

Interviewee: DANIEL STACEY RICE
 Participant: VIRGINIA S. FOSTER
 Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[THE INTERVIEW WAS RECORDED ON BOTH VIDEO AND AUDIO. THE SOUND ON THE AUDIO IS POOR.]

[BEGINNING OF VIDEO 8, CASSETTE 1]

[BEGINNING OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 1.]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Dan, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

DSR: Actually, my brother heard about it first. He was in the Marine Paratroopers. He was in some campaign, I forget, Choisan [PH], Bougainville, one of those islands and a fellow paratrooper, who lived in the South, had been, he said, thrown out of most of the Southern universities, and if he came through the war alive, he was going to go to this place called Black Mountain College. And told my brother about it. Jack wrote for a brochure – information – and he then decided he wanted to go and mailed it to me. And I was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and I got, fabulously, this letter from him with the brochure in it. I was interested in music at the time. I had been a trumpet player, and the war gave me enough of a pause to realize that I didn't want to go on being a trumpet player, but I wanted to study composition. And here was this fellow, Jalowetz, teaching at Black Mountain. He had discovered Alban Berg and Krenek and I think gave Schoenberg his first hearings, and it sounded wonderful to me. So I decided I would go too or apply. So both Jack and I applied, and the admissions committee decided that we had a – what's that term? I can't think of it. Anyway, a dominant-dependent relationship, and so they told Jack to apply later. "We're going to take the younger one that's dependent." And so I was accepted. We both went so that he could look it over, and he then had to get back and board the bus and go back to California. And I stayed on. And indeed he did come later. So that's how I heard about it, and that's how I got there. It was my home. So much more than a school. It's really a place to live with people that I want to live with. Jalowetz died about two weeks or so before I got there, but I quickly learned that I was never going to be a composer, and switched to architecture. I had been dabbling in drawing, painting, continued to do that, but it wasn't until I left Black Mountain to go back to California and get married, and then went to Berkeley. I wanted to go back to Black Mountain immediately and called my advisor, Bill Levi

[TELEPHONE RINGS. INTERRUPTION IN TAPING.] and he said that there's just no one here to teach architecture right now. Why don't you wait until there is someone? And so I went to Berkeley for a while.

MEH: Dan, okay, you went to Black Mountain and that would have been like maybe the spring of '4- –

DSR: '46.

MEH: '46. Okay. And then how long did you stay?

DSR: I stayed until – through the '47 semester. And then Don Wight, and I hitchhiked across the country together back to California, and while I was going to Berkeley, I met Dreyfus and his wife Fannie – I can't remember what her maiden name was now. But they were married by that time, and he told me that Joe Fiore was across the Bay in San Francisco at the San Francisco School of Fine Arts. So I really spent half of my time at the School with Joe, and he finally said "You know, you've got to quit messing around and start painting." And he, on his GI Bill, bought me a lot of tubes of paint and canvas, brushes. So, I started painting. I really – I really knew that I wanted to paint. I don't know why I went on with architecture but I did. So, when Bucky Fuller came to Black Mountain, I went back, nominally, and studied architecture.

MEH: You went back to Black Mountain to study architecture.

DSR: Went back to Black Mountain.

MEH: Was that '48 or '49?

DSR: Taking my wife who – while we were in San Francisco, Merce and John came through giving concerts, that is one night a concert of John's work, the next night Merce dancing with Cage playing the piano. And it was so wildly exciting, and my wife, who had gotten her degree in Phys.Ed., really didn't know what she wanted to do. Decided she wanted to dance. So she went to Black Mountain along with me, of course. As a matter of fact, we drove across, you know. A car that June and I had just bought and taking along with us the Dreyfuses and Fiore – six of us in this little Ford V8, with a trailer behind. It was the most god-awful trip. We had just gotten Joe's wife out of the mental hospital, where she had been for some months, and I think three days after her release we were off on this trip, and it was just too much. She broke down on the way, so we dropped Joe and his wife, Anne off at Joe's parents' place outside of Cleveland and went on. The Dreyfuses were going back to France, so we drove them to Brooklyn where her parents lived. Crossing Brooklyn Bridge, the trailer wheel gave way [LAUGHS] right in the middle of the Brooklyn Bridge. Oh, my. And so her father salvaged us all. We spent a couple of days, and then we went back to Cleveland. Picked up Joe and got Anne into a hospital, with her parents, and the three of us returned to Black Mountain. And that's when he met Mary, that summer. I think it was. End of that saga.

MEH: Was that the summer of '48? Was that Fuller's first summer there? When he did that dome? The Supine Dome? Or was it the second summer when he had all of his people from the Institute of Design.

DSR: No, he came back.

MEH: Right. With whom did you take art courses at Black Mountain?

