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Oral history interview with Don Freeman, 1965 June 4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Don Freeman on June 4, 1965. The interview was conducted at Don Freeman's home in Santa Barbara, California by Betty Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Hoag on June the 4th, 1965, interviewing the artist, Don Freeman, that's spelled D-O-N-F-R-E-E-M-A-N, in his home in Santa Barbara. Mr. Freeman is an illustrator and an easel artist and he has a very unusual talent with chalk powder and is very busy with these all the time I understand. Mr. Freeman, I wanted to ask you first of all if you use the whole Donald and the middle initial at all?

DON FREEMAN: No, just Don.

BETTY HOAG: And before we talk about your work on the project in New York, would you tell me when and where you were born? And where you were educated and something about yourself?

DON FREEMAN: I was born in San Diego, California, and I lived there with a guardian until I was 11 years old and then I went to school in St. Louis, Missouri --

BETTY HOAG: Excuse me, would you like to tell me when you were born?

DON FREEMAN: 1908. And August 11, if you want that. So, I went to St. Louis to a private school called the Prineipia, P-R-I-N-E-I-P-I-A, and I went through high school and then I went to New York. And I think I arrived in New York 2, 3 days before the stock market crash. I've always had that on my mind, er, you know, had a guilt complex.

BETTY HOAG: 1929.

DON FREEMAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Why did Prineipia have any particular art courses? They don't specialize at all.

DON FREEMAN: Well, they did in that time, I don't know, I think they still do, good teachers. But I was very lucky to have Kathryn Cherry, K-A-T-H-R-Y-N Cherry, C-H-E-R-R-Y..

BETTY HOAG: Is she Herman Cherry's wife?

DON FREEMAN: No.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, no relation?

DON FREEMAN: She was a marvelous painter and she's not living now. I was just lucky to have her. I think it was just the last year of high school that I specialized in art.

BETTY HOAG: It gave you a good academic basis I suppose, (inaudible).

DON FREEMAN: Yes, she got me interested in painting, and I was just extremely fortunate.

BETTY HOAG: Did you know that you wanted art at that time?

DON FREEMAN: Oh yes.

BETTY HOAG: Always did?

DON FREEMAN: Always, I was stuck with art. I couldn't imagine doing anything else. I was painting when I was in San Diego in Oils, I think I used to do more oils when I was a kid.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? Your guardian must have been a person who was very understanding to see that you had them as a little boy.

DON FREEMAN: Yes, except she was a little disappointed. She tried out everything on me, violin and piano and none of these things worked and all the time I was doing cartoons and she didn't think so much of cartoons but when I met an art teacher named Mrs. Hobberman, she kind of encouraged me to paint on Saturdays and things

like that. My guardian just went along with it, she didn't know much about painting but Miss Hobberman and I always remembered.

BETTY HOAG: Was she a private teacher?

DON FREEMAN: Well she was just in the public schools but she said "wouldn't you like to go painting on Saturdays?" and so on. I said yes, so we'd go out to La Jolla or someplace like that. So I like to think of her as being the one who sort of encouraged me the most.

BETTY HOAG: So you arrived in the middle of the stock market crash in New York and you were expecting to find work at that time.

DON FREEMAN: Oh I have to tell you this, that going back to answer that question, I have to go back now to the fact that my guardian wanted me to be an opera singer and a violinist and all these very high, mighty things and I just wanted to be a cartoonist and I also wanted to play a horn. My father gave me a horn when I was quite young and I used to sit and play with the records, play to the records and some of the best bands of the time like Paul Whiteman and the Minstrels Five and he had a very strong weakness for jazz and it took – this is what really happened, the best thing that happened for me was I started playing a jazz trumpet so that took me to New York as a professional dance band. I played these one night stands.

BETTY HOAG: With any particular orchestra?

