

Interviewee ROBERT DE NIRO
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW. BEGINNING OF TRANSCRIPT)

RdN: —because I knew I was—I knew that Albers was—that wasn't on then
before? Right. This is—

MEH: No, no. I'm just cutting it on now.

RdN: Oh, yes. So the—what was it? The sabbatical thing. Because my memory
was that they had given me Albers—and I think it's—I mean, my memory
couldn't be that far off. They had given me Albers' studio, and I remember
that outside I could see the Appalachians and the Blue Ridge and the
Smokies all came to gether. It was a beautiful view, anyway. And I liked that
the best. You know, it was a beautiful studio. It was almost the biggest one
there, maybe the biggest one there. And I knew he could not have been
there. I knew I had no quarrel with him, and that if I—and that I wouldn't
throw paint brushes out the window, because I had no money to buy new
ones. And the whole thing just seemed—I was teaching at Penn State when
I saw that. I went into a bookstore, and I saw this book. I looked at the index
for my name, and I said, "What nonsense." But I thought, "You don't get in
touch with somebody who wrote this, because it's printed, and it's not that

serious." I mean, maybe they think it's a romantic story. I don't know what they think. I mean, you know, I'm not gonna—What's the point?

MEH: But when you left, Albers was in Mexico?

RdN: I mean, he wasn't even there. That's what I say.

MEH: Yes.

RdN: He was on a sabbatical. I had his studio. That was to me the proof that he was—I mean, I remember that very clearly. So then where did he get this nonsense—this story?

MEH: Did you have a fight with Albers before he left or something?

RdN: No. I'll tell you what happened. When I got there, he took me out on the veranda of this building, this colonial building there. And he said—the first thing he said after we introduced ourselves is that he had only studied with Hans Hofmann in Munich to use the models that Hofmann had—five models posing at once. Now, you see, I didn't know he'd ever studied with Hofmann, so there was no need for that apology or whatever it was. And probably Hofmann—[UNINTEL] and it cost him much and he was sort of a showman and to get people there at the beginning. It was a way to get people into the school. So then he told me that my paintings were too emotional, "Well," I thought, "anything compared to those iced cubes that he does would be too." I didn't say that to him. But then he mentioned Grünewald and Modigliani as too emotional. So I thought, "Well, that's a sort of strange combination, but it's very flattering." And too emotional, for me, would mean

lack of control. And there's certainly no lack of control in Modigliani or Grünewald, you know. So—and in his paintings there's nothing to control. I mean, it's just emptiness, as far as I can see. It has nothing to do with Mondrian or any—it's just a contrived sort of thing. Albers. So—I didn't say this, of course. But anyway, I went to the class and then I decided, well, what I had to do if I wanted to stay was go to the class and paint the way he wanted which was not—abstractly. He had a simplest version of artistry. I mean, Goya, he reduced to sort of black eyes—these burning eyes, you know. And everything was very, you know, sort of an insen sitive, let's say a simplistic untrue version of things, because he left out so much, you know. And so I painted in the way that would please him, you know. It wasn't abstract, as I remember, but it pleased him. And then I went back to my studio and painted—I mean, it got unbearable after a while, but there was no quarrel, I mean, in the whole thing. But, you see, because I came from Hofmann, he felt this rivalry and so on. It started off on a shaky basis. That's all. But it calmed down because I knew what I had to do if I wanted to stay there. It's just that I didn't want to do that it after a while. So I did [didn't ?] have five dollars in my pocket when I left. And I came back and studied with Hofmann. Hofmann said, "Oh, what a fool. You should have stayed down there. It's a nice place and it doesn't cost you any money—or much money," or something. But, I mean, that wasn't the point of it at the time. I couldn't have developed in that situation.

MEH: What had you done before you were at Black Mountain?

RdN: Well, I was born in Syracuse. And then when I was about thirteen, I went to a class—a children's class, at the museum. But I was always drawing and painting. I knew I wanted to be a painter when I was about five. And then at the museum someone saw my work, and it was very competent in an academic way. We just did casts, and so on. So, when I was—They asked me to an adult class. So when I was just thirteen, I was studying with people who were—a class of people in their thirties. And then the museum gave me a studio. I was the only person they gave a studio there. And then they—I went down there every day about three or four hours after I got out of school, about two o'clock in high school. And then I painted, and that's all. It was a very boring kind of a situation. That's why I left. At sixteen, I went to study with Ralph Pearson in Gloucester. He had a coal barge in the harbor. And it blew down. There was a Northeaster and it was the end of the coal barge in the harbor. But then—that was the one week after I left. When I was there, there was a big storm, but it wasn't that bad. I remember, because I was living in a tent then. I had a tent. And I had to go into the hold of the boat once to stay to sleep because it blew down. And then I went to Black Mountain and then back to Hofmann, and, you know, back and forth to Provincetown. And then when I left Black Mountain, I came here and stayed in New York, where I've never left except to be in France for about four years. I left over ten years ago.

