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January 24, 1975

INTERVIEWER: Robert Johnson

INTERVIEWEE: Hollis Howard Holbrook

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J: This is January 25, 1975, and this morning we're in the Ford Library of the Florida State Museum on the campus of the University of Florida. I'm speaking with Mr. Hollis Howard Holbrook, Professor of Art here at the University of Florida. Mr. Holbrook, let's begin with just the basic biographical information--you were born where, and when, and let's talk a little bit about your childhood, just very briefly. Did you grow up in Massachusetts, or...

H: I was born in native Massachusetts, attended schools there, and went away to Montana for a while.

J: What date is this, now, that you...

H: I was born in 1909, February, February 7, and grew up in a very small town.

J: Did you have any interest in art when you were a child? I know I always did when I was little.

H: Well, I think this happened...my father was a businessman and my brother was a businessman, my sister studied business, and I ^{felt} ~~thought~~ I should do the same thing but I was a complete failure. My family were very tolerant and understanding, and gave me ^{abot of leeway} ~~the lively way~~ and my mother ^{felt} ~~thought~~ that I might succeed at something of my choice so I started to...I thought about the ministry, ^{and} ~~I~~ went to Mt. Herman with the idea of preparing myself to go to college, or theological school of some kind, but after two semesters of Mt. Herman and the rigid way of life of those people I decided that religion was not for me, because we had it every day of the week--every morning, every night, during the week...

J: What denomination is this?

H: This is the regular Dwight L. Mosby school, and I was a Congregation-
alist, which but really, after, uh, what Mt. Herman did was cure me of any

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H: ... religious fervor whatsoever, and there were too many questions left unanswered to suit me so actually, ^{perhaps} I became an agnostic after that and I ceased to have any interest in ^{it} ~~that~~... and went back home and... became interested in art, went to art school for a year...

J: This was now..at Boston U. .

H: 1927, I went to _____ originally, and after a year there I had wasted my time completely because of too many women in the school, and then I went to work for two years. I worked for Liberty Mutual Insurance Company as a clerk, and ~~then~~ I worked for Benson Manufacturing Company as a designer. Then the Depression came along in 1930, and, oh, and ^{during that time} ~~and~~ ^{I was} ~~in that time~~ I had such bad grades in school I had to take all my examinations to get into the state-run art school, the Massachusetts School of Art, which is now a college, and ^{I studied for} ~~and~~ during those two years I was working, going to night school, ^{I went to} Boston University night school for two years.

J: How did you manage? Of course, this was during the Depression. Did you have a part-time job, or did your family help out?

H: Well, I always worked, from the time I was nine, except when I went to Mt. ^{I always worked} Herman, ^{in the} I worked as a newsboy ~~at~~ first, and then I worked in a drug store, ~~and after~~ the drug store, Ames Butter and Egg Store, ^{in fact,} from the time I was nine until the present day I've worked, you see, and you know retirement looms up as a terrible ogre because I don't know what to do if I'm not working, and I've got to find something that will keep me busy every day, so this is one of my problems that ^{see} I foresee for the future.

J: What about your painting? Don't you consider being able to do that for many more years?

H: When you're a painter, see, you're on the faculty here at the University,

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H: and you paint because you're paid to paint, really, you're paid to do research, and teaching is just a part of it, and so as an Art faculty member I'm given credit for any successes I have as a painter.

J: In other words, it's kind of like a historian publishing, in other words, your painting...

H: If I exhibit in ~~some~~ national shows, or if I get ^{have} ~~perhaps~~ some honors ^{you know} given to me, then I'm given credit for that in my paycheck, so that this is an important part of it. And being a competitor, all my life I've been a competitor of a kind, and so when ^I going into painting fields, part of it, how much of this painting, to be very honest, how much of ~~was~~ ^{to paint} my desire ^{is} a part of a natural part of me I don't know; I'll find out, but I don't at this time because I like the competition of working against others...

J: That's an interesting point--you never think that artists, you know, feel that way, but I'm sure it's very true.

H: Well, yes, I compete daily as a teacher; I like to have my courses the best so that people will point them out and say these are the best, and quite frankly I ^{think} ^{I've} ~~have~~ achieved that in the courses that I'm teaching, so that this business of competition is such that I distrust something for my interest in art, and it's like looking on from the outside into a person. I try to be as honest as I can with myself, and it's very difficult as you know, to be, to know what you are is very difficult, and ^{I've said know what I am,} ~~I want to know who I am.~~

J: Well, it's almost, you have a ^{way} ~~while~~ before you retire, don't you?

H: Oh, _____ . If the administration doesn't change the rules of the game in midstream, here, and they're thinking of cutting back, having people retire at sixty, I believe.

J: Well, it's almost like a second life, though, the way you visualize it, you know, whether you will continue to have this interest in art for art's sake

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J: instead of ^{as you say,} a competitive type aspect. Of course, you still will be competing.

H: That's true. I don't know many painters or artists who are natural artists, who do it naturally. Most of the people I know do it because of the pressure on them, and I could name the people if necessary, but I won't do that because it would be unfair, but I do know, for instance, a lot of people who do one piece a year for the faculty show, or they, uh, and during the meantime they are engaged in mowing lawns or something else, you see. My life, I paint and work every day, I mean it's a compulsion because I want to succeed. Even now, you know, I keep thinking that I'm going to do it, and when I say going to do it I mean the national meaning so that, ^{like} this is just an idle dream, perhaps, but I think it's possible, I think that it can be done, I think it could be the best and have everybody acknowledge it, but of course this really, it begins a long way back.

J: Do you think an artist either has it, or he doesn't? Do you know what I mean? Is there any way you can train yourself, because, I mean, naturally, aside from the technicalities, to become perhaps a famous national or even ^{perhaps} international name?