DON FREEMAN: No, just one date would lead to another. I say it that way, one-night stands, the truth is they could only stand me one night. No, I just worked away, worked my way across so I arrived in New York. I knew I wanted to study art at the Art Students League because John Sloan was teaching there and I liked his work so much and I'd seen it in San Diego years before. They had one painting of his at that time, then I looked at his prints and I read the "Art Spirit" and he was mentioned so many times in "Art Spirit" by Robert Henri, that's the man I wanted to study with.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, he was teaching there, too?

DON FREEMAN: At the Art Students League, yes. So I went right to the Art Students League and signed up for his class and I studied there almost every day of the week except when I had to go out and get some work, jazz, you know, in advance. I would have to go out and get jobs on Broadway, the musicians used to have to hang around the union headquarters there --

BETTY HOAG: Oh I see, you had to have your work through the union.

DON FREEMAN: Yes and they picked you up because of your unbooked look you know. If you were not booked up, you really showed it so they'd give you a job --

BETTY HOAG: Because they wanted to help you because they could get you for less.

DON FREEMAN: I think they could get me for less, but that kept me busy going to the League and then going around the union on the Broadway. We used to pace up and down the sidewalk there with you know, a case or a horn case.

BETTY HOAG: Did you get into John Sloan's class?

DON FREEMAN: I'll say I did. That was the greatest experience I think any artist could have and I got to know him as --

BETTY HOAG: I dint know him.

DON FREEMAN: You didn't know who he was?

BETTY HOAG: I didn't realize who he was, I knew he was a great artist.

DON FREEMAN: Oh, to me he was marvelous. Not that I used everything, I wish I did and I had but he was so stimulating and really encouraging about my drawing New York life because that's what I was interested in the minute I arrived in New York I started sketching, painting. Then I made drawings of the shows, theatres on Broadway.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, that would be a wonderful experience.

DON FREEMAN: I forgot to mention that in San Diego I used to go to the theatre with my father and that really connected that interest and so when I had some time off, had any extra cash, I would go into the theatre and

standing room only and watch these shows and I'd make sketches and after awhile I had quite a few impressions on paper, pen and ink drawings and different characters. And then one night I did a job at an Italian wedding and playing in the orchestra there and I left about midnight and I was so busy sketching in the subway that I forgot all about my horn and I got off at Sheradon Square and I realized I was without my horn and I swung around you know and the door slammed in my face couldn't get anyone to notice this horn on the floor. I don't know what they would have done anyhow but when I saw that subway carry my horn which was my living, but I think it was that night that I really decided I was going to stick to drawing now, I'm just going to forget it, so I took the drawings to the *Herald Tribune*, *New York Herald Tribune* drama department, they used to have big section there on the theatre and gradually my things started appearing. Then we got to the depression very fast.

BETTY HOAG: Excuse me just a minute, I want to kind of finish this up. Were these illustrations of the shows in New York that you were doing that accompanies the script in the newspapers?

DON FREEMAN: Well, they were my impressions of the shows and I started going backstage and sketching people in their dressing rooms or just activity of backstage life.

BETTY HOAG: Did you have any classes with Stuart Davis?

DON FREEMAN: No. He was very important during the WPA.

BETTY HOAG: One of the artists told me that he didn't have many people in his class, that she remembers his classes were always very scampy. I wonder if you knew why.

DON FREEMAN: I studied also with Harry Wickey who was very important in my life and is.

BETTY HOAG: How do you spell that?

DON FREEMAN: W-I-C-K-E-Y. A great etcher and sculptor.

BETTY HOAG: I want to tell the tape that Mrs. Freeman was also studying at the Arts Students League, I presume at this time, wasn't she?

DON FREEMAN: No, I met her in California but she came as soon as I started going someplace with this newspaper work and then I demanded that she come back to New York so we were married.

BETTY HOAG: She was telling me about working (inaudible).

DON FREEMAN: Who else was in the class besides Jackson Pollock and Manuel Tolegian? This cartoonist, marvelous cartoonist …?