MEH: So you studied with Hofmann after Ralph Pearson?

RdN: Yes.

MEH: Before Black Mountain?

RdN: Yes.

MEH: How did you hear about Black Mountain?

RdN: I heard about Black Mountain and about Ralph Pearson from one—the one person in Syracuse who was interested really—you know, talked to me about painting. He was a guy about twenty then, and I was about thirteen or fourteen. And he later went to Cleveland and started a tex—gave up painting and started a textile business, married, and had a lot of kids. And he was somehow coming down to the museum, and I don't know why. I met him there, you know. It was looking at my work you know. He saw my work and somehow—

MEH: Do you remember his name?

RdN: Yes. Bob Metzger.

MEH: I've run into his name before.

RdN: Oh, have you?

MEH: Yes.

RdN: I wonder what he's doing now.

MEH: I'm not sure. But it's a very familiar name.

RdN: What he's doing in Cleveland, I guess.

MEH: Um-hm.

RdN: And then there was another person there that I always supposed to meet and never did, who has become a pretty well-known painter in New York. What is his name? Bob? Oh, I've got a block, or something, about it. He was with Tibor de Nagy. Do you know any abstract painters with Tibor de Nagy?

MEH: Not that I can associate—you know, make the associations. This is somebody who was at Black Mountain or in Syracuse?

RdN: No. This was in Syracuse.

MEH: Syracuse.

RdN: And he's the only other person in the city who was up and was—you know—the museum did have an art department—I mean, the university—at that time when there were no—very few university art departments. And the big wheel there was a sculp tor from Yugoslavia or something—Moscovitz [PH]—or somebody like that. I don't know. He wasn't too bad or too—too good. And how he got there, I don't know. But the department was very dead, you know. There was nothing there. And these two people—What is his name, Bob—? You should know it.

MEH: Yes. See, I just don't associate a person with the gallery.

RdN: Yes. But I just—I can't think of it. If I had a—I don't know where he shows now. Maybe Emmerich or one of those places. But I was always supposed to meet him and I missed—I never did. In a way, I wish I had, because I didn't have—there was nobody there I could talk to. You know, I had so few friends. So—anyway. But I don't see him in New York. You can check if you like.

MEH: How would you compare Hans Hofmann's—not only his methods of teaching, but sort of the atmosphere of his school, with the sort of thing Albers was doing?

RdN: Well, Albers was sort of, to me—I mean, to use a not too nice—he was sort of a petty tyrant in a way. I mean, he had an arrogance in a sort—that Hofmann didn't quite have—he didn't have, you know, that sort of German—I mean, not so German—But he—Hofmann didn't have it. And he had this kind of rigid belief in his own muse which I think kind of often I associate with ignorance, because I do think he—his view of painting, and so on, is a very limited—you know. Hofmann was a more, a much bigger person than a painter. I don't think he's a great painter, but I just think he's closer to it than Albers. I mean, by great painter I mean he's no Titian or Matisse or that sort, to me. But as a teacher, he was inspiring, and he was enthusiastic, and he wasn't dogmatic, in that sense. He said any great painter could break his rules and—you know, and do great paintings. And—but he had some insights and some ability. As I say, he generated enthusiasm, and he had an ability to analyze certain elements that were maybe basic to painting in some way. Maybe not. They weren't as—his view was much—His painting was much less superficial than Albers, I would say. Now, I think what they've done with his—There's a lot of teaching around with a kind of vulgarization or commercialization of his—And he even pointed it out to some people, who mentioned it to me, at the end of his life. And all these phrases like

"push-pull" and "the picture plane." Well, that's not so original, but I don't know how original the others were, but they were relatively. No one had—was too familiar with his way of analyzing those things, of thinking about things. I can't think of the other—the other terminology. But I'm sure you know. You've heard of it. You've heard interesting phrases like in the "tensions between planes" and the whole thing. It's like—they've done to it what they'd do—what happens in every field. It usually happens to somebody with genius. I don't think that he quite had that. But, I mean, they do it in psychology, like take "Oedipus com—" all these phrases from Freud, you know, and then they become commercialized like drug-store psychology. It has no meaning anymore. Well, that happens in every art department in the country now, you know. They take this—And, like I say, he noticed it. He even pointed it out to somebody, who mentioned it to me, and before he died, toward the end of his life. So—funny I can't think of more of the phrases. "Push-pull" and the "plasticity" and, oh, there were many catch phrases that had some meaning with him. But, if they're just dragged around and made little formulas, then they don't mean anything.

MEH: Do you think that Albers' teaching had any influence on your work?

