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Dolph and Jesse Smith, 1971

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SS192.mp3

Carolyn Yellin- We go testing 1,2, 3?

David Yellin- Testing 1, no we are fine we are on, yes this is the way it goes now it is going, ok this is November 21st 1971 and we are talking to Mr. and Mrs. Donald Smith, this is David and Carolyn Yelling.

Carolyn Yellin- And we are at the home of Donald Smith.

David Yellin- Right in the living room. We are going to be talking about, what would you call this Donald. Portrait, painting, how would you classify what you are doing here?

Donald Smith- Just an outburst, I don't know it wouldn't be a portrait. It just an outburst, I say that because it is unlike anything I have done.

David Yellin- Can you just tell your own story about it, when did you do it and we can just put this down here and you can just sit down. I mean I don't want to tell you how to act in your home.

Carolyn Yellin- Dave we might say first that this is, these are two works of art that Donald Smith is presenting to the Memphis search for meaning committee and as a citizen of Memphis who lived through this that this really the outburst as he says I think expresses what Memphis citizens were feeling at that time.

David Yellin- Ok what we are primarily interested in now in the tape is to record about it as if you were annotating this whole thing if that is a good way to put it so almost at your own time.

Donald Smith- Well you, these, the photographs that are in it all the material was in my possession at the time of the painting, I did not go out to get anything that you would find in the paintings, photographs of the torn flag or the paints it was all here even the canvas was stretched and I stretched some canvases never knowing if I would work on canvas but for some reason I wanted to have some around.

Carolyn Yellin- How long have they been around Donald?

Donald Smith- Oh they have been around for months.

Carolyn Yellin- Just in your studio?

Donald Smith- Yeah they just been there for months and months in the studio about three different sizes big paintings, big canvasses rather and no hadn't done a thing but stretched them and they had been sitting in a corner. I had the flag and just began painting by simply taking the flag and just tore it as you see just tore it completely in two right up through the stripes and...

Carolyn Yellin- How long had you had the flag?

Donald Smith- Well we had two flags at the time one that we were using outside each day and then one that was a new flag that had been given us and this was our spare I suppose.

David Yellin- The tearing of the flag was part of what you are going to do?

Donald Smith- Yeah that I don't know when the title of the painting came but at one time I had written it in, this is a magic marker which I figured would be permanent and I think it is as far as the writing on the bottom and I wrote the title of the painting in there too which is the verse in the bible that the veil in the temple was ruined in two from top to bottom so I started at the top of the flag and I ripped it right up the middle from top, bottom, from top to bottom I am mixed up on the verse right now but whichever way from top to bottom.

Carolyn Yellin- What is that bible verse, (muffled).

Donald Smith- Well this was when Christ was crucified the veil in the temple so called was ripped in two. It is part of the crucifix story but the intent was not to liken any onto a black Jesus or something like that, that wasn't quite the intent, the veil of the temple as I saw it was the temple that government had probably had come and all of a sudden it got the rip that it had coming maybe and the expose was (Muffled) of government really but actually I started with a picture of my own son. A little picture I made of him when he was 3 or 4 years old.

David Yellin- Will you explain the other pictures and how you got them.

Donald Smith- Alright the pictures were here and the first picture wandering about where it all started this seemingly cute sort of picture of a little boy aiming a cap pistol and so I had this, these are all contact prints by the way, they haven't been printed just the negatives are just put in a contact printer and then printed and they are the size of the negative and this is how I would select photographs I would want to use.

Carolyn Yellin- And then if you were using them you would then enlarge them?

Donald Smith- Right they would be enlarged if I was going to print them for any reason what so ever. But these are just directly from the negative and I had just stacks of these and I began to go through them in selecting photographs that I had either made for my own amusement or for research for painting or just because I wanted to try to think in a photograph as I do in a painting in some aesthetic manner.

David Yellin- Now in your collection of photographs did you have an colored photographs?

Donald Smith- No.

David Yellin- So there wasn't a choice of whether color or black and white?

Donald Smith- Just black and white.

David Yellin- (Muffled).

Donald Smith- No I don't work from color and I don't like it in...

David Yellin- In photographs.

Donald Smith- In photographs in particular. Now we make a lot of slides but that can be pretty accurate.

David Yellin- Yeah, of course it is interesting to me is had our flag not been red white and blue the red is so ripped but it says so much.

Donald Smith- Well I added some red back in there but as I said before it is a real flag and the color of the inks in the flag with the exception where I came back with the paints that you can see where it has run and bled what have you. But the photographs were, they show a lot of different things that you just have to know about. Like for instance there are a couple of buildings in there, the brick buildings with the windows knocked out of them.

Carolyn Yellin- Which, how far down?

Donald Smith- About...

Carolyn Yellin- The one by the building with the flag.

David Yellin- (Muffled)

Donald Smith- By the flag. About a third of the way down the painting and that building and then...(Tape Break) Where are the other buildings?

Carolyn Yellin- (Muffled)

Donald Smith- Well the, I felt there was one more of the school and I wonder if it is in the other painting.

David Yellin- While you have that you will get to that smaller one too.

Donald Smith- Yeah I will get to the small one, I was looking for a picture of another building, well, I'll....is it that one? Well at any rate it is in that other painting I think I understand it now. Not that I understand my own painting, but anyhow the buildings are, had been white school buildings and they had been a better school, a better building had been built and this of course was a white school and then people had been moved the white children had been moved into their better school and this good building, good brick building could have been available but was not made available or given to the black people to use and so it just became a deserted building and windows began to be broken out of it and deteriorated and that's, I just happened to have that picture and knew the story. That it was not, even when the whites had a new school they would not permit this building to be used even by the

blacks. So it just stood empty and torn apart. The same way with the church the church building that is down here (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Where you have both interior and exterior shots.

Donald Smith- Of the church, the same story, is true of that church. They built a better church, a new church and a better building and this was allowed to just fall apart and not allowed to be given or otherwise used by anybody else so both have just fallen apart.

David Yellin- How come you took these pictures?

Donald Smith- I don't know.

David Yellin- And when did you take them?

Donald Smith- I don't know why I took them, the bottom one I was inside some of those are interiors and I thought maybe I was going to paint that one. The church.

Carolyn Yellin- Where are these buildings located Donald?

Donald Smith- Well one is in Tennessee and one is in Mississippi.

David Yellin- Now can you go back to that night again, I think we left you tearing the flag.

Donald Smith- Well yeah I did that and then began just to glue it back with the acrylic medium. Working it back into the painting. And as I worked I would sew it, you can see, stitchery in there where it is sewn in places and I began to tear it some more horizontally and then I began to tear holes in it and patch those holes back suggesting that I began to get the idea that the government had been torn and patched and torn and patched before and then it ends up a pretty tattered sort of frayed and jumbled, really wretched sort of order at that point.

David Yellin- Can you kind of recall the statistics, you started it and when did you finish it and how long did you work on it.

Donald Smith- Just the well I began it on the day that Dr. King was shot and...

David Yellin- That evening?

Donald Smith- Yeah.

David Yellin- After you heard it on the air? Do you remember when you heard it?

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say I would like for both you and Jesse to recall were you hear that evening?

David Yellin- In this house?

Jesse Smith- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- In this house and you heard the news when did you hear the news of Dr. King's death?