DSR: Well, I took one semester with Albers. The rest of the time I really worked mostly with Fiore. And then Pete Jennerjahn taught an Albersian color class and design class, having studied a good deal with Albers. So he sort of second-handedly taught the Albers principles also. And I worked with him a short while, I forget now, a semester or a year or whatever. And then the New York painters started coming at that time – de Kooning. And de Kooning said “You ought to get Kline,” and actually I had met Kline in New York on my first Christmas vacation in '46. I went to New York to see what it was like, and quite by accident this cafeteria on Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue, where a lot of painters hung out. And I was sitting with a cup of coffee. At the next table there must have been five or six guys talking about painting, so I asked if I could come join them. And one of them was Kline and another was Mark O'Riley [PH]. Can't remember who the others were – Peter Agostini? Anyway. So I went to Kline's studio with him, and I think there was another – not that day – but brief, that day, to visit him, Fourth Street studio. So I saw some of his work then. It was very conventional work, you know, still lifes, cityscapes, that sort of thing. He was just beginning to experiment, and he kept them very much to himself. I re-met him when he came to Black Mountain. I think it must have been '52 or so. But he was the second of that New York group and [UNINTEL WORD] I forget who, Motherwell, Tworkov, Stamos, et cetera. And I think Ben Shahn was thrown in there someplace because he was a friend of Charles Olson's. So I studied with all of them, but it was – mostly I really worked with Fiore. Mostly I really didn't work with anybody, to tell you the truth. That was one of the wonderful things about Black Mountain was you had a studio, and everybody assumed that you were working hard. Fiore would stop by once in a while, “Are you busy?” It looked pretty good. Kline came to see me once in the studio. He said, “Pretty good size paintings.” [LAUGHS] I think Motherwell came in once. I don't even remember what he said, but he had some single comment equally bland. I just worked.

VF: Where, physically was your studio?

DSR: At various places. All over. I had worked in the Study [sic] Building for a short while, but then the paintings began to get larger. So behind the Study Building there were some old GI barrack buildings that the school bought for dormitory and classroom situations. I had a studio in there for a while. Then I took over the lobby of the building called Black Dwarf for a while and worked there. Just any place that was large enough and bright enough.

MEH: Did you ever study painting formally besides with Fiore – as formal as that was – with Albers? [OVERTALK]

DSR: Formally? No. No. No. Joe also taught drawing and lithography and silkscreen, and I took courses with him. You know, that kind of thing. Ours was a – I mean, I had met Joe in '46 as a fellow student and [UNINTEL WORD]. Then we became very close friends in San Francisco. So, it was

always a strange teacher-student relationship between us. But from – I really learned a lot about the technique of painting from Joe, but it was Kline that I felt that I got the most education from because he taught me how to live as a painter. Both I began to get glimmerings at Black Mountain what that was about, because he spent all his time with students, and although I didn't see him in my studio, I saw him constantly – Peek's Tavern and, you know, around. The Dining Hall, et cetera. And then, of course, later we became very close in New York, and he really taught me how to live as a painter. If you want to paint, that's what you did. You painted. And when you ran out of material to paint with or were about to get thrown out of your loft or got thrown out of your loft, which happened several times for non-payment of rent, and you needed another studio, then you went out and got a job until you saved enough money to buy a roll of canvas and enough paint and for a down-payment on a new studio, whatever. And then you quit work and went back to your real work. And I don't – I look back on that in those years and realize that Black Mountain really educated me in those terms. I guess it was dedication [UNINTEL WORD]. And the poverty that was such a constant at Black Mountain was great preparation [LAUGHS] for the life of an artist. I lived down at the Fish Market, surrounded by ex-Black Mountain students like Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly, Basil King, et cetera. New York really was a continuation of Black Mountain. Studying painting at Black Mountain was also a marvelous introduction into professional life as a painter in – in the sense that you knew all these people that had either taught there or had been students there. So, you walked into a family of Black Mountain people in New York, and that was a great gift. So many people go to New York and are just lost. It was nice to go there and be part of a family.

MEH: Dan, did you take courses at Black Mountain? What courses other than art did you take?

DSR: Oh, I always audited Olson's classes and studied anthropology with Paul Leser and language with Flola Shepard, math with Dehn, and, as I said, Peter Nemenyi taught me calculus. And, oh, had a chemistry course with Paul Williams, given by Natasha Goldowski, right? There's Wanda Landowska. Anyway, Natasha gave us a special course in the chemistry of metals and plastic for architectural purposes. That was fun. What else? History. Can't really remember. Can't really remember anything else, academic courses other than that. Woodworking with Molly Gregory. But building, designing, building the chemistry and physics class with Paul Williams and the other architects were the sort of projects that really taught me carpentry. And it does help. Now I can pretty much – how I made my living in New York, when I had to make a living.

VF: You were still thinking of becoming an architect then?

DSR: Well, I, you know, I split once again. Went up to live with Paul and Vera Williams in Boston and got a degree. I don't know why. But really knew I wanted to paint.

MEH: Now is that when you got your degree at MIT?

DSR: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: In architecture?

DSR: Yeah.

MEH: Did you live with Paul and Vera then?

DSR: Yeah.

MEH: Where were they living?

DSR: Oh. It was Hyde Park. One of the great districts. It's so vague. I think it's north, the north part of Boston. As I remember we had to drive a long way – Paul and I – and Paul had this World War Two jeep with just a canvas top and the floorboards had great holes in them. And driving through the winter weather was really, really tough. I don't think the heater worked. If it did, you couldn't tell.

MEH: Were there other Black Mountain students living with them then in Boston?

DSR: Not at that time, no. I think other people visited. I don't remember that anybody else actually lived with them.

MEH: Now is that when he was still –

DSR: There was another person living with them at the time. He was a mathematician at Harvard. Nice man, but I don't remember his name.

MEH: Were there other people – Is that when he was doing his A-frame house on the Cape or was that later?

DSR: No, we built the Cape place later. And I helped him get that started. I didn't work long with it. We sort of began it and I saw it later. Years, years later. [UNINTEL WORD]. I remember when we were just beginning to work on the place Oli Sihvonen, who lived just down the street in Wellfleet.

MEH: Why did you decide to go back to Black Mountain?

