

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Richard Mayhew

Richard Mayhew: Painting Mindscapes and Searching for Sensitivity

Getty Trust Oral History Project
African American Art History Initiative, Getty Research Institute

Interviews conducted by
Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes
in 2019

Interviews sponsored by the J. Paul Getty Trust

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Richard Mayhew, “Richard Mayhew: Painting Mindscapes and Searching for Sensitivity” conducted by Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes in 2019, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, under the auspices of the J. Paul Getty Trust, 2020.



Richard Mayhew

Abstract

Richard Mayhew is a painter, as well as a retired professor of art. He was born on Long Island, New York, and displayed an early interest in art. He studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, the Art Students League of New York, the Pratt Institute, and Columbia University. Mayhew received a John Hay Whitney Fellowship in 1958 to live and study in Europe in the early 1960s. He was joined Spiral in 1963 and was a member of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC). Mayhew has taught at many universities and art institutions, including Hunter College, Pennsylvania State University, San José State University, Sonoma State University, and University of California Santa Cruz. In this interview, Mayhew discusses: growing up in New York; family and education; Native American and African American identities; artistic training, including time at the Art Students League of New York; early artwork and work as an illustrator; receiving a John Hay Whitney Fellowship and living in Europe; working as a ceramic decorator and meeting his first wife; working to create the Creative Center for Arts and Science; Spiral, including its civil rights history, artists, and exhibitions; discrimination in the art world; working with the Rockland Center for the Arts; teaching, including schools and introducing interdisciplinary work to students; exhibitions, including his three retrospective shows in 2009; his children; meeting his second wife; and relationships with other artists.

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Preface

I love and respect my father. In reading over this recounting of his oral history, I wanted to make sure there was a stronger presence of my mother in this history of my father's life. He and my mother, Dorothy Zuccarini, met as aspiring art students—both working together painting decorations on plates—and how they equally were striving to have a life together as artists.

Although my father respected and admired my mother's talent, and although he wanted her to continue as the artist he had married, like so many wives of artists at that time, she had to make raising a family her first priority. Her art took second place. But she was passionate about art and fully supported my father and raised my brother and me, immersed in his world and in all arts generally. She was so often the researcher who discovered grants, and then the writer who applied for grants, which permitted my father to continue painting and elevate his art.

Dorothy was with Rick during his historic Spiral exhibition, and when he was sworn in at The National Academy of Art and Design in 1970. They hosted wonderful parties at our house in Rockland County, New York. Regular attendees included Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Calvin Douglas, Benny Andrews and Reginald (Reggie) Gammon—a very dear friend and frequent house guest who took photos of us at home. They came with their wives and girlfriends, many of whom were artists themselves. One of my most cherished memories is of sitting among them all, watching and listening to the stories they could weave, this family of artists enjoying their kinship, talking and laughing together.

My parents together helped develop an artists' outreach program as part of Rockland Center for the Arts, in the historic and unique community of Hillburn, New York, long a diverse community of interrelated Native Americans, African Americans, and the original Dutch. My whole family worked on this project, and again, it's a precious memory to me.

My mother Dorothy was the one who kept track of the exhibitions and valuable documentation that I still have to this day. She continued to gather and document Richard's work until her passing in 2015. She, in fact, was the one who discovered and pursued Rick's right to be awarded the Special Congressional Medal of Honor for his service in the Marines during World War II.

Dorothy was a very talented painter and artist in her own right. She was a watercolorist, and created many etchings at the famous Robert Blackburn studio. She designed a limited edition series of mugs for Lord & Taylor, as well as plates for other designers; and she created a line of delicate ceramic flower sculptures. It is my wish here to see her remembered as well as my father, since she so contributed to making Rick Mayhew the artist he became.

Having said that, I love and respect my father, who has created such transcendent works and greatly influenced American art for 60-plus years. He has been a great influence on me in my own career, as has—obviously—my mother, Dorothy.

-Ina Mayhew

Interview 1: March 8, 2019

Tewes: This is a first interview with Richard Mayhew for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes at Mr. Mayhew's home in Soquel, California, on March 8, 2019. Bridget, why don't you set us up?

Cooks: All right. Well, today we're going to be talking about some of your early years. We're going to talk about childhood and family. We're focusing on some of the important things that happened in your life that brought you to being an artist. We'll talk about some of your earliest artworks, your beginning of art education and exhibitions, and we'll talk about your work as an illustrator, also. So that's what we're covering in this conversation today. So I'm going to start with some easy questions. Tell us when you were born and where you were born, and where you grew up.

01-00:01:15

Mayhew: I was born in Amityville, [New York]. Well actually, that's a myth. I was born in Massapequa, which is an adjoining town to the county. So it was across the line. The reason they say I was born in Amityville [is] because the doctor was from Amityville and he came to Massapequa, in which there was a house there, my aunt's house. He came across the County Line Road into the area of Massapequa, and he put down I was born in Amityville, but I was really born in Massapequa, Long Island.

Cooks: So when was your birthday?

01-00:01:56

Mayhew: April the third, 1924.

Cooks: Okay. So your birthday's coming up. You're going to be—

01-00:02:08

Mayhew: Next week. Or within the next three weeks, three weeks.

Cooks: Okay. Yeah, next month.

01-00:02:12

Mayhew: April the third.

Cooks: You're going to be—

01-00:02:15

Mayhew: Ninety-five.

Cooks: Wow.

01-00:02:18

Mayhew: But I think I'm seventy-five, so—

Cooks:

I think you think you're thirty.

01-00:02:22

Mayhew: [laughs] All right.

Cooks:

So what was it like growing up in Massapequa or Amityville in the twenties and thirties?

01-00:02:31

Mayhew: Well actually, my grandmother's house—I was in my grandmother's house at the time. She used to bring home magazines and art books and I used to browse through them, since I was much too young, I think, at that time to read. But she brought the *Apollo Magazine*, which was the inspiration—because it's an antique and art magazine. The interdisciplinary structure, I think that's what set me off later on, how I got into that area. But the *Apollo Magazine* was part of it. I was drawing all the time. My beginnings was brown paper bags and brown wrapping paper and newsprint. I used to use graphite on those. That was joyful. I still like the texture of brown paper bags to draw on because it's great with graphite. But I used to draw constantly, and my grandmother used to encourage me to keep me doing that. Actually, that inspiration—it's too bad she died before I became an artist; she never knew. But she encouraged me in the very early years by bringing these art books. I used to browse through them, and at that time had no idea what that was all about, but I was fascinated by the magazines and the prints and the antiques, the European structure.

Cooks:

So what kind of things were you drawing at that point? Were they from images from the magazines, or did you—

01-00:04:16

Mayhew: Oh, just magazines and whatever was going on at the time. I'd make drawings of people and, actually, sports. I did a whole series of drawings on sports, all the different sports: basketball, football, baseball. I drew the figures and cut them out and made games out of it. I played the games of all of them with these images, all right? I wish that they were still around somewhere. I was trying to look; maybe some of them were saved. But they have not [been]. That was the early years of constantly drawing all the time, drawing everything. Where that skill came from, I have no idea. Because I could draw perfectly, the figure.

And later on, the Hudson River painters used to come to the coast on Long Island by the ocean, and I used to go and watch them. I guess they were curious about me, this little boy sitting there constantly watching what they were doing. I was fascinated by the[m] dipping the stick into paint and then putting it on; images come out of the end of it. That was fascinating. The

magic wand, that's what I thought at the time. They were fascinated by me, so they encouraged me. They'd hand me a brush out of, I think it was fun on their part, to see what I could do. But they found that there was some talent there, and they were surprised by that. So I'd only see them in the summer, but one of them kind of took me on as an apprentice in the summer. So it was a very short-lived thing, but it was constantly inspirational, my watching the Hudson River painters.

Cooks: One of the people that you're talking about who really took an interest in you, that was James Willson Peale? Was that his name?

01-00:06:19

Mayhew: James Willson.

Cooks: James Willson, okay.

01-00:05:21

Mayhew: Later on, when he died—I didn't know that he was James Willson Peale, who was part of the Peale family.

Cooks: Wow.

01-00:06:29

Mayhew: That was shocking. He didn't want to be identified with that, but he was—all I knew was James Willson; I didn't know that he was part of the Peale family.

Cooks: So when you were much younger and you were drawing, you were drawing things that you saw in the magazines. Then you have these artists that are coming and they're painting the landscape.

01-00:06:54

Mayhew: Oh, before that. In between, in the forties, I became a ceramic decorator. I used to [work] on Cambridge China and on lamps and vases.

Cooks: In the 1940s?

01-00:07:11

Mayhew: In the forties.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:07:13

Mayhew: But at the same time, the forties, I was a singer, a jazz singer.

Cooks: Oh boy.

01-00:07:19

Mayhew: I was very involved with the performing arts at the time, because I was learning to dance, I had acting classes. This was part of a whole 'nother area. But that ended very quickly because as a singer, that lifestyle was just too

distracting, too disturbing. So I used to rush back—well, I didn't have a studio, but I became part of a creative process because at the end of the forties, I actually went to art school at the Brooklyn Museum.

Cooks: So I want to back up a little bit and talk a little bit more about two things. One is your family, what your family life was like in the 1930s and forties. You mentioned your grandmother, but what about your parents?

01-00:08:11

Mayhew: Well my parents, unfortunately they were separated at the time, so that's why I ended up with grandmother for a while. But I used to go back and forth between my father and my mother. My mother was a city girl; she liked to live in New York City. My father was a country bumpkin and he wanted to live in the country. I always used to go back and forth between the country and the city, so between them. So my education was disrupted in some way by that, constantly changing schools [between] Long Island and New York City.

Cooks: Your dad was a painter himself.

01-00:08:45

Mayhew: My dad was the master of a little bit of anything. He was like, actually, a carpenter and also a house painter. He had painting contracts, but he couldn't do it because he was Native American. He used to have someone do it for him and get the contracts, but he'd do the painting, though.

Cooks: So what was it like growing up in that community? Were there a lot of Native American people? Were there African American people? Were there white people?

01-00:09:21

Mayhew: African American community in Amityville was a mixture of African American and Native American history. This is where, let's say, a lot of Native Americans that left the reservations, they ended up in Amityville, because it was a very discriminated area, where they would find a house or buy a house or rent a house. So there was a community there in northern Amityville, which is where this group came together, African Americans and Native Americans, all right? That was part of the heritage there, which was part of my heritage.

Cooks: Can you tell us more about your heritage? Because that is a big part of who you are, and it influences your painting.

01-00:10:01

Mayhew: Well, it's a big part my her[itage]. Only recently, I found out how much the heritage is in one area or the other, and I didn't want to get too heavy into that. But there was the combination of African American and Native American heritage. Recently, I found out that my Native American heritage is much

more dominant than the African American history, but I lived my whole life as an African American.

The Native American heritage goes back to 1650. My great-grandparents—not parents, but the history of the family—sold the Hamptons to the English government in 1650. They sold it because they were going to take it anyway. Well, you have to remember, the English government at the time was part of the New England states, and the end of Long Island was part of that. That's where the English government was, on the end of Long Island and the Hamptons. Oh, you need to know the history of the country at that time. Upstate New York and Canada was French; New York City and Pennsylvania was Dutch; and Long Island and the New England states was English. So this was part of the Hamptons, which [was] all Native American area, right? Which is Alleghanian and Algonquin Indians, which was part of the New England states and Long Island. The Unkechaug tribe, the ones who sold this to the English government—but also that was my grandfather's tribe. My grandmother was Shinnecock. So Shinnecock and Algonquin was at the end of Long Island. That's really part of my history.

But my mother was Cherokee Lumbee from North Carolina. My mother was really raised in Nova Scotia, because her aunt took her out of the country because they wanted to take all the children and put them in residence schools, Native Americans. So in order to save her from being that, they took her to Nova Scotia, which a lot of the slaves had taken up. That was a way of escaping away from the United States at the time; the slaves were taken to Nova Scotia. So she was up there in Nova Scotia, and she was raised there until—but all this is hearsay—until she was sixteen, [when] she came back into the United States. Because she ended up marrying my father.

Cooks: Okay. So growing up, was it just you? Were you the only child in the family?

01-00:13:05

Mayhew: Oh, my brother.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:13:07

Mayhew: My brother was brilliant.

Cooks: What did he do?

01-00:13:11

Mayhew: He did everything you can imagine. Anywhere he'd go, he would take over. He ended up at Pratt [&] Whitney and took over. He'd become a special engineer that would sign off any—those that worked on the engines and everything. Pratt [&] Whitney is where they made engines for the airlines, and he'd have to sign off the papers on the end about that. He was a technical engineer. That's what a technical engineer does. That was only one of his

enterprises. Through the years, he did a little bit of everything. He was as assistant mechanic at the airline engines on the Long Island Republic Airline. Also, he was involved with working with different companies, where he became the head of the union with these companies. At the end, he finally had to leave Pratt [&] Whitney because he had a minor stroke. That responsibility, I think, became too extreme for him, to sign off, make sure that these engineers did the right thing. He signed off, saying that that was accepted. When he retired because he had this semi-stroke, he went to check in New Haven, Connecticut, about his benefits as being a retired elder. He found out the papers were all screwed up. So he straightened out the papers there and he became the commissioner for the elderly in New Haven, Connecticut. So he just constantly was involved with doing very exceptional things.