BETTY HOAG: (inaudible)

DON FREEMAN: Oh, Whitney Darrel Jr.

BETTY HOAG: -- and she mentioned someone else, didn't she? I didn't write that down either.

DON FREEMAN: Well, she studied with John Sloan also and we lived on 14th Street, right off 7th Avenue.

BETTY HOAG: What was her name?

DON FREEMAN: Lydia Cooley, C-O-O-L-E-Y. And we were just living it up even though it was difficult in those days and I didn't make very much money out of this newspaper work but I was doing things for magazines, theatre lithographs in magazines and posters for shows. And but it was very difficult and then that was of course, the depression and then WPA came along. I signed up for WPA, however you did it, I don't know how you did it.

BETTY HOAG: Well, how did you first feel about it, do you know?

DON FREEMAN: Oh, I don't remember but I didn't have any job. Well, actually I had always been in the depression and it was a matter of everybody coming down to my level so I wasn't really too aware because I was lucky to have some way of earning a living. But it was just such a bare living, we just barely made it, we, so I thought I shouldn't do anything because people were so much worse off than we were so then things got pretty tough and so I put in for it I suppose, I don't remember how it worked out. Somebody said well why don't you take on this.

BETTY HOAG: You don't remember what year it was?

DON FREEMAN: I really don't, '32, '33.

BETTY HOAG: ’33 or ’34, people went on it at different times. Were you right on the easel project?

DON FREEMAN: No, graphic.

BETTY HOAG: Graphic.

DON FREEMAN: I did lithographs. I must have done 4 or 5, I wasn’t on very long, I think I was on just about 2 or 3 months and --

BETTY HOAG: Well, then you didn’t do one a week or one a month or something, you mean a total of only 3 or 4.

DON FREEMAN: 3 or 4 lithographs?

BETTY HOAG: Lithographs, yes.

DON FREEMAN: I was very prolific then, I don’t know how many actually I did but people say they see these prints of mine in government offices here and there, even out in California, in Sacramento. Somebody said they saw it, so that pleases me very much to think that they got around.

BETTY HOAG: (inaudible)

DON FREEMAN: No, I might have one but I wish I had prints. Just the painting, you see here, called “Freedom of the Press,” this subway scene. I made a lithograph of this for WPA.

BETTY HOAG: You painted the picture sometime before that or just about that time?

DON FREEMAN: About that time.

BETTY HOAG: It reminds me a little of Reginald Marsh, too, in the treatment and color. Did you know of him at all? Was he studying there or teaching?

DON FREEMAN: Yes, he was teaching at the League.

BETTY HOAG: Did you have any classes with him?

DON FREEMAN: No, I was mostly Sloan.

BETTY HOAG: You didn’t put your horn in.

DON FREEMAN: No.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, excuse me, did you ever get that horn back?

DON FREEMAN: Oh I had to get another horn later on.

BETTY HOAG: It wasn’t returned?

DON FREEMAN: Oh never, no. Somebody else took up my career and I play a horn now just for kicks but I never played another job. This Graphics project was so interesting to me that I got so excited about the possibilities with art being shown, artist’s work being shown everyplace that it occurred to me once that pictures should be in the subway and everybody lit up when I started talking about this so they almost put me in charge of this project but it became so political and I was so busy drawing and painting and I didn’t know what to do with it, I just wanted to see it done and I didn’t have than organizational talent, you know, but it was called Print for the People or something like that, and I had this visualized in all the subways you know. I thought it was going to happen there for awhile.

BETTY HOAG: Well it would have been a great idea.

DON FREEMAN: And ever painting the subway you know. I don’t know, it’s very cold down there.

BETTY HOAG: Incidentally, in Italy they have paintings in the public buses, which I think is interesting. Apparently original paintings just put up for people’s enjoyment, you know where the back seat is by the windows, and you get to watching for these things.

DON FREEMAN: I know. I’d like to see it.