H: I think there's something, perhaps, in the person themselves that I think, for instance, they're walking in the street without knowing it, and uh, that uh, [inaudible] if they really have it they're going to, sometime they're going to bring it out. I've seen talented people in Business Administration, Engineering, really talented people.

J: From the art standpoint?

H: Oh yeah, from the art standpoint; I've had them in my classes and they ^{distrust} what they can do, it's too easy, and so they go into their business and stick at that. But I see more talented people, perhaps, in these other areas

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H: than there are in the Art Department, but they have other interests.

J: That seems to be a case I've noticed. I went to the University of Kentucky for a while and they had an art show, and some agricultural major submitted some piece of painting which won the first prize, and he'd never painted anything in his life. I see this every so often, you know, some amateur, as such, seems to have a knack or an ability as against so-called semi-professional artists.

H: Well, one of the things that I would be, perhaps, criticized for saying, and that is that I think art schools destroy a lot of talent.

J: That's an interesting point.

H: I think they destroy it by inhibiting the people who get in these curriculums, and having the people draw and paint the way the teacher ^{feels} ~~thinks~~ they should, rather than allowing them to do it naturally, and coming out with something of their own. I have finally, at this late stage, decided that art schools are very badly organized for artists, ^{the real} ~~career~~ artists, not for the people in advertising design, necessarily, or the people in the commercial areas, because they, it's a different sort of requirement. But the people who are going to be creative artists, they should make their own curriculum, they should take the things when they need them and what they need, and not be compelled to take things that somebody else ^{said} ~~feels~~ they should take, and do them according to the style and the limitations of the teacher who's teaching, because a great many teachers ^{are} ~~teach~~ what they do, not ^{what they} ~~in~~ a broad generalized way, what art is, but what they think it is, and you work within those limitations rather than the limitations of what painting can be. Of course, who knows what a painting is? Every generation decides what a painting is, and so, for instance, today the painters don't think of painting the same as those ^{are} ~~fifteen~~ years ago.

J: Well, of course, these teachers ^{are} ~~were~~ swayed by their own teachers, and it just

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J: goes back generations, almost.

H: And art schools are made up of teachers who studied from teachers who studied from teachers who just decided to be teachers--they weren't creative artists in the first place, they were people who got good grades in school, so they did ~~that~~ ^{what}, they got good grades, they did what ^{their} ~~good~~ teachers are supposed to do, and they went through... like I, I went from Yale to Florida. At that time Yale graduates, still, Yale graduates are being asked to teach everywhere.

J: You got your Bachelor's in Fine Arts, ^{at Yale} in what, 1936?

H: 1936, and in 1937 I got...my wife was graduated from Yale, and she got a job teaching at Colby Junior College in New Hampshire, right out of Yale. ^{had} There were very few positions then, in fact, at that time the only two positions then available for men graduates were at Illinois and Florida, and...

J: Did this artist program under Roosevelt begin at this time? I think we can maybe touch on that one.

H: The W.P.A.? Yes, I couldn't get in to the W.P.A., because my father was making too much money, you see, and when you say too much money that, that, he was making very little, so much that I was, it was impossible for me to get a job, and I would have ^{liked} ~~loved~~ to get ^{have gotten just for the} a job ~~to get~~ some experience, just to have been part of that big action, and those people were working and it seems to me they were getting twenty-five dollars per week, something like that, just ~~for~~ painting pictures, and materials and supplies; I knew a lot of them in Boston, ^{and} I used to visit them and it was a great thing, for those pictures finally ^{a lot of them, great deal} realized a ~~lot~~ of money for the government because they were done by talented people all over the country. I visited workshops in Boston and Buffalo, and it was very, very exciting, there was an excitement in the air about the art, and Roosevelt was swayed by Edward Bruce and Bruce, and I can't remember, they both went to Cooper, and this is where Roosevelt met them.

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J: That's where he went as an undergraduate.

H: Yeah, and Edward Bruce was a classmate, and he swayed Roosevelt on this matter, and so he was head of the program. And I knew Ed Rowan, who became head of the department later on. Ed Rowan was a fine man; he visited the University of Florida one day, and, because at that time I was ^{working on} ... competitions, the government would have competitions, you see, for post office murals. In 19-, oh, I did my first one in 1937, and that was for the Summerville, Massachusetts, post office, and I did sketches for that, and I was a runner-up.

J: Was this an American scene?

H: Yeah, these were all American scenes, and very realistic things, you know, and I took some scene of Washington ^{revealing} ~~revealing~~ the troops ^{at something} around Boston, and then they awarded me, because I was a runner-up they awarded me the mural of to do at _____, Massachusetts, and so I was, at that time I got nine hundred dollars, and I think ^{for it} _____, which was a lot of money in those days, nine hundred. And I painted this mural of John Elliot saying goodbye to the Indians as they were taken into captivity and sent off to be Deer Isle out _____ in Boston.

J: How did you come about this particular subject? It ought to have made a good artist, I mean, a good painting, I gather.

H: Well, you see, the ~~native~~ ^{we're} Indians, ~~who are~~ important, and of course I took the ~~native~~ Indians as a theme, and John Elliot _____, of course, did teaching out there, and John Elliot ^{actually} was one of the most beautiful and important figures in American history. and so little is known about it, about him, that ^{you know} I feel like an apostle, I should go out and say here you have one of the great men in history, one of our ancestors, and you should know about ~~it~~ ^{him} because John Elliot came to Boston; I think he was about twenty-seven at the time he came to Boston, and he came from England, and became interested in the Indians, he

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H: wanted to help them, and he met the native Indians and he wanted to give them The Word, so he learned ^{their} ~~the~~ language, their spoken language, because they didn't have a written one, and he learned their spoken language and put it down in a grammar book and this book today is a classic, it's used all over the world, taking spoken languages and putting them into written form. After he put their language in written form he taught them their language so they could read. Then he translated the Old and New Testaments into that Indian language for about 120 Indians so that they could read the Bible, and there are two or three of those books left, ^{what} and Harvard has one of them. But this is one of the great feats in the history of the world.