DSR: Why did I decide to paint? [PAUSE]

VF: What year was that you got your degree from MIT?

DSR: Gee, I – you know me and years. I just –

VF: Early '50s.

DSR: It was in the '50s sometime. '54 or something like that. I don't know. I just really don't know. Virginia knows how bad I am about years or dates.

MEH: How would you describe Charles Olson?

DSR: How would I describe him? My god. Just overwhelming. The breadth of his knowledge and his interests was absolutely mindboggling. I mean, I had never known anyone just quite like that. I'd known quite a lot of poets by that time but –

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2.]

While I was at Berkeley, Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan used to come over to our house all the time, and they were terribly taken with Olson, having read Call Me Ishmael, the Melville piece. And Spicer died and Duncan later went to Black Mountain, of course. He taught there, and they were both brilliant minds. But, you know, I – it wasn't just that Olson was brilliant. It was that the scope of his interests and reference was just staggering. I'd never experienced anything like it. He took me to meet Ezra Pound, and I went back to St. Elizabeth's several times with and

without Olson. And there, again, that was the only other person I think I'd ever met that had a breadth of interest that could compare to Olson's.

MEH: Describe your meetings with Pound. Where did you meet?

DSR: At St. Elizabeth's.

MEH: Was there like a visitors' room, or –?

DSR: No, it was during warm weather, and we were always outside. And there would always be a large group of people – or almost always –and he would expound. It was something else. Megalomaniac. I felt – I think it was Nick Cernovich that said "the guy could culture a boar." [LAUGHS] But he was also quite insane. That I do know. He had no sense that if you got him talking about economics, then his anti-Semitic –anti-Semitism –immediately came up, and it was very hard to keep him off either politics or economics. And either one of them just sent him into a – well, he couldn't get out of it once he was in it. You know, he was very out of it. But as long as he was talking about poetry or literature, it was wonderful.

MEH: How did people react to this?

DSR: I really couldn't – couldn't tell because people were pretty generally silent. I mean he just held forth.

VF: How big a crowd are you talking about?

DSR: Well, sometimes thirty people just ringed around. He usually leaned back against a large tree, spoke to us in a semi-circle in front of him. Sometimes not so many. And Olson very clearly was something special to him, but a challenge to him.

MEH: Would Olson sit quietly and listen to him?

DSR: [LAUGHS] He – he would argue with him sometimes, historic facts. But he pretty much played a passive role. When they – They saw each other alone quite a lot, and those meetings were anything but – his role in those meetings was anything but passive. He sure took pleasure in taunting Pound. Pound was always trying to trace his genealogy, for instance, and he'd play a little game with him. Was he some way back Jewish or not? But by that time, Olson had pretty well, I think, outgrown Pound or at least discarded him as just not worth it.

VF: What was Olson doing in Washington [INAUDIBLE]? What brought him back to Washington? [INTERRUPTION; MEH LEAVES ROOM WITH RECORDER STILL ON]

DSR: Shall I go on? He was teaching at Black Mountain on a – on a sort of lecturer basis, and he would come down for short visits and then return to Washington.

VF: So he hadn't left Washington, really?

DSR: [OVERTALK] He was really living in Washington at that time. I think it was just the next year that he accepted a permanent position at Black Mountain, and very quickly became Rector.

VF: When you think about your Black Mountain years, who were the people, the students, your fellow students, that you, that most quickly come to mind as your real soul mates?

DSR: Interesting question. My first year there, Ken Noland, because his study was next to mine, and we listened to jazz together all the time, and – I'll save this story till Mary gets back about his involvement with painting, at that time. But not so much Fiore until I got to San Francisco. We really got close in San Francisco. I knew him but not awfully well. José Yglesias was very – in that first year –

VF: That is '46.

DSR: Yeah. Very important. He was older and really sort of taught me a lot about politics because I was very naïve about politics. And later on, I think, Nick Cernovich. Certainly Creeley, but he wasn't a student.

VF: So when Creeley first came, he came as a teacher.

DSR: Yeah. By the time he came, we had exchanged many letters and all of that. So, we met through Olson by mail. But I was going to save this story for you, Mary, because I'm not sure that you've ever heard it. Ken Noland and I had studies next to each other that first year of mine at Black Mountain. In '46. And he was a day student from Asheville, and he was there to find out if he was a painter. He was going to give it one semester, and if he did a good painting, then he was going to be a painter. And he went through most of the semester. Ilya Bolotowsky was teaching, and Ilya would come with a little flashlight and point at parts of the painting with this little flashlight. So, I heard next door Ilya say "That's a wonderful painting!" Then he left, and Ken came running into my studio and said "I'm going to be a painter!" [LAUGHTER]

VF: I wonder if he remembers that? You ought to remind him.

DSR: I never asked. But it was a real tiny thing like this. Cubist. And it was quite good. . [LAUGHS]

MEH: Did you study with Bolotowsky then?

DSR: I talked a lot with Bolotowsky, but I didn't study with him.

MEH: What do you remember about Albers' class?

DSR: Mostly Albers, and I really didn't [UNINTEL] like Rauschenberg – one semester, which was plenty. I didn't like Albers and – I was fascinated by his work, but I didn't like the man at all.

MEH: Why not?

DSR: Germanic. [TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION]

MEH: What type of printing things did you do when you were at Black Mountain?

DSR: Silkscreen and lithography. Not a lot of either. I was – I was just too intent on trying to paint to have really the patience for it.

MEH: Did you work on the college press? The printing press?