BETTY HOAG: Then no one ever did anything with this then.

DON FREEMAN: As far as I know, no.

BETTY HOAG: And did you go the WPA headquarter people to try to get them to do it?

DON FREEMAN: Oh we had meetings and I was suppose to be in charge of this project and I just said I don't know how to carry on with this thing. It got so involved with going to Washington and things like that but I just didn't have what it took to carry through, I was just glad to have had this idea to listen to but as I say, I got off WPA as soon as I could, it seems I was able to earn a little better living as soon as I got out. But then, Hallie Flannigan of the theatre WPA wanted me to do some things for the WPA Theatre magazine so I was always in the theatre, I was as involved in the theatre world as I was in the art, so I did these drawings of, cartoons for the theatre magazine for awhile, just for a little while. I thought I'd mention that.

BETTY HOAG: Oh definitely. What was the name of that magazine?

DON FREEMAN: WPA – I don't know what it was called. A lot of interesting happened there. Well, of course, in the theatre it was just marvelous, Orson Welles…

BETTY HOAG: Oh, was he on the project, the theatre group?

DON FREEMAN: Didn't he do Hamlet?

BETTY HOAG: I don't know anything about the theatre aspect in doing that.

DON FREEMAN: What was it called, "Living Newspaper," oh, marvelous things in those days, you just knew it was a renaissance of the theatre.

BETTY HOAG: I just haven't interviewed any of the people on it although I'm supposed to. The interviews referred to, it said it was a wonderful, wonderful period, especially here in Los Angeles. It seemed like 110 theatre groups which is more than we have now. Were these pen and ink drawings that were reproduced in the magazine?

DON FREEMAN: No, they were actually done on a lithograph machine, on a Mezzotint and that got me interested in making lithographs, original lithographs. I drew right on the zinc plates that heretofore had just used type to print photographs from and I developed this idea of making drawings on these lithograph plates and I started a magazine of my own.

BETTY HOAG: You did? Oh, for goodness sakes, what was the name of it?

DON FREEMAN: It was called *Newsstand* [*Don Freeman's Newsstand*]. And I just drew anything I wanted, no editor to tell me what to do or what I couldn't do and I just got a subscription list going and it just kept getting better and better.

BETTY HOAG: How long did you have this?

DON FREEMAN: Oh, about 3 or 4 years.

BETTY HOAG: I hope you have copies, we would like to microfilm them.

DON FREEMAN: Oh, you can't get away, you can't get away without my giving you some.

BETTY HOAG: Wonderful. You mentioned feeling the freedom of doing what you wanted to. Had there been any of the Federal Projects in graphics division?

DON FREEMAN: No, absolutely not, no.

BETTY HOAG: Apparently there wasn't any place, that's the wonderful thing. I have artists tell me from different areas that they weren't told what to do.

DON FREEMAN: No I can't remember any suggestions even on what to do.

BETTY HOAG: Did you still work, ah, do you still work (inaudible).

DON FREEMAN: Once in a while.

BETTY HOAG: (Inaudible) Ah, just before we leave the project I wanted to ask you about how many people were on the graphics division in New York, do you remember? Did you ever see any of the other ones? Did you work at home?

DON FREEMAN: I worked at home. I'd take a stone and work at it at home or work on it and then when I'd finish

I'd take it to a printer and the printer – he's a very well known painter now, and I can't think of his name. When I heard you were coming I was trying to think who is that fellow, because he's a very well known painter now. He was a lithograph printer.

BETTY HOAG: And did they supply your stone and all of your material, do you remember?

DON FREEMAN: I'm sure they did. Yes, they had a number of stones there.

BETTY HOAG: Some of the artists in Los Angeles told me that at that time the depression was so bad that they'd never had owned a stone and would have had no chance to even learn how to do the work if they hadn't provided them.