J: I can see why you chose it as a topic.

H: So, John Elliot, and then of course, the poor Indians...

(TAPE SKIPS HERE)

J: Let's see, now, we were talking about the post office murals, and John Elliot; I think we've probably covered it.

H: This is a mural... I did a mural on John Elliot in 1937 at the _____ Library, and ^{then} after that, on the basis of that, I got married, and I had _____ and my wife was working, uh, Vivian was working, so we got married, and went to live in Nantucket for a while during the summer, and while I was ^{at} in Nantucket we got this invitation to teach at the University of Florida.

J: How did this come about, now?

H: Well, I had left my name at the University Of Florida, saying that I would like to teach, and there were these two positions, one at Illinois, and one at Florida, and it seems to me that, I can't remember why I didn't go to Illinois, but Rudolph Weaver asked me to come down and hired me without seeing me.

J: Mr. Weaver, now, is who?

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H: Rudolph Weaver, Head of the, Director of the School of Architecture and Allied
Arts that we had at that time in the University of Florida. So, rather than wait around to hear about the other, I accepted this job and found out later that Doolittle, who had ~~this~~ ^{the} job teaching at the University of Florida, had accepted the one at Illinois, he had also graduated from Yale, and Illinois wanted a Yale graduate so Doolittle went to Illinois and I went to Florida, and this was the way it was at that time--whatever ^a vacancy occurred they got Yale graduates and they still do today. So anyway this was my introduction--I came down to Florida in 1938, without my wife, who had to continue teaching rather than break her contract there so she taught until we could get a replacement for her, and ^{we} I got a friend of mine who went to Yale ^{for me} to replace her at Colby and...

J: Your wife seems to have been doing quite well in those days.

H: Yeah, Francis Merit took the job, and ^{today Fran} ~~he now~~ has one of the big schools in the United States. the Haystack School ^{of Art in} in northern Maine, and it's a very famous school of crafts, mostly, he is more interested in crafts than anything else, ^{so that} and he has the best teachers of crafts available teaching for him. And Barnes of Yale designed the school in Pegg Lake, Maine, a handsome, beautiful school on the side of the cliffs that overlook Casco Bay.

J: Do you have a slight interest in architecture yourself?

H: I enjoy good architecture... I've done a lot of it; I'm a frustrated architect, perhaps. My son is going into architecture now, I enjoy good looking buildings.

J: I think the Yale Rare Book Library is an interesting library. Are you familiar with it?

H: Oh yes.

J: The slabs, I think, on all four sides, ^{type thing} I think it's a rather striking building.

H: I haven't had the occasion to use it too often, but I always liked stone libraries;

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H: it's a very-pleasant library to go in.

J: Have you seen the Orlando Public Library that...

H: No.

J: ...Johansen did? He's from Connecticut, I think, it's a huge, gothic type...

H: Ocala has got a handsome looking library.

J: Libraries are very hard to design, I think; I've worked in one off and on for about five years and they're very difficult to work in all the technical aspects and still make them attractive. So you came here in '38, I guess you were a little, not surprised, but Gainesville ^{was} a rather sleepy little town, still, in those days. Did you have trouble accomodating yourself, too much, from living up north?

H: Well, I came down Route 1, and I didn't know what Florida looked like. I'd stopped in the restroom of a place on the road, and the owner said he'd been down here during the Depression ^{when} after the boom, and he said it was just a big sand dune, and so I expected to see a big sand dune when I came down here. ^{And} I came through miles and miles of pine trees, uninterrupted, not even billboards, just pine trees; flat, the land was so flat, the sky was so big, and these are the things I remember. I'd looked up, too, to find out what Gainesville was noted for before coming here, it said it was a railroad center, that I could see a lot of tracks everywhere, and there were, they were through the middle of the town, and at that time it was a sleepy little town--you could drive up to Wise's Drug Store, and ask them for a Coca-Cola and they would come out and give it to you on the curb; our afternoons ~~were~~ ^{were} sometimes spent going down to Wise's Drug Store and ordering a Coke.

J: I guess the college then...who did you first meet when you came here, Mr. Weaver?

H: Yes, I remember going into the office when I came here in Peabody Hall, it was on

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H: the second floor...

J: This was where Art was located, Peabody Hall?

H: Yeah, Architecture had the top floor and Art had the north corner of the top floor, the attic of the top floor, and it was an attic in those days.

J: Yes, the library, wasn't the library partly in there, too?

H: We had what ^{is} ~~was~~ called, Mr. Weaver once called it the Book Room, and so it was called the Book Room because ^{he} ~~we~~ didn't want anybody to think that we had a library, ^{he} ~~we~~ said that wasn't a library, and that was on the top floor, it was a little room up there about the size of the one we're in now, and ^{was} ~~is~~ as a matter of fact when I came to Florida I was amazed at the scarcity of books; I had a better collection of art books than they had at the University! And so a lot of the time I had to bring my own books in to show the students, and I still do because the Art Library still is, you know, a meager one.

J: Is that right?

H: I don't think we have a good library at all.