Jesse Smith- By telephone, somebody called us and I can't remember who called us?

Carolyn Yellin- Do you remember?

Donald Smith- Someone had called us?

Jesse Smith- I think that as well as I can remember was that somebody, things had happened like this you never can unless you (muffled) put down who called. But somebody called us on the telephone and told us and I remember that Donald went almost immediately into the studio and began these works. Which amazed me because it was something so different than he had ever done.

David Yellin- When you heard the news did you turn on the radio or television?

Donald Smith- We certainly must have done that at that point.

David Yellin- Yeah it is hard to remember.

Jesse Smith- It is hard. You are so aware of what happened but you can't really collect your thoughts to know that you didn't, but I know that Doc worked late, late into that night.

Donald Smith- I remember listening to the last talk he made about he had been to the mountain top.

David Yellin- Yeah on Wednesday night.

Donald Smith- I remember listening to that and then of course it was re-broadcast so many times, after he was shot and then after he was dead. And so I kept hearing this really prophetic, I don't know, it has been described probably so many ways but anyhow I heard that a lot what he had said in his own words. And without watching too much of the, of the where all of the testimonials and all of the things that came between his death and he is burial, I don't recall that we tied, I think we intentionally sort of avoided all of that.

Carolyn Yellin- You didn't go and march in the march for instance.

Jesse Smith- One thing we did was the (muffled).

David Yellin- Memphis Cares.

Donald Smith- Memphis Cares.

Jesse Smith- And took our children and it was such a great feeling, we went tot eh Memphis Cares to the stadium and I remember to us it was so important to us to go and take the children because people had all these feelings that there was going to be violence and that friends of ours thought we were obviously out of our minds to

go but to take the children which is you know unheard of. But I think to go and not take the children would have been saying...

David Yellin- And your children at that time were...

Jesse Smith- Were small, we took all three of them.

David Yellin- Can you name the ages?

Jesse Smith- Well let's see it has been how many years?

Donald Smith- 3.

David Yellin- 3 ½

Donald Smith- 9, 6, 3.

Jesse Smith- 9, 6, 3. And walked all the way up in those bleachers with the three children and it was just I thought a marvelous feeling, I couldn't have gone without taking them because I think you would have not been committing yourself all the way to have left your children safely at home and saying I am going but I am not really showing that I care. Because I am leaving my children safely behind. I thought a tremendous experience.

Carolyn Yellin- There was this need I think and we have certainly run across it time and again, a really need to participate or to express something of a sense of, at least a sense of knowledge of what was happening. Because I think your impulse that you have to go into your studio almost immediately, you couldn't keep from going, would you say it was that strong?

Donald Smith- Probably because I never do anything like this, so something very strong.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you usually work at set hours or do you plan your work?

Donald Smith- No not that so much I just don't all of a sudden felt great urges and rush into the studio it is, you go and you spend maybe three or four hours waiting for things to fall into place rather than going and just immediately making something...

David Yellin- Now if this doesn't disturb you kind of interrupting your trend if you do have a trend. We haven't figured some of the statistics but we will get back, how long it took you, you mentioned it before but I do want to ask you a question that I think maybe very interesting and special for you. How would you interpret this experience as an artist?

Donald Smith- Maybe one thing before we get too far, I think the reason, you asked about the march. And we weren't down there. Well I was of course I was working on the painting.

David Yellin- The march on Monday we are talking about?

Carolyn Yellin- With Mrs. King came to Memphis and led the march the day before his burial.

Donald Smith- Now this was also when Mr. Roger Mudd was here and I remember hearing him say well we had a certainly I can't remember the words but I certainly had something that stuck in my (muffled) and that was his said well it looks like there are only a few people who really care enough to really be down here in the march and after I heard that I spent some time trying to reach him by phone and I was going to invite him out and just show him that we weren't all having a march to show we cared.

Jesse Smith- (muffled)

Donald Smith- Because he made some really ugly comments.

David Yellin- I will get it.

Jesse Smith- He closed with one statement and I wish we could remember but it just sort of said that Memphis doesn't really care.

David Yellin- Was this television or radio do you remember?

Jesse Smith- It was television....

Donald Smith- I think it must have been TV.

Jesse Smith- Immediately to the telephone and called that staff member and he had just left the city.

Donald Smith- He recorded this and then took off you see.

Jesse Smith- Donald was so infuriated by this just overall statement.

Donald Smith- Because I just about had the painting done and I wanted to invite him out and show that I...

Carolyn Yellin- That is very interesting...

Donald Smith- Because he measured all of the caring by how many people he counted in the march and that was absurd because there were other people doing other things.

David Yellin- Well now how long did it take you then?

Donald Smith- Well I started the painting when he was shot and then I finished it on the day he was buried, I did the last piece of work on it.

David Yellin- And you didn't watch the funeral on television while you worked?

Jesse Smith- We followed it.

Donald Smith- I think we did see some of that.

David Yellin- And when did you write the caption at the bottom, I have been to the mountaintop?

Donald Smith- That would have been right at the, the painting progress in the order you would see, from the first photograph I would select and set them out and move them around and as they move they go through, I had pictures of places where they still have the white side of the square and the black side of the square.

Carolyn Yellin- Small towns.

Donald Smith- And pictures of just utter poverty and sickness, pictures that I had made form time to time showing the black people in real you know the states that you find them so often down here. And then I had some shots of some small town officials. There is a picture in there of a fellow leaning back in a chair with his feet thrown up on the desk and his very important little town role.

Jesse Smith- I think this is interesting, the tattered flag the flag is almost in this condition...

David Yellin- The last 4 at the bottom.

Donald Smith- And those were made up in Main St. up in the general area of the march.

Carolyn Yellin- Those are Memphis pictures?

Donald Smith- These are all Memphis pictures and they were made just about where the march was.

David Yellin- Before or after?

Donald Smith- This was before, al of these were before. I even had a picture I was in the train station one day which is down in that vicinity and there was a black couple and apparently they had just met the father, he had just come in and there is a black man and his wife and little girl walking, you can see they are walking along...

Jesse Smith- The marching feet.

Donald Smith- Along in the area.

Carolyn Yellin- Why do you have any notion why you took the picture of their feet?

Donald Smith- No.

Carolyn Yellin- This is the contact print you obviously something about the feet caught you there.

Donald Smith- I had just made these they were just done before any of this happened and then the flags along Main St. and then the next picture down is a picture of a boarding house.

Carolyn Yellin- Yes I was wondering about this.

Donald Smith- Which is on in the area.

Carolyn Yellin- The hotel room.

Donald Smith- It could easily have been, certainly not the one he was shot from but could have been the one, it is in the area, and it is a boarding house...

Carolyn Yellin- Probably on Main St.

Donald Smith- And it is in that area.

Carolyn Yellin- I was wondering I see the pawn shops here were those along Beal St.

Donald Smith- Those are the ones down on Beale St.

Carolyn Yellin- The , for the march that he led that broke up.

Donald Smith- Right.

David Yellin- Now a side question, those photographs how long will they last, have they been treated?

Donald Smith- How long will they last? They would be, I could get more accurate information but I think they would be black and white they may yellow some what but I think they would tend to be quite permanent. I could get more information on that.

David Yellin- I just wonder would it be a good idea to put some glass or something?