Cooks: But were both of you exceptional children? I'm trying to imagine the two of you.

01-00:15:04

Mayhew: Very intuitively. [laughs]

Cooks: Okay. Even as children.

01-00:15:08

Mayhew: Because each of us didn't go the university, but although I—well, that comes later, how I got my education, right?

Cooks: Okay. I wonder, also: when did you start getting interested in drawing nature? We talked about the artists that would come in the summer to draw and paint the landscape. Is that when you started to—

01-00:15:32

Mayhew: That was the Hudson River School, was an influence there. But not so much as the landscape, but the technique of painting.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:15:40

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: When did landscape start to appeal to you?

01-00:15:44

Mayhew: Well, that was after I studied at the Brooklyn Museum with Edwin Dickinson and Reuben Tam, at the Brooklyn Museum, but also many other artists that taught there. Artists at the time didn't study in universities; artists studied at art academies, which still goes on in Europe. One who studies art doesn't go to the universities; they go to the art academies. So here, at that time, the art academies were the place[s] for one to study. I was there for about four years. But I went to Columbia University to study art history and art education. So there was this added influence and understanding about the arts.

Cooks: So you started your formal training at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, and that was 1948.

01-00:16:39

Mayhew: After I came back from Europe.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:16:42

Mayhew: I went to Europe after studying at the Brooklyn Museum and the Art Students League, and I went and studied at the Academy in Florence, and also at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Cooks: I thought that you did that after you studied in Brooklyn. Is that right?

01-00:17:01

Mayhew: After I studied at the Brooklyn Museum, because that's when I went to Europe.

Cooks: Okay, okay. I'm thinking of the 1940s. So in 1948, you're talking about starting your formal training at the Brooklyn Museum Art School. Before that, did you have any exposure to art besides the painters?

01-00:17:21

Mayhew: That's what I said. Actually, I had the sensitivity or creativity, and that's why I became a ceramic decorator. I was painting on ceramics.

Cooks: Were you able to go to museums? You said your mother was a city girl. Were you going to any museums when you were in the city?

01-00:17:44

Mayhew: My mother was—

Cooks: You were saying your mother loved the city, that she was a city girl.

01-00:17:48

Mayhew: Yes, she was a city girl.

Cooks: Did you go to museums in the city?

01-00:17:51

Mayhew: I used to go into New York City with her. So later years, I used to go to the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] and study, and go and visit the museums. I was just fascinated by the painting. I felt it was impossible to do what they were doing.

Cooks: Was it around that time that you discovered the work of George Inness? His work was an influence on you?

01-00:18:18
Mayhew:

I was in New York and I'd go around to the galleries in New York. There was one gallery that handled Inness' paintings. So I was fascinated by this. Every time I'd come there—and they got used to me asking—when I'd come, they'd pull out Inness paintings in the gallery to show this young man. Which is fascinating, the fact that they would do that. There's a mystique in his work, there's like a melody of sensitivity there. Someone said, "Well, how would you describe it?" It's like the dew on a leaf. It's a sensitive feeling I felt in his work. So it influenced me. I couldn't figure out what it was. Was it the color? Was it the application of paint or the mood of how he felt about painting? So I started doing a little study about George Inness and of his life. It didn't seem to fall into that category of what I was feeling. Mine was more out of the African American and Native American heritage, in terms of the love of nature and also the respect for nature, because nature's involved in reinventing itself. That was what's going on, in terms of African American and Native American sensibility. They constant[ly] reinvented themsel[ves] and constantly grew and matured and survived. That was my connection to nature and the fascination, almost until today. I'm still trying to paint that feeling.

Cooks:

So many people talk about your work in relationship to feelings that seem very spiritual. I wonder if you could say something about what you think about that or if that's part of the way you think about your own work.

01-00:20:18
Mayhew:

Well, that's part of what I saw in Inness' work, was this mystery of sensitivity. Was it color? Was it the tonality? Or was it the subject matter or the feeling of space? That was a special mood. Right now, my paintings are in the de Young Museum in San Francisco. On the wall, three paintings away, is Inness' work.

Cooks:

Wow.

01-00:20:48
Mayhew:

That was shocking for me, to be on the same wall with him, because my painting that's on that wall doesn't have that mystique that's in his painting on that wall. It's a mystery of feeling, of time and love and desire, ambition. It's all in that work.

Cooks:

But do you think it's also in your work?

01-00:21:11
Mayhew:

Well, I don't know that. That's what I've been striving for all these years. Is it there? Is that it? See if I can find that moment of truth or the dewdrop on a leaf, all right?

Cooks:

I wonder if you could talk about how old you were. You must've been a teenager when you were—

01-00:21:35
Mayhew:

Oh, when I started out, I was a teenager, then in my twenties, and then thirties, and then in the late forties, ending up in my thirties. How much I was involved with this mystery that I was trying to solve and resolve and to understand that? It's still a mystique right now. Intellectually, how do you define that? That's very difficult, to do that. Because that's what I'm doing as a—we'll get involved with it later, in terms of becoming a teacher, why I became an interdisciplinarian, not just an art teacher, which was constantly rejected through the years; now it's an accepted part of academia. But there is still part of that mystique, and that's it. It's a combination of all the elements coming together, and part of the creative sensibility and inventiveness.

Cooks:

When you were spending summers with James Willson, when he could come Amityville in the summer—

01-00:22:56
Mayhew:

James Willson, you're talking about?

Cooks:

Yeah. I wanted to know what kinds of things you learned.

01-00:23:00
Mayhew:

Well, it wasn't the summer, it was actually—how long they were there in the summer, it was only about three or four weeks.

Cooks:

Okay.

01-00:23:10
Mayhew:

He was certainly influencing about how they were painting and the history of art. He was a medical illustrator, also. So that's how I got involved with it. He was doing an encyclopedia, a medical encyclopedia at the time, and he had drawings right there, as well as when he's doing his paintings on the coast. So I got involved with doing some sketches along with him. I always looked for that encyclopedia that he did because a couple of those drawings were mine. [laughs]

Cooks:

Really?

01-00:23:47
Mayhew:

Yeah.

Cooks:

Did you think about becoming a medical illustrator?

01-00:23:50
Mayhew:

No.

Cooks:

[both laugh] No. I also wanted to hear more about your interaction with nature when you were a child. Did you work with chickens? Do you have any experience raising chickens?

01-00:24:08
Mayhew:

Oh yeah, I raised chickens. They were fascinating. It's how they grew, how they took place, and how sensitive they are. They said the bird brain of chickens—they were pretty smart, I didn't realize. Especially the rooster. He kind of commanded the whole barnyard. So there was an encounter with the birdlife.

Cooks:

Did you ever make any sculptures of chickens, or drawings?

01-00:24:39
Mayhew:

Oh, I used to do a lot of drawings of them, but I don't know where they are today. I did a lot of drawings. I ended up doing a painting of a barn with an abandoned nest with an egg in it. That was the only close thing to the fact of doing all the chickens.

Cooks:

When you were a child, did you ever work with papier-mâché?

01-00:25:05
Mayhew:

Yeah well, there's a conflict with my grandmother. I used to use her flour. She'd go, "What happened to my flour?" Mixing it up with water, that would make paste; and with paper, it becomes papier-mâché. [I'd] make little sculptures.

Cooks:

So let's talk more about your formal education. We mentioned already in 1948 you began your formal training at the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

01-00:25:28
Mayhew:

Then also the Columbia University art education, art history.

Cooks:

Okay. I have that noted as in 1951 you started at Columbia University. You took some classes there.

01-00:25:52
Mayhew:

Then I started teaching. So I was learning at the same time. I wasn't just teaching, I was learning and becoming educated. Because look, the history of the arts is so much involved with a certain creative, intellectual intrigue. When I was in Europe, this is where I really got involved with understanding some of that. In Florence, there were several books there I was reading on the optics, the phenomena of the eye and how the eye sees, and two-dimensional illusion. I got heavily involved with two-dimensional illusions, where the rods and cones of the eye—and how the eye, after seeing, the afterimage becomes like a camera photograph copy. I was learning more about that, and there's several books on it there, which I was learning from. Actually, I sneaked into the basement of the Uffizi Museum in order to see this. I wasn't supposed to be down there, but anyway one of the guards was looking out for me.

Cooks:

So you have educational experience in the United States, and also abroad. Some of the other places where you took classes in the United States—the Art Students League of New York. How was that a part of your history?

01-00:27:22

Mayhew: The Art Students League?

Cooks: Yeah, the Art Students League.

01-00:27:23

Mayhew: Well, I was studying with Edwin Dickinson. I wasn't really registered at the Art Students League, but when he would go there teach, I'd go there with him. I became the monitor for him, and at the class at the Brooklyn Museum. When he wasn't there—the main teacher's only there two days a week, and the class continued for the whole week. They have a monitor there, and I was the monitor. He made me the monitor. So they gave me a lot of support and respect.

Cooks: Did they help you? I'm thinking about how you paid for tuition.

01-00:28:06

Mayhew: To be Edwin Dickinson's monitor of his class? That was unbelievable. He's one of the great American impressionists. Well, it's forgotten today that Edwin Dickinson—he's in all the museums, but everyone [wonders], Who's Edwin Dickinson? He was my teacher. He was a very special man. Very sensitive, and really dedicated to creative sensitivity of imagery and two-dimensional design. He and Reuben Tam—Reuben Tam was a mystic painter, and actually was Chinese Hawaiian and involved with the history of sensibility of culture, along with it. So it was a very unique—both of those two artists—I studied with other artists, but these are the ones that really made a great influence on my life.

Cooks: Would you say they were mentors for you?

01-00:29:00

Mayhew: They were.

Cooks: Absolutely, yeah. They were mentors.

01-00:29:05

Mayhew: They what?

Cooks: Mentors for you, as artists, people you looked up to?

01-00:29:09

Mayhew: Yeah, but also they respected *me*. Because when I came back from Europe, I came to the Brooklyn Museum to visit. The head of the Brooklyn Museum [said], "You have been recommended to teach here." I said, "By whom?" He said, "Reuben Tam and Edwin Dickinson recommended the fact that you would be a great teacher." I couldn't imagine what this was all about. So I became a teacher at the Brooklyn Museum, which all the top artists in the country was teaching there. And I mean all the best. That's what the art academies had; all the great artists were teaching. At the Art Students League,

that's where all the American impressionists studied, at the Art Students League. And the National Academy. So for them to recommend me—the fact that I had a certain sensitivity for two-dimensional design and passing that sensitivity on to other people, that gave me such encouraging sensitivity, which was hard for me to live with then, and even now.

Cooks: So, Richard, what did your art look like at that time? You were starting to teach and you were taking classes.

01-00:30:23

Mayhew: My first exhibition after I finished—let's say until I finished the school, after almost five years at the Brooklyn Museum—this was an exhibition there. Not only there, but also in town, in West Greenwich Village. There was a little storefront museum—or actually gallery—that exhibited my work. John Canaday interviewed me—

Cooks: Wow.

01-00:30:53

Mayhew: —for [the *New York Times Magazine*], and said that I was a Neo-Barbizon artist. That set me off.

Cooks: So you were making landscapes at that point.

01-00:31:04

Mayhew: That's right.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:31:05

Mayhew: I was trying to imitate the feeling of what was going on in the works of my mentor.

Cooks: So at that time, was it a problem for some people when they saw that you were African American and Native American? Did that present a problem for other people?

01-00:31:28

Mayhew: Yeah well, I never identified with being Native American because every time I mentioned it, it was rejected. So I lived my life as African American. I always mention that, always, because when I mentioned Native American, it was constantly rejected.

Cooks: When you would say that you're African American, did they ask you questions about—

01-00:31:55

Mayhew: Well, they accepted me as African American, so that was the first thing. That's who you are. That's it. So I went along with that. That's perfectly all right.

Both sides. I was getting a lot of support, also, from African Americans being an African American. But Native American, there was no support at all, or even the identity wasn't there. So I didn't go that way.

Cooks: So did your mentors respect that you were an African American person? I'm just trying to think about—

01-00:32:27

Mayhew: Well, today I'm listed—that's what I'm listed as: an African American.

Cooks: Do you think that influenced the way people thought about your art?

01-00:32:36

Mayhew: Well, I knew who I am within myself, so it's hard to explain it outside. So that identity is a matter of how they identify you, because it has to do painting. "You're a landscape painter." I said, "No, I'm a *mindscape* painter. I'm not a landscape painter."

Cooks: Hmm. A mindscape, okay.

01-00:32:54

Mayhew: Mindscape. Not landscape.

Cooks: Did they understand what you were saying?

01-00:33:00

Mayhew: I doubt it. [both laugh] Because when I go to a canvas, I just put paint on there and it's suggestive, it's very suggestive. Since I'm involved with the feeling of desire, ambition, love, hate, fear—that's my paintings. It takes on that kind of structure and imagery, okay?

Cooks: I just wonder about some of these things that you're talking about, with love and fear and hate. Those are universal feelings that people have, regardless of what their racial background was. So I'm wondering if you think by expressing those things through your landscape paintings—what kind of impact did that have?

01-00:33:52

Mayhew: Well, I use landscape as a metaphor to express emotion. That's it.