DON FREEMAN: No, you didn't own it at all, it just rubbed off you know and then the next person would get it and I remember during the fair, the World's fair, the WPA had a display of the print and they had artists making prints, lithographs and showing the public how a lithograph was made, drawn, etched, printed.

BETTY HOAG: That was in 1939, '39?

DON FREEMAN: I imagine so.

BETTY HOAG: Did you do that at all, demonstrations?

DON FREEMAN: Yes I did.

BETTY HOAG: Was that for the project?

DON FREEMAN: Yes!

BETTY HOAG: Well that leads into a question that I usually ask at the end of the tape and I think it's time to ask you. Do you think that the work done on the project affected work that's being done today and obviously with educating the public, for one thing, at that time that you were having demonstrations, classes?

DON FREEMAN: Oh yes, I think it not only saved the day for the artists and individually they were able to do what they wanted to do, although a lot of these artists who were on the program there. And their work has changed now and certainly you have to start with something so you have to change and so I think that besides keeping the country together from exploding, to think that art was nourished during the worst time.

BETTY HOAG: Well did you ever teach any of the other artists yourself to do plates?

DON FREEMAN: Oh, yes.

BETTY HOAG: Did you?

DON FREEMAN: Oh, yes, it wasn't a secret.

BETTY HOAG: That was important right there. That was an important thing in itself that you were able to pass on your experience to other people on the project.

DON FREEMAN: That's right. Oh yes, there were a few artists who were interested but I haven't seen anybody do much work. Today I draw in plastic on acetate, and it's the same surface, the same very sensitive surface but it's still lithograph…

BETTY HOAG: Hm-m, does it give a texture of any kind?

DON FREEMAN: Exactly you can hardly tell it from the stone. There's nothing like stone.

BETTY HOAG: To work or for printing, which?

DON FREEMAN: To work on and to print.

BETTY HOAG: I suppose the acetate is less expensive.

DON FREEMAN: That's it, it's so easy to handle and you can see straight through the acetate, you have a drawing or print and you want to do it in color you can put this acetate over the color drawing and transfer your…

BETTY HOAG: You mean you'd be using multiple colors.

DON FREEMAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: Oh, that would be a great advantage.

DON FREEMAN: 5 or 6 acetate plates.

BETTY HOAG: Does that make them come out more precise because you're able to …

DON FREEMAN: To register, yes. There's never been this where you could see through your register to register each color so it's so simple.

BETTY HOAG: Do many people work in that? I never heard of it before.

DON FREEMAN: I haven't seen very many except in the children's books that I'm doing and it's cut down the cost of the publisher, making photographs, reproductions, about 6 or 7 artists that I know of are using this technique.

BETTY HOAG: How did you happen to get into illustrating books and are they all children's books? Because I didn't know that you had been…

DON FREEMAN: Well, just now 12 years. I used to illustrate books in New York, a few books and --

BETTY HOAG: Do you want to give me the names of any of them?

DON FREEMAN: Well, I did *The Human Comedy* for William Soroyan.

BETTY HOAG: Oh you did!

DON FREEMAN: And it's very interesting, there should be a Manuel Tolegian tells you to come up the same _____ went up it was actually Manuel Tolegian who introduced me to William Soroyan.

BETTY HOAG: For goodness sakes, and that was in the theatre probably too, wasn't it?

DON FREEMAN: Yes, so I've illustrated 3 of Soroyan's books. *My Name's Aam* is another one I've illustrated.

BETTY HOAG: Did you do the jacket for the collection of short stories, *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*?

DON FREEMAN: No.

BETTY HOAG: I saw that when it came out, a beautiful book, it has gold metal of some kind and kind of black allure and I think it's the most interesting book binding of a modern book that I've ever seen.

DON FREEMAN: (inaudible) I think that was probably 2 or 3 years.

BETTY HOAG: (inaudible) you probably didn't know him till later. And what about the children's books?

DON FREEMAN: What about them?

BETTY HOAG: Do you remember the names of them?