Donald Smith- I think probably it should be.

Jesse Smith- OH I think it would be a shame to have the glass.

David Yellin- Yeah but...

Donald Smith- I am thinking of the cloth that is involved and the pieces...

David Yellin- I mean it would have to be out of reach if it ever was hung because somebody is bound to touch it. We are all so kinetic.

Donald Smith- Yeah it would be touched and also of course acrylic is permanent and of course you can clean it as far as that goes, but the dust and all might collect in the fabric that is still free.

David Yellin- Can you go on to the blue ribbon?

Donald Smith- The last photograph is a picture I made in the old union station or the old central station which was once again in the same area. And it is a picture of a man....(tape break)

Donald Smith- He is making a telephone call and I so that completed the in sort of a narrative way the absolutely tragedy of the whole thing was when somebody had to call Mrs. King and tell her that her husband was dead or that he had been shot and he was critically shot and that would have had to be done by phone.

David Yellin- It was Ralph Abernathy didn't he?

Donald Smith- I don't know who would have called.

Carolyn Yellin- It was Ralph Abernathy or Andrew Young, but I believe it was according to Mrs. King but we can look that up.

David Yellin- No it was Billy Kyles. Because they all went, I forget they all went down you see, to the hospital. But somebody went and called Corretta.

Jesse Smith- I know for a long time, I know that you made several calls but I don't remember at this point if you ever got through to Ralph Abernathy offering this thing, if there was anyway it could be used...

Donald Smith- No I was trying to call all that time I was trying to call...

Jesse Smith- Somebody that you know?

Donald Smith- The minister here...

David Yellin- Lawson?

Donald Smith- Lawson.

Jesse Smith- At that point it was so hard to get through....

Donald Smith- I never did.

Jesse Smith- But we were trying to shard to do something.

David Yellin- We will tell him.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I am glad you ended up from our point of view because it seems it is just what we are about. it expresses so much of what really dissents of our efforts of what al the other people in Memphis who were sharing this. I was going to ask, Jesse was telling us the building with the flag at half mast, she was telling us of an earlier painting you did at the time of the John F. Kennedy assassination. Which was a more, a painting more in the tradition of what you usually do.

Donald Smith- It was like my normal regular painting right.

Jesse Smith- And yet it encompassed all of the feelings you know like this does and yet that being still typically his type work you look at it and it really...

David Yellin- Can I do something, can you describe typically your type work? I know it will be elsewhere.

Donald Smith- Very mild in comparison to this.

Jesse Smith- Blue skies.

Donald Smith- Just my painting has been more of a recording of qualities and shapes and the sensations of the area.

David Yellin- The clouds and I think of wind.

Jesse Smith- Yes but in all fairness it has been a recording of something that is passing, he has tried to hold on to something that is going.

Carolyn Yellin- I remember reading the, at one point your description of something you did when you would paint the deserted farm buildings and that you, I believe you said you like to get to the buildings while they are still breathing.

Donald Smith- I remember that.

Jesse Smith- That was Bill...

Carolyn Yellin- Bill Thomas?

Jesse Smith- (Muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- And Bill Thomas incidentally Bill Thomas works with us for three months.

(Muffled)

David Yellin- That is right yeah. They met through our committee.

Jesse Smith- I am so glad.

Donald Smith- I remember that, when I first clipped a little article it had your name and Jerry's name mentioned.

David Yellin- Yes on that.

Donald Smith- Well I still have it back there I called for awhile and...

Jesse Smith- I would like for you to show them the (muffled).

David Yellin- Yes we would, can we go to the next one of your...

Carolyn Yellin- Excuse me can you mention it I just want to get on tape that he painting you did of the Kennedy was called during the mourning's spelled...

Jesse Smith- Mournings.

Donald Smith- Right.

Carolyn Yellin- And it was a building with a flag at half mast, a school or a church?

Donald Smith- Well it was a little....it was a mercantile store a the time she had dry goods and it was a post office and it was these two thinks and she had the flag at half mast and flag poles held up by the bailing wire that holds everything else together, just seemed to really say it I didn't have to change a thing.

Jesse Smith- I will never forget we were driving through and he just braked the car immediately when he saw it and (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Did you say that was your home town?

Jesse Smith- (muffled).

David Yellin- How do you spell that?

Jesse Smith- Belen.

Carolyn Yellin- Belen.

Jesse Smith- It is probably not even on the map it is so tiny.

David Yellin- Where is it then put it on the map.

Jesse Smith- It is down highway 61 sort of between here and Clarkesdale.

Donald Smith- _It is just outside of Marks.

David Yellin- Oh yes.

Carolyn Yellin- And of course...

David Yellin- (Muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- To Martin Luther King the poor people's march.

David Yellin- And where are you from?

Donald Smith- Ripley Tennessee.

David Yellin- Ripley.

Carolyn Yellin- Which is west Tennessee?

Donald Smith- West Tennessee.

Carolyn Yellin- So it would be a, the towns would be similar wouldn't they?

Donald Smith- They, so in both of these towns ahs happened both just real deep prejudice as well as this really beautiful weight or more...

Jesse Smith- Simple.

Jesse Smith- (muffled) these pictures a lot of these pictures were made just somewhere within sight of my parents home in (muffled) just right there. In the small towns, some of these were. (muffled).

David Yellin- Again just you know.

Donald Smith- Oh and by the way there is another picture in there, that little picture down there is a picture of a trash can.

Carolyn Yellin- I noticed that.

Donald Smith- Which is also on Main St. which was also what the whole thing was about anyway, the garbage and trash.

David Yellin- So that you went through all your pictures and any picture that kind of struck you as being related, in some way or another.

Donald Smith- it really fit in but the strange thing is the pictures were made where all this went on.

David Yellin- Yes.

Jesse Smith- So far in advance.

David Yellin- Manifest destiny.

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say I have to ask this question because I just...did you ever have an eerie feeling about this Doc, did you feel that something beyond you had...

David Yellin- ESP or something?

Carolyn Yellin- To take these pictures and had them here. It seems to me the fact that all of this material was at hand that could so be used, I don't know enough about the way an artist works, do you always find at hand what you need or was this a particularly gratuitive thing that all these things were at hand.

Donald Smith- Just I didn't sense anything or I could (muffled).

David Yellin- That you were looking for some from of expression and there they were.

Donald Smith- It was just, maybe something was maybe the some vibrations were lining up for a couple of years in there.

Jesse Smith- But your paintings are sort of what it is all about. He paints the whole country (muffled) so that his photographs would naturally be that sort of thing and the deserted churches and the barns, this is what he loves to paint anyway. It sort of was all related.

Donald Smith- Well it has to do with the people and it doesn't have anything to do with the color of people because people never appear in the paintings. These things I paint could be there without concern for race, or creed, or color, etc. Because the people aren't in any of my paintings.

David Yellin- Now did either of you again, and this is again probably interrupting but did either of you have any feeling about Martin Luther King or what was your attitude about the strike as it was going on, that suddenly cause this kind of reaction when the death happened?

Donald Smith- I don't remember being so much involved with political evaluations of the rights of wrongs or what have you about the garbage strike itself but I do remember believing strongly that he would bring his nonviolent meanings, attitude here and make it work. I thought this would, I remember I wish I could recall just what I did mean there.