Cooks: Okay. Were there other African American painters making work that was landscape or—

01-00:34:05

Mayhew: Well, it goes all the way back to 1800s in African American painters that were involved with painting the sensitivity of nature. I saw some of the writings about it. Duncanson was saying that he was involved with the feeling of his culture and nature.

Cooks: But so when did you find out about Robert Duncanson?

01-00:34:31

Mayhew: Oh, the histories. I started reading the history about the survival of African Americans, going back to 1800 in New England.

Cooks: And you were finding out this while you were a student?

01-00:34:43

Mayhew: Oh, no, I started reading about the history of African Americans, also. And the history of Native Americans certainly was not accepted in any museum anywhere, except for them being craftspeople. Now crafts, everybody now has accepted it as a work of art. But not then.

Cooks: So you were aware of this art history also when you were in your twenties?

01-00:35:08

Mayhew: So I started reading more about art history, but also I was seeing how art history was sensitively set up in terms of European education and how European education is involved with a certain control concept. I had problems with that, so I tried to do some research on how two-dimensional illusion, even though it was developed in Europe—because the art of Asia and Africa is not two-dimensional illusion. So I was getting involved with that and how that development in Europe out of the salon art, to impressionists, then expressionists, and then the abstract expressionism. So the series of that going through Europe is two-dimensional illusion. So I got more involved with understanding, What do you mean by two-dimensional illusion? What is it? That was an optical illusion, and how one would be involved with the illusion. I got involved with music and optics combination, time-space illusion.

That's when I got heavy into interdisciplinary thinking. But that came out of Europe. While I was in Europe, on my way to Amsterdam, where I was going to go study, I stopped in Paris and I met a lot of French artists. One of the French artists says, "I like the way you think. Come with me and let me show you something." So I went with this French artist to Lindau Bodensee. Lindau Bodensee is a province between Switzerland and Germany. Now I think it's part of Germany, but at that time it was a single province. What was then going on there was there was a meeting of philosophers and scientists discussing the legal order of the world, how that kind of structure would be involved with organizing it where they wouldn't be involved with the primitive intrigue of tribal fighting one another, which European was doing. So when the UN was formed, that was after. But at this meeting, when I went there, I didn't understand. All of them were talking about where the arts or creative sensitivity would be involved with the world order or structure, in terms of how different countries were being organized. A union, I guess, was formed. This was in the late fifties, okay? How much they were involved with doing this. But [Jean-Paul] Sartre was there, which I didn't know that and I didn't read him. And he said, "Anytime anything's structured, it falls apart

because of the bureaucracy of the heads of anything." I forget the term that was called now, but that was part of the concept that was going on, and Sartre was part of that. He said, "Your organization is not going to make it because it's bound to destroy itself."

Cooks: So you had many different influences.

01-00:38:57

Mayhew:

So that influenced me a lot about international creativity, because that was a venture of having world order being involved with that kind of sensitivity, being involved with uniting the nations and people together, which the UN was supposed to be doing; has never really done it. Then the united European countries came together, and how much that's really doing it now, also. Or how much that's the world order, or how much the United States is involved with that united state.

Cooks: So do you think that there were other artists who were like-minded artists who thought the way that you did? Because I'm thinking about the style of the time in art was abstract expressionism, but I don't know of that being one of your periods or something that you were interested in.

01-00:39:54

Mayhew:

Well, I was thinking about abstract expressionism, because I was thinking about the transition in Europe from salon art to impressionism and then expressionism and then to abstraction, and how much there's a form of destructivism along with this, which I felt, which it starts to diminish the point of the solid sensitivity of continued creation. This is one of the problems of when I was looking at the art magazines. It's part of it now. It's the memorabilia and nostalgia art, and how much that is defining the uniqueness of sensitivity of the soul. The soul doesn't need to get involved with the religious concept, but involved with the unique sensitivity of self and expression of self.

Cooks: So abstract expressionism, to you, was more *destructive* than what you were trying to express, in terms of bringing people together?

01-00:40:59

Mayhew:

Well, it reached a point where everything is eliminated. Everything's eliminated, and you go back to starting from nothing. What do you have but nothing? Symptomatic of what's going on in the world right now. It's a symptom of destructivism and how one can avoid that and find a norm, so that the norm is of the past. It's not necessarily true. The norm was not of the past, because they wouldn't have discrimination in the United States if that was part of the norm of the past. So the norm is involved with the uniqueness sensitivity, as I said. How would you describe it? I said, "The dewdrop on a leaf."

Cooks: So, Richard, who were your friends? Who were the people that you would talk to about these ideas?

01-00:41:56

Mayhew: Well, I tried to discuss this. But a lot of artists have this sensitivity, and you talk to them but they disguise it. They don't get involved with the depth of that uniqueness. But many of the artists, writers, and composers think this way. I went to the MacDowell Colony. At the MacDowell Colony—which was 1958, all right—I met writers and composers. This was the formation, again, of my thinking. I was very naïve about a lot of things. A lot of things started to come together there. It was way over my head, as I said. Now I understand everything that was going on, but at that point, there was this—it's how a composer who's involved with the beauty and uniqueness of sound—that's music. It's a melody of sensitive[ity] of sound. The writers, how much they're involved with that kind of sensibility—Toni Morrison was a friend of mine, a neighbor in Rockland County. I got to know her a little bit. But anyway, there was this kind of sensitivity of writers and composers that were thinking on that plane, that I eventually started to think that way. That was part of my education, is meeting artists that were involved with this creative state of mind from different disciplines. That was my ground development of interdisciplinary study.

Cooks: So the fact that you are an artist and a singer, that you have at least two different forms of artistic expression, is that part of—

01-00:43:46

Mayhew: Well, there's acting. And also, my daughter is a famous production designer for the movies and television and stage and theater. How she got there is unbelievable. And my son was a graphic designer, and a very good one. How they emerged—so I'm learning from them, as well. There's no end to learning. So that's why the fact that the older get, [I say], "I haven't learned anything yet." I'm just beginning to learn what it was all about.

Cooks: So I was wanting to hear you talk about some of your friends in the 1940s and fifties, artists that you felt you were connecting with. I know that you met Ernie [Ernest] Crichlow.

01-00:44:41

Mayhew: Ernie Crichlow was very special. He was figuratively an artist, and involved with painting the community and the feelings in the community. He was actually an illustrator, as well. So I respected his sensitivity, which was—he never got his due, and I always felt so bad about that because he was more than what his paintings were showing. He and I used to talk a lot. I learned a lot more from anyone else but Hale Woodruff. When I went to Spiral and met Hale Woodruff and Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden and Charles Alston, to me they were the heavies. They were the senior artists. They were involved with this kind of sensibility, but they never talked about it. At Spiral, they touched on it.

Cooks: How did you meet Ernie then? When did you meet him?

01-00:45:47

Mayhew: Well, after I came back from Europe, I went to an exhibition in New York. My painting was in the exhibition with the other artist that was in the exhibition. He came over to me and he says, "You're an African American artist? What are you doing here?" It was Felrath Hines. Everyone forgets about Felrath Hines. Now, there was a brilliant mind. He and I really had a closeness of that creative thinking. He took me and introduced me to the other artists. He says, "I'm going to—" and introduced me to Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, and the rest of them. Felrath Hines.

Cooks: Which exhibition was this where you met all of these people?

01-00:46:32

Mayhew: Oh well, just meeting him. It was an exhibition in the Bronx, New York. A little museum up there was having an exhibition of artists, and I happened to be in it. Felrath Hines was in the exhibition, also. He saw me and he saw my painting and he says, "Who are you? I don't know you."

Tewes: I wonder, was this Morris Gallery? Is that the right gallery?

01-00:46:57

Mayhew: Morris Gallery.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:46:58

Mayhew: That was the first gallery that exhibited my work, where Canaday wrote that note about—

Cooks: Okay. That's 1957.

01-00:47:06

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Okay. I just wanted to put that in the timeline, because it's an important moment for you. That was a group show or a solo show?

01-00:47:16

Mayhew: What?

Cooks: In 1957.

01-00:47:18

Mayhew: That was a solo show.

Cooks: A solo show, okay.

- 01-00:47:20
Mayhew: That's the show that Canaday wrote this, "Neo-Barbizon artist."
- Cooks: That's very cool.
- 01-00:47:27
Mayhew: Yeah. I'm still looking for that article. I had kept it for years. It's all brown and changed. I was trying to looking at the archives of the *Times*, if I could find that somehow.
- Cooks: I'll get it for you.
- 01-00:47:39
Mayhew: Okay.
- Cooks: So you told me once about something that was really interesting to me: that you were talking with Ernie Crichlow, and maybe Jacob Lawrence. You were talking about how you could get more people in the community to see the kind of art that you were making.
- 01-00:48:00
Mayhew: Well, you have to see that what happened there once, when I was teaching at the Pratt Institute—Jacob Lawrence and I were both teaching at Pratt Institute. Ernie Crichlow puts his paintings on a fence in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and he asked Jacob Lawrence and myself to do the same. So we came together on a fence in Bedford-Stuyvesant, and our work hung out there for the community to see.
- Cooks: How did that work? What kind of—
- 01-00:48:34
Mayhew: Well, people would go shopping in the area, would go by and look at it. Then they would be interested and they'd come over and say hi and we'd talk to them. Because they'd go to a museum or gallery, so they were these people who would never go and meet artists, right? So we would talk to them. And Jacob Lawrence would talk to them about it, what we were doing and so forth. People going shopping would come by there.
- Cooks: It's such a great idea.
- 01-00:49:00
Mayhew: Oh yeah. That was Ernie Crichlow's idea.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 01-00:49:04
Mayhew: Ernie Crichlow, in later years, formed the Cinque Gallery in New York [with Lewis and Bearden].
- Cooks: Right.

- 01-00:49:10
Mayhew: It was Ernie Crichlow, Norman Lewis, and Romare Bearden, but Ernie Crichlow was the one who wanted to do it. They forget about him and his contribution he made.
- Cooks: Your paintings were very different from each other. Your work looked very different from Crichlow's work.
- 01-00:49:29
Mayhew: Creativity doesn't look different. It's a matter of the form that it takes, okay?
- Cooks: Yeah. At this time, were you working on your series, the *Thicket* series?
- 01-00:49:44
Mayhew: [makes questioning noise]
- Cooks: You had a series of work you started in the fifties, the *Thicket* series.
- 01-00:49:51
Mayhew: Well, that was as a result of going to the colonies and the study in Europe. So when I came back, I was trying to get more involved with the intimacy in painting. And how would you interpret it? I'm still trying to discover, did I really do it? What I'm doing, does it have any of that? So people look at the painting, Oh, it's a nice landscape. I missed the boat, if that's true. Then I haven't done it.
- Cooks: So could you talk to us more about your creative process then? Because you paint landscapes, but you're not a plein air painter.
- 01-00:50:37
Mayhew: I paint—
- Cooks: Mindscapes.
- 01-00:50:39
Mayhew: —mindscapes.
- Cooks: You paint mindscapes and—
- 01-00:50:42
Mayhew: Because I just put a pattern on the paper or canvas and it starts to evolve, and it's suggestive right away of a certain feeling, and I go that way.
- Cooks: And you're not outside.
- 01-00:50:57
Mayhew: No.
- Cooks: You're not in the forest.

01-00:50:58

Mayhew: Well yeah, but you have to realize, I drove across country six times. Three over and three back, from San Francisco to New York.

Cooks: How did that impact your vision?

01-00:51:08

Mayhew: Well you see, when I got to California, I found that California has all the terrain factors of the rest of the United States. It has the desert, it has the forest, it has the rivers, it has the lakes. It has everything that the rest of the country has all in in one state. So I embraced California at that time, even though I didn't live here. But driving back and forth across the country, each time I went across it was like seeing it for the first time. But I went different directions. I went the southern route, and then the northern route, and then the central route. I drove across it the first time, I think, with Jack Bolen, who became a good friend of mine.

Cooks: And he's a painter.

01-00:51:57

Mayhew: Jack Bolen was a painter. It was an interesting experience, how I met him. I was on my way to Amsterdam after leaving Florence, and I went to a restaurant in Paris. I was trying to order, and the French waiter was giving me a hard time. He was kind of fooling around, having fun with me. Then this voice in the background spoke up and said, "[imitates Jack Bolen]," in French. That was Jack Bolen, a painter from New York. That's how we met. He ordered for me in French.

Cooks: Wow.

01-00:52:38

Mayhew: He was an Army soldier in Europe, and he was discharged and was living in Paris. He was a painter. So that's where we met. We're friends. He was the first one—he and I drove across the country together on the southern route, Route 66.

Tewes: Do you remember why you took that trip with Jack?

01-00:53:07

Mayhew: Well, that was like the main drag going out of the coast here, going to California. Jack Bolen's family comes from Missouri, so that route goes through Missouri, right? So that was part of it.

Cooks: So you were both trying to get to California?

01-00:53:31

Mayhew: Yeah, I wanted to get to California. Well, that was the trip; we're going to California, and come around then to the central route, come back to New York.

Cooks: I see.

01-00:53:40

Mayhew: That was our idea. But "Route 66" was written by someone I met in later years who wrote that. It was about singing, which told me, "You've got a good voice. You should be a singer."

Cooks: So when you did this road trip, you were remembering you were seeing a lot of different landscapes, and those are part of your memory even today, the kinds of things you think about.