RdN: No. I think I went there because I liked the idea of the place, and it was a beautiful place. And I think he had almost no—just like, you know, a zero practically. But I can also say that about other teachers I've had, like—what's his name? There—Ralph Pearson in Gloucester. Now, he wrote a book

called *Experiencing Pictures*, which I think was practically a textbook. It was a textbook in many schools, apparently, but you never see it anymore. And he died a few years after that. But this book no one ever reads. It was another simplist—but in a different way, of modern painting. Like, he reduced it to a sort of decorative pattern. He would take a Titian—And there was a little thing then of turning your paintings upside-down. And they were supposed to be as good upside—you know. And little things like that. Well, they aren't as good upside-down as the way they're painted. It doesn't work that way. And all kinds of formulae. There was a lot of things. People were figuring things out then. I think this went along, in general, with the way people were thinking in the society, too, because in psychology they were doing the same thing, trying to figure everything out. Picasso said about that—made a remark about that, too, of how everyone tries to understand, you know, what can't be understood. And not only painting, but he said they will—people will after—will only—some thing about people will fall in love after they measure the—you know take the measurements of a person. Do you know what I mean? It's a whole sort of fear, or something—trying to categorize everything and put it in a little cubbyhole, you know, and trying to understand things which you're not meant to understand probably.

It's—[UNINTEL] to do it for so many thousands of years. But it happens—And I think this—There's been too much criticism like that, books written explaining things which are only confusing people. As I say, I think it

was in the air. Every—there were—And Hofmann came along with his sort of Germanic kind of—I don't know whether that's the correct word, but theories which had some truth. But he even said—as I said, he said, himself, a great painter—you could find holes in them, and you could point out examples of great painters who hadn't used to do it. Painters who didn't follow these composition rules, and so on, and did great paintings. And he even said, himself, that, you know—But they did give him, I don't know, a crutch. They had enough truth in them so there was a way to approach—criticizing your own work. But while you're working, you can't be criticizing, you know. You have to forget yourself. On the contrary, you have to do the exact opposite. It becomes a very self-conscious sort of thing. But that has happened in criticism in the whole—I mean, in the 19th century you don't find that. If you read Valéry or Baudelaire or great critics, they don't have this quasi—I don't know what they would call it then, or what's—It's—it just doesn't ring true, a lot of it. What they say—what they're trying—to explain the unexplainable, but they do it to the extent—they can do it. They don't pretend. It isn't pretentious, you know, or pretend to do more—be able to explain more than can be understood. So—well, a lot of criticism today seems to be the exact opposite. Anywhere, say, pick up a magazine the *Art News* just by people, the average person, who is not even—who is—well, not certainly on a level of Hofmann. But it seems to be the exact opposite of what Baudelaire and Valéry did, who were trying to make something that was obscure or difficult,

lucid. and clear. And people—you can see it when you read—read them. But you pick up the magazine and read somebody's writing for the Art News who's—very often knows nothing about it. I mean, one of the critics was posing for me once, and she said, "Well, she hoped in a year she'd know something about painting." I thought, "The poor painters, who are, you know, victims." But they're trying to make something which is sometimes very clear in its, well, lack of values or medio crities appear profound by a lot of gobble-de-gook, you know, and confusing people, instead of doing the making it more lucid. So, they do the exact opposite. And I think a lot of that happens in painting, too. But Hofmann was not a rip-off. He wasn't putting on anybody. He was doing—he was limited in that he came along at a time—I think if he really had been a Rouault or Soutine or Picasso, he would have had his suc cess at the time they did because he was their generation. But he came here, and it was the right time and the right place for him. I think that was true of most everybody. I mean, they come along, and they—you know. Cezanne, if he was—when the world was ready for him, they were ready. But I mean, he couldn't [UNINTEL]. For HofmanN this was the right place. Although he was very cyn ical about—in a way, about the situation, because I remember when I had my first show at Peggy Guggenheim's, I was about twenty-two. And he was—he was obviously much older and then even Pollock was older. And he and Pollock had their first shows the same year. And I was walking down 14th Street where I lived, and Mrs. Hofmann

lived a few doors away with her—I liked her very much. She was very honest and a very good person. And she said—Greenberg was starting the Pollock promotion. And she said, "In America you can convince anyone of anything, but by the time they find out he's not as good as they think, it'll be too late. And if you say anything, they'll think you're jealous." And this has been true—Many—you know, people who have come along with much less talent than Pollock, and it's been more true. So, he was a little cynical, but he'd seen a lot of things probably in Paris, too. So, I mean, you know. And it was more—I don't know, I think here there is some kind of gullibility, because Elaine de Kooning said the same. She said she knows what goes on in public relations, she said, "They believe anything they read here." That's true. You can sell anything, you know, if you've got enough publicity.