David Yellin- Yeah that is so hard.

Jesse Smith- Were the marches before the strike? There was marches before....

David Yellin- No it was during the strike.

(Muffled)

Jesse Smith- During the strike but before this and I think the way I became most involved because I am very ignorant politically was that through the church that we now belong to which we didn't at the time...

David Yellin- Do you care to name it?

Jesse Smith- Would you, should I name it.

Donald Smith- No.

Carolyn Yellin- We would like it if you feel which one you now belong to or you don't have too, it is up to you.

Jesse Smith- Well the associate pastor of this church and it is Idlewild Presbyterian church and I know you(muffled) The associate pastor...

David Yellin- Yes John Aldridge, oh he made a tape for us wonderful.

Jesse Smith- Yes, well and he was just he had so much and we had not gone to that church at the time but he meant so much, so very much to so many friends of ours

and this is how I got so involved but then see he left and directly because of this and I think this was my involvement, I really felt it because one man....

Carolyn Yellin- He too is from Mississippi, so he could put into his reaction...

Jesse Smith- (muffled).

David Yellin- Marvelous. I think he went to Princeton.

Donald Smith- He is a...we were asking about him the other night and he is up east.

David Yellin- Yes.

Donald Smith- He is at Princeton.

Jesse Smith- But we have joined the church since then.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I am grateful that you mentioned that because we do have a tape of him and this what interests me just the fact that this does tie up together and this is what we are getting at is that it is the interrelation of these things.

Jesse Smith- Well so many of my friends were just, were so with him and of course the church just split at the time and there were people that who were ready to leave the church...

David Yellin- (muffled) can we switch a minute. How come a little girl from Mississippi...I mean explain yourself girl.

Jesse Smith- Explain myself?

David Yellin- Wherefore are you different than your peers.

Jesse Smith- I think Mississippi is terribly misrepresented I really do. (muffled) knows that my father grew up always a very poor man working hard and farming hard and working. Hardly anybody and yet, he is a very gentlemen and I think that there is so much prejudice is ascribed to Mississippi that maybe it is not really there.

David Yellin- Maybe we don't hear your story.

Carolyn Yellin- There are prejudices against Mississippi that are as real as the prejudices that are ascribed to them.

Jesse Smith- That is the way I feel and I know...

Carolyn Yellin- Because they are generalized and they include everybody.

Jesse Smith- That is true and for so many years when I came to Memphis I felt that...

David Yellin- When did you come?

Jesse Smith- ...Defend Mississippi, I came straight out of high school into nurse's training, with the (muffled) and I defended Mississippi tried, for so many years and then I just decided it is hopeless you know. I am what I am and I can only speak for myself and it is very frustrating.

David Yellin- Well what do you think Martin Luther King meant people like your father, and you don't have to answer any of this it is just....or did he not mean anything really?

Jesse Smith- (muffled).

David Yellin- Did you ever talk to her dad about this?

Jesse Smith- (Muffled)

Donald Smith- Oh, Dave Willy and I had a good relationship by the time Jesse says he is a good man and we really love him and....and yet I don't think, we have never discussed...

David Yellin- Would he have sent his painting? Or this....this the depiction, the reaction.

Donald Smith- I think all of us, all of us period, no exceptions are one thing in our hearts and we are just a little different the further we get out to the color of our skin.

Jesse Smith- I have to say I am one generation from my father and he grew up, there was a definite two classes and he is still in that generation and yet he would never be unkind to any person in the world I don't care who they are, and yet because he is in the generation he is , there is a, there's that and if you can call it prejudice ok. But prejudice to me is the way you treat a person, do you see what I mean?

David Yellin- Yeah, no we have the same problem with her parents, I mean not problem but it is the same situation.

Jesse Smith- but dad...

David Yellin- There is no problems we don't talk about it either.

Carolyn Yellin- To illustrate what Dave is talking about my parents who were coming from Oklahoma to visit us and they were driving into town and they had driven across the state of Arkansas and were driving across the Memphis Arkansas bridge into Memphis at the moment the announcement was made on the 4th that Martin Luther King had been killed butt he curious thing was that I had talked to them a little bit earlier that week about three or four days before and it was during the week of curfews and after the march had broken up on March 28th and my mother at that point had said well if Martin Luther King had just stayed at home I don't think he would be having those troubles there. And I said well maybe so maybe not because we didn't want to get with it, but they sat with us the night that you are describing and they sat with us and my mother in particular and my father

both but in fact my mother said I didn't know this about Martin Luther...she listened to his sermons and his speeches for the first time that night.

(muffled)

David Yellin- It was a beautiful thing.

Jesse Smith- We have a very good friend who is a instructor at the academy...

Carolyn Yellin- At the Memphis arts...

Jesse Smith- At the Memphis arts academy and he has come up east and he is Jewish and he came here and you could imagine how different Memphis is from whatever he is from.

David Yellin- Yes I can imagine it very well yes.

Jesse Smith- (Muffled) and they really thought they had encouraged him and he really didn't want to come to Memphis and then (muffled) he couldn't imagine anything more hostile, but he came and had maybe I think a weekend seeing the academy and being a part and being introduced around. And the night that he got on the plane just as he was boarding the plane the announcement was made that Martin Luther King had been assassinated.

David Yellin- Yeah did he ever come back?

Jesse Smith- He came back and he...

David Yellin- Is he here now?

Donald Smith- He is here now.

Jesse Smith- He has just been tremendous.

David Yellin- what is his name?

Jesse Smith- Maurice and he is just one of our, we love him, he is just a great friend. But I think this says so much for him that he would have even brought his family to Memphis after he this.

David Yellin- Yes, well now do you recall around that time anything that you can recall, we are really just fishing, were classes in session at that time?

Carolyn Yellin- I think we should have in the record that Doc teaches at he Memphis art academy?

David Yellin- Yes and you were at that time too?

Donald Smith- At the Memphis academy of arts and it may have been that at that time we were on our break, our two week spring break I can't recall.

David Yellin- It may have been because of the curfew I know Memphis state...

Donald Smith- The curfew or something because I think I had, that was a Friday.

Jesse Smith- It was good Friday.

Donald Smith- Friday and then Sunday and it seemed like we for some, I don't know if it was because of Dr. King's death or because we were on Spring Break but for some reason there was time on either side of the assassination that we were away from school. I may be really wrong there but I just feel like...

David Yellin- I think so, I know that at Memphis state what happened was they did it a week early they immediately declared....

Donald Smith- Right I remember that but I remember that but I don't remember what happened to us.

David Yellin- Right well now was there anything at school during the strike preceding the assassination, did the kids participate in anything?

Donald Smith- Well we have...

David Yellin- Did they make signs?

Donald Smith- I think you should probably go to them because my memory is really not able to recall those things. I do know that a lot of our black people participated and some people were arrested as being involved in the rioting and the marching.

Carolyn Yellin- Or the curfew violations.

Donald Smith- And various so called violations and so called...

David Yellin- Do you remember any stories I mean that they were maltreated, mistreated?

Donald Smith- I really don't.

David Yellin- Ok if we didn't ask we would never get it that's all. And this is something that is so far gone you can't remember you would ask me I don't recall those days.

Jesse Smith- But these kids at the academy are so intense that I wish you know at that point we could have talked to some of them or interviewed them. Because...