01-00:54:12

Mayhew: Yeah. Yeah, because there's feelings of mountains and valleys and woodlands, and then there's the sensitivity beneath the bush. That's the beauty. There's a mystery there of life.

Cooks: I think it's just so important for people to know that you've traveled so much, you've seen so much of the world and the country, and now when you paint, you are inside; this mindscape is your memories.

01-00:54:44

Mayhew: Not inside; I'm still out there with nature.

Cooks: Okay.

01-00:54:49

Mayhew: I live with it all the time, the feeling. Until I came when I bought this house. It's a matter of the view—it's unbelievable—of nature. The sunsets, you can't believe. It's the most fantastic sunset over here.

Tewes: Do you ever work out on the balcony?

01-00:55:08

Mayhew: Oh, I work direct[ly] with the feelings of what is out there. I paint the feeling.

Cooks: When you would drive across country, did you and Jack ever go to museums? Did you stop?

01-00:55:22

Mayhew: I'm sorry?

Cooks: Did you ever stop, when you were going across country, to see art?

01-00:55:26

Mayhew: Oh yes. Yeah, we stopped at museums if they were on my trip.

Cooks: Do you remember seeing any artists or artwork in a museum that really influenced you?

01-00:55:41

Mayhew:

Going across the country was—well, what you're meeting are the central American artists are in mid-United States. There was a certain direction in painting that they were involved with. Illinois and Indiana and that area, there was a whole school of painting out of that era, and you'd see their work there. But then going the southern route, it was a whole other thing. Going through Missouri and Louisiana and so forth, there's a whole other sensitivity of painting. Also music, because that's when I was involved with being a jazz singer. That's where music's from, especially from that area, right? So I was involved with that feeling.

Cooks:

I want to talk more about the singing, because it's another form of your artistic expression, and your love of music and jazz.

01-00:56:41

Mayhew:

Well yes. Singing, I didn't realize later on that I had a good voice and being able to sing. I imitated other singers, like Billy Eckstine and Arthur Prysock. There was a certain sensitivity there that I liked about his voice. Unbelievable. Also how he was done in. Billy Eckstine had one of the greatest bands in the United States. The finest, the most famous jazz band. All the jazz bands that came later, the famous heads of that was in his band. You name those famous artists, they was in Eckstine's band and they was just starting out in his band. Sarah Vaughan started in his band. He never got credit for it. He died without that credit. Only as a singer. He stuck with the band. In that band, he could play any instrument. He could play the saxophone, he played the piano, he played the trumpet. It's unbelievable, Eckstine. And his voice is unbelievable today. He tried to start, actually, a television program, but he never got the sponsors to support him. Because he wanted to do it a certain way and they were trying to dictate to how they'd set up the program. So he said, "Oh, I can't go along with that. No."

Cooks:

Well, when you sang and you were singing like Prysock and Eckstine, where were you performing?

01-00:58:21

Mayhew:

Oh, around New York City, in little clubs around New York City and so forth. That's where I met Amiri Baraka. He was always hanging out in the clubs.

Cooks:

Wow.

01-00:58:31

Mayhew:

LeRoi Jones, at the time.

Cooks:

Right.

01-00:58:33

Mayhew:

Right. He didn't even remember me, that I was singer then. I met him recently, before he died.

Cooks: Yeah.

01-00:58:42

Mayhew: Right? He doesn't remember that. I said, "Do you remember, I met you in the clubs?" He said, "No." Well—

Cooks: So I think we can turn to talking more about your exhibitions. We mentioned the exhibition, your first solo show at Morris Gallery and how that was important.

01-00:59:05

Mayhew: Well, I wasn't used to even exhibiting, so I went there. I was very naïve about the whole thing. So the head of the gallery was—I had to borrow money to pay for the brochure. He didn't know that. He said, "You shouldn't borrow money to do that."

Cooks: Were people buying the work?

01-00:59:25

Mayhew: Well, after that article, they did. Then also, the Robert Isaacson Gallery was another gallery which actually wanted me to come there, which was in the mid part of New York City at the time, on Sixty-Seventh Street.

Cooks: Another important exhibition that I have noted was you were in the Whitney Annual exhibition in 1961. You showed a painting called *Morning Bush* that you had painted in 1960.

01-01:00:02

Mayhew: Yeah. You know where that painting was?

Cooks: No.

01-01:00:04

Mayhew: It was in black and white in the show, with this bush. I painted over them and painted it green.

Cooks: I knew that you painted over it. Do you know where that painting is now?

01-01:00:17

Mayhew: Well, it's in the Whitney Museum.

Cooks: Okay, so they purchased it.

01-01:00:21

Mayhew: Yeah. Guess who was on the committee?

Cooks: Who?

01-01:00:26

Mayhew: [Willem] De Kooning's wife.

Cooks: Oh, Elaine de Kooning?

01-01:00:28

Mayhew: Elaine de Kooning was on the committee, and she told me she did it. She was on the committee. How I found that out, I went to Santa Barbara. There's a teacher down there and I was visiting with her. Elaine de Kooning came to visit the school down there, and she met me and she said, "That's Richard Mayhew." She said, "Oh, I know you. I was on the committee that got your painting in the Whitney Museum."

Cooks: That's incredible. What a wonderful story.

01-01:01:01

Mayhew: Yeah well, it's strange, the connections that go on, right?

Tewes: Well, do you remember what that moment was like? It's still a very prestigious thing to be an artist selected for the Whitney—now it's the Biennial.

01-01:01:16

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: But back then it was the Annual.

01-01:01:20

Mayhew: Well, that was surprising. When the first one was in the museum, that was very surprising. Now it's in all the museums across the country, and it still is surprising.

Cooks: So you had a studio then in New York, where you were painting. Do you remember a curator came or someone from a gallery came to see your studio? I'm wondering how that happened.

01-01:01:46

Mayhew: Well, the gallery used to come around and look at it, but they never paid attention much. It was like, landscape. Just-another-landscape-painter-that's-all attitude.

Cooks: Well, somebody saw your work.

01-01:01:56

Mayhew: Oh yeah. Well, as I said, I was in the Midtown Gallery.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:02:01

Mayhew: Which is one of the prestigious galleries on Fifty-Seventh Street. For years I was there.

Cooks: So they must've seen your work there.

01-01:02:09
Mayhew:

You have to realize, in the seventies, my paintings were completely abstract. There's a whole listing of completely abstract paintings that was at that time. There was no horizon, no tree forms. It was just free color and form, suggestive form of nature.

Cooks:

But the *Morning Bush*, though, is a nature painting.

01-01:02:34
Mayhew:

The *Morning Bush*.

Cooks:

Yes, the *Morning Bush*. So was that exhibited in a gallery and then someone saw it and then selected it for the Whitney?

01-01:02:46
Mayhew:

It was an exhibition at the Whitney and a lot of artists were there. Out of that exhibition, they selected paintings to be part of the collection. So it wasn't just a separate area. It came out of an exhibition at the Whitney, and so it was selected for being part of it. But it was part of an exhibition.

Cooks:

So after the Whitney exhibition, you had five solo shows between 1962 and 1965 at different galleries across New York.

01-01:03:23
Mayhew:

Well, the main gallery, almost until later years, was the Midtown Gallery.

Cooks:

Okay. You mentioned Robert Isaacson.

01-01:03:36
Mayhew:

Isaacson was the first one after the first exhibition I had. I went with the Robert Isaacson Gallery.

Cooks:

Okay. We have also noted the Durlacher Brothers.

01-01:03:50
Mayhew:

Durlacher.

Cooks:

Okay. You had a solo exhibition there.

01-01:03:54
Mayhew:

That was right after the Isaacson Gallery. Then at the Durlacher, the head of Durlacher—the curator died. The Midtown Gallery saw the paintings there, and then since that gallery kind of went down a little bit, that's how I ended up at Midtown, because I went to the Midtown.

Cooks:

Okay. You also had an exhibition at the Sutherland Gallery in Boston.

01-01:04:29
Mayhew:

Oh yeah.

Cooks: Now, how did that happen?

01-01:04:31

Mayhew: Well, they saw the work in New York and they wanted [me to] exhibit there. So I exhibited in Boston at that time.

Cooks: Were you gaining collectors? With every exhibition, people were more and more and more interested in your work?

01-01:04:48

Mayhew: Mm-hmm.

Cooks: Yeah.

01-01:04:50

Mayhew: Well, there was more people started to be interested in it because in later years—which goes on now, which is very unique—the paintings that was done in the seventies was purchased by the Transamerica Building. The head of Transamerica came to New York and bought four paintings—two large paintings from 1965. They're still in the Transamerica Building, hanging there.

Cooks: That's incredible.

01-01:05:22

Mayhew: They were not allowed to leave the building.

Cooks: Right. We tried to borrow them for your exhibition in 2009, and they wouldn't let us.

01-01:05:32

Mayhew: The head of Transamerica said those paintings are not supposed to ever leave the building. That's strange.

Cooks: Well, they're very precious paintings. So can you tell us a bit about—it's very prestigious to be in solo exhibitions, to have your one-artist shows. All artists want that. They want the space, they want the respect.

01-01:06:03

Mayhew: Then there's the cost of that, yeah. So like at the gallery in New York now, I had a solo exhibition there and it's the cost of that and how much that they benefit from the cost of that by sales or not. So there was an anticipation. Problems.

Cooks: But then also, there's group exhibitions. Do you remember some of the artists that you started to be exhibited next to?

01-01:06:34

Mayhew: In terms of the group exhibitions?

Cooks: Yeah, like Georgia O'Keeffe or Richard Diebenkorn or even Elaine de Kooning.

01-01:06:41

Mayhew: Well, at the National Academy.

Cooks: Okay, at the National Academy, you were in group exhibitions there. How did you feel about your work being shown? You were talking earlier about at the de Young, you're on the same wall with George Inness, which is incredible. What was it like to be on the wall with some of your contemporaries, when your career really started to take off in the sixties?

01-01:07:11

Mayhew: Again, I haven't done what I feel should be in my work.

Cooks: And that is to capture this mystery and sensitivity.

01-01:07:25

Mayhew: I'm still searching for the mystique of the sensitivity. Some people, they come to look at my work, they say they feel it. So I keep asking, "What do you feel? What is that?" So I'm still trying to paint that. As I said, "The dewdrop on a leaf."

Cooks: Were there other artists your age, your peers, whose work you really admired?

01-01:07:51

Mayhew: They're all deceased.

Cooks: Well, now they are; but then they were not.

01-01:07:57

Mayhew: Well, there's Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Hale Woodruff, and some of them, which I very respected them. Norman and Hale Woodruff and I used to talk for hours and hours about the inventive, creative existence. Then I think I talked more to him about things like that, because he said being a teacher was hard because he had to pull a curtain between his studio and the classroom. How do you do that, right? He said that's very hard. You don't bring the limitations of your sensibility and enforce them on your students. You should be involved with teaching the creative sensibility, and not just who you are. So that's what I tried to do.

But that's part of interdisciplinary study, which I tried to teach at all the different schools I went to. It was constantly rejected everywhere I went. I was at Smith College for a while, and then I went to Hunter. Now at Hunter, there was the problem there of—I used to bring actors and musicians into my class. Actually, I used to take my class out of the studio and take them to a museum, because I found out many of the students had never been in museums. And some were graduate students. So I took them there. I used to get my hand slapped for doing that. "You're supposed to be in your classroom

teaching them, not there." So I used to take them to the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan, the Museum of Modern Art, out of my classroom, right?

Cooks: So we've been talking a bit about how important interdisciplinary work has always been for you, and that you've been a painter, but you've also been a singer. I wanted to also talk about your life as an illustrator. We have a stack of books that you illustrated.

01-01:10:08

Mayhew: Which is surprising. It's very surprising.

Cooks: I want us to talk a bit about that. There's some good stories here.

01-01:10:15

Mayhew: Okay. All right.

Cooks: Let's see. Is this the first book that you worked on?

01-01:10:25

Mayhew: *Samuel Morse*? I think that was one of them, yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:10:29

Mayhew: *Samuel Morse [and the Telegraph]*, which is the—I'm an academician of the National Academy of Design, and Samuel Morse was the creator of the National Academy in 1850.

Cooks: Wow.

01-01:10:44

Mayhew: He felt that it was important for artists to have respect. But not only artists, architects. That was founded for artists and architects, what they call the National Academy of Design. Design is the inclusion of architects.

Cooks: So how did you start working in this field? Was it through the National Academy? How did they find you, these publishing companies? How did you get connected to them?

01-01:11:12

Mayhew: Oh well, [laughs] I'll tell you how I started. I used to go to publishing companies. I'd take my sketches and drawings around with me and go knock on doors of publishing houses, and also newspaper places, for illustration. So I went to one place there. The secretary came out and I said, "Well, I wanted to meet the director, because I'm interested in doing illustrating," sort of thing. She said, "Well, the director isn't here." Then inside, a voice says, "I am. Tell him to come in!" So the secretary was shocked, because that Russell Lions, the head of the book company, telling me to come in. So I went in and I told him what I wanted to do. He called someone from the back. The head of the

area of publication was in the back [and] came out. He says, "We have a young artist here. What do you think? What should we do?" So they gave me a story to illustrate. So I went home. About two weeks later, I came back with some drawings, right? Because I felt these were something I could improve on. So I took them there and Russell Lions says, "Ask for me when you come back in." I asked the secretary. [laughs] "No, you can't see him." He said to ask for him, so she asked him and I came in. Russell Lions became a friend of mine, because he was on the board of directors of the MacDowell Colony at the time.