DSR: Well down underneath the Study [sic] Building there was – you know, where that large gravel area, that room that led out to that open gravel area was where the lithography press was and where we did drawing. It was much of it an art room, and the next room was the weaving room, which was about four or five times the size.

MEH: I'm talking about the press that they did like poetry things on.

DSR: Oh, you mean the printing press. Are you asking me if I had anything to do with it? No.

VF: Didn't you do some covers for some things?

- DSR:** Oh, I did covers, but they were always made into lini cuts [linocuts ?], and then other people would print them.
- MEH:** What was the Jargon publication – was it The Double Backed Beast that you did?
- DSR:** That was with Kalos, Victor Kalos.
- MEH:** How did you go about doing that?
- DSR:** It was the first winter that – You were given your choice at Christmas vacation to either go away or live without heat, and I chose to live without heat, for some reason. Now I don't remember why. Which was also a great preparation for being in New York. But I couldn't – for the ink, because it was so cold. It was too thick to go onto the printing plate. So I did it by hand – rolled the ink out on the line cut [PH] and pressed by hand. And the inside I just did by hand.
- MEH:** Would that mean that each of them is individual – is different?
- DSR:** Yes. They were all – Ink being so thick and even being rolled out by hand, it would adhere differently. So each as quite individual. Yes.
- MEH:** Who were the other students who were painting seriously when you were there?
- DSR:** Painting students?
- MEH:** Who were the other students who were painting seriously when you were there?
- DSR:** Well, in the early years Fiore, Ruth Asawa, Oli Sihvonen And there were others but I can't remember right now. Joan Stack. Later on Rauschenberg. Cy Twombly. Ken Noland came back to work I think when Clement Greenberg and Stamos came down for the summer. Basil King. I'm forgetting names.
- MEH:** What about Dorothea Rockborne?
- DSR:** Dorothea was very, very subdued. There was those days at Black Mountain – I remember that she claimed that there was a great deal, not of misogyny –
- VF:** Sexism?
- DSR:** Sexism, and I've never believed that true, and I checked with some of the other women, after I heard that Dorothea, and they didn't believe that it was true. But it was certainly her interpretation that it was true. She must have felt something.
- VF:** And Francine says the same.
- DSR:** Francine says the same?
- MEH:** That it was sexist. Yes, Hilda Morley says the same. A lot of people felt that way.
- DSR:** Well, I can understand it from Hilda because she was – her ego was not being satisfied. She was so dwarfed by Olson that nobody paid the slightest bit of attention to her, and she would give readings. People would sort of yawn because they weren't – Her poetry was not dynamic and that was certainly the mode. It wasn't just Olson. The way that the students were writing, what they were interested in – Pound and William Carlos Williams, Zukofsky. Creeley. And Hilda was competing with Creeley and Olson, and I'm not surprised that she felt insignificant or felt not paid attention to. But the truth, [INAUDIBLE WORD] Dorothea, I just don't remember at all as a painter except she then married Carroll Williams and moved into Black Mountain proper – I mean the town – with their child or to have the child. And I had to see Carroll about something. I was driving a little MG at the time, and it was making a funny sound and went to ask Carroll's advice about this funny sound. And I saw a painting of hers on the wall there that really struck me very forcefully. I remember it to this day, a blue pitcher

on a yellow table. It was a very fine painting. I remember telling her so. But other than that, I just – I mean I was very – I was startled. I don't think I'd seen any of her work at all. I have the feeling that she was just waiting to be coaxed out. I mean, if somebody wanted to have an exhibition or wanted to put up their work to get comments from the community in general, particularly from the other painters around, you just checked it out with Joe, [INAUDIBLE] and mounted a show. That's the kind of way it worked. And that may have been against Dorothea's nature and consequently she may have felt slighted. But I – I was never aware of sexism at Black Mountain. I was thoroughly convinced there was a meritocracy, which maybe was [UNINTEL]. Not real – because other women were paid, you know, a lot of attention to. Francine was ignored because of her manners and her background. She came off as very snooty, and everybody but Jonathan Williams was very put off. She was thought of as being a sort of lightweight, frivolous. I don't think – I don't think she could possibly have been, but I think it was her sophistication and her manners, accent, and very ultra New York background. Just everybody went the other way. Except Jonathan Williams.

VF: Which raises the question, how much – if you don't mind my asking because I'm interested in it – how much pressure was there, even if very subtle, to adhere to or to follow some of the main interests or trends? If you're a poet, how much pressure did you feel to explain that the poetry of William Carlos Williams or if you're a painter or whatever – do you see what I'm asking? If you're someone who's not, whose main impulse is to track that way, did you feel sort of the need to track that way because that was the need thrust up in such a small community?

DSR: I just – I believe that the time was right for that kind of work, whether it was in poetry or painting, sculpture, whatever, and people who responded – I remember Motherwell saying that when he first saw quotes-unquotes “modern painting,” that it was an instantaneous relief in it. He was ready for it, that the time was right, et cetera. And he stopped being a philosopher and became a painter. And I believe that was the situation at Black Mountain, that there were a certain number of poets all working more or less in the same direction. I mean, if you compare Creeley's verse to Olson's verse, they are in a sense almost antithetical, yet they are in the same direction.

VF: How would you characterize that direction? I mean – That cut across all of the disciplines. Would it be that it was the cutting edge of moving Modernism or, you know, what –?

DSR: No, it was the death of Modernism. It was the end of Modernism. It was the first thing to replace Modernism. Modernism being a French product.