Carolyn Yellin- They were particularly sensitive to this kind of...

David Yellin- now how many blacks did you have there that...can you remember in relation to whites? And how has it changed since?

Donald Smith- We, the black enrollment has grown at the academy until this year and had nothing to do with anything that anyone can see other than the money

situation and the unemployment. And speaking of a figure you would hear them talk about a 6%, 6% unemployment. Well in the black community this means about 20%.

David Yellin- Oh yeah it is higher in the study among the young people it was some 30%.

Donald Smith- So, they think it is that it is because of that that we had fewer black people that enrolled this year but it had been growing up until this year.

David Yellin- now can you tell us about that little...

Donald Smith- Now the, of course the big one started out to be biographical in a sense but it didn't all end up that way.

Carolyn Yellin- All biographical or biographical starting with your son's picture was it to be biographical for you?

Donald Smith- Yes. Because I did start with that one picture and a few of the other pictures sort of show the other children and we are picking up the (muffled) with some black people and just because we always see them when we go home and then it became something else totally different. Like finally this picture of the little black girl there and she has got a coat, she has managed to have a coat and you know it is cold and if you can see close enough she is barefooted, and it is cold because we are picking up pecans and the school bus and all. But the title of the painting I wrote in at the top there in magic marker and I decided that didn't really, and I dated it event he date of the assassination. And I decided at one point in the painting that I didn't want that in there for some reason or another.

David Yellin- And what was the title you mentioned it earlier.

Donald Smith- The veil in the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom and then the date April 4th 1968 and I decided I didn't want it, I can't remember why but I just didn't want it in there, so I began to paint it out and I painted it out with some white acrylic and I went on with the rest of the painting and I guess the next day I noticed it had come back and so I painted it out again. And I must have painted it out maybe three or four times and because of the chemical in the magic marker it kept bleeding through the acrylic paint and so finally I said there was something going on there.

Jesse Smith- It was meant to be there.

David Yellin- Somebody is trying to tell you something.

Donald Smith- But at least three times it bled back through the white when I tried to paint it out.

Jesse Smith- I think it says so much.

Carolyn Yellin- Yes it does, yet right now you have to go and ...

David Yellin- What would you call it then, would you call it...I mean do you have a title?

Carolyn Yellin- That is the title still.

David Yellin- Oh I see but I thought you took nit out because you didn't want it to be the title?

Donald Smith- No I wanted it to say the title but I just didn't want it written in there it just seemed to be too much writing in there I wanted this to be more important at the bottom. And I kept trying to get it out.

David Yellin- I noticed you didn't sign this?

Donald Smith- No I didn't feel like I should have signed it either?

David Yellin- Why not?

Donald Smith- I don't know. I would, I have shown it in a couple of shows and I have talked about it to Southwestern and anybody that would have asked me so it is not that I am objective saying that is my painting, it is just for other reasons that I didn't want to...

Jesse Smith- We showed it at northwest junior college in Mississippi.

David Yellin- Oh yeah.

Carolyn Yellin- Could you say a little bit about the reactions you have gotten to it?

David Yellin- Yes.

Donald Smith- Well I have obscenities written on it.

Carolyn Yellin- Written on itself?

Donald Smith- Written into the paint.

David Yellin- What kind. What do they say?

Donald Smith- Well they said suck and I believe that is all.

Carolyn Yellin- That is how you know the painting can be cleaned right?

Donald Smith- Yeah so people that were showing it they tried to paint it out and I bet I can still see it in there and so it has had that happen to it but other than that it has received some good comments.

David Yellin- How soon, well go ahead what are the good comments?

Donald Smith- Well they are just like people who seen my artwork were glad to see that I had done this, I don't let's see now because I painted these others that are just

in a recording sense, so I know how sense the landscape and the, all of the qualities of the south without relating..

Jesse Smith- I think it has brought real color in other people, the good responses that we have gotten off of people that have really responded in the way that we have.

Carolyn Yellin- Well as you said Jesse if we could have had the tape recording just when Dave and I saw it at the very beginning and we are now very calm about it we are discussing it very objectively but...

David Yellin- Has this affected you in any way as an artist, I mean this experience of doing this, I still don't know what to call it.

Donald Smith- I don't either.

Carolyn Yellin- Is it a collage?

Donald Smith- Well it is just as far as the technique, it would be called a collage, and it, but I don't know how it has affected me made me talk more about it and more reaction to it if it is shown again . Like for instance I never was aware but I don't know who noticed that, I don't know who was it (muffled) they could have noticed that the shape if you look at he shape of the pictures and the tear of the flag it is the shape of the capitol building you know the dome and the...the dome and as it comes out and opens into the domed shape, somebody commented on that and then it squares off in the bottom white area and be come symbolic of the capitol.

Jesse Smith- The nice thing, the fun thing would be to record different people's responses to this.

David Yellin- Oh yes.

Jesse Smith- You would get a lot of (muffled).

Donald Smith- Except it has been some time.

Jesse Smith- A lot of people have seen it.

|David Yellin- That's the point you wouldn't know...

Carolyn Yellin- Who was the first person that saw it other than people in your own family, do you recall?

Jesse Smith- You took it to school? Didn't you take it to show your students?

Donald Smith- No just different people that would come into the studio, that was what April? I could probably look up the records of my shows because it seems like it went into a show shortly after that, a faculty show an academy faculty show or something like that.

David Yellin- Soon after?

Donald Smith- It gave me an opportunity fairly soon.

David Yellin- How did you identify it was there ea caption to this, you know what is it? How would anybody know except they came and Jesse said that they didn't, a lot of people didn't recognize mountain top.

Jesse Smith- Remember how (muffled) in there said where did this come from and they didn't recognize.

Donald Smith- How you say at this point would you identify this as being representative of...or would you just call it April 4th 1968.

Jesse Smith- I don't think that we have made any real attempt to, if you can it means a great deal to you if you can't.

Donald Smith- Well what he means is...

Jesse Smith- Did you title it?

Donald Smith- Well the title was the scripture verse but I think what David is asking is about tying it to Dr. King.

David Yellin- Yes how would anyone know?

Donald Smith- How would anyone know unless they knew what he said, or knew his wife's name.

Jesse Smith- I think surely by the time it got down here...

David Yellin- Yeah but the point is that this thing, you get a reaction if you go into it knowing it then your reaction is a constant one of the whole thing. But then if you have to discover then you go back and already that initial impact is lost. Or it is...

Carolyn Yellin- But surely someone realized it had been done by a Memphis artist?

David Yellin- It is a different experience and maybe it doesn't have, that if you discover yourself that it means maybe that in itself is an experience or a sensation that is an exciting one. Now did you do this, now...

Carolyn Yellin- Does the small one have a title or what is the small one?

Donald Smith- Well I had too..

Carolyn Yellin- The cross...

Donald Smith- Of course the, it is still a piece, yet it is back to the (muffled). I say 11-39, now that is the verse where it says that the...

Jesse Smith- (Muffled)

Donald Smith- The lions shall lie down with the lamb and...

Jesse Smith- Something about the peaceable King...

Carolyn Yellin- Yes.

Donald Smith- Where I found that were are all going to be at peace and of course it is in a cross and there are twelve panels on each side and this on the left side, they all have to do with me. There is a graduation, here is where there is a graduating class at the art academy and here is a picture of some little black children in the store.