Cooks: What a small world.

01-01:13:07

Mayhew: We became good friends.

Cooks: Do you remember what the publishing company was? Which company was that? Was it the one that published this?

01-01:13:16

Mayhew: Yeah. Yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:13:17

Mayhew: Well, I don't know if it's the book company.

Cooks: It might be on the inside. I can look.

01-01:13:21

Mayhew: Russell Lions. [The drawings are for] *Harper's*, *Harper's* [*Magazine*].

Cooks: Was it *Harper's*?

01-01:13:25

Mayhew: Yeah. [The children's books are from a book company, not *Harper's*.]

Cooks: Wow. Then these books are for children, right, these are for young readers.

01-01:13:34

Mayhew: They're about the middle—

Cooks: Middle school?

01-01:13:39

Mayhew: Yeah, middle school.

Cooks: Okay. There's two more that I want to hand you so that we can document them. *Galileo and Experimental Science*.

01-01:13:47

Mayhew: Right. Yeah.

Cooks:

Can you tell us about *Galileo* and this project?

01-01:13:54

Mayhew: Well, that had to do with the whole interest of what was going on in Florence. Which later, I went and did a study, which is unbelievable. When I did the illustrations, it was actually like the way it was there. I said "Oh my." So it's just like, ooh, maybe I was born [in] another life.

Cooks:

Because you had to draw images of the Ponte Vecchio in this book—

01-01:14:22

Mayhew: Yeah, right.

Cooks:

—but you had not been there yourself.

01-01:14:25

Mayhew: That's right. Well, I saw pictures of Ponte Vecchio, but what I drew is a little added to what really was there, which wasn't in all the pictures of things.

Cooks:

It's incredible. Here's another one, about William Harvey, [*William Harvey: Trailblazer of Scientific Medicine*].

01-01:14:37

Mayhew: Oh, Harvey. This is part of the circulatory system and the vascular/circulatory system, which is great. For me to get involved—because as I said early on, in doing medical illustrations, this is the first time I really got into doing something like that.

Cooks:

So do you think some of your training with James Willson helped?

01-01:15:01

Mayhew: Well, it had to do with learning to draw anything. Because I went to the library to see the drawings of medical illustrator[s]. They're [such] beautiful drawings, you can't imagine how—they're fantastic. They were before they used to photograph. They used to photograph the dead images, right, and the vascular things. Now they photograph it, but in those [days], the artists used to go there and study them and make drawings. Any time one goes to the library and look[s] at illustrations, medical illustrations going back to the 1800s, they are unbelievable drawings. I thought that I couldn't do that. No idea, looking at them.

Cooks:

But then you end up making them.

01-01:15:54

Mayhew: But then this came up, for me to do drawings. And I read about him. In order to do this, I had to do some reading. I had to read the story about how he was

involved with the discovery of the vasculars [sic] and capillaries and arteries, and how that functioned in the body. So that was a sense of understanding of physical existence. Then for me to have a stent put on one of my arteries, that was like something else.

Cooks: So you yourself had a surgery much later. Much later.

01-01:16:36

Mayhew: Oh yeah. That happened about ten years ago.

Cooks: Okay. I'm going to hand you another book. This is from 1960, *The First Book of Tools*.

01-01:16:44

Mayhew: Okay. Oh, *Tools*, right. Like the research [for] that going to the library; but going to the Metropolitan Museum, they have all the history of tools there. This is where I got these tools and the history of tools, was at the Metropolitan Museum.

Cooks: Did the publisher give you a lot of freedom to decide which tools? The cover of this book is so important.

01-01:17:12

Mayhew: Well yeah, but they didn't realize the research that I did here. They really appreciated when I did it, because it was very in-depth. I got involved with it and—there were suggestions about these, but they didn't do the research; I did it.

Cooks: Can you talk to us about the cover of that book? Because it's one of my favorites, the concept it has.

01-01:17:35

Mayhew: Well, it was the Egyptians, right?

Cooks: Yes.

01-01:17:41

Mayhew: So there was that whole thing with using the Egyptians, which is beyond any sophisticated European development of the tools, right?

Cooks: Now I'm going to hand you two books.

01-01:17:58

Mayhew: I'm thinking about the research that I had to do every time I did one of these books.

Cooks: So you were going to libraries, you were going to museums.

- 01-01:18:05
Mayhew: Right, right, right. These books on water—[*Let's Find Out about Water*]—well, the first ones that I did, [I did] of African American children.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 01-01:18:14
Mayhew: Which wasn't published. This is what they published.
- Cooks: So you were asked to make illustrations for this book. It's a science book for kids.
- 01-01:18:22
Mayhew: It had to do with water. They described the different areas that they wanted to be educated, like clothing and rain and drinking water or watering the field, all the different aspects of the development of water. It was all outlined, so I just did the drawings based on their suggestions of the different areas.
- Cooks: But the children you made.
- 01-01:18:50
Mayhew: But with my own interpretation, though.
- Cooks: Right. The drawings you made initially were—
- 01-01:18:57
Mayhew: So now I'm surprised, the fact of what I've done with some of these. I don't know if I could do that now.
- Cooks: You should be impressed with yourself.
- 01-01:19:06
Mayhew: Yeah.
- Cooks: Yeah, absolutely. So I want to hear you talk about the fact that the first set of drawings you made had African American children.
- 01-01:19:15
Mayhew: Yeah, because I felt that that would be very appropriate, to be able to do that.
- Cooks: What happened when you showed them the drawings?
- 01-01:19:23
Mayhew: Well, they felt that the circulation would be limited, where it would be seen. That was it right away.
- Cooks: So then what happened next? They rejected the initial set of drawings?
- 01-01:19:38
Mayhew: No, they just told me to do other children in there, that's all. That's what I did.

Cooks: Then they published—

01-01:19:47

Mayhew: This was in the fifties, and I needed to make money for my family. I had two children. I had two children at that time.

Cooks: So you were working on it as an illustrator for money to help support your family.

01-01:20:02

Mayhew: Yeah, just doing illustrations.

Cooks: We discovered that there is a version of the book with white children.

01-01:20:10

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Then today, you saw for the first time the book in your hands [with the illustrations of black children].

01-01:20:15

Mayhew: This is unbelievable, because I did the drawings for that, right? Then I transferred them over, doing them with white children doing the same pose.

Cooks: But you didn't know that they made a published version.

01-01:20:29

Mayhew: I never saw that they published this.

Cooks: We were looking at the title page, and it says that the book with the black children was published in Japan.

01-01:20:40

Mayhew: Oh, in Japan?

Cooks: Yes.

01-01:20:42

Mayhew: Wow.

Cooks: But they're both from 1962.

01-01:20:45

Mayhew: I didn't know that. See, that's why I never saw it.

Cooks: Right.

01-01:20:51

Mayhew: Wow, that's crazy.

Cooks: Well, let's also talk about what you're—

01-01:20:56

Mayhew: That's good to see. Wow.

Cooks: I'm going to get you one of those.

01-01:20:59

Mayhew: [laughs]

Cooks: I'm going to get you your copy with the black children.

01-01:21:05

Mayhew: Oh, excellent. Thank you.

Cooks: Yeah. So I want to talk about: there're a number of significant paintings that you were making at the same time that you were doing these illustrations. A couple of them, we had in the exhibition when we did your retrospective at the Museum of the African Diaspora in 2009.

01-01:21:28

Mayhew: Oh.

Cooks: You had *Gull Island* and another painting called *Rocks and Ocean*, which were from the 1950s. Can you remember making those paintings, or the landscapes that inspired you to make those paintings?

01-01:21:46

Mayhew: When, during that time?

Cooks: Yeah, these are seascapes with the seagulls.

01-01:21:50

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Right? With the water and the white foam.

01-01:21:53

Mayhew: That's right. Okay.

Cooks: Yeah, can you talk a bit about what inspired you at that time to make those works?

01-01:22:02

Mayhew: Well, there was a history of Long Island. I was right on the Long Island Sound, right near the ocean all the time, so there was a desire maybe to do—then I studied with Reuben Tam. He came from Hawaii, and his home here in the United States was just off the shore of Maine, on an island off the shore of Maine. He was really about water and so forth, so he was discussing about the sensitivity of land and water. It has its own mystique and mystery and time changes, and low tide, high tide, and storm waves—all the different feelings of water, in terms of land. So I got into the whole feeling about maybe

something out there was—the last painting I'm just doing, there's like waters in the foreground.

Cooks: No, it's beautiful. One of the earliest paintings that we had in that exhibition was *The Abandoned Nest*. I just would love for you to talk about that painting.

01-01:23:13

Mayhew: Yeah, I did a whole series of still lifes. That the only still life that's been reproduced. Over the years, I did a lot of still life paintings. Also, I was a portrait painter.

Cooks: Well, let's talk about that. Where are all of the portraits?

01-01:23:29

Mayhew: I want to know, because I'd like to find them. I don't know if you know about the Borscht [Belt] circuit, which is Upstate New York. Used to be like the—what's in Arizona?

Cooks: Was it like a resort town?

01-01:23:59

Mayhew: Yeah, it was a resort town. But that's where all the singers and dancers used to come to perform.

Cooks: Did you sing there?

01-01:23:57

Mayhew: It's like Las Vegas is right now, only this was Upstate New York.

Cooks: Okay. Did you sing in the Borscht Belt?

01-01:24:05

Mayhew: Yeah, that's right. I did portraits of the family there, which I'd like to get a hold of them, because this would be the grandchildren would have them by now, or the great-grandchildren, right?

Cooks: So you sang, and then you made portraits of the guests.

01-01:24:23

Mayhew: In the morning and afternoon, I'd do portraits. At night, I did a little singing. But it was only filling between headliners. I was the filler-inner.

Cooks: Wow.

01-01:24:35

Mayhew: I was not a headliner.

Cooks: Okay. But you were doing portrait paintings at the same time, so that's another important moment where you're working—

- 01-01:24:44
Mayhew: Yeah, I could do a portrait in the afternoon quick.
- Cooks: I would love to see those paintings, too.
- 01-01:24:52
Mayhew: I would, too. I would like to see them.
- Cooks: Maybe someone will watch this when they're doing research at the Getty, and realize they know where some of these portraits are.
- 01-01:25:03
Mayhew: Right, right.
- Cooks: So *The Abandoned Nest* was part of your still life series.
- 01-01:25:07
Mayhew: It was part of the still life [series]. But that's not really the better still life I did. I did a lot of glass bottles and things like that.
- Cooks: Okay. You were also doing some of the landscapes that people are more familiar with. There's one called *West* that's owned by the Studio Museum in Harlem.
- 01-01:25:32
Mayhew: Oh.
- Cooks: They have a couple of paintings. I remember we wanted to borrow one for your retrospective.
- 01-01:25:40
Mayhew: Oh yeah, right.
- Cooks: We couldn't borrow it because—
- 01-01:25:44
Mayhew: They wouldn't lend it?
- Cooks: No. But do you remember why?
- 01-01:25:46
Mayhew: No.
- Cooks: Because President Clinton had it in his office.
- 01-01:25:50
Mayhew: Oh yes, right. He had one. He only had one in his office—I mean, they had two of my paintings there.
- Cooks: Okay.

01-01:26:01
Mayhew: In fact, they're in one of the folders over there.

Cooks: We'll have to look at this.

01-01:26:06
Mayhew: The folder for Spiral's over there.

Cooks: Oh. Is it the black one?

01-01:26:10
Mayhew: It's the white one over there. It says Spiral. No, no, not that one. That's it. Those two paintings are from the [Art Students] League [of New York].

Cooks: Okay. And they're from the sixties.

01-01:26:25
Mayhew: Mm-hmm.

Cooks: Let's see this one. *West* is one that I know about, that's at the Studio Museum.

01-01:26:31
Mayhew: These were in there.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:26:33
Mayhew: There're two paintings.

Cooks: Let's see.

01-01:26:37
Mayhew: That's in their collection.

Cooks: Okay. One is *West* from 1965; the other one is *Gorge*—

01-01:26:43.
Mayhew: That's the other one.

Cooks: —from 1966. Okay.

01-01:26:47
Mayhew: Okay?

Cooks: Now, which one is the one that President Clinton has? He wouldn't let us borrow it.

01-01:26:53
Mayhew: I think it's *West*.

Cooks: Okay. So this is work that you were making around the same time that you were making these illustrations for money.

01-01:27:06

Mayhew: Mm-hmm.

Cooks: Yeah. Who was buying this work? Do you remember who was buying this work then?

01-01:27:10

Mayhew: No, this is not the same time. This was in the fifties. All these are in the fifties.

Cooks: Okay. I think some of those might be a little late, maybe early sixties. Or maybe you *drew* them in the fifties, but they were published a little bit later?

01-01:27:25

Mayhew: Yeah, they were published later. There were all fifties.

Cooks: Okay, okay.

01-01:27:28

Mayhew: I was trying to make a living. This is the only way I could make a living. They're middle fifties, in the middle fifties.