DON FREEMAN: Oh, I remember them but you don't want the names of these books.

BETTY HOAG: Well, the publisher.

DON FREEMAN: Oh, Barton Press, my wife, Lydia and I started doing these books together. She'd help me write and I'd illustrate, and we actually started just for kicks. We had no idea it was a serious field, we had this idea.

BETTY HOAG: I'm sorry, I'm not following, did you write as well as illustrate them?

DON FREEMAN: Yes.

BETTY HOAG: I didn't know that…

DON FREEMAN: I don't know what I say "oh, yes."

BETTY HOAG: I haven't researched you enough.

DON FREEMAN: No, that's the fun of it to create from scratch, it's to me, its creative in one sense of the word. I try to make exciting books for children and of course, I do them for myself too, I put everything I have into them.

BETTY HOAG: Do you have children, incidentally?

DON FREEMAN: Well, that's what I was going to tell you, that I only had this boy and so we started making books for him.

BETTY HOAG: Well, what's his name?

DON FREEMAN: Roy, yes, he's at school. He's now a surfer and the whole bit and good student, he's everything, thank goodness. A real scientific and mathematical --

BETTY HOAG: Well, I think your books paid off then – you gave him an imagination.

DON FREEMAN: I don't know, I didn't think about that. But he's a very severe critic, he's very good. I give him the books before I send them to the publisher.

BETTY HOAG: Is he high school age?

DON FREEMAN: Yes, he's 16.

BETTY HOAG: Are these books that have anything to do with history or with nature or with fantasy or …

DON FREEMAN: They're fantasy, yes they're fantasy. But life is a fantasy, I can't tell where it all begins.

BETTY HOAG: I'll look forward to seeing them, we have children too…

DON FREEMAN: Oh, it's for pretty young children. You could have young children, I didn't mean to imply.

BETTY HOAG: I have both as a matter of fact. And how did you ever get into chalk drawing?

DON FREEMAN: Oh I don't know, that was some years back in New York and I just had this idea of going around doing _____ seeing the country, I wanted to see the country so some agent said he would book me and send me around. And I enjoyed, I did it for 3 years, twice a year I'd go out, clubs, colleges and…

BETTY HOAG: What do you talk about? Art or fantasy?

DON FREEMAN: I talk about New York, I go to New York every year and I see theatre and I talk a lot about the theatre and the shows and what's going on in New York but I do it all to music. I have 11 the shows taped and things.

BETTY HOAG: The scores from them.

DON FREEMAN: Yes, certain things. I do it all to jazz and classic music and all kinds of things.

BETTY HOAG: Are these abstractions or are they realistic pictures of what happened?

DON FREEMAN: Not very often abstractions that I had and improvisations.

BETTY HOAG: Because some of the theatre art work and the art department at UCLA, they're making films, taking movies, and doing pictures of what the music sounds like visually and I just wondered if that was the way you interpreted your music?

DON FREEMAN: Yes, that's right. I've been doing that. But this is almost like a side line that I needed since we decided to come West, my wife and I are both from the West and we like the idea of raising our son out here and being a free-lance artist I had to cook up all these different things to do.

BETTY HOAG: You don't teach also?

DON FREEMAN: No.

BETTY HOAG: This is what so many of the artists do on the side.

DON FREEMAN: I know but this chalk talk business is something like teaching. I go to the art department of the colleges, I really don't teach but I mean I feel some contact with young people.

BETTY HOAG: It is an educational thing really.

DON FREEMAN: I don't think so, no, but it just compact with young people.

BETTY HOAG: Excuse me, sounds fascinating. Well, I can't imagine that you can be doing anything else, is there anything in your work that you haven't told me?

DON FREEMAN: Well, there are a lot of things I suppose but I – doing books and illustrating other people's books teach me drawing but I think it's so important what you're doing, and what is being done about getting the history of the arts project. I wish I could think of more pertinent things to help bring out the flavor, the meaning of that time but it's so important that it never occurred to me that anyone would have doubted it for a minute. Of course this isn't a defense of the WPA.