VF: Is that how it was felt at the time? Is that how you experienced that? I mean the sense in the air of what you were all about?

DSR: No. Not as students. I think some of the people – See, I'm not sure say, Kline or de Kooning, thought in those terms. But it would take Harold Rosenberg to formulate this, [SECTION ON VIDEO ONLY BEGINS: To look at the product that way. They were just trying to figure out what to do, how to make a painting, how to make a painting a way they wanted it to be without knowing just what it was they wanted it to be. [END IF VIDEO ONLY TEXT]

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF AUDIOTAPE 2, SIDE 1.]

[DISCUSSION OF PLANS FOR EVENING NOT TRANSCRIBED] It really was not formulated in anyone's mind quite yet. Apropos your original question though, I do remember a girl there who wanted to study poetry, and she was crazy about Gerard Manley Hopkins. And nobody had any patience. It was "Get out of here!"

VF: That is my question.

DSR: And I was struck by the sort of incivility of it and the impatience. But, but if – if you are intensely involved in a direction and in some making of something that you have no firm grasp of, no definition of, you don't have a lot of patience for people who are trying to distract you with something you feel has nothing to do with what you're doing.

VF: Or you feel that you've left behind. Is that the idea – that that's in the past and we know we're –

DSR: Well it's not so much in the past, because there's a great deal of admiration for certain poets of the past, but Hopkins wasn't one of them. Those historic figures that were either revered or studied intently had some relationship to the current process.

MEH: Who really determined what the current process was?

DSR: I'm not sure –

MEH: Who really determined what the current process was?

DSR: There wasn't anyone determining that. Everybody was flying off their own directions. Rauschenberg and Twombly were sticking gravel and doing their all black paintings. They would take their heavily painted canvases down there in that gravel area underneath the Study [sic] Building and press them into the gravel and pick up gravel and then paint over the tops of that all the way to Fiore's, you know. I mean the range of work was all the way to Fiore's very finicky kind of abstraction, very carefully done, almost cerebral. Cerebral in effect. Almost cerebral in effect. I don't think his process was all that cerebral, but the paintings were very neat.

MEH: Were you there the summer that Creeley came the first time, the spring?

DSR: I can't –

MEH: Were you there the first spring when Creeley came?

DSR: Yeah. I was there when he came. Later, I don't believe it was right away. I think it was later that we roommated together. Yeah, I think when he first came, he lived in the Study [sic] Building. He and I had known about each other from Olson. I'd read his work, and Olson had told me about him about me, and so – he was still in Mallorca, as a matter of fact I believe when we first exchanged letters he was still in Aix-en-Provence. Then he moved to Mallorca, and in Mallorca he published a book of verse by Paul Blackburn and asked me to do the cover for it. And that began an exchange of letters. So we felt really we knew each other before we actually met. And we were sort of – at Black Mountain sort of constant companions. As a matter of fact, they called us the Bobbsey Twins. Chamberlain and that group. Jorge Fick. Jorge Fick is another painter of a lot of intensity.

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. VIDEO SCAN OF STUDIO WHILE WAITING.]

DSR: She and I had a great adventure with Martin Story (?).

MEH: Now you are talking about Joan Stack?

DSR: Yeah. In itself, but I hesitate to give it to you on tape because I'm not sure that she would want it known. And so while she's living, I guess I'll keep that in abeyance. I'll tell you privately [INTERRUPTION]

MEH: Looking back, how did you, as you recall it in the '50s, see the life of an artist? You know, you guys, you were young artists. You were in touch with some pretty serious people – de Kooning and Kline and, you know, I think for young artists at that time it was really hard to know how to be an artist. Do you understand what I'm saying? You know, how do you just make it work? What do you do? It wasn't like today when everybody's an artist, or they're artists everywhere.

DSR: Right.

MEH: I mean what did you really, what did it mean to be an artist then?

DSR: It was a dedication to absolute poverty and trying to keep things together, mainly a studio that had electricity and usually meant living without heat through New York winters. And without bathing facilities. Just however you could put it together. Most – most painters married and their wives supported them. It was – I found that unacceptable to force any woman that I would be that interested in to live that kind of life. And so I didn't remarry for many many years. It – it was a day-to-day existence, held together by the one common thread of the intensity of involvement with work – that was the end and the entirety of the life plan with a sort of quiet desperation of trying to find a gallery that might possibly sell your work. And in the end, but not until I think it was '59 when I was about thirty-three I think or thirty-two that Catherine Viviano had a party, asked Kline if he knew of any young American undiscovered artists that she might build up her gallery, which was almost entirely made of Europeans – Kay Sage, Yves Tanguy, Afro, Mirko. Italians. English. I think by that time Kay Sage had died. But she had learned the business through Matisse and Pierre Matisse, and it was European, mainly European-oriented, and she wanted a young American doing that kind of work to – to take, you know, a risk on, or with, and build up. And then I later learned that she had also asked de Kooning, and they had both suggested me so she decided that I was probably the one. We met at Franz's studio and then went down to my place in the Fish Market, and she looked at the work. We made the agreement. I was to be associated with the gallery. I stayed with her then eleven years. And I had several exhibitions with her. I'd had just sort of single exhibitions before that with the Stable Gallery, the Poindexter Gallery, which had evolved from the old Charlie Egan Gallery. And I adored Catherine because she was an old-world dealer. No pressure. She understood artists and their eccentricities and made no demands at all. No pressure about having an exhibition until you were ready to have an exhibition. And she was in the process of getting articles written in good prestigious magazines, et cetera, introducing the people like Dorothy Miller and all the critics. And then Pop Art hit and everybody flooded away from the kind of work that I was doing. And so she really lost a great deal of money by having taken me on. Not that she didn't make sales, but the sales were to generally interested places, the work in collections that would be seen and that sort of thing. And really laying the groundwork for building a reputation. In the meanwhile, oh, Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, Ken Noland, John Chamberlain had all found their niche, and when she said at one point "I got you

two years too late. So it never quite clicked.” I’ve lived in anonymity since. Not that I particularly regret that, but somehow my own – it’s allowed me my own path without the pressures they all experienced. Reproducing what made them famous. All the distractions of fame and fortune.