J: I've used it but just as purely pleasure type thing; I wouldn't know ^{whether} ~~if~~ it was of course good technically. That's something, perhaps, we can talk about later, or we can talk about it right now, ^{actually,} What is it--a lack of funds, or is it a lack of acquisitions? *Just the way they go about it,*

H: I think probably funds accounts for most of it. I think probably you could go around the faculty and compile all the books we have now and ~~you would~~ have a better collection than you have at the library. ^{So,} And you see when I came here we had ^{this is} something that may have been mentioned by others, but this is a cow college.

J: Oh yeah.

H: And agriculture is the main thing. I find out ^{you know} from the ratings that I think it's got a "C" rating, the national, the national....and so if that was the main thing

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H: you could imagine what everything else was, so...

J: Were you disappointed?, or were you just saying, ^{well} oh my God, my work's cut out for me, looks like here?

H: Well, you see at that time I was a pioneer and ^{honest to God I was,} consequently I had the zest of an apostle. I wanted to bring the word to everyone, and I wanted no... to tell everybody what art was. ~~to art work.~~ I was so stupid, I didn't know very much because, actually I'd had seven years, seven years of art school, and I should have known something, and of course I was. you know, fairly good because ^{I was} knocking off these mural awards, I went into another competition after I got here for the uh, some other post office, I can't remember which one it was, it was a national competition, and because of that I was awarded a job in Haleyville, Alabama, which was another sleepy little town, and then on the basis of another competition I went into, another national competition, I was awarded a job in _____, Louisiana, so ^{at} that time I was awarded three. And then, of course, all my work was... my mural designs that were submitted to Washington were ^{appreciated} ~~pretty~~ and Ed Rowan, who was head of the thing, was very much interested in me and we corresponded and I asked him to come down here. So he came down, oh, perhaps about 1940, and talked to the student body, and the student body at that time didn't know what he was talking about because I used...because this ^{is} was a humanities group and the humanities was a lot...I taught the humanities for a while and I didn't know...I was, you know, I was no scholar of any kind, but they had me teaching the humanities, lecturing to them. So you can see from that that things were pretty tough, and the audience was made up of athletes, agriculture people--they couldn't have cared less about what went on, you know, what I had to say. So most of my work was done...I did a lot of it for myself, that is, the going into mural competitions. For instance, in 1939 I went to Mexico and spent three months

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H: designing the sketches for the St. Louis, Missouri post office. It was a big job--three months labor for that job, and this is one of the competitions, national competitions; I was runner-up, and the President's ^{daughter} ~~daughter~~, President Tigert's ^{daughter} ~~daughter~~, came to me one day and said, "Did you see the newspaper this morning?" she said, "You've just won...you were runner-up in this national competition, and they've given you another award." I hadn't seen the paper, it was very nice to get that information, especially from the president's daughter.

J: Shows the size of the college in those days.

H: Oh yes. I think she was the only female in the college, you know, she was an Art student. This college was so small I knew practically all the faculty, and Mrs. Tigert, and there was another one. and my wife and I used to go horseback riding each morning. well, two or three mornings a week we'd go over to the ROTC unit where they kept horses and you could take them out for something like five dollars a month. and we used to go riding over where, now, you find the northwest section of the campus, I can't remember what...^{around} ~~along~~ Lake Alice we used to go, riding around there...the trails are gone now because there are just condominiums, apartment houses, student housing.

J: How was the Art Department set up in those days? How many were on the faculty, two or three? And then, was Art a required course? ^{As for as an introduction,}
^{So} ~~to~~ to Art?

H: No, there were...I was the only teacher here in Art; I was the only teacher ^{about} until 1944, after the war, and we were very lonely here, ^{in that the} ~~and the~~ only people I had to go out with were the architects, and gosh, they only had two or three architectural teachers, Tom Graham, and then let's see, Guy Fuller, who worked with Mr. Weaver, Mr Weaver was an architect ^{of} ~~on~~ the Board of Control and all the architecture for the state schools was done right downstairs on

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H: the second floor, and a lot of the graduates of the Architecture Department started there and worked there. Later on, let's see, Ralph Gulley came down-- he had been head of the school at Rensselaer in New York, and he came about 1941 to teach at the University, and I got to know Ralph very well and he, you know, he's a very fine person, has good background, graduated from Harvard, and he couldn't take the crap that was handed out by the head of that school. We had a rough time because Mr. Weaver was a...you know, I think he was part sadist and part something else...he didn't allow freedom for the faculty--we had the freedom of a high school teacher. Our private lives were not private--he looked into them and saw to it that we led exemplary lives, and...so from the years 1938 until the time I went into the Navy which was about 1942 or '43, it was pretty rough working for him, because he just didn't allow any freedom whatsoever in your private life.

J: In other words, he was the head of Architecture and Art.

H: Yeah.

J: It was all lumped together there.

H: Yeah. He was an interesting person. He came down from the coal mines of Pennsylvania down to Florida. He was really what you might call a job He's been called _____, all he was was a great facade There's nothing behind it, and of course looking back on it now, it seems impossible that I, that any one of us could have had fear ^{of} ~~for~~ this man, and everybody had fear except Ralph, and Ralph couldn't take it and finally left. He went to New York, ^{and} he worked for Donald Esky and then for some other people, and now of course he's a designer, he's retiring but still working for Skidmore, _____, and Merrill in New York, and he's, and probably making \$50,000 a year up there because he was an unusual person.

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J: Well, these were troubled times and of course you don't want
jeopardized your job security although as an artist and
so forth or just normal relationships, I imagine you were hesitant to
rebel too much against...

H: No, we ^{didn't} couldn't rebel too well.

J: What about President Tigert and some of the other figureheads here---did
you come in contact with them to any extent? What are your impressions.