Tewes: How did it make you feel to learn that President Clinton had one of your works in his office?

01-01:27:46

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: That's pretty special. Did you know that his office has your paintings in it?

01-01:27:55

Mayhew: Yeah, because there's a photograph with Rosemary talking to Clinton.

Cooks: Really? In his office with the painting?

01-01:28:03

Mayhew: Yeah. I don't think the painting's behind him. I'm not sure if the painting's behind him or not.

Cooks: Okay.

Gibbons-Mayhew: [Rosemary Gibbons-Mayhew, Richard Mayhew's wife] They invited all the artists that they borrowed work from to come to the Clinton Office, so we all went there.

Cooks: In Harlem.

Gibbons-Mayhew: In Harlem, across the street.

01-01:28:18

Mayhew: Right.

Gibbons-Mayhew: So that's where we saw his work.

Cooks: That's amazing.

01-01:28:27

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Yeah.

01-01:28:29

Mayhew: Well, it had to do with the one who painted Clinton.

Gibbons-Mayhew: Nelson Shanks.

01-01:28:39

Mayhew: Nelson Shanks.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:28:42

Mayhew: He was one of my best friends, was studying in Florence the same [time] I was there.

Cooks: I see.

01-01:28:47

Mayhew: He became a famous portrait painter in the country, right? He and I, I remember we were struggling artists in Florence, Italy, at the time, years ago. He became the most famous portrait painter in the United States.

Cooks: Wow. So we didn't talk about: how did you get to Florence?

01-01:29:07

Mayhew: How did I get to Florence?

Cooks: How did you get to Europe? What happened that allowed you to do that?

01-01:29:10

Mayhew: Oh, I won a grant. It was a grant.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:29:14

Mayhew: But I took my family, and no one takes their family on a grant. But I took my family. Which is historic, it's also on *The Liberté*. It was the last trip to Europe by a ship, French boat.

Cooks: Wow.

01-01:29:30
Mayhew:

The Liberté.

Cooks:

So this is in 1958 you got the John Hay Whitney Fellowship.

01-01:29:37
Mayhew:

That's it. That's the one I went to Europe on.

Cooks:

That's the one. So you had a wife and two children?

01-01:29:42
Mayhew:

[laughs] Yeah.

Cooks:

You took this ship.

01-01:29:44
Mayhew:

I took them there. My son was four years old and my daughter was six.

Cooks:

Okay.

01-01:29:53
Mayhew:

Now they're famous, both of them.

Cooks:

And they're in the arts.

01-01:29:58
Mayhew:

That's right.

Cooks:

And they're in the arts.

01-01:30:00
Mayhew:

Ina's doing *Queen Sugar* right now in New Orleans.

Cooks:

Okay. So Ava DuVernay's television show, right, for the OWN Network? It's the television show.

01-01:30:12
Mayhew:

It's a television show. She just finished the television program for Dolly Parton.

Cooks:

Oh, good.

01-01:30:24
Mayhew:

In Atlanta. That was Atlanta; she just went to New Orleans.

Cooks:

You were talking earlier about being a student and teaching at the same time. It seems like you were always doing that, even with your family, if you raised two artists. They were part of that trip, so they got to see art in Europe.

01-01:30:46

Mayhew:

Yeah, well, the wife at that time, she was very supportive. She was very, very unique in that area of supporting what I was doing. Having the two children and—there's always a struggle with this.

Cooks:

Financially?

01-01:31:04

Mayhew:

Yeah. Well also, I taught at Pratt Institute, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Art Students League. You can imagine driving down for the different days to do that from Upstate New York.

Cooks:

So at this time still, you're being rewarded for the work that you're making. You're working, you're teaching, you're making illustrations. But then you win the John Hay Whitney, and you also have that artist—

01-01:31:36

Mayhew:

I went to Europe, yeah.

Cooks:

And you went to Europe. How did that influence your work?

01-01:31:45

Mayhew:

Because this was the seat of two-dimensional painting, right? So in Florence, in Italy, there was the Italian Renaissance paintings, which I really got heavily involved with. And there was Nelson Shanks right there. He and I were both studying the paintings there. Then I went to France and I went to the Louvre. I spent several days in the Louvre, right? I sneaked down to the archives. I wasn't supposed to be [there]. The guard let me in. He was very nice.

Cooks:

I think about some of your early paintings having a dark green palette. I'm thinking about the colors that you used in your early paintings, in that it changed.

01-01:32:32

Mayhew:

Well, when I went to Florence to study, I got involved with the whole concept of color illusion, two-dimensional, and how it works in relationship to basic design space. Like circles, squares, and triangles and secondary shapes. And then you have the primary colors and the secondary colors. That's two-dimensional design. That's it. That's all painting's about. Nothing else.

Cooks:

Did that change the way that you started using color in your own paintings?

01-01:33:04

Mayhew:

Well, only in terms of the illusion of optics. Color sets up a whole other space dimension, optically, and how the artist sees it and the afterimage of that. So I was looking, looking, trying [to figure out]: what's the afterimage? How does that work? Well, there's Caravaggio's paintings there. It was reds and blues and yellows and greens, but no orange.

Cooks: Well now, why no orange?

01-01:33:36

Mayhew: Oh, it just happened to be in that one painting that I was looking at.

Cooks: Oh okay.

01-01:33:40

Mayhew: But you'd see orange because the afterimage—

Cooks: I see.

01-01:33:43

Mayhew: —in the painting, okay? So that's where I started learning about the whole phenomenon of the mystery of color and how the afterimage—how the eye is trapped into this and how the camera learned from this, in terms of the negative, which is the afterimage of the eye. If you close your eyes, you see the afterimage. Wow, unbelievable. So I got heavy into that, and using color as an illusionistic control. Even with the subtle colors. Also basic shapes. Basic shapes. Because a round shape advances on the eye and reds advance on the eye, so if you want the round shape to recede, keep it cool. That's the whole game I started playing with, understanding color in relationship to two-dimensional design. So there's this illusion, optical illusion.

So I started working with that with sound. How long does it take for you when you heard a sound, for you to understand what you heard? *Ding!* How long did the mind understand what you heard? How long did it take?

Cooks: A second, a second.

01-01:35:00

Mayhew: And if I put my hand up, what did you see? How long did it take before you realized that you saw my hand?

Cooks: About a second.

01-01:35:06

Mayhew: Mm-hmm. Time-space illusion. And how much sound in space has a simple dimension of time. Sound takes longer than the other. It depends on how the mind registers in response to what it heard or saw. So I started playing with that whole thing going on.

Cooks: Do you listen to music when you paint?

01-01:35:29

Mayhew: Yeah. I would always listen to jazz, because I was a jazz singer. Then I stopped doing that because of nostalgia. So I started listening to more classical music. Less nostalgia, right? So it's a little game going on with music. If I

want a nostalgic kind of sensitivity, in terms of nostalgia with different areas of nature, I could listen to that kind of music.

Cooks: When you look at your paintings, do you remember the music that you were listening to when you made it?

01-01:36:07

Mayhew: Well, recently it's a lot of classical music, like Stravinsky, especially. I listen to Stravinsky music. Then there's sometimes heavy drama. *Bang!* And then, [sings] subtle changes. So I love it for that reason. So there is that kind of uniqueness going on. Several jazz musicians, that they was involved with that kind of sound space, too, so I was listening to that. Right now with the music, I have a problem. The music is not there; it's just sound, variations on sound.

Cooks: You mean contemporary music?

01-01:36:59

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: Yeah.

01-01:37:00

Mayhew: It's involved with sound space. Which is okay, but it's not that melodious sensitivity of the dewdrop on a leaf.

Cooks: I want to see a painting of a dewdrop on a leaf that you make.

01-01:37:16

Mayhew: Well, it has to do with whatever painting I'm painting, it's full of that. The feeling is in that, hopefully. That's the idea. It's the mystic feeling of love and desire and emotion, all right? Hopefully that's what's taking place. Yeah, because this whole era here was in the fifties.

Cooks: Okay. Yeah. But it takes a while for the books to come out.

01-01:37:48

Mayhew: Yeah, right. Then coming back in the sixties, I got involved with Spiral. My paintings in the seventies were completely abstract. A couple of books there that was from the exhibition at—not that one. The exhibition at the [Studio Museum in Harlem in 1977]—yeah, that's it. Mary Schmidt-Campbell wrote [the catalogue, *Richard Mayhew: An American Abstractionist*, for] this.

Cooks: Oh wow.

01-01:38:28

Mayhew: Okay?

Cooks: That's very prestigious.

- 01-01:38:32
Mayhew: These were paintings of that time.
- Cooks: Now, what year was this exhibition?
- 01-01:38:39
Mayhew: 1978.
- Cooks: '78.
- 01-01:38:40
Mayhew: The exhibition was. But I was doing all the paintings in the seventies that's in that show.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 01-01:38:50
Mayhew: Which was the influence coming out of Spiral.
- Cooks: So we'll talk more about this tomorrow.
- Tewes: That sounds good.
- Cooks: Yeah.
- Tewes: I know we want to talk a lot about Spiral tomorrow.
- Cooks: Yeah. I was going to ask him, not on camera, but I—you know the slides that you show when you give lectures, and you have the photographs of everyone in Spiral?
- 01-01:39:18
Mayhew: Right. [break in audio]
- Tewes: Okay, we are back from a break, and, Richard, we just thought of some more things we want to talk about. Why don't you take it away, Bridget?
- Cooks: So we didn't talk about the Depression, and we didn't talk about your work as a ceramics decorator. Can you tell us more about that?
- 01-01:39:44
Mayhew: Yeah. Actually, I was looking for a job in the artist's world, and that was opportunity right there. I found out there was openings in the area for china decorating. I don't know if you know china decorating. It was all hand done. The flowers and the paints was done hand[s]-on—also, you know the perfect circles on a dish? [gestures] You put it like that and spin and put the brush down and that spins around and makes the lines on there. I was doing that for a while.

Cooks: Was that in the forties, in the 1940s?

01-01:40:26

Mayhew: That was in the forties, yeah, in the forties.

Cooks: In the forties, okay. That was in the city?

01-01:40:30

Mayhew: That was in New York City.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:40:33

Mayhew: Then I met Dorothy, my first wife, then. She was a china decorator. She'd pick up the paint on one side and another color on the other side, and make one stroke, and that made the flower. I was learning how fantastic that gesture is.

Then in later years, unfortunately, they did away with the china decorating. So that kind of work went out the window, because they started using decals. It was pasted on and fired that way, and not involved with the hands-on. But it was all done by machine after a while. But that art was a whole period at the time. There were several companies in New York that were doing that. This company was doing Cambridge China, which is [an] English firm. Also it was on vases and lamp bases and teacups or tea pitchers, right? So it was doing that kind of thing.

Then my brother was looking for work. Here again, the one that comes and takes over everything. So I got my brother to come there. Certainly, he wasn't an artist. So in firing this china, it's a special technique of knowing how to do that, because if you fire it wrong way, you break the china or overburn it, overfire it. So he learned how to use the kiln there from an old German master. The man who worked on it, he was a real old man. So he taught my brother to do it, and my brother just took over and just backed off. The old man didn't have to do it because somebody can do it now. So my brother learned very fast. It has to be a certain temperature or you—and how to control the different kiln levels and so forth, and when to take it out and how to do that. So he learned to do that. So as I said, he was exceptional; he could do anything, I thought, my brother. So I got him the job there as the trainer in how to develop the whole sensitivity of that.

Cooks: So this was in the late 1940s. This is after World War II that this happened?

01-01:43:06

Mayhew: Yeah, right.

Cooks: Your brother was older than you or he was younger than you?

01-01:43:13

Mayhew: My brother's a little older.

Cooks: Okay. Dorothy was your first wife, and you met her on the job.

01-01:43:22

Mayhew: As a china decorator.

Cooks: Okay. What other kind of things did Dorothy do to help after—you said that she was very supportive of you.

01-01:43:34

Mayhew: Well, she was very supportive of me, in terms of the art. We had a lot of agreements about what was going on in the art world at the time. Because she was spending a lot of time in museums, and so she was talking to me about what was going on in museums, which I knew a lot about also. So we collaborated on that sometimes. We became more of a close association because of the arts and the museums and so forth.

Cooks: Did Dorothy work in museums, or was she an artist?

01-01:44:03

Mayhew: She was a china decorator.

Cooks: Okay. But did she paint or—

01-01:44:09

Mayhew: She was a watercolorist, a very good watercolorist.

Cooks: Did she help you to write grants and fellowships for these awards that you—

01-01:44:18

Mayhew: Well, she didn't know about it. I knew about the fellowships. But she helped me in terms of in doing some secretarial work about it.

Cooks: Okay, all right.

Tewes: I'm interested: when you were decorating the china, if any of that work you were doing to pay the bills, did that impact your work on the side, your own artwork?

01-01:44:40

Mayhew: No. It was very commercial, very repetitious. You had to do a hundred plates, and they all had to be exactly the same, right? [laughs] Then the circles on them; I did a lot of the lining, they call it. I was a liner for a while, which is make perfect lines or the double lines that you see on the dishes, how they were made by hand. Now it's all machine. At that time, it was by hand and they paid extra if it was done by hand.

Tewes: Well, that seems like very exacting work. I was just wondering if that was something, a skill you brought to your other work.