MEH: How do you see yourself in relationship to, say, Noland or Rauschenberg and Twombly.

DSR: In relationship?

MEH: To these other people – Noland, Rauschenberg, Twombly – as an artist?

DSR: Well I, I never fit comfortably, I believe, into the general idea of so-called Abstract Expressionism – not being very expressionistic. I was more – I seem to be sort of a natural lyricist and, and I’ve always wanted to build time in my paintings so that you didn’t get them right away. But as you look at the painting, discover things. I’ve always believed in process of making the painting, and an act of discovery, rather than innovation. And I’ve always felt that was a necessary – almost a responsibility – of producing work with that element in it. That after a few years of living with a painting, you were still able to see things suddenly differently, or something you had had missed before. That immediately separated me from that entire group. Bob Rauschenberg and somewhat followed by Twombly, but certainly by Jasper Johns, two of Rauschenberg’s boyfriends, whom he I firmly believe taught how to paint. Followed Cage in his philosophies about art and which in turn came right out of – oh, lord, my memory – the French painter who painted *Nude Descending the [sic] Staircase* and a lot of DADA work and really created the found object. A great chess player, who lived in New York. I cannot think of his name.

MEH: Duchamp.

DSR: Duchamp. Yes, thank you.

MEH: Took me a minute too.

DSR: Cage was a very close friend of Duchamp’s, and I think had those leanings to begin with but were fortified by Duchamp. John always said that when he studied with Schoenberg, Schoenberg told him that he couldn’t be a composer because he couldn’t write melodic lines, so he decided that he’d be a composer who didn’t use melodic lines. And sure enough, he didn’t. But in all of Bob’s work I can see very clearly came out of Cage’s ideas in a graphic or a visual way, and quite wonderful. And I could have gone that way myself. I was interested. I liked John. Got along well with him, but it just wasn’t me. I know at Black Mountain I was surprised – I was reading Amiri Baraka’s biography. Amiri Baraka I knew as LeRoi Jones, and we were pretty close friends. One of those that were incorporated into the Black Mountain Poets, of a sort, you know. Cubby Selby and a number of other poets. And until he divorced himself – that is, LeRoi – Roi we called him – divorced himself from his white friends for political – politics reasons – we were very close. And I was reading his biography, he referred to me as the first Minimalist and I was just staggered because all the Minimalists to me seemed like Albers design assignments. And – But aesthetically, a much deeper reason. It went against my somehow innate or deeply felt – and/or deeply felt – feelings about the element of time being built into a painting, because Minimalism you see. And it’s not that you can’t go on experiencing it, but it’s a

very limited range of experience. You get the idea, and then that's it. In general terms. So I was very startled by Roi's comment. And then I thought back to my late years at Black Mountain when I was working on paper, very large sheets of paper. Oh, seven by ten, twelve feet. And trying to work out paintings that had to do with sound and silence, and when I thought about them, I realized that, yes, they were Minimalist. As a matter of fact, the cover that, you know, that I did for the Black Mountain Review was part of that period. Just sort of squiggles on a field. So that, that's how Roi – or Amiri – got the idea about my Minimalism. I'm sure it was had also been reported to him by others who were at Black Mountain at that particular time, which was fairly late in the school's history – Chamberlain and all. But I could do – and how I got into all this was by my remark that I – there was an attraction of the Cagean philosophies et cetera for me. But I did turn aside, rather consciously and went the other way of keeping (heaping?) stuff into a painting. Well, I think it would be redundant to really say a lot more.

MEH: What about – you make a real distinction between art and design.

DSR: Well, the way Albers taught it was as visual phenomenon. Lines when they become very close begin to vibrate and create third lines and the in-and-out perspective of the concentric lines et cetera. That sort of thing. It also, of course, had to do with gathering natural materials, which was then pretty much because we didn't have any other materials, as you've heard ad infinitum. But it was what he taught at Yale, producing people like Stella and so many of the Minimalist painters reminded me of Kenneth Snelson, who was attending Buckminster Fuller lectures, and I was surprised to learn in conversation with him –

[END OF AUDIOTAPE 2, SIDE 1, BEGINNING OF SIDE 2.]

MEH: You were saying – talking about Kenneth Snelson.

DSR: Yeah. I was surprised to learn one day, in conversation, that he had no interest in architecture. And I said "What he was doing there?" and he said "Well, I'm a sculptor, and I'm absolutely fascinated with the visual demonstrations of his principles of structure, which are based on tension and compression." And often the demonstration of his various theories were steel bars suspended in space by wires, all with interactive forces holding these things in space. And I could see they were sculptures. And true enough, Kenneth was then producing those things ever since, which, you know – they're very beautiful. But they are Bucky's demonstrations of theory. But Bob's – Rauschenberg's – white paintings, say, came right, completely out of [INAUDIBLE WORD] Cage's philosophies. You know, the piano piece which is called "Four Minutes and Some Seconds."