H: Oh yeah, when I first came here Mr. Weaver had parties so often, dinner
parties. and they were all, you know, black tie affairs, so that I practically
lived in a tux while I was here. At these parties, the President and his
wife would be there all the time, and so I knew them rather intimately, in
fact, it was a very small, homey group and I suppose I saw the President and
his wife ^{maybe} once every two months or so, because of these parties, dinner parties.
Every time Mr. Weaver went out, shot something he'd have a party. a dinner
party. We were required to come, and it was a...

J: It was almost sounds like a diplomatic ^{corps} ~~core~~ or something.

H: It was very important--you never refused. Of course we had to have to have them over
at our little apartment. . At that time I was making, I think, \$1600 a year,
and we lived very well. Went to Mexico and lived for three months.

J: Was your wife teaching locally?

H: No, she never taught. ^{after} she doesn't like to...she did teach... ^{in the} when I went in the
Navy they allowed her to teach in my place so she taught here for a short while
but she hated it so much that she asked to be relieved and so they got some
other person to come in and take her place.

J: Was this an Art Appreciation course that all undergraduates had to have?

H: No, it was a professional course leading to a ^{Bachelor's} ~~Doctor~~ of Fine Arts degree, and
^{Bachelor}

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H: Bachelor of Design degree, and I had, I think it's very important to note that I had very few students, but I think that every one of them, with the exception of one or two, went out and did very well. For example, I had in the beginning when I came here some students who came in, _____, who is teaching over at the Ocala Junior College. Hennington, who was Head of Art at Connecticut University, University of Connecticut, until he died of a heart attack; Mickey _____, who is now teaching at Cornell; Whitehead got his Master's here but he didn't go on and he went into real estate; there was a fellow by the name of Smith who was Head of Art at St. Petersburg, ^{he} who died recently; and I can't remember all... oh, Chuck Holder, who worked, who really is the most outstanding because he's made a career of painting, and ^{done} ~~doing~~ extremely well, selling his paintings now for \$1500 apiece, he's put two kids through college, and on his painting alone. ^{So, he's} ~~He's~~ done extremely well, but I think that if you went on you'd find that all my students, and of course when I say my students they had me for five years. Albert Stadler, went to New York, he had me for five years, and he really resented it because when he graduated we changed the course back to a four year program, and, but he left and he's done very well in New York City, had big write-ups in magazines as one of the coming artists. Not one exception; all these people did well.

J: Small group with a lot of quality.

H: Yeah.

J: Do you think the big change probably came about after the war, as far as the Department of Art and so forth. When did it begin?

H: The big change took place ⁱⁿ about '44-'45. I remember at that time we were supposed to, you know, fill out these questionnaires;--how many students did

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H: we expect next year--at that time we had fifty, and a friend of mine, Bill _____, ^{at the} ~~I went to~~ school with him. came down and helped teach in about '44-'45. We had about fifty students then.

J: Of course with women coming in after the war that made a big difference. I imagine you had several women in the program, didn't you?

H: Yeah. They...it opened up...we... in '46 it opened up. Oh, they wanted to know how many students I thought ~~I'd~~ ^{would} have in '46 so I said 300. By gosh, we had 300 almost to the figure, and we had this... and then we didn't have any teachers--Bill _____ and myself, so the architects came in to teach my classes. I was head of this department just by default. ^{almost, I mean} I just inherited it.

J: This was in '48, I think.

H: '48, yes, and...

J: This was the ^{head} ~~year~~ that you were Head of the Department of Design, what is it?

H: The Art Department.

J: The Art Department, yeah, that's what I thought.

H: In '48 we had 300 students and Florence Kelly and all the group of architects came in to teach. The artists, oh they took, thought of it as a lark, but ~~oh~~, what a chaotic situation. The kids didn't get an education at all--it was a mess. So then they gave me permission to go out and get a lot of teachers in a hurry, and at that time they just weren't available. I sent out letters everywhere trying to get teachers--you couldn't get teachers. ^{And} ~~Some~~ ^{Some} of them who'd said they would come and were signed up, like Valentine from Connecticut, didn't show up after he was signed; _____, another one, signed up, he wouldn't take it, he left without letting me know, I mean they, no one had any integrity, and so I was left holding the bag, grabbing ^{where} ~~what~~ I could getting teachers, so it was very, very difficult.

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J: What was the cause of this, do you think, was it because there were better opportunities elsewhere?

H: There just wasn't any teachers, there wasn't any. And so we brought in a lot of people in a hurry, and then I...we had so many students the old project system wasn't working; we had a system called the Project Method devised by Mr. Weaver, and inherited by Bill Arnett, who was the head of the department at that time, and Bill Arnett thought it was the greatest thing in the world and when I wanted to change to a class system, have classes rather than work on a project system, because it used so many teachers--it was an individual sort of thing-- you couldn't do it with a lot of students--he had a fit. And I remember when we devised a class system with the help of Barbara Ebersol, who was very, very helpful--she was Barbara Warren then --she had been the wife of Wiseman, who is at Texas. But she helped devise this class system and I presented it to the deans and said this is what we want to do, so he said go ahead, take it to the Senate, but I don't approve ^{of these} . . . we don't want ^{don't want} to do away with the project system, it's so important. Well, you know, it was so difficult; my life was ^{really} ~~so~~ miserable because every time I wanted to do something I was frustrated because I had this wall against me, ^{wall of} no understanding, and you see I'm not a person who can talk to somebody and explain things in detail and be considerate and understanding about their lack of understanding, so every day it got worse and worse, and I took my idea to the Senate and the...I remember Allen and ^{then} were in _f at that time and I was supposed to defend this thing because the dean didn't want to defend it, he said you'll have to ask the man who wrote it up, well, I wouldn't say anything...talking in the Senate is...I always ^{felt} ~~thought~~, you know, that these people were so important, ^{you know} and _f my little art department, nobody cared about it and they didn't have any

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H: understanding; I felt very isolated in this university, very, very isolated because I didn't even have friends in architecture who understood the importance of this thing, who still don't, of course; the Art Department is still a little bit of a flag-waving and bravely without any understanding in ~~the entire~~ Tiger, and without any understanding hardly anywhere because people think of art as something that's done by ^(you know) ~~incompetents~~ incompetents.