01-01:45:20

Mayhew:

There was a certain order of consistency, let's say, maybe that had some similarity. Not in terms of repetition, but consistent technique and learning how to execute that. So that was very nice.

So china decorating, it was—everything went down the drain when the automatic system took over, so all these companies just lost their business. That was it. But at the time, that was a good job for artists. A lot of artists, this was their side job, to be a china decorator. And it was good. It was good pay at the time, and very consistent. So that filled in the gaps between that until when I became an illustrator. This was just before that in the forties.

Then again, just in terms of how my brother just comes and takes over, he took over, was the one who fired [the] china.

Cooks:

So did you know other African American artists in the 1940s? Or did they come into your community later, in the fifties and sixties?

01-01:46:46

Mayhew:

Did I know—

Cooks:

Any other African American artists in the 1940s. Other painters? Or when did you start to become part of that community?

01-01:46:56

Mayhew:

Well, Charles White. I knew Charles White.

Cooks:

In the 1940s or a little later?

01-01:47:02

Mayhew:

A little later.

Cooks:

A little later.

01-01:47:03

Mayhew:

Well, in the forties. That's when I got to know him a little bit.

Cooks:

Okay.

01-01:47:07

Mayhew:

Right. Which I met his daughter. You know his daughter. She lives in Oakland.

Cooks:

Yes. And he has a son who lives in Pasadena.

01-01:47:16

Mayhew:

That's in LA.

Cooks:

Yeah, that's right. I took my students on a tour of the Charles White show.

01-01:47:22

Mayhew: These are the two adopted children.

Cooks:

Yeah, that's right. Ian was telling us that his dad was in the armed forces—I forget which wing—but he was an artist. He was an artist and he drew many of the different places where they went.

01-01:47:43

Mayhew: Oh, you're talking about Charles White?

Cooks:

Charles White.

01-01:47:45

Mayhew: Oh yeah. Well, right.

Cooks:

That he did that. So I know that you were in the service, also. Did you ever make—

01-01:47:51

Mayhew: I don't want to—

Cooks:

Did you ever make any drawings as an artist?

01-01:47:54

Mayhew: No. That whole existence—I'm completely opposed to war, so I have no feeling about the whole existence, how mankind has not reached the level of solving his problems and he has to get involved with killing himself. That's how I feel. So I have no identity with that at all.

Tewes:

As we were talking about your time as a china decorator, and then your father's work as a carpenter and a house painter, I was thinking about craftsmanship and fine arts.

01-01:48:37

Mayhew: Right.

Tewes:

How do you see those two connecting?

01-01:48:41

Mayhew: Well, that's why I became an interdisciplinarian.

Tewes:

So for you, it does.

01-01:48:46

Mayhew: The inventive, creative process of carpentry and what's going on with electronics today and graphic design and so forth, the development today is all involved with the interrelationship of the various disciplines. So when I was teaching, I was trying to get more of that involved, the association of the various disciplines. For years, I taught at art academies, and you have no other discipline than the arts. Then when I went into the university, I found out most

of the students in the class are involved with electives. Out of fifteen, you might have five majors in the arts, and the rest are electives. That's where interdisciplinary study started taking off right there, as soon as I got involved with teaching at the universities. So what happened there, the fact that they had students from medicine, those from business, those from engineer[ing], and then how much I was challenging them, in terms of the creative process, how inventive are they in their area.

I was supposed to be teaching painting. I was involved with a design class. So when I went to Sonoma State in California, I blew up a balloon twice the size of this room. It was forty feet long and maybe thirty feet, twenty feet wide. What they did was—the design class was my students—where they tape big, long pieces of plastic together with one seam. We found this big tape to do that. Then we had to find the engineers that were in the class. "How would you inflate this?" They said, "Well, we have to get a compressor." I said, "No. Well, okay." So I took a box fan and I did it in ten minutes. I was saying how ingenious you can be with simplicity and how you can imagine to do this. Then with the skin on there is how much these scientists are involved with the reverberations on the skin of the acoustical chamber. How is the sound space inside of this bubble? They're measuring the acoustics, in relationship to a square building, right? I had the scientist students and then the engineer students and the museum students, in terms of sound space, in terms of acoustical. So there was my interdisciplinary program right there, by using a device and have everybody involved with responding to that. I had a dance company perform inside there. It had to do with the space in relationship to the acoustical response within the bubble. Then we had an orchestra in there, and how much that music was involved with how it's inside of—what was the acoustic reaction inside this bubble? This was my interdisciplinary program at Sonoma State. They thought I was out of my mind.

Cooks: Well, how did you even come up with some of these ideas?

01-01:52:39

Mayhew: Just design idea. You need to use a device like that in order to include all the other interactions. I did that when I went to Penn State. That's when I did a lot of that. But every place went, it was that. I tried to do it at San José State, and they didn't accept it.

But what I did at San José State, I created the Center for the Arts and Sciences in California. I developed the Creative Center for Arts and Science by using Dwight Cannon, which was a fantastic trumpet player, and Allen Strange, which invented electronic music. [points to documents] I have a listing there of the board of directors. The board of directors in on that right there.

Tewes: Hold on, we're going to find it.

01-01:53:50
Mayhew:

This all came out of San José State, because of my wanting to teach interdisciplinary study. So it helped me develop the Creative Center for the Arts and Science. See, the board is involved with the Transamerica Corporation. You can have it.

Cooks:

Okay. I'm going to read some of these names then.

01-01:54:15
Mayhew:

Right. Okay.

Cooks:

So board of directors, the Center for Creative Arts and Sciences. John Chase. Is he the one that takes care of your paintings at Transamerica?

01-01:54:29
Mayhew:

Now? Well, Transamerica sold the building.

Cooks:

Yeah.

01-01:54:33
Mayhew:

The paintings are still there, even though Transamerica doesn't own it anymore. That was one of the executives, the board of directors.

Cooks:

Paula Kirkeby. We remember her.

01-01:54:47
Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

The director of Smith-Andersen Gallery in Palo Alto, E.J. Montgomery, who's a legend, who was part of the San Francisco Art Commission and was really important for the Oakland Museum [of California], as well.

01-01:55:02
Mayhew:

This was my board.

Cooks:

You were an interim director and coordinator. I see you listed as codirector of the center.

01-01:55:09
Mayhew:

This came out of San José State, okay?

Cooks:

Okay.

01-01:55:13
Mayhew:

They didn't want any part of it. They didn't want to know. So we developed that whole program. But you have to realize we'd taken over the forts on the other side of the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County. That's what this whole program is. Now, the only thing that's left there—because the Department of the Interior came and took over, and then didn't want to go along with what

we were doing. But what is still there is the artist-in-residence program in Fort Baker, in Fort Cronkhite.

Cooks: So when you say you were taking over the fort, do you mean that you were having programs off campus in different places in Marin?

01-01:55:54

Mayhew: No. When I left, this was separated from the school after September.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:56:00

Mayhew: They had nothing to do with it, or even interested in it. So this ended up in San Francisco with S.I. Hayakawa.

Cooks: You were having art shows and performances in different places?

01-01:56:15

Mayhew: In San Francisco.

Cooks: Okay.

01-01:56:17

Mayhew: Now, I raised a board of directors here. In one of the museums, they allowed us to have one of the big rooms in the museum up there. Then also on [an] experimental cement boat, sailboat in the harbor, we had a meeting out there on this experimental boat.

Cooks: A cement boat?

01-01:56:37

Mayhew: [laughs] Yeah.

Cooks: How far does that get?

01-01:56:39

Mayhew: Well, wire mesh was around, and then the cement was in it, and it floated like any other wooden heavy boat, right?

Cooks: Wow. That's another experiment.

01-01:56:52

Mayhew: It was an experimental boat, but it was made out of cement. So we were on that. We had a lot of different meetings. Then in Marin County, we went over in Marin, the other side of the Golden Gate Bridge. There's a map there, showing that we started to take—oh, I don't know if it's there or not. There it is. See that?

Cooks: But it shows different places where you were having events?

01-01:57:21

Mayhew:

We were going to experiment with the development of a theater program, designing the architectural structure and redesigning the acoustical structure within the theater. Movable floors and walls that would create different scene effects. This was part of our idea.

Then in another area in one of the forts, we were involved with the oceanography, involved with experimental underwater gardening and examining the currents of what's come into the Bay Area, which it can be used for a force of energy. So it was a tremendous experiment. We were involved with the scientists in the development of this concept.

It was going to be financed by—a billionaire program—Buck [Family Fund]. Maybe you should mention the name. Because the Department of Interior came in and took over the property, they pulled all their money, so we never finished this.

Cooks:

Richard, this was in the 1970s, right?

01-01:58:46

Mayhew:

Mm-hmm.

Cooks:

Okay.

01-01:58:47

Mayhew:

1975.

Cooks:

1975.

01-01:58:50

Mayhew:

And then it was San José State, but it started there, okay? Then I went and told them about it. They said, "What's that?" They had no idea or even cared less.

Cooks:

So this is an example of you not wanting to be limited by the disciplines in universities, but figuring out another way to work with the community, to work with people with different kinds of talents.

01-01:59:17

Mayhew:

But also, it was my instinctive organizing concept, which is part of inventive, creative thinking, okay? Because I had a helper in New York, which was the Helen Hayes Foundation. We went into a community which was completely separated, but interracially very interwoven. It was Dutch, African American, Native American background.

Cooks:

This is the Appalachian Mountains?

01-01:59:49

Mayhew:

Yeah, Appalachian. [The Rockland Center for the Arts in 1970.] But that was from an organizing program out of the Helen Hayes Foundation that I was

involved just organizing. This was again, another program where I was involved with organizing a particular concept.

Cooks: And again, it was—

01-02:00:04

Mayhew: Out of interdisciplinary thinking.

Cooks: Right, across disciplines. Okay.

Tewes: Well, do either of you have anything else you'd like to talk about today?

01-02:00:16

Mayhew: Well, this is one I felt that needed to get into this. This is really unbelievable.

Cooks: Yeah, I hadn't seen this level of detail of the program that you were doing, so it's great to hear you talk about it and see some of this documentation.

01-02:00:29

Mayhew: This is very major. Dwight Cannon and I went to Washington, D.C., to see Senator [Rida Cabanilla] Arakawa at the time. There was a long line waiting to visit with him. All the different places were announced to his secretary, which one was coming to visit him. The secretary leaned down and reached down and pointed for us—we were almost at the end of the line—to come first.

Cooks: Really?

01-02:01:12

Mayhew: Oh, everybody was like, [grumbles]. So when we came in, Senator Arakawa said, "Oh, I heard about your program. It's like mother's milk."

Cooks: Wow.

01-02:01:25

Mayhew: "It's unbelievable," he says.

Cooks: So these were, I guess I want to say, abandoned forts?

01-02:01:31

Mayhew: So there were senators and congressmen that also came to our meetings and supported. They're not listed there, but they were some of the—and prominent attorneys in San Francisco at the time. So this was far beyond what we could've imagined could've happened or would happen, right?

Cooks: So you were working in developing Fort Barry—

01-02:01:55

Mayhew: That's right.

Cooks: —as a public arts and recreation facility, and you were looking for some financial support for the work that you were doing.

01-02:02:04

Mayhew: The artist-in-residence program is still there, ever since 1975. I went back there to visit and I told them what I did. They said, "Oh my God, we didn't know about the history." So they wanted to know about the history of when we did this, because now it's there, it's still there. Rosemary came with me. We went there.

Cooks: Wow.

01-02:02:29

Mayhew: Which is surprising, that still part of our program is existing.

Cooks: Well, that's wonderful.

01-02:02:36

Mayhew: Yeah, with the rest of it—with all the money, with billions and billions of dollars going to come to support this concept.

Cooks: So what happened as a result of your conversation with the senator?

01-02:0:46

Mayhew: The Department of Interior took over the property.

Cooks: Supporting what you did or they just took it over and moved you out?

01-02:02:54

Mayhew: They took it over. They didn't even go along with what we were doing.

Cooks: I see.

01-02:02:58

Mayhew: Because this was a military site, you know?

Cooks: Right.

01-02:03:02

Mayhew: Then when the Department of Interior took it over, they wanted to preserve the military history of the site. So it didn't matter what we were doing.

Cooks: You were trying to transform the military site.

01-02:03:13

Mayhew: We were going to transform and restructure. The building for the artist-in-residence program is in one of the old barracks of the military. Which they restructured, reinvented the building. But this was one of the biggest enterprises that—I went to Penn State at this time and they said I abandoned

the program. I said, "What about everybody else on the board? I'm only one person."

Cooks: Right.

01-02:03:53

Mayhew: Anyway, I was at Penn State while they finalized—the Department of Interior just did away with us, that was it.

Cooks: You were having your meetings at San Francisco MoMA.

01-02:04:09

Mayhew: [No, the Legion of Honor].

Cooks: So [the Legion of Honor] was supportive of what you were doing.

01-02:04:12

Mayhew: Only they allowed us to use the room, that's all.

Cooks: I see. Okay. Yeah, this is amazing.

Tewes: This is about the time when San Francisco was redeveloping a lot of its other areas. Did you see the work you were doing in terms of that?

01-02:04:29

Mayhew: They were not interested.

Cooks: So just independent, a group of like-minded people decided to get something done.