MEH: In fact, Cage would say the opposite, because the white paintings came before the piano piece and Cage says the piano piece –

DSR: I know, but he talked about the theory of silence being –

MEH: Okay, that's right.

DSR: – an absolute generator of sound, and the found-object paintings which Bob called assemblages – or *assemblage* – again, was done – By saying this, it sounds as though I'm putting Rauschenberg down. I thought he had a wonderfully inventive mind, and I had a great time with Bob. He was a good friend, and I liked what he was doing, and he was the first that I knew personally that went against what was being accepted as – what was his name? – names,

again. Oh, well. You know, the – at that time, abstract, so-called Abstract Expressionism or the New York School, which is more comfortable, was the way to paint, and Bob was one that – as was Ken Noland – who disagreed with that and created their own direction, as I were.

MEH: I think this partially explains why there's no Black Mountain style or no Black Mountain "school of art," in that if you look at you guys, you know, and women, fewer women, people identified with different philosophies and different personalities. Like Rauschenberg found a kindred spirit, and Ray Johnson too, in Cage and [UNINTEL WORD] Cunningham and that way of thinking and exploring. Someone like Ruth Asawa was more attached to Albers and his way of thinking. You know, it's like you selected the person – because you were all exposed to the same people. So when like Ken Snelson saw in what Fuller was doing a visual image that he wanted to explore. You identified more with Kline and with de Kooning and with what I really see as more of a European tradition than what was happening in –

DSR: Oh, always. Quite an influence.

MEH: So people really – It's not like there was a single father figure that everybody looked to and so you had a similar style. It was very much people being exposed to a lot of different people, and different people taking different directions, but having in common that you all wanted to be artists. And so I think that sort of helps explain the reason that there's no Black Mountain "style" as such.

DSR: True.

MEH: Which I think is one of – that's one of the strengths of the school. And you felt that you were very close to the poets?

DSR: Yeah. I – [OVERTALK]

MEH: How did this influence your work?

DSR: – somehow seemed to – their work resonated with me personally, and I really couldn't say how it influenced my work. I think I have more the sense of a parallel track than sort of being somehow influenced.

MEH: Yes, now I'm not really thinking of their work influencing you but, you know, your art. I'm thinking what was the – how did it affect your work being in contact with poets and writers – not in terms of how you painted but just in terms of how you thought or how you thought about your work.

DSR: Well, they – they were always more verbal than most of the visual artists that I had known, and I found that very easy to live with. They were able to verbalize a lot that I recognized as my own unexpressed ideas and thoughts, which gave me a certain confidence, I think, particularly in those formative years. But the economy of language I think was very attractive to me, and yet within the economy of the language, the reverberations, internal resonances of meaning and sounds, I found directly familiar in my own work. Less with Olson, who believed in keeping up, which is more the de Kooning style of painting with – with a painting surface that was never still, was never – every moment in the painting had an active role. It was the way Charles's work was. It just – idea heaped up, and thoughts, parentheses within parentheses within parentheses, none of which were ever closed, which is another direct parallel to de Kooning's work. Because his imagery slips as Olson's thoughts slip through and expand within a particular

piece of work, so do de Kooning's images slip into this into that into this into that. You can never quite grab the – it doesn't stay still for you. I think my early, early work had ambitions in a de Kooning-esque direction, but I could never really do it because it's against my nature, I discovered. And yet, I couldn't go in the other direction towards Minimalism because I'd always believed so, so basically and with such intensity that the act or process of art is one of discovery and not of invention. And I've always made it that way. That is – without a dialogue between the painting and me. So that I'm willing to, in fact, force myself at times to listen to the painting, what it wants to do as opposed to imposing my will on the painting: this is the way a painting's going to be and that's what I'm going to do. I think that just that process is a very fundamental one, and one that I saw the poets really going through, and those poets appealed to me. Also [UNINTEL WORD] the willingness to let the work have its, have its own autonomy in a sense so that it was a working back and forth between the painting as an existence and you, in your existence. Well –

MEH: I'm going to just ask you, because I'm interested in impressions of different people maybe for about fifteen minutes and then we'll look at some art. Okay? I'm interested in just sort of descriptions of different people at the college at the time by other people. Starting with say, Rauschenberg. How do you remember him as a student at the college?

DSR: Well, Bob was very industrious and was very separate from other students, by and large. In his free time – he associated mainly with Hazel Larsen and with Merce and John and led a more or less private – more than most – kind of private life there. And I think he felt that he was working in a counter-direction to what most painters were working and may have felt a sense of isolation because of that. That's conjecture. We never talked about it.

MEH: What sort of work was he doing?

DSR: The black paintings that I described and the unpainted canvases, the white.

MEH: What about Twombly?

DSR: Well, Cy at that time was pretty much following Bob. He hadn't quite found his own legs until in New York. He used to live around the corner from me down in the Fish Market so that I was often in his studio, and it was of interest to me to watch Twombly discover himself there. But then he soon after moved to Italy and I really never heard from him after that, and then Jasper Johns came along to replace him in Bob's life.

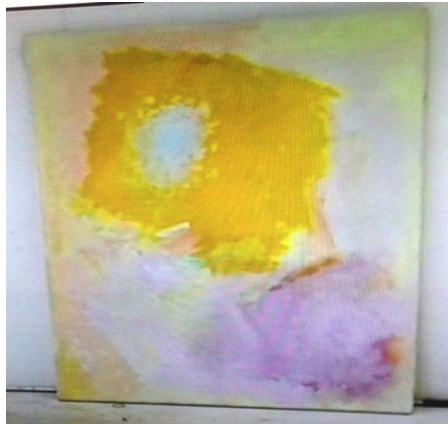
MEH: What about Ray Johnson? Do you remember –? Were you at –?