[UNITEL]

MEH: Art is a marketable item just like toothpaste or—

RdN: Yes. But people—

MEH: You know, if your advertisement campaign is successful—

RdN: People have better instincts for it, I think, than they give themselves credit for. And I've had maybe a thousand students. I've taught in twelve—after saying "I'd rather die than teach." To say, I'd rather die than do a lot of things. But I lived on the street before. I lived on the street—up the street—you know, I mean, closer to Washington Square. And I paid about ten dollars rent. Now it's a fortune to buy a place like this. I own this place and the next

one. And I—you know, because you could then. It hadn't gotten to this point. If you had any talent, you would sell a few paintings. And the financial pressures weren't so great, and everything. And then I came back from Paris, and the whole market had changed. And somebody said—I didn't have a nickel, so somebody said, "Do you want a job in Visual Arts?" So I taught there. And then one thing leads to another. I ended up with twelve art schools and universities around the country. I went from—The last place in Michigan State about—almost two years ago. And then I came back to Studio School. And then I cut it out. And fortunately, I started selling. I've been to Tamarind in New Mexico, and they invited me there to do those lithographs. There's another—she has actually, Poindexter has another show. And, I mean, she—I thought of this when I saw a review in the paper of some friend of mine who has—two shows. And she has a second gallery, as I'm trying to say, a new place that's open by appointment only. And she has all the lithographs I did at Tamarind on the wall.

MEH: I really like the lithographs.

RdN: She should have shown those to some critics, because it makes a difference, if you have two shows at once. And, you know, if you—But—

MEH: It would have been nice if you could have had a mixed show, you know, the lithographs and the paintings.

RdN: Yes. But, you see, I don't have—and she didn't have the space there, see.

MEH: Yes.

RdN: And since she has it in the other gallery, she didn't see need for it.

MEH: Oh, I see.

RdN: But, you see, she'd have to ask people over gallery by appointment.

MEH: Is that not on 84th Street?

RdN: No. That's on 90th and 5th. I showed them at the Kansas City Art Institute last year. That's the only place they've been shown before until she bought them. But they invited me there. There's a book here. I think the reason they invited me—it's a book called *The Painter and the Photograph*. And it turned out to have been written by the director of the museum that's part of the University of New Mexico and across the street from Tamarind, which is also part of it. And there's a [UNINTEL WORD] Still and a Garbo, Anna Christie thing in that the painting of mine from it in there. There is something about other paintings. There are a lot of things you wouldn't believe that are done from photographs. This is a Cezanne. Here's a Degas done from a photograph. And Cezannes. And the thing that surprised me is Matisse. This Cezanne is done. Marsden Hartley—most things. But this Delacroix, that's from this. This Cezanne is really—I've seen it so much I never knew it was—That's an example.

MEH: This was done from a photograph?

RdN: Yes. It doesn't—I don't think it makes any difference what you work from. Here's a Gauguin done from this one.

MEH: Ah-so.

RdN: Here's another one done from another—Oh, this is in a book now. It's a flyer that I saw from a show at Zabriskie's—I had there and I saw him put it in a book that just came out.

MEH: Were you at all interested in the community at Black Mountain? You know, the—?

RdN: Well—I'm not telling you too much about Black Mountain.

MEH: Well, that's okay. We'll go back and forth.

RdN: What?

MEH: I say, that's okay, we'll—

RdN: This is the book. I mean, I'm in good company. I mean, there's Mallarmé and Joyce and other people. And it's not just contemporary people. It's got a Turner poem he wrote in the back about canvas [PH].

MEH: Very nice.

RdN: So—

MEH: Very nice.

RdN: Yes. [UNINTEL] Well, the community thing, I don't know. You know, I don't remember what community business was going on there, what the—I mean, I used to go down to that farm and pick up husks of corn and make cider, and all that sort of stuff. But I thought they were sorta token gestures; they didn't really mean too much. You know what I mean, I had—I wanted to do something. And it seemed as though—I didn't know what the—I didn't feel the college was too cohesive as far as—you know, there wasn't really sure

what it was about, in a sense, and whether the emphasis was on arts or what it was. But I don't think too many people were down working on the farm in a very serious way is what I mean. But I used to go down there and go through the sort of routine, which was—It was all right. I mean, I can't remember exactly what I did. I remember this sorta corn husking and this sorta thing, picking it up and putting it in the truck. But I know I did regularly make the cider. And—but—And there were dances. But I don't remember anything. That was around Lake Eden, you know, this—But I don't remember anything really important that went on, outside of the—I thought it centered around Albers once that other—Who was the first person who was there who left? There was a schism, a quarrel with a guy who was from Rollins College.

MEH: Oh, you mean Rice?