Carolyn Yellin- And that is on the right hand side.

Donald Smith- On the right hand side just the opposite. It is just directly across the street from one of these schools that is not even, they are sitting within 20 feet of a good brick building that they could have gone to school in and can't. And here cap gown college education.

David Yellin- Excuse me you said 12 panels? There are 10 aren't there?

Donald Smith- I am sorry there are ten panels on each side. But and then here is a voting poster, vote for someone county clerk or something and over here in this panel down this hall was where the, is a registration in one of those doors down that hall is the registration, where voter registration office and then each one has to do with here are my children healthy...

Carolyn Yellin- In the second row.

Donald Smith- Playing in the sand pile and it is all everything is nice and these kids over here that I talked to at this house, both of these houses and all three of these families here they were just no heat, no nothing and I went up and talked to them and their noses were running and just no way to get any kind of medical care to even stop their noses from running and of course at this time my little boy had a broken arm and he had gotten the best of medical care.

David Yellin- He knew a good nurse.

Donald Smith- He knew a good nurse.

Jesse Smith- Except his good nurse was in Chicago.

Donald Smith- We were out of town. This was not at our home but they are watching TV.

Carolyn Yellin- A large screen.

Donald Smith- Yeah and then in the next panel the relation, these little black children were playing basketball out in the country. And that is a baseball game on television. And here I am in my studio with all of my securities and here is a black man whose working at a very...

Carolyn Yellin- Out in the fields?

Donald Smith- Extreme manual labor, which is not as, no strong analogy here particularly because that kind of work certainly wouldn't hurt me either but just trying to make some relations. And then finally and of course here are pictures of the white side of the square and the black side of the square.

Carolyn Yellin- Which you spoke of earlier which existed in...

David Yellin- The bottom panel.

Carolyn Yellin- In all the small towns.

Donald Smith- Here is a church, a used church in one town and then here is the church that is empty because no one will let them use it and here we have our washing machine and (muffled). And then the final picture is the picture of a dog we had at one time and a cat and just a wonderful animal this dog was.

Carolyn Yellin- We have seen your animals tonight we have seen your present dog is very friendly with your present cats.

Jesse Smith- The cat is grey.

Donald Smith- Also tonight you saw the cat and dog together but this dog and the cat that he would, the cat would play with him and crawl over him and sleep with him and he would never hurt the cat and so this was the last picture that would.

David Yellin- Carolyn you asked if there was a name and there isn't a name to this.

(Muffled)

Donald Smith- The whole chapter would amount to that, it would be, it just has to do with the ...

Carolyn Yellin- (muffled).

David Yellin- Of course my reaction, I don't know not being religion oriented, to me that looks like a blue ribbon award. And that is what I thought it was.

Jesse Smith- Why do you say that?

David Yellin- Because that is what it looks like. It looks like so many, you get it and there is a little circle around her and it says what it is for.

Donald Smith- All the big at the top and then the...

David Yellin- That is what I thought it was you know. In fact I called it the blue ribbon...

Carolyn Yellin- That may say a great deal about you.

David Yellin- Yeah, I want to get it on the record that is not your version that is...

Donald Smith- That is not.

Carolyn Yellin- (muffled).

Donald Smith- That is from the same flyer.

Carolyn Yellin- Is it from the same flag including where did you get the stars from the other?

Donald Smith- Well that, I just cut off some of apparently was just cut off from the end of that because either way it wrapped around...

David Yellin- We don't have, that is 50...

Donald Smith- That is 40.

David Yellin- Just before we run away, your children either at the Memphis Cares or around this time did they have any particular reaction?

Jesse Smith- Of course our oldest at the time was 6 and we had, he was very....Tim was 9, and he was a very aware of what was going on.

David Yellin- in what way?

Jesse Smith- Beg your pardon?

David Yellin- In what way?

Jesse Smith- Well I think he has, well he was with us and a child that age sense so much you know.

David Yellin- Well did he know before hand about the strike and the tension?

Jesse Smith- Very little, but this of course was just he culmination of the whole thing and he was very aware and the thing, you know there was never any question of whether they should go but the fact that they were allowed to go meant so much to him in particular, even a 6 year old it meant a great deal to go, because there were a few children there. I don't know if you were aware of that.

David Yellin- That's true.

Jesse Smith- And to me that says so much you know that you would go that you were going to leave your children stay home, this was not going in a trusting sort of loving sort of I care sort of way that I am bringing my family and I am here because I care.

Carolyn Yellin- And what kind of safety is it, does it include the children?

Jesse Smith- That's true and I think it says so much to the black community that you would walk up into the stands with your children which is your whole world, it showed that you cared and that was what it was all about.

David Yellin- Anything else?

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say, I was going to ask at one point have people wanted, have you had any people who have wanted to buy these paintings.

David Yellin- You are shaking your head no. That doesn't record.

Donald Smith- We had one offer of a friend that would have wanted to have them I think but they have never been for sale, they have always...when they would be in these shows they would be not...they would be indicated not for sale. They have never been for sale they have either been for...

Carolyn Yellin- And what you certainly have made a great effort to get them to the place where you felt they needed to be or where they would say something.

Donald Smith- Well we knew that from the very beginning that we would either place them with, in a valid sort of way that they could perpetuate anything of value there and in, at any rate they have never been for sale.

David Yellin- Well obviously you tried to get a hold of Dr. Abernathy....

Jesse Smith- It was not Abernathy it was Jim Lawson and he had really left many (muffled) just saying if there is anything that you can do with this we would love for you to have it.

Donald Smith- Well he never knew.

Jesse Smith- Yeah to was at a point where things were so hectic you know he probably never got a message.

Carolyn Yellin- I think it should be...

David Yellin- Well we will be very happy to show it to him...

Carolyn Yellin- I would like to get it into our tape recorded record how you came to mention this to Dave that you were going to be on one of the television shows and you mentioned that you had these paintings, but the first we heard of them was your remembering, you had mentioned the clipping you had...

Donald Smith- It was on face to face and that night which I never saw.

Jesse Smith- We never watch television so..

Donald Smith- Well we were gone, we were...

David Yellin- In fact I have a show on right now.

Jesse Smith- Do you and you are missing it.

David Yellin- That's alright.

Donald Smith- Well we were out of town and couldn't see it, we were on a camp trip or something.

David Yellin- That was a good I may have you back. We are coming, well we are pretty good then.

Carolyn Yellin- I want to follow this through, you had clipped out this clipping.

Donald Smith- And then I had the clipping.

Carolyn Yellin- And you had it for some time?

Donald Smith- I had it since.

Carolyn Yellin- But you clipped it out with the idea that you would inquire and see of this collection of material was where this painting belonged?

Donald Smith- I think maybe I even tried to call you at one point.

David Yellin- Yes you said you did and...

Donald Smith- Couldn't reach you and didn't leave a number or something and this was....and I wrote a number on the clipping which I am sure I still have.

David Yellin- And as a matter of fact when I spoke to you to ask you to be on the show you said well you had been wanting to contact me or something about a picture and so on when after the show we just talked about it and in fact you took me home.

Donald Smith- That was it right,.

David Yellin- Then the next morning I heard that you were going to give it to us because somebody had been at the party that you went to when you left me. Or something. Oh dear what did I say.