J: Can't do anything else, type thing.

H: Yeah, people who are really kind of fey, and so anyway they did pass the thing. They passed it because I had proposed it and because I was the Art Department at that time, so we had the class system. Then...

J: Was this President Miller, at this time?

H: Yeah, Miller went along... and Miller was a fine man. Both Miller and Allen. Dr. Allen is I think one of the finest men we've had.

J: Was he one of the deans?

H: He was vice-president, and then he went of course to South Florida and became president and he was responsible for that campus. Dr. Allen had a great feeling for aesthetics, and South Florida was fortunate to get him because he made a beautiful campus there, and also he gave them a _____ that they still have, opposite the regular freedoms of the teachers and the students; Dr. Allen was responsible for that.

J: So at least, say from '47 into I guess the mid-fifties you had quite a time...

H: Well, there came a revolution, really, because every time you wanted to do something you had to fight the dean, and I couldn't...

....

J: Besides the class versus project situation were there other areas you know that you found very difficult to get ironed out?

H: The biggest problem...

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J: Like faculty, for one thing?

H: Yeah, the biggest problem was the growth that was taking place, and the lack of funds, and the lack of understanding on the part of the administration.

J: Which do you think is probably not up today?

H: I think we still have the same problem, but at that time it was very important thing to me, because I probably was suffering from ulcers, I was sick all the time, headaches, I had headaches every day, and I was working, oh, twelve hours a day, maybe more, and Saturdays, Sundays, and it was just a hellish situation, so finally, being frustrated I just told the dean I couldn't go on anymore and wanted to get out, and I arranged everything so I'd take a year off and use my G.I. Bill of Rights and went to Mexico. That was in 1950, I think it was, '49 or '50. And he was glad to get rid of me, because I'd just been a constant burr in his bonnet...

J: Which dean was this, now?

H: This was Arnett.

J: Arnett?

H: Yeah. Arnett was a...a problem.

J: He was dean a...

H: He didn't have the background to, you know, to take over this thing. He reminds me somewhat of Connell; he came in here without a feeling for the University; Arnett didn't have any feeling; he was alright in the situation he had grown up with, but when he was faced with this group coming in after the Second World War--and those people were rough--they wanted an education, and they worked like hell. They were a different kind, they didn't take shit from anybody, and I couldn't get along with them because they were...their demands were constant, they wanted, you know, they wanted something constantly, they wanted

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H: a good education, and the dean was a wall,^a barrier, through which I couldn't go, because he was living in the past, and so, there was nothing to do but get out, so I asked to be relieved and I did get out. I was replaced by ~~Stuart~~, Stuart ~~_____~~, who came in 1949 or '50, and I stayed away for a year and a half-- well, a good year, in Mexico, and I lost my son down there to polio, which ^{was an} unhappy experience, came back and the faculty was still having this same hassle. Stuart _____ was just so unhappy with the leadership that he would take off and hide in places and let somebody else take over his duties, because he couldn't face the administration, which, and the administration was Arnett. So after about two more years he, and the faculty were aroused to ~~an~~ ^{the} extent that they asked the president to relieve them of the dean. The president got rid of the dean and he got rid of the Head of Architecture.

J: This was President Miller, now?

H: Yeah, and _____ resigned also, and a whole new group came in-- Bannister, and Bannister brought in his own Head of Architecture.,.

J: Bannister was the new dean?

H: Yeah, and then we had a series of people from the Art Department who acted as interim heads. So, these were the formative years, and naturally, in any situation where you have a group like this, I suppose it took place in other colleges, but I'm only concerned with my own, but I'm sure, ^{that} this growth, this sudden growth, taking place with people who had...had...were not accustomed to a new world...

J: Do you think the University College formation was a detriment, or was it a...

H: I think it's a good thing.

J: Good thing, yeah...

H: Yeah, I like the idea. I like Tigert's idea of that University College; I think ^{perhaps} ~~in parts~~ it's outgrown itself, and that's why that situation exists over there now. That may not be ~~permanent~~ ^{pertinent} anymore, but change is, you see,

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H: people don't like change, and I've always liked change. Like the Art Department is changing now, and that, really, I suppose, is getting less and less of traits from myself in it, because of the youth coming into the group. They are very different, and it's very difficult to understand them; I don't understand the young people today as I once did; I hear stories that the young students tell me, the girls, for instance, these innocent looking girls who get on, you know, bum their way around the world, around the world! And who take all the chances that you can possibly take, and some of them make it and some don't. One of the girls recently told me she was raped, beaten, and robbed in Belgium, and so, if they do this...the same girl told me two days ago that she was going to get a motorcycle next summer and to go across this country, and she always travels alone... she looks like a sixteen-year-old virgin angel, you know?

J: Of course, artists have always been ^{individuals} ~~evolve from individuals~~, but I know what you mean.

H: She isn't an art student, she's just a student.

J: Yeah...What is it, as far as art itself, that's changing nowadays? Of course, I guess most of your paintings...What is your...what do you consider yourself, besides, naturally, ~~as~~ a painter? Is there a particular area that you have an interest in? Is it realism, or is it...you, know, are you still ^{just kind of} ~~sort of~~ delving into various areas? Did any one particular artist impress you, has he influenced you particularly? Not necessarily a known artist, either.