RdN: Yes. And then after that, Albers was sort of the big wheel, and people came there because of the arts program more or less, I thought. And the other things were just sort of, you know, like frosting or something. At least, that's my feeling about it. And I don't know. I had one close friend there who—she went to Russia, and she stayed there.

MEH: Who was this?

RdN: Naomi Doniger was her name.

MEH: Oh. No wonder I haven't heard anything about her.

RdN: She never came back. She set—

MEH: From Russia?

RdN: She had been to Columbia, or something, and she was married, but she was not—She was leaving her husband, or something. And she got a job down there in some—She was really into agriculture. She was, you know—that was—with her, it was "something else." And she went to an agricultural college near there and got a job teaching. And she was right into the whole thing. And she had some sort of realness about her, maybe, that some of the people didn't because they weren't—She was older and was more developed and knew what she wanted. But she'd always said she was going to go to Russia and stay, and that's what she did. Because I met her sister. I didn't know what happened to her, but she left before I did. And I met her sister, because I had been, you know, to her place—at her house in New York a couple of times, at the Modern Museum when I came up here. And she said, "She's gone to Russia, and she was staying there a bit, and she never came back." So that was the original plan, anyway. But she looked sorta Russian, peasantish, more of a Norwegian peasant. She was blond and very good-looking.

MEH: She must have found her place.

RdN: Yes. Well, she was already—she didn't—she was a little outside. She didn't take it too seriously, too, because it did have a sort of dilettantish thing about it that she didn't—I mean, as I say, it could have been because the students were not sure what they wanted. But I suppose that's true in any college or university. Except that they're made to do what they don't want to in other

places, so that it looks, at least, as though there's some kind of grind going on, if nothing else. But there, they weren't made, so it could get pretty lax, the whole thing. I mean, unless you had some self-discipline. And that was a little young to develop your self-discipline. So it was very nice, but it was quite more—it was more real to come up here and study with Hans Hofmann. But all the people, whatever you think of them—however they developed—I mean, so many of the people like Pearl Fine and what's-her-name—Lee Krasner, who married Pollock at that time—were studying with him then, you know. And the Fritz Bultman, who said the—that Martha Jackson, and so on. And it had a very serious atmosphere, more serious than art schools now because, as I say, I've taught in a lot of—I've had about a thousand students. I know something about what goes on in them. And Black Mountain was—I didn't feel was that serious at that point. Now what would have happened if it had run on longer, I don't know. But it was—since it was emphasizing the arts, and since it wasn't really—really there was no one there but Albers and his wife. And she was teaching weaving. It hadn't developed. There was sort of a germ, or something about it that could have been developed.

MEH: You weren't there when Xanti Schawinsky was there?

RdN: No. See, I wasn't there long. For the first—I left in the middle of the third term. And I was there—they had seventy-five students, and I think they told—there were twenty-five in the faculty. And someone told me later, that

was about their height. And I went back to visit at one point with a friend of mine. I was living on the street before here two years ago [UNINTEL], when I started. And we went. And he drove down there, and I went down with him. And the car broke down, but we found the way to Lake Eden. So we had to stay until it got fixed. And that was when Olson, Charles Olson, was there. And maybe—

MEH: That would have been the fifties.

RdN: Maybe—Yes. Maybe about eight students, or something. So, and then it gradually, I guess, just petered out. That was sorta the end. But it was a beautiful place. It had a nice atmosphere, and there was a lot of hope in the air and a lot of—But there was hope in the air here, but when—but that particular time I went back, that was later, in that there was this big renaissance supposedly going on here in painting. It was a very flourishing thing, a different type of thing. But there, I think, the place, if it had developed and stayed—well, it would have had to gel into something. I mean, it was neither—it wasn't the New Bauhaus. I don't know what it was at that point. It probably hadn't found its direction either, really. I haven't quite thought about it just that way, but I think it's very true. [UNINTEL]

MEH: Your basic medium for working has been painting?

RdN: Yes. Yes, I had a few pieces of sculpture through the years, and—but the problem of casting, and all that, always came up. And then the last dealer I was with wanted me to have a show of sculpture. I wanted to have a show of

sculpture, but she co-operated and paid for half of the casting, and I got a Guggenheim scholarship. So I've been to Europe, and I don't want to go back there. So I put the money—I paid for my half that way—part of that. So it is quite a big—I wouldn't do it again, though. But you have to keep doing it, because, as I say, it was reviewed on the radio, for whatever that means. But if people think—you thought of me as a sculptor, but most people do not. And this is not my idea either, but other people have told—you know, if the image of whatever it is, is a painter, you have to keep—show more than once—or sculpture, or no one really knows what to think of it, you know. You have to keep at it. I did a book of poems.

MEH: Is this your first book of poetry?