DSR: Yew, I remember Ray from '46, though we were not at all that close. He was very much a part of the Albers – But he – he was always an "oddmoment," taking notes and in class, with a crow quill pen, making in perfect Bedoni printing, which always just amazed me, just the feat to do it that quickly. It was very beautiful. And then later in New York, I got a few of his postcard art and – to which, I'm sorry to say, I never responded so he stopped sending them. But I did once visit, and I think probably shortly after I moved permanently to New York. He and that sculptor that taught –

[END OF VIDEO 8 TAPE 1, BEGINNING OF VIDEO 8 TAPE 2]

[RICE IS PULLING PAINTINGS FROM THE RACKS AND MOVES IN AND OUT OF SOUND RANGE]

DSR: But I also have [INAUDIBLE]



MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE]

DSR: This was started '75 and finished in '93.



MEH: That's recent – finishing.

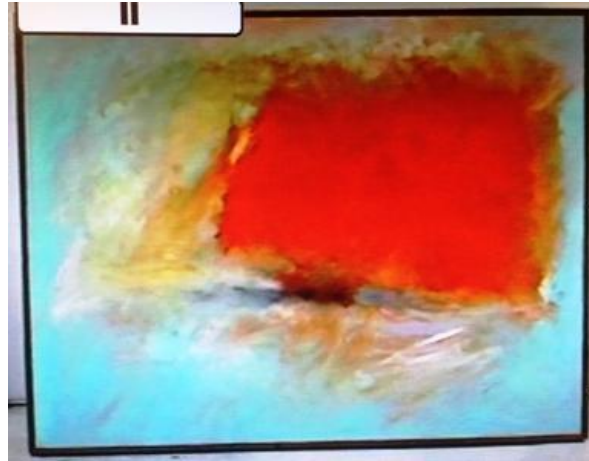
DSR: Well, I thought it was finished earlier.

MEH: These were stretchers that Kline had made?

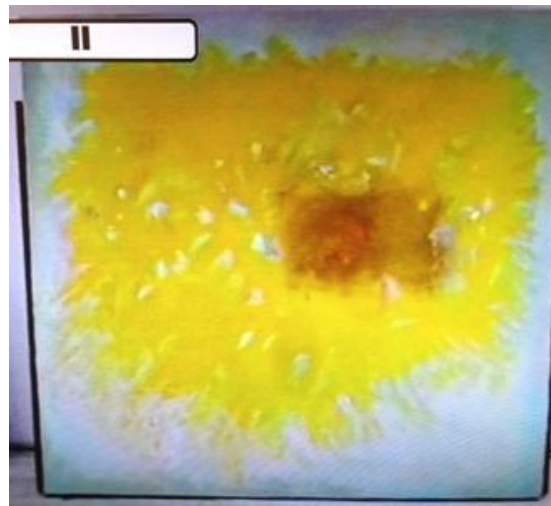


DSR: He had them made by a shipwright. You tell me when you want another one out.
MEH: Okay. It's okay.





DSR: [INAUDIBLE] [REFERS TO VISIT TO HIS BROTHER JACK AND HIS WIFE BARBARA IN CALIFORNIA] But probably fifteen to twenty thousands. Fairly mountainous and spectacular.



I found when I got back that all I could think of – Jeremy Tibbage [PH] was Barbara's gardener and surrounded the house that Jack had built. It was more of a floral thing and it remains that sort of unique –

MEH: You say beginning with this piece.



DSR: [INAUDIBLE] off in a new direction.

MEH: That was done here?

DSR: Yes.

MEH: So this is very recent.

DSR: I started this series, oh, maybe a year ago or so.

MEH: And this is part of the –



What effect did the marsh have on your painting?

DSR: [STILL OFFMIKE] Well, it made them more – de Kooning called them “outdoorsy.” And made them more landscapey. And these – what I think of as the black paintings – have all been sort of going perhaps back to a period which they weren’t so landscapey. And interestingly enough, if you’ve noticed, I’ve developed a pretty severe tremor, and I can’t draw anymore which really it’s awful because I can’t, you know, I can’t draw and I loved to draw. And my early work had a lot of linear work in it, and now that I can’t draw any more, I’ve returned to eye (Kline?), because it disappeared in all the landscapey things. You’ll see this [INAUDIBLE]. I think these are pretty much – these black ones that I’m showing you are pretty much the way they were done, in sequence, that is, that large linear –



MEH: Okay, so that large black band is really –

DSR: That large black band is the first of the series and [OVERTALK]

MEH: It's been dissolving, bit by bit and more color moving in and more lines.

DSR: Yes. And I suspect that the two ways of painting will probably merge at some point.

MEH: Now this is part of the series that grew out of the painting with the black band?



DSR: Yes. Yes, I always [INAUDIBLE] anyway – Are you ready?

MEH: Not quite. Okay.



DSR: I think of it as a series, and not yet finished, really. I mean series –

MEH: You were saying this is the last of the series?



DSR: Yes, I have a couple of others that are in process.

MEH: Over what period of time have you done these?

DSR: Oh, a year, I guess.

[END OF INTERVIEW]
[END OF TRANSCRIPT]