H: See, studying at Yale...you...as I did... ^{under} ~~because of~~ the situation under the faculty that existed then, we, we were taught, more or less, to be Renaissance artists; that is, able to do everything. ^{And} ^o Of course, when you grew this world of specialization, the painters or the artists who have succeeded are those who are not Renaissance people, but specialists, and I and...well, most...

H: I have lost a lot by going from one thing to another. ^{Like} ~~I have~~ murals, I paint them rather well; portraits, which I can do rather well; and easel paintings, which I have exhibited on three, four, five occasions in New York City; and I've made shows throughout the country; and I've designed buildings; and I've turned out a lot of sculpture; I've turned out polyester ~~to~~ sculpture, and trying to be one of the contemporaries, but the thing is I like all these things. Unfortunately I was taught to do a great many things and not specialize in any, and this has really been a great...a serious problem.

J: It would be hard for me to flip through a gallery, catalogue, oh that's a Holbrook, without even looking at the caption, or something.

H: ^{There's} ~~What is~~ the style? ^{it's} true, it hasn't developed, although one of my colleagues recently said that this isn't quite true because if he looked at my work...he had known my work anytime--whether sculpture or painting, whatever it was, he had... my style was unmistakable. But a lot of people think that I spread my talents so that I don't have a style, and I somewhat agree with them.

J: What do you think of these commercial-type artists like Rockwell or maybe Andrew ^{Whyet} ~~White~~ ^{Whyet} ~~White~~ ^{Wyeth} is not commercially oriented, but...any comments on that, or do you think they're artists in the sense of the word? Their works, say, five hundred years from now will be respected?

H: Well, I think when you turn something out for commercial purposes, it looks like it was turned out for commercial purposes, and Norman Rockwell, of course, is one of those people, and I think, for instance, his work will become as important as Chandler, who is recently getting a lot of importance. I think the work is very light, and doesn't have any depth whatsoever. Andrew ^{Wyeth} ~~White~~ is a very good artist, with tradition behind...that goes back through the mainstream of art. ^{And} ~~of~~ course today painters are ceasing to be abstractionists, and so

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- H: Andrew ^{Wyeth} ~~White~~ is right in the stream of things right now, because artists all over the country are swinging back to realism.
- J: I was going to say, what do you see coming now, realism?
- H: It's quite...quite evident that this...swings back radically ^{I don't,} ~~and~~ I can't go all the way because I'm not that impressed with it...photographic realism...I like to interpret a scene a little bit broadly.
- J: Particularly in acrylics, I think, they look almost like color photographs, but I don't quite go that far myself, although I do like some realism. I guess ^{that's} being a historian I can't stand to see a painting that's not realistically portrayed...a particular scene, you know, at least accurate as far as what really happened, aside from the purely art aspect of it.
- H: Well, I went into abstraction for a while, I think it was about 1956 to about 1961, but my heart wasn't in it. I tried to understand it, and tried to...to be part of the scene, and...oh, I did rather well and the art magazines did well by me and Robert Coates, who wrote in The New Yorker wrote well of my things, and some of the other critics did. My heart... I...I study the figure and I like the figure and this has been my concern over the years.
- J: What do you think of the students here at Florida? Are turning out good artists or are you turning out just technically competent people?
- H: It's difficult to say. ^{It's really difficult,}
- J: It's probably a shallow type regard for art, I imagine.
- H: I don't know whether we have been unfortunate in not getting talent, or what the problem is, but it's true that we haven't had the kind of graduate you'd find in some of the other schools. Whether it's because we haven't got the name-- I think we have an excellent art department, but we haven't done that well with graduates.
- J: I guess so many times the people that become great artists never take any formal

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J: training, perhaps, you know, they just seem to blossom...

H: Yeah, I think if you looked on the national scene you won't find the art school graduates there. I think...at university...I think at one time the idea you'd find at College Art Association meetings was that the artists of old were being brought into the universities to teach the students, you know, and they wouldn't have...like, Fletcher Martin came here. Fletcher Martin didn't go beyond the twelfth grade, and we brought him in as Artist in Residence while Miller was President. He taught here for two or three years; he came in '48, I think-- I went up to Woodstock and got him, and the idea then was every university in the country was getting these people to come in and teach. Oh, Fletcher had been everywhere; he'd been to Iowa, Mills College, he's in New York now, loves it in New York. But anyway it was in all major universities so we were very fortunate to get him, and we thought he'd upgrade the students, give them that necessary lift, but one thing about a university--it stifles. It stifled that creative thing and so the people today who we thought were going to come out of the universities, and people who are successful, came out of art schools like the Art Students' League, John _____, and some of these art schools, where, you know, you have a very free life, and you don't have that disciplinary attitude. You can't, for instance, to get creative art, you don't, you don't...

J: You can't put a letter grade on it, or something like that.

H: You can't put letter grades on it that much, and you can't have this narrow-minded administrative hold on ^{the} students.

J: Perhaps a seminar type approach would be about the closest you could get...

H: Well, I tell you, you'd have to go to an art school to see what they're like. I grew up in art schools and I went to the University...now the Yale Art School is

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H: very free. Now, compared ^{with} to this place the Yale Art School is free—it's as near to a regular art school as you can get, and that gets talents, ^{But} ~~because~~ they don't stifle it, because the teachers have a hell of a lot of freedom. You might say, well, there's freedom here--there ain't. We have faculty meetings that are rituals.

J: There's so much administrative...

H: We have a musician who's head of our department who's got his degree in art in art history, and he's a good man, but he just doesn't understand this thing, you see? Where do you find them? I don't know where you find them anywhere in the United States in the university system...I'm not downgrading it; it's just that the university picks certain kind of people for these jobs, and by gosh, this is true...but Yale doesn't, and Yale has the outstanding department in the country. Ask...what's his name?...Rosenbloom?...Rosenbloom?...I've got no idea...good critic in the United States. But Yale Art School is conceded to be the best.