RdN: Yes. I never—There's a poem, you know.

MEH: Yes. I saw that.

RdN: That.

MEH: Is that your poem?

RdN: Yes. But there's an article—There's a magazine called *Tracks*. In fact, he just sent me ten copies of it today. I got it—I just got them here, that—And I think this may have come out because—It's called *A Journal of Artists Writing*. And I think there is something in the air, you know, just thing of being of the domination of critics, you know, and all this. This is sort of coming to an end, and some people being intimidated by them. I say most people do have some—an instinct for painting that they don't—that they're afraid to trust. In

fact, students—where, say, I've had a thousand students, I've never had one that didn't get better, because—maybe if you have enough—enough interested to study, you have some talent to go with it. But, also, there's some taste, or something, there, because people will come to look at your paintings, you know. Very often, in more cases than not, they will pick out the good ones, and even if they know very little about painting. But then they've got this investment and all, this other thing going on in the back of their heads, and they go and ask a lot of people, you know, "Is this good?" "Is this good because of this there, and because of the other thing or because you're—?" And they've turned to bananas by the time they think like this. Anybody would be. And I was thinking about it in relation to the theatre here, because if you go to buy a ticket for a movie, or something, a dollar or two—I mean, if it was a question of paying ten thousand with the possibility of reselling it for a hundred thousand or fifty thousand, it could—the same thing could happen, you know. People trust their instincts. They know they like it or they don't. That's all. But here they're so mentally manipulated because of this money thing that's come in and the greed, and the playing on ignorance—people's ignorance to manipulate their heads. So—and they read that somebody bought a Van Gogh or Cezanne for fifty hundred dollars, sold it for fifty thousand, and so they don't care anymore how much they like. And you end up in not knowing what you like. You're out of contact with your own feelings that way. It's a very crazy kind of thing. was gonna say—So,

Tracks came along, and Elaine de Kooning sent this guy. She said—told me she'd do an issue of my writings. Well, anyway, he's—he hasn't done that yet. He's like—he's a guy in his—a sculptor, or something—in his twenties or something. And so she's an influential person, and so he does one article. And he wrote me a note. He's got two others—poems of his. He told me he had one of the poems set in type for the next issue, but I don't know what he's—So, I'll show you, if you want to.

MEH: Yes.

RdN: He said you not only can't understand what you call the poetry-painting—You know, he's just talking about the poetry, but if you could, you wouldn't be able to paint." Well, this sounds almost mystical, or something, but in a sense, you would be in another plane, you know, if you could [UNINTEL WORD] a poem. But in the Baudelaire, it said two things—the best criticism is a prose poem, an approximation of the work, you know. Now, this thing started—my article—Now, did you—? I showed you. I opened to that—

MEH: Yes, right.

RdN: —page. Now, that started because I had given a few lectures around, like, the University of New Mexico, Michigan State, and Cooper Union, wherever, teaching. And I was out—down in—one day—a Sunday morning, I was walking on 8th Street, or something, and I ran into [UNINTEL] who ran the Studio School. And she said, "The students are going to get in touch with you to give a talk." So I thought, "Well, you know, these talks. " You say—you

show slides and you say, "Look at that doodle." I mean, "I did it in front of a delicatessen, eating a pastrami sandwich." I mean, it's all the same sort of thing, you know, for other people. And there's no reason why they should be restricted to that. And I sort of got out of it by—I used to do demonstrations of analysis of paintings, Cubist paintings, and—but that can only be done with a restricted audience who are very close to you. And demonstrations of drawings. In New Mexico, I remember, somebody saw me working at Tamarind and asked me to do one. So this title popped into my head, "Corot, Verlaine and Greta Garbo and the Melancholy Syndrome." I don't know from where. But I decided that it—you know, they're not inter—most of those kids, nice as they are, and so on, they're the products of the—whatever the—the society, or whatever it is, and they're interested prime—merely in "making it." And that means that they want to hear about whatever is fashionable at the moment. And they are not interested in anything—if you can relate Corot to Tworokov, or something, all right, you know. But they're not interested—And plus the fact that Verlaine is—how do you—nobody—is some kind of musical poetry that no one has tried to translate. There have been no translations of Verlaine, unlike Rimbaud. This is in his visual imager. So—I knew I couldn't—there was no way I could translate any of that, so—or find any translation. So, I turned it into this half prose -oem, half essay, and with no biography—You know, just—it's not a—there's no biographical—It's not meant as anything that can be given as a talk. So then I thought, "It's very

appropriate for this magazine that came along." But he's got these two other things. And there's poems. And he's got them, and he—apparently, he's gonna publish them, I think.

MEH: Are these things that you've written recently, or over a period of time?

RdN: Well, that one has dates on it.

MEH: Right. Yes. But I'm talking about the other things.