(Muffled)

David Yellin- In fact as I say I hear that Donald Smith is giving you....were you in the backseat of the car? At this point I don't remember who in the world it was.

Donald Smith- Where did we go after that?

Jesse Smith- Oh it was the opening, the opening because I went with somebody.

David Yellin- You said you were going somewhere, yes.

(Muffled)

Carolyn Yellin- It wasn't Allen Almers?

Jesse Smith- It was Mary's...

Donald Smith- Mary Simms, right, I recall.

David Yellin- Yes and it was Ted (muffled).

Jesse Smith- Ted (muffled).

David Yellin- Yes now that you yes. The next day I remember he was outside of my office and he said something about it.

(muffled)

Donald Smith- That is the connection there, glad we figured it out. Glad we got it on tape.

David Yellin- and now when you look at this from time to time or even saying now, do you feel it says what you want it to say?

Donald Smith- Well I have to say that it did then to the artist it is important that it worked for him then, and then of course that it does hold up. But now it is more dependent on the viewer than the artist. It is more...

David Yellin- But I am asking you as the artist but at the time then it did say pretty much?

Donald Smith- Yeah I thought I was convinced that it..

.Carolyn Yellin- And this would be one of the reasons then that it is important that this end up in a collection where it can speak to the viewer or where the viewer can bring this, this understanding to it or this awareness.

David Yellin- But at the same time nobody could ever share this with you, this had to do with the moment just as you say, the moment of creation and all the things that you felt.

Jesse Smith- And yet if you really care and you start at the top and go through you have got to feel something, you have got to feel a little bit of what he felt.

David Yellin- Yeah I don't really look at paintings and in that sense I am not even a viewer of paintings and I don't know how to view them except what the....but this thing I saw at once and it did and I am not just saying it.

Carolyn Yellin- I think I am reminded of the recent tape that we got from Jim Lawson when he was speaking at a thing called Snack and Rap which is a lunch meeting where people just get together and talk over at Memphis state and he was there on

the day that there came work that mayor Lobe was calling a curfew after the Elton Hayes killing, which was 1971 and Jim Lawson with the tape machine running recording this, heard this while he was talking about religion to Memphis state students. And it was an interesting thing and I am reminded of that particular moment because looking at this flag the American flag one of the things that Jim Lawson was talking about then was that to him part of religion was being able to be a loving critic he called it and this was a word that, a phrase that stuck in my mind and this picture, the flag, I get a feeling of a loving criticism.

David Yellin- Instead of a unpatriotic or treasonable thing of tearing up the flag, yeah. That is true. (Tape Break)

David Yellin- Good what we want now short, not necessarily short but just your biographical material where you were born and how you got into art.

Carolyn Yellin- Born in Ripley Tennessee.

Donald Smith- No I was born here in Memphis and the....

Jesse Smith- (Muffled).

David Yellin- Really?

Donald Smith- The Methodist hospital it is just I can see it from my studio window. That is where I was born and that is where I...

David Yellin- Do you ever want to go and burn the building down?

(muffled)

Donald Smith- Wait till you hear it I really do want to go burn it. But that is where I met her, that is where I worked through school.

David Yellin- You met her when you were born?

Donald Smith- We...

Carolyn Yellin- You worked in the hospital?

Donald Smith- Well I was, I was working through school, well I was over there and worked weekends and some nights.

Carolyn Yellin- Doing? What were you doing?

Donald Smith- Office work, just.

David Yellin- You went to art school, did you go to college before then or you went right from..

Donald Smith- I had been at Memphis state a couple of years and it was just disaster.

David Yellin- For whom?

Donald Smith- Really for both of us.

Jesse Smith- We won't pursue that.

Donald Smith- You are going to get a few cracks in the wall when you present this tot eh archives at Memphis state anyhow so we better not get that on the tape.

David Yellin- No we have to be completely objective and let the chips fall where they...

Donald Smith- But just a little of that and then army and then I knew what I wanted to do and came back and went on the G.I. bill out to the art gallery.

David Yellin- What do you mean then you knew what you wanted to do, in the army?

Donald Smith- After the service I came directly out of the service and then...

David Yellin- Where were you in the service?

Donald Smith- Oh, I was for awhile in school near Boston and then went for a couple of years in Germany. It was...

David Yellin- When was this, when were you born so we can get this straight.

Donald Smith- I was born in 1933, and this was between any sort of conflict nothing was happening when I was in the service. It was a...

David Yellin- That was a good time to be in.

Donald Smith- It was a good time to be in and it was a good place to be overseas. I think that seeing the museums, the few that I saw.

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to ask.

David Yellin- Did you paint at all?

Donald Smith- No I never...

Jesse Smith- (muffled) that mother had. (muffled).

Donald Smith- No I don't. Is it that watercolor...

Jesse Smith- in the basement.

Donald Smith- I did those, those drawings, that drawing? Did that after I got back even, it was in art school.

David Yellin- You mean you never had an inkling?

Donald Smith- No I had never seen to my knowledge by the time I was out of high school, to my knowledge I had never seen what I knew to be an original work of art.

David Yellin- Never been to a museum in otherwards?

Donald Smith- No.

David Yellin- so you saw, right it was accidental.

Donald Smith- _I wouldn't have known what I saw.

David Yellin- ...At somebody's house and so on.

Donald Smith- I don't think that in west Memphis I was in, when I was born my parents lived out in Arkansas and that is where the paternal side of my family is from.

David Yellin- And what was your dad, was he a farmer?

Donald Smith- He was an insurance and he had the same name, I am the 3rd and my grandfather. But my dad was dead when I was 6, he died oh I guess before I was even in school.

David Yellin- So anyway you were a poor boy?

Donald Smith- No. No. We were, no I wasn't. We were comfortable. Jesse was much more like that, she grew up...very much without things. But I had, I seemed to have the big Christmases and the...

David Yellin- That is why I wonder why you (muffled).

Donald Smith- Now this, I have always have seen them and this has always been a part of he country but...

Carolyn Yellin- It was part of the landscape.

David Yellin- Yeah but are these things explainable. Why should you see them? Usually you see them out of your own experience, out of your own need to say something?

Donald Smith- Well when I was in art school, I was in advertising and got my degree in advertising and spent 6 years with art studios and an advertising agency.

David Yellin- And you did commercial art?

Donald Smith- And did commercial art for 6 years and then...

David Yellin- When did you get honest?

Donald Smith- well just 4 years ago. Be cause 6 years and I finished school in 1960, at the art of Memphis academy of arts and that was in 1960 and 6 years in

advertising and then, and then I went and I had begun to do a little teaching at night and then the agency I worked for he was on the board of trustees at the art gallery so he gave me one day to teach, one day.

David Yellin- What agency was that?

Donald Smith- This was Ward Archer.

Jesse Smith- (Muffled)

David Yellin- Yes it was Archer and Woodberry at the time right.

Donald Smith- At the time and Ward was the trustee out there and he worked with the school and he gave me a day off to teach out there.

David Yellin- And Harry Woodbury was a part of the administration.

Donald Smith- Then Harry left and boy it is Ward Archer and associates now. Of course I think an awful lot of Ward. But at any rate he let me go and then just after that I had a chance to teach about 15 hours and paint and so I quit. And once summer, quit on my vacation 67, 67, and ever since it has been.