J: Picking persons for their artistic abilities less so than their administrative aspect, and so forth.

H: Yeah, they ^{had} ~~have~~ artists in the...artists as head of the department, and they don't have a hell of a lot of work. I went in and visited one guy who was.. he was an outstanding painter in the United States...I visited him up there in his office. He had this glass-topped desk, a secretary up front, he had all the time in the world, no papers around, I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I don't have anything to do," he said, "I come in here and I, you know, you asked to have an appointment with me so here I am." But he didn't have anything to do. You go up and look at _____ office-- papers are so thick on his desk and he has reports to make and he's probably working, like I did, twelve to fourteen hours a day.

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J: It's not worth it. I think so much of it is dictated purely economic aspect, too, you know. A school this size is just so wrapped up with budgets, statistics, and all--it's very bad for art.

H: It is.

J: It's bad enough in history.

H: You worry the teachers--the teachers are worried. Yesterday at the faculty meeting they said they're thinking of cutting retirement back to sixty. Then, you see, all kinds of things come in, and then you have to decide on who's going to get promoted. Yesterday we were trying to decide who should be promoted, you know, to full professor, and you have to weigh all these people, and the people who are being weighed feel it.

J: You can't be creative when you're worried about whether you're going to get a promotion or whether you're going to have tenure, and the whole thing.

H: No; so I don't see any hope for anything happening in a state...in a state-run university, because the tax payers won't allow it.

J: At least it should teach the student it's part of his general education, the importance of ^{Art that} ~~that~~ type of thing...

H: We had...we had when I came here in 1938 that was left to me by the preceding Yale people--Doolittle and the other guy that preceded Doolittle was a Yale man--we had a Yale atmosphere. And that's why, I think, largely, why we had such good results. I visited one of my former students, Beasley _____, down in Clearwater, and we were reminiscing. He asked me to come over to his studio, because he's made his life on art, he's done very well. Right now he owns two or three stores in Clearwater----he just came down from New York--he's been in New York and New Jersey since he got out of here--and he's done very well. His portraits are beautiful. So anyway, Beasley and I were talking about

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H: the people that came out of the art department under me, because they didn't have anybody else. They had freedom, man, they had freedom, and they all did well, you know. Maybe it was just the time--who knows? But they were ready, anyway, for the times.

J: Well, that proves your thesis right there.

H: You see, then, after the...after the... then of _____ course, Stuart _____ was the same type as myself, because he came up that way, you know, he came from the Art Students' League, and you see, the Art Students' League was a good thing, and what did the university...Yale get one time but Art Students' League people from Chicago? I think it's called that... no, Chicago Art Institute. They brought those people into Yale, because they had the same tradition, you see, and Stuart had it. He tried to do it here; he couldn't do it under Arnett. So it was... we lost the big chance, you see.

J: ^{Right in that} ~~That was a~~ crucial two or three year period there.

H: Yeah. There was an opportunity, but there was no understanding, you see. There still isn't.

J: Well, Art, just like History, Sociology--people don't see a real need for it as such, you know. Of course, I'm afraid that's true as far as the way administrators approach various departments, you know. Let's build up a science-chemistry-physics type thing, and much as I hate to say it, I think ^{as} you know it's true, students, I'm afraid, have been brainwashed to feel that ^{also} ~~too~~. You know, if it doesn't have a practicality to it that they can see as far as an income, you know, they're not interested in it. Although I think there is a shift back to this now. I think students ^{are becoming} more humanistic, perhaps more aware of art, music, history, and so forth. Maybe I'm mistaken. I don't think the administration necessarily is... and you've got to understand their point. They're trying to

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J: get money, and the government doesn't want to give them money as far as art, they want to give them money as far as Gatorade, you know, type things, so your stymied I can understand. There's a lot of frustrations.

H: I know. Yeah, and I can feel it too.

J: Well, I think you've had a career to be rather pleased with. Of course, it's by no means over. You're worried a little bit about retirement, you say.

H: Yeah, the retirement looms up.

J: ^{You don't want to} ~~With all the~~ travel, paint, bliss, abroad for a year or two.

H: Yeah, really I love students. I just love them. ^{But} I don't think I can do that much for them. I can do some...the kind of student I have now, which is a non-major, and I get them from every college in the University, and usually brilliant as hell. They come from Arts and Sciences---I have students up to seventh year students. One seventh year, one sixth year, and a bunch from engineering, the others from Arts and Sciences, and you know, they're brilliant. It's a pleasure talking with them, working with them, because they have... they haven't got that indoctrination the art student has, you see, ^{that} ~~the~~ art student has this curriculum he's gone through, and he is... he ^{knows} he's got to go through these things and he has to take them like pills. ^{And he} ~~He~~ isn't ready for them, he doesn't want them, but he does them because this is part of the whole thing. These students...I don't have any... I don't have any required courses, mine are all electives, so the people who come to me want it and they, you know, and they're open, open to get what they...what I have to offer.

J: That's always the way. They can stand detached a little bit from the main curriculum and so forth. I think that's probably true in a lot of areas. That's why I hate to see courses required, whether it's history or art, ^{or whatever,}

H: Yeah, this was my thesis, frankly, in that a good university should not have required curriculums except in certain fields, say, medicine, perhaps, law.

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H: But in the art department, no, not for people who are going into painting and sculpture. If you want creative work, you've got to allow them to create, not do their creating for them.

J: Yeah. We've got this about Sumner up. You said at the beginning, you know, the University is a detriment, I think, in many ways it kind of curtails creativity in so many things. Well, we've covered...