BETTY HOAG: No, it doesn't need a defense but it does need some exploitation and airing to the public, I think. I hope that you have material that we can borrow for microfilming… (inaudible).

DON FREEMAN: I suppose I have. It was very important in my life, helpful, the project.

BETTY HOAG: Well I won't keep you any longer, I told you I'd only be here an hour.

DON FREEMAN: I hope I've given you enough.

BETTY HOAG: (inaudible)

DON FREEMAN: But this thing of all the books and all that, it just goes right on from my original interest in theatre and so I'm making I out here.

BETTY HOAG: Well, your work on the project certainly contributed to what you're doing now in giving you a background that was very important to you.

DON FREEMAN: I think you have to give credit to – I do, give credit to the WPA, through that very difficult time. My wife, she wasn't on the project, it jelped us to carry on so that we could paint. We were just painting all the time. So it helped us through a very difficult period.

BETTY HOAG: Well, if I find any of your lithographs in any of the public buildings when I'm looking around, I'll let you know, too.

DON FREEMAN: I never got the statement, you know, where it is.

BETTY HOAG: You know no one did.

DON FREEMAN: Is that so?

BETTY HOAG: Every artist I talked to says "Well, I've heard there's some here and there" and there's been no record kept. I hope sometime that Archives might be able to do it or I understand the Smithsonian is doing it for the government now, trying to locate these things. In fact they've turned up some very important things by Franz Kline and Stuart Davis, an article I read in the *Christian Science Monitor* said that President Johnson's daughter had chosen one by Stuart Davis to hang in her bedroom and it was one that turned up in some of the way school so we're beginning to realize that these things are around and should be …

DON FREEMAN: Oh, I was reading a mystery the other day and it describes the scene where the private eye. I don't know how he got into a Federal building, but the private eyes don't usually have anything to do with the Federal government, but he described going into this politicians office and described everything about the office and there on the wall, he said, was a print by Don Freeman.

BETTY HOAG: Oh really? What was the book just for the records?

DON FREEMAN: *The Ivory Grin* I think by John McDowney. The reason I --

BETTY HOAG: Was *The Ivory Grin* in your lithograph or did this refer --

DON FREEMAN: No, no! It was just the writer evidently had been around and he made this observation and no one reading the book cared or anything and the writer gave it a feeling of authenticity.

BETTY HOAG: You must be in probably more than you realized. And the sad part is that often they don't realize that they do have something good by Don Freeman or something else.

DON FREEMAN: My name means nothing to anybody, especially readers of mysteries, but to him it felt authentic.

BETTY HOAG: Well, I'm delighted you told me.

DON FREEMAN: Well, it's a pleasure to talk to you.

BETTY HOAG: Thank you so much for this interview. Something else has come up which I feel is very important to go on the tape about Mr. Freeman. At the time the war came along he did many very beautiful illustrations of the activities of the Navy for the Navy department. And many of these are reproduced in a book called *Our Flying Navy* which was published by MacMillan Company, New York in 1944 with an introduction by _____ and the forward by Thomas Craven. And there is a biography of Mr. Freeman in a book, the pages are not numbered but Mr. Freeman is going to let us borrow the book for microfilming and this will be in the record with the history of other work which he did and which he hasn't told me about as well as the pictures. It's a shame that we can't get them on the microfilm in color, incidentally, because they're beautiful and it doesn't take color. Some of them, at least one of them here, is a cartoon which was reproduced in *New York Times* or something?

DON FREEMAN: Where?

BETTY HOAG: It looks like it may have been an illustration for a cartoon.

DON FREEMAN: I don't know whether they were in the newspaper or not.

BETTY HOAG: In fact it is a cartoon …

DON FREEMAN: I used to do things for the *Times Magazine* section during the war too before I went into the army, I did old plants, you know what I mean? Where they were building planes, I don't know how I got into all this technical bit. They'd send me out to make my impressions of the war effort.