RdN: But the poems—oh, the poems started when Bobby, my son, was born on—or even before that, because Fritz Bultman—Do you know who Fritz Bultman is? Do you know him?

MEH: I know who he is.

RdN: Yes. He's got two shows now at Martha Jackson. He sent me poems—six poems I think they were—from Provincetown, that I wrote in 1941. And I didn't know there were any—any—I said that I'm getting this book together, I didn't know there were any copies of them. I didn't know he was even—even knew I was writing poetry. I guess, you know, I—But he was at Hofmann's then, and—Gee, I don't think I even was studying with Hofmann the day—the time I wrote them. I was just living there with Bobby's mother—and working—what—packing fish in a—you know, once in a while. But I got to know writers then, because I don't think I had—But they weren't the ones who influenced me, because she was publishing—editing a little magazine called Experimental Review with—she'd been doing this with Robert Duncan, a poet out on the West Coast, before the Woodstock—before I met her at

Hofmann's. And I remember Anaïs Nin came up there that summer, because we—she was told it was a great place, and so on. So she was—oh, she had a very kind of—it's a weird story. She had a lover there she was supporting, because he was married to a famous Argentine dancer. I don't know anything about Argentine dancers. I don't know who she was. But she was blind from syphilis, so he had to—you know, he had to take care of her [UNINTEL]. So Anaïs had to support him. So she wrote pornography to do this. And she got paid a dollar a page, which was—and did fifty pages a week, which wasn't too bad. As a goal. Not as—those were many years ago. So I'd never written anything in my life, and she—I wrote stories that she used, the stories told by [UNINTEL] was better than the fisheries. I didn't know how much—and what it was, really, in the end, because I took it very seriously. It took place in Constantinople or some very exotic place where I'd never been. I didn't know—You know, I didn't have that much experience in things. I didn't know what it was. So it became very laborious. After a while I'd had it. But then, you know, in Paris she'd published Henry Miller, too. And all the people had underground reputations then: Lawrence Durrell, [UNINTEL]. But I really was not—And this was after Hofmann. It was sort of a reaction. I used to do painting, and I'd write in them, like—Well, Miro started that. He would put his own poems or versions of poems in his paintings, you know, when he was friendly with Surrealists. They were around at that time. And, as I say, after I left Hofmann, I reacted by this. And

I had reacted in a kind of—And that painting—I remember there was one about that time I did when I got back from Provincetown that was—oh, it was inspired by a line from a novel by Cocteau. And I was never a great admirer of Cocteau. I thought it was a little corny, but it was melodramatic. But, anyway, the lines inspired me to do these paintings. It was—I think the line in English was "Venice by day is the county fair shooting gallery and crumbs by night. It's a Negress in love, dead in the bath, to the jewels of paste." So I had this painting with a purple Negress in a yellow bathtub, dead and the lines, the line written on, you know, above it. But, as I say, the thing started—at that time, Miro had these—his own poems in his paintings—written in his paintings. And everybody was writing things about him. Lee Krasner—at the time the Art Project was ending. And she was just living with Pollock, before she married him. And she had on her wall written—And I thought, "This can't be just a coincidence?" because she didn't know where the next meal was coming from. And she didn't want to get a job. And she had a quote from A Season in Hell—"To what beast must I hire myself out?" [LAUGHS]MI don't know if she knew why she put it there, but—And Fritz had another one from Paul O'Guire [PH], and so on. Paul O'Guire [PH] was a fact that influenced me then. So, I wrote that. And then I wrote other poems then, so—In France, I started again. And then—I've got about seventy-five now. And about fifty I've rewritten. And I'm gonna rewrite—look over the other twenty-five, and I probably will change them,

you know. And then I'll print them myself. But I even knew the title of the book when I lived in Bleecker Street. When Bobby was born, I knew I was gonna write a book of poems, and I knew the title. It was called *A Fashionable Watering Place*. And I lived in France when I started writing them again. Well, I started before that, I think. I was outside of Paris when I started. But then I went down to a town in the high Pyrenees on the Spanish border. Somebody told me that someone [UNINTEL]—But she fortunately didn't, because it was a great isolation. I had a—and we used to keep it—build a fire, you know, to keep warm. And it was about a mile up in the mountain in the high Pyrenees, and there was this spa, this watering place, down below. There were gambling tables and all this water. Whatever they used the water for, I don't know. Arthritis, I guess. And the ski thing above. But it was—I was there in the winter. And in fall and the winter it's snowbound. So we'd go off to Spain for the dentist and buy groceries. I guess it was cheaper. But then that's when I—at that time, I started again. And then I've been writing, oh, you know, at various times, but I haven't kept at it consistently.

MEH: Are they mostly biographical?

RdN: Well, not—Yes, I'd say mostly. Yes.