David Yellin- So when did you first have a show?

Donald Smith- That was before, that was just after I had gone with Ward I was painting at night, I would come home after work and paint and I had a show just after I went to Bruick's, I am sorry just after I went to Ward's I had a show at Brooke's Art Gallery. And then a few more...

Carolyn Yellin- Were there some sales as a result of that first show or did you, so that is was encouraging.

Donald Smith- Yes.

Jesse Smith- The first show was, your first real show was at Johnson's.

Donald Smith- First show was at Johnson's.

Jesse Smith- And the sales we were just amazed, (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Do you think that Dave asking earlier why you painted these landscapes that you felt you wanted to get on campus, I have so often heard it said the thing that distinguishes this southern novelist is a sense of place and do you feel this is true for an artist too, do you think a northern artist or another regional artist, are there other regional artists who are doing what you are for the south, this section, the Delta section?

Donald Smith- I, is the to say to answer it vicariously, is that the word, I will answer from another point of view and say that no I don't think that someone else can come here and paint the south. And Murray Reese will tell you that nobody has ever

photographed the south although some fantastic photographers have worked through the south. Walker...

David Yellin- Walker Evans yeah.,

Donald Smith- For one. And Murray says that the silence has not yet been photographed because it is going to have to be someone from here, from the south.

Carolyn Yellin- You see it with different eyes, you have to have grown up here.

Donald Smith- I believe in that.

David Yellin- Doesn't Wyatt do the Pennsylvania landscapes or, some of them, they are different.

Donald Smith- Pennsylvania Maine and he would only be able to paint that because he spent his whole life..

David Yellin- Those neat farms, they are not arty all like..

Jesse Smith- They are his, they are his life, his heritage.

Donald Smith- This is, I believe this is true, I believe I will stay here and I don't know I will come as close as anybody.

David Yellin- Yeah, if you had to paint Memphis today then how would you paint this city or it is a very unfair question therefore I am happy to ask it.

Donald Smith- I don't think I would paint Memphis.

Carolyn Yellin- You don't respond too...

Donald Smith- I think that Memphis is just a something that is where humanity is pushed together out of the whole fabric...

David Yellin- Just a piece of real estate where they live.

Donald Smith- Just happened to be more people here but the whole fabric is what I am concerned with.

David Yellin- So what part does Memphis play in the fabric of society, does it have an identity or is it kind of...

Donald Smith- To me it doesn't seem to.

David Yellin- Why is that?

Donald Smith- I don't know, I don't think it is..

David Yellin- Does any other city have an identity?

Donald Smith- No. not to me if you are asking me, no. It would have to be the only thing, the towns, the little towns that come more into the upper portion that I can work with.

Jesse Smith- Well like there were certain areas of Memphis that Don could paint, he would go down to like what was the last place that was left almost that the urban renewal took? (muffled). There was one little street on Orleans that still had the little shacks and the little (muffled) grocery that he would even take his students down on field trips to do. And then the bulldozers came in and that was the end.

Donald Smith- I have painted around in the city.

Jesse Smith- It is getting harder to find things.

Donald Smith- Yeah it is not..

David Yellin- But you are not a city of a people painter?

Donald Smith- No. People probably, the people aren't there for another reason and that is that the people would take it away from me. I have said this lots of times, if people in the painting then they deny, it is not my painting any more, I have to share that experience with them.

David Yellin- What did that person do, I am sorry.

(Muffled)

David Yellin- I am sorry that I noticed that.

Carolyn Yellin- Dave is quite into a painting that is standing on the dining room wall, we have got to tell the tale to the recorder.

David Yellin- (muffled) is a people person.

Carolyn Yellin- %It is not exactly a (muffled) ad painted on the side of that barn there.

Donald Smith- Well this I can tell you real quick the story about this painting. It is this nude on the back of the barn and it, of course you always see signs and advertisements on the side of barns , well this painting happened to come along just about the time that ladybird Johnson was doing here beautification. And...

David Yellin- I couldn't think of a better way.

Donald Smith- The title of this is keep America beautiful.

David Yellin- That is great, that is great.

Donald Smith- That was my idea.

Carolyn Yellin- So Doc, you really have responded to other events that were far less significant than the response of this one.

Jesse Smith- Oh there was another great event that I think you should share with them that you responded to about the little lady in Mississippi there, it was so funny there was a very small clipping in the newspaper and are we running out of tape?

David Yellin- No.

Jesse Smith- A little lady in Mississippi that was waging a great campaign...

Donald Smith- Mrs. Schwartz.

Jesse Smith- Mrs. Schwartz to tear down all of the unsightly shacks in Mississippi, to do away with them and you can imagine how this affected Don, this is his lot, so he did this great huge painting and he had gone through a series of painting with landscape and he had been giving sort of seed names, titles. But this one he named, well what did you name it?

Donald Smith- Well they just, the I am trying to recall some of the other titles, like all the ships at sea. You can remember the journalist the newscaster that walked away...

David Yellin- (muffled) Good evening Mr. America and all the ships...

Donald Smith- All the ships at sea, well this was a painting of a house that seemed to be just at sea and it had the (muffled) on it and you know that is all they contact these people had. The outside world, well they were a ship at sea just as much as a ship at sea. Well anyhow I titled a bunch of paintings like that and then this was as if you were in the house kind of and on the house and the roof of the building kind of looked like the prow of a boat. And the title of the painting was flank speed or damn busy Schwartz.

Jesse Smith- The funny thing was it was written, it was written up in the paper.

David Yellin- Which paper?

Donald Smith- _Guy Northrop.

Jesse Smith- Guy Northrop wrote it up and Mrs. Schwartz was from...

David Yellin- The commercial appeal...

Jesse Smith- Was from some little town in Mississippi, wrote a letter to the editor that was just the delightful and then wrote a letter to Don explaining her stand. She was a marvelous person.

Donald Smith- (Muffled) letter about the painting and she, I wish oh I could get the letter and read here last comments later but it is...

Jesse Smith- So he reacts to just whatever happens to come along, but in different ways.

Carolyn Yellin- And the fact of the matter that you never quite reacted in this way to any other event.

Donald Smith- No not like this, other than the Kennedy, the John F. Kennedy painting which was you know.

Jesse Smith- Nothing like this either.

Carolyn Yellin- I have...

David Yellin- But I think Jesse explained that, this was the first time it happened.

Jesse Smith- Right.

David Yellin- And by this time you were so, this has a sense of more anger in it.

Carolyn Yellin- This had to be a more, a stronger statement of some sort.

Jesse Smith- It was so close, it was just here.

David Yellin- Right.

Carolyn Yellin- One other thing, do you have relatives brothers or sisters, or is your mother living, or has she seen this painting?

Donald Smith- They have...

David Yellin- Any of your own family?

Donald Smith- I don't know, I don't have any brothers or sisters but my mother has married again and that is why Ripley is my home now and they have sent he painting and I don't recall just how they reacted, once again it is a situation.

David Yellin- Ralph we are finishing, how would you classify then yourself politically or socially? A liberal, a progressive a...

Jesse Smith- A southerner.

David Yellin- A painter, an artist?

Donald Smith- Just a southern watercolor painter that had an outburst or two along the way. (Tape End)