BETTY HOAG: This work was not done under the project and you were in the army, not the navy and you were paid for these by the navy at the time so I (inaudible). Well thank you so much, is there anything else you want to tell the tape yourself about it?

DON FREEMAN: No, the laboratory --

BETTY HOAG: Oh, well that was a pharmaceutical company --

DON FREEMAN: Pharmaceutical company that helped sponsor or sponsored the start and then the Navy took it over but it was all handled through the Associated American Artist in New York. It was a gallery and they got the artists together and saw that they were paid properly.

BETTY HOAG: Well then, they used them in advertisements for their products in magazines during the war.

DON FREEMAN: That's right, all of these pictures seen here were used in the advertisement program magazine.

BETTY HOAG: Did you say that Mr. Tolejian had some in?

DON FREEMAN: Well not in this book, no but he --

BETTY HOAG: He was part of it at the time.

DON FREEMAN: Yes, they're somewhere, I've forgotten where.

BETTY HOAG: I was just wondering if any of the other artists who were on the project (inaudible)

DON FREEMAN: (inaudible)

BETTY HOAG: The other thing, one other thing I wanted to ask you, too; you're the only one of the New York artists who hasn't mentioned the various union uprisings and being part of them. Did you have anything to do with them?

DON FREEMAN: No, I really didn't. I went to a few meetings, no I was really out of all that.

BETTY HOAG: Busy working.

DON FREEMAN: I know that there was a kind of urge, urgent thing going on there about getting a department of art set up in Washington. And I'm all for it, the government helping the artists, but I'm not too sure that the right people will ever be at the head. It's nothing you can count on, the wrong person being at the head. It seems to be – because there's no right person in the art world.

BETTY HOAG: And especially the way the art world is split today, it's hard to say who would be right. Don't you think on a local level which in effect, is (inaudible).

DON FREEMAN: The thing that I thought was very good during the project was the wide range of acceptance of all kinds of art. It really should have been based on not their art work so much as how are they existing? Helping

them to live till the next week and if they're practicing artists their work was recognized. I do know that I was furious with one thing there, a friend of mine who really should have been on the project and I said now you just take you work in and show it to so and so, like everyone else, he did this but they said, your work, you should do more about the workers, you should paint the workers and then maybe – he was already abstract in those days.

BETTY HOAG: And on that account they kept him off the project?

DON FREEMAN: Yes, if anybody ever should have been on the project, this was just a little incident, you see but I remember being very upset about it.

BETTY HOAG: You can't tell his name or do you remember it?

DON FREEMAN: Beauford Delaney, he's now in Paris --

BETTY HOAG: He's gone on with it anyway.

DON FREEMAN: He's gone on with it anyway but I never knew anybody who had a tougher time.

BETTY HOAG: Pardon me, do you remember how you --

DON FREEMAN: B-E-A-U-F-O-R-D D-E-L-A-N-E-Y. He has a brother in New York now, but I think, I don't know whether I should say this but I was always so upset that somebody had the wrong notion and I hope there wasn't too many people kept off because they didn't paint the right painting, because this is not what I found to be the usual thing but in this one instance of Beauford, I just felt very badly.

BETTY HOAG: Well, there are probably be bound to be a lot of times when there are individuals. I know many times when they had shows they made an attempt to get jurors who were representative of for instance, the Treasury department murals (inaudible). But that's a shame.

DON FREEMAN: Well what do you think from what you've heard. Was there discrimination?

BETTY HOAG: I have heard very little of it, in fact, the artists I've talked to usually made a big point of saying they felt there was very little of it and no dictation, again only in the Treasury murals a few times... (inaudible)

DON FREEMAN: Well, this is about the only incident that I can remember, I don't like to bear down on it.

BETTY HOAG: We're running out of tape.

END OF INTERVIEW

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