MEH: I'm finding that a lot of artists who write poetry, you know, or creative writing, largely instead of a diary, or whatever, you know. It's sort of a biographical thing.

RdN: Yes. Well, I don't know how—if it's any more biographical—Well, it's hard to say? They always have a biographical basis. Let me see. Yes. Sort of—very often, they have a humorous thing.

MEH: Um-hm.

RdN: I don't know if all this is relevant to Black Mountain or not, though, but—

MEH: No, it's not. But that's okay.

RdN: No. So—Like—I remember—once there was a girl from NYU, and she was talking about music, and so on. She said that Mendelssohn was the best music critic of the time, which is generally accepted. And I thought, you know, "Why do people outside the profession have to sort of set themselves up as these judges?" And they really are taking—They come in like—Greenberg even is referred to as "The Mafia" in some places—At Bennington, I know a girl who poses for me has told me. And they do come in like sort of gangsters and take over, and dictate tastes, and dominate people, and play on their fears and worst instincts. And there's no reason for it, except the people allow it, because they don't have enough confidence, actually. They have better judgment, most people than they give them credit for. But even—in the Soho News they had a quote from Delacroix that said that most of the—of the writing in art is done by non-artists, from whence arises all the misconceptions. Because there is no—anybody can come in and set themselves—If they act arrogant and authoritative enough and set themselves up as the greatest critics in the world.

MEH: Yes. I think one problem is that it's—that painting is a visual thing, and that criticism is verbal. And so far as I'm concerned, I mean, the criticism of artists is often as inane and misleading as that of critics. You know, it's just you're giving—

RdN: Oh, yes. It can be.

MEH: You're giving a verbal parallel to something that's not really verbal.

RdN: Yes. I said—Baudelaire said, "Ideal criticism is a prose poem, because it's a—it's not an approximation—not approximation, but an equivalent of the work." He said it's been transformed into another thing. But I don't think many painters really are that much concerned with the subject. I mean, they're concerned more with making it, and they don't know anything more about it than the critics [RECORDING ON DVD SKIPS] isn't a bad painter. He's as good a painter as a lot people show. You know, I don't mean to categorize things that rigidly, but I do know that critics have an awful lot of power that they—I don't—they only invest it in which they really—There's no reality, you know. There's no reason for it. But—and I think, too, that you're in a non-visual culture. Now, acting or writing is something that's—There have been writers here: Poe and Melville and Walt Whitman, you know, people who have been as great the—anybody—as most European writers. And who, like Poe, they take in France almost too seriously. But it is not a visual culture, like the Mediterranean cultures, Spain, or—you know, Greece, or France or—And it's—Well, Holland probably is the one exception to that. And

it started from England, which has probably the greatest literary tradition in the world. And they just don't—there have been very few, if any, great painters that equal the painters in Europe. There's no—you can't even say about Ryder or—who is that? People I think of that are painters of genius like Ryder or Marin or Whistler, that they're—Courbet. I mean, Whistler and Courbet were friends. And Whistler's in the Louvre, but I don't think he's quite Courbet you know. so—

MEH: They were painters of genius, but their stature, somehow just doesn't quite measure.

RdN: It's not quite—No. And—but there have been a lot of them with talent. They—I like Luks and Glackens and all those painters, and Prendergast very much, very good. Prendergast may even be more than that. I think he's a very good painter. But as for really—you know, painters like Goya or Van Gogh or Cezanne or Rembrandt or Titian, or something, they don't—you can't find it. It hasn't been here yet. So this whole thing in the last thirty years has been a very—I think it's been a reversal of the real that through the mental manipulation of the mass media has reversed the reality. I mean, they've—it's been a period when painting has been—Oh, some of these people think painting is dead, many people. I don't think so. But I mean, there must have been some germ, or something, for them to say it, you know. And the thing is that they've built it up, because of this money thing, to be the greatest period that ever happened, so to speak. So—But I do

think—I think the germ of the—of whatever is here, from what I've seen, whatever is painting right now is in this country. But that doesn't mean it's Florence and, you know, the Italian Renaissance. That's just something that—because there's six hundred galleries and you have to earn a living. Certainly, there's more painting here than in Paris, but the Paris now is not what it was, you know, fifty years ago—two of the museums out West. There are different dates, like '58, '70, and the other one was '66, I guess.

MEH: Do you usually work on that large of scale?

RdN: Yes. Very—I did last year two that large. What I would like to have now, before they're sent, is a show of big paintings, because you only need about eight or none. And I can get some back from museums. And then NYU—the theological school, there's a big crucifixion I did in France. And someone bought it and sent it back to show and gave it to them, to the church at the Theological School. So I can get enough big paintings for a show, you know. And before they're sent away—

(END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT)