughs.] So hard, and so heavy, but she used it, and she used to complain about her thumb being—[laughs]—hurting from cutting. [00:30:04] It's hard to cut through.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the effect would be a little different, too, wouldn't it, in the print?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think so. I think so. That's the reason that there's a different quality in her print there on that paper.

ROBERT BROWN: Did she use the same mulberry paper that you used?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, I think so. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, there's not the softness. The colors, of course, stayed up near the surface of this hardwood than they do in your pine.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Then, of course, she and Agnes Weinrich, who had been in Paris, got some watercolors that were manufactured over there, which are a little different from our American watercolor that we get now. It has a little body to it, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: And that would sit on top of the wood, to an extent, wouldn't it?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: That's right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think so. I think you're right about that.

ROBERT BROWN: But you've never sought to duplicate or become very close to what she did?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mine are nothing like hers. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: No. And after all, you were a mature artist by the time you learned the technique from her.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, yes. I'd had all of that behind me. As you say, mature.

ROBERT BROWN: You simply went to learn the technique, briefly, from her, and then you were on your way.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yeah. If I'd been smart, I'd done some more like hers, probably, not so complicated [laughs]. However, I was determined to do my own. You know. So that's how it came out. [00:32:00] I was there

ROBERT BROWN: I put it on.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: —working commercially, you see, and not painting, as I thought that I would be painting. And that time went by, as it does. Time goes by [laughs] fast sometimes. So I didn't accomplish anything but a work job. I was interested enough in that commercial work to keep with it, because every day was different, and it was somewhat allied to the embroidery that was used on everything in those days in New York. Everything was covered. You wouldn't realize how everything is covered with embroidery. And labor was cheap in France, you know, and they were the people who knew how to do that.

ROBERT BROWN: But nevertheless, all that work—you lost a number of years, you're saying.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: I think so, yeah. But I earned my living, and I paid for my expenses, and—

ROBERT BROWN: But there really weren't all that many outlets where you could sell your work, if you had spent all of your time painting. There were some galleries, weren't there, but—

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Well, I think I could have sold some. Yes. Uh, what was it here? I think I said, in 19—hmm, can't see it now. [00:34:00] I did sell something in New York in that period of 1912, at the academy.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you had mentioned that.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Oh, I did say that.

ROBERT BROWN: In the '20s or '30s, did you ever take things to the art galleries to be sold?

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Uh, I don't think so. No.

ROBERT BROWN: And you'd had mentioned earlier that many of the commercial galleries were rather conservative.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Mm. Yes, they were. No, I don't see it.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: —we're talking about the *Fish on Table*.

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes, print that was sent from Philadelphia Print Club, I think—yeah. It was in a traveling show to Japan. And [Un'ichi] Hiratsuka, a Japanese printmaker, was still living in Japan at the time, and he and some other Japanese gathered together and looked at it, and wondered how it was done, because they don't do that in Japan.

ROBERT BROWN: [Laughter.] So it is a technique that's not too well-known? [00:36:01]

FEROL SIBLEY WARTHEN: Yes. Sure, sure. But Hiratsuka has come to Washington, and I've known him for several years now. So, he's a very, very good printmaker. Japanese. In the—his prints are black-and-white. He doesn't do color, or he did—he attempted color one time, I think, or did color one time, but doesn't pursue it. So no, he's a very good printmaker, and a good friend of mine, and his daughter also. That's all.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]