01-02:04:36

Mayhew: But this started at San José State.

Cooks: Interesting.

01-02:04:40

Mayhew: I was involved [with] teaching a design course there.

Cooks: Right. And then it just took off.

01-02:04:48

Mayhew: Just took off. When I met Dwight Cannon and Allen Strange, and also [Donald Buchla and Robert] Moog, I think. I don't know if he was teaching there or not. He's the inventor of the synthesizer.

Cooks: So who were the students? Were they students with San José State or everywhere?

01-02:05:07

Mayhew:

There were some students. There were students there, but after I was cut off from the program, some of the students wanted to come and participate and help and things like that, but it wasn't connected with the university anymore.

Cooks:

Was it students and nonstudents, people that were not in school, who were getting involved in what you were doing?

01-02:05:32

Mayhew:

Oh, when we were setting up the program, we were going to use them when we're doing the whole thing, building and everything, have all the students involved with it. But since the program didn't go, we couldn't pay them. Then all the billions of dollars that was going to be put into it; you couldn't imagine how much money was going to be spent to support the whole program. There was the [Buck Family Fund] that is a billionaire organization, but they only support anything that's in the Marin County, in a sense.

Then I came looking for a space here at the University of California Santa Cruz. You have no idea the property they have here. I wanted to use one of these big fields and property; we could build on it and so forth. They wanted to have control over what we were doing and where we were doing it, so that ended that. Then I went other places looking for a space to do this. But then since the money was pulled out, that was the end of that.

Cooks:

Yeah, you never got the support.

01-02:06:45

Mayhew:

They accused me of abandoning the program, because I became a professor at Penn State University. They said, "We're all involved in your own kind of intrigue." I came as a full professor and tenured at Penn State.

Cooks:

Wow.

01-02:07:02

Mayhew:

And so they say, "Oh, you bought your way in." Yeah, right. [laughs] I'm so sad that that was dissipated because it had unbelievable potential, in terms of the development of the arts and science together.

Cooks:

It sounds like there was a lot of engineering involved with some of your experiments and music and sound.

01-02:07:28

Mayhew:

Well, the experiments with actually the currents coming into the San Francisco Bay, they could harness the energy of the force of the very exchange of the currents there. They was learning how to do that.

Cooks:

That's incredible.

01-02:07:43
Mayhew:

And Oceanography. Planting in the area down there. Oh, it was just endless what they were talking about. I didn't understand. I can't even repeat now, some of the experiments the scientists were intending to do in that area. The land erosion in the mountains under—just across the Golden Gate Bridge, it's nothing but mountain area right there. They were talking about the erosion and the change of temperature and reaction there of the wind currents and so forth of that area. Unbelievable. I can endless[ly] describe what they were going to do. Yeah.

Cooks:

No, it sounds like something that was clearly ahead of its time, and all of the issues that you're talking about are in a critical crisis state right now. These are things that we really need to explore now.

01-02:08:42
Mayhew:

Yes, yes. Right. But you can see the support that I had there. Unbelievable.

Cooks:

Right.

01-02:08:50
Mayhew:

The government support, local support, and I had the—I forget—the Berrigan brothers, I think. They were both congressmen in San Francisco.

Cooks:

Then because of the Department of Interior, then it just all apart? I see.

01-02:09:07
Mayhew:

They were protecting the preservation of the fort area. On this side of the Golden Gate Bridge, too. You have the Presidio right there. Now, this is like a presidio on the other side of the bridge. The Department of Interior needed to preserve the history of that area and situation. So what we was going to do would upset the history of that. That was it, it's all over.

We wanted to move it somewhere else, right? That was not easy. The property here, the university wanted to control whatever we were going to build. Also the finances, the money that was going to develop there, they wanted an interest in that. I said, "Well, this is not a money-enterprising thing." Well anyway, it just didn't work.

Then we went down to Baja, see if we can do a painting down there, but then there was a problem with the Mexican government and so forth, in order to build on the property down there. Well anyway, I went to Penn State.

Cooks:

Yeah, Okay.

Tewes:

It sounds like we are done for the day. Thank you so much for your time.

Interview 2: March 9, 2019

Tewes: This is a second interview with Richard Mayhew for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes at Mr. Mayhew's home in Soquel, California, on March 9, 2019. So thank you both for sitting with us again today. I'm going to kick it off to Bridget to take us through the morning.

Cooks: So, Rick, what would you like us to know about your involvement in World War II?

02-00:00:33

Mayhew: Well actually, I was part of the Montford Point Marines in the United States Marine Corps. The Montford Point Marines integrated the Marine Corps. I received a Congressional Medal of Honor from that group.

Cooks: Okay, thank you. [break in audio]

Tewes: Okay, we're back from a break, and we just wanted to show Richard wearing his Medal of Honor here, with its great beading work done around the lanyard. Do you want to say anything more about the medal itself?

02-00:01:13

Mayhew: No, that's it.

Tewes: Okay, thank you.

02-00:01:16

Mayhew: It's just like— [break in audio]

Tewes: Okay, we are back from a break. Go ahead and take us away, Bridget.

Cooks: So, Rick, we wanted you to talk about the history of Spiral. How did the idea come about and when did it form?

02-00:01:31

Mayhew: [In 1963.] Well, there is a problem here in the myth about Spiral, actually. Spiral was a group of artists that met in New York, where [A.] Philip Randolph called Romare Bearden, Charles [Alston], and Hale Woodruff: would the artists form a contingent of artists for the March on Washington? So they started together. These were the elders that came together first.

Cooks: Who was that? Who were the original members that got together?

02-00:02:09

Mayhew: The original group was Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, Felrath Hines, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston. That was the original group of the elders. Oh, Hale Woodruff. Yeah, right. So they formed, and they didn't

know the younger artists. But also, [A.] Philip Randolph wanted not just the visual artists, he wanted all African American artists that wouldn't be in the New York area. So we called the artists in Missouri and Chicago and also Los Angeles about this idea that Philip Randolph wanted a contingent of artists. So they made contact with them over there. We didn't have all the people together, so Ralph Ellison came there and he was talking about—I don't remember all the names now of the composers, and also directors of the theaters in New York which Afro-American. That was part of the idea, the contingent not just be the visual artists, but all the areas of arts in that area.

Cooks: Do you remember who the artists in Los Angeles were that you reached out to?

02-00:03:52
Mayhew:

Oh, that was in Watts.

Cooks: I see.

02-00:03:54
Mayhew:

The Watts artists.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:03:57
Mayhew:

Then in Missouri, that was the artists that came out of the art academy there, and also the ones in Chicago, the Chicago Art Institute groups. So there was these different segments of artists from across the country. But they weren't all visual artists. They made contact with visual artists and those involved in the theater and actually composers in those areas.

Everyone forgets about Philip Randolph was the organizer, not Martin Luther King [Jr.]. He actually asked Martin Luther King to visit, to bless the congregation. That was part of the idea. But Philip Randolph gets lost in the shuffle, the fact that he was the one that actually organized. Who was Philip Randolph? He was the head of the [Brotherhood of] Sleeping Car Porters. It was a labor movement, really, in terms of the just payment for all African Americans in all areas of lifestyle in the United States. So this was the beginning.

The artists started to form, and these were the elders. They didn't know about the younger artists in there. I was in an exhibition in the Bronx; I'm not sure if it was the Bronx Museum or not. But I met Felrath Hines at that, because we both had a painting in the exhibition there. So we came together. He didn't know about me and I didn't know about him. He said, "You've got to come with me. There's a group forming in New York and you have to come." I didn't realize Felrath Hines was one of the organizers of Spiral. Because later on, we found out Romare Bearden or Hale Woodruff was the organizers, but Felrath Hines was one of the head organizers of Spiral. So he brought me to

meet the elders. That's what I thought of them because that's all I knew about was these names; I never met them. I don't know about them, but I didn't really meet them. This was the excellent experience. I was really charmed by meeting them because they were these very elegant people and very promising and involved in intellectual sensibility. It was a surprising encounter. They asked me about the other artists in the town, the younger artists; they didn't know them. So what I did, I contacted several of the younger artists to come and join us.

Cooks: So who were those younger artists?

02-00:06:59

Mayhew: It was Al [Alvin] Hollingsworth, Reginald [Reggie] Gammon. I have them all here. I have them all here, if I can find them. There's actually William Majors.

I have to make a special point of William Majors. He was one of the younger artists, which he was on a grant in Florence, Italy, when I was there. I met him. How I met him: my son was in the hotel there with me, and he ran out into the lobby and he ran into Bill Majors in the middle of the building, and [Bill] picked him up and said, "Who are you?" So I came out to retrieve my son and I met Bill Majors. That was very strange because he was on a grant at the same time I was.

Cooks: And you didn't know him until that moment.

02-00:07:54

Mayhew: We didn't know each other.

Cooks: Wow.

02-00:07:56

Mayhew: He's one of the younger artists that I brought there. Then Earl Miller was another one.

Cooks: When did Emma Amos get involved? Was that much later?

02-00:08:11

Mayhew: Well, if you want to talk about Emma Amos—Emma Amos came from Atlanta, and so did Hale Woodruff. Hale Woodruff came to New York and Emma Amos had just graduate from, I think Spelman [College], and came to New York City. Hale Woodruff's wife was there, and the family of Emma said, "Would you look out for her in New York?" So Hale Woodruff's wife was concerned about Emma Amos. So when Hale Woodruff came to Spiral, he thought it would be nice to have Emma Amos meet these elders, right? So that was how Emma Amos became part of it. By the time when he brought her there, we were setting up paintings of all the group on the wall, we were preparing for an exhibition. The exhibition was just going to be a showing of this group really to themselves, not to the public. They'd included her in this

group, asked her to bring her work there. So that's it. That's how she became part of.

Cooks: Would you say that Spiral was an occasion for black artists from all over to get together?

02-00:09:26

Mayhew: All artists, yeah, in terms of the theater and writing and so forth. Because Ralph Ellison kind of made a demand. He says, "Where's the other artists here?" In terms of the theater, and also music. So that was kind of his input, right away.

Cooks: So the writers, the composers, the visual artists.

02-00:09:46

Mayhew: Writers and composers and directors of theater and so forth.

Cooks: Were they all African American people?

02-00:09:52

Mayhew: All African American. That was the idea.

Cooks: Okay. What kind of things did you talk about at this first meeting?

02-00:09:59

Mayhew: Well, what we started in the beginning, this—it became a think tank, really, not a club. It was supposed to form a contingent to the March on Washington. But what happened, by the time we got together and was solving the interrelationship of problems about creativity and so forth, it was too late to go to Washington because you had to plan the place to stay and the transportation and going together. So the other groups from all the other areas that we contacted, such as in Los Angeles and in Missouri, in Chicago, they all formed and went as a group. We never went as a group. Individually, some of us went to Washington, but not as a group. That's why [when] that movie came [out], *Get on the Bus* from LA to Washington.

Cooks: Right, the Spike Lee movie.

02-00:11:03

Mayhew: Yeah. My daughter was the set designer for that.

Cooks: Oh really?

02-00:11:08

Mayhew: Yeah, Ina. Ina Mayhew.

Cooks: So there were other people that you had contacted who were able to go. For Los Angeles, was the group from Watts?

02-00:11:18

Mayhew:

Oh, also in New York. There's other people in New York at the time we contacted that was in the arts. It was not easy. You're thinking, say, Well, you just go to Washington. But forming a bus trip or a train trip as a group together, that's not a simple problem. Also, where are you going to stay when you go there? So there was all this. It was too late for us to really get our act together to go by the time we formed a group. So what Philip Randolph said, which was very excellent, he says, "If you can't come to Washington, take care of the problems that we're trying to address in Washington about the discrimination and the lack of relationship, in terms of financial [assistance] of Afro-Americans in the community." So they said, "If you can't come to Washington, take on your particular area." So that's what we did. We got involved with challenging the museums and the galleries, in terms of the arts area; but also in the theater and music and publications, in terms of the writers. Because that's what Ralph Ellison was talking about, in terms of African Americans being published and how they were being segregated and not really featured.

Cooks:

So these problems of discrimination, they were in the art world, they were in the music world, they were in the publishing world.

02-00:12:44

Mayhew:

Right, right.

Cooks:

And together, you were able to talk about that.

02-00:12:48

Mayhew:

That's right. Well, addressing that, it's a matter of what to do. Some of them picketed the museums. I was involved with picketing the museum; Reggie Gammon, Norman Lewis, and myself. We picketed the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] and also the Whitney Museum. But the elders, they were more reserved about it. They wrote letters and [made] phone calls and addressed meetings to go and meet some of the heads of the museums and galleries. So their approach was quite different than some of the other elders, who wanted to be out there in the street and picketing, which I was involved with.

Cooks:

Can you talk to us about putting the exhibition together? When did the exhibition happen? Was that after the March on Washington, the Spiral exhibition?

02-00:13:37

Mayhew:

Well, it's during that time, during the time of the March on Washington. But the exhibition, as I said, was just—this was a small storefront gallery in the west part of New York, west in terms of—now I'm thinking about the downtown New York.

Cooks:

Was it on Canal Street?

02-00:14:07

Mayhew: Yeah. No.

Cooks: It wasn't on Canal Street?

02-00:14:09

Mayhew: No, it was in [the] West Village.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:14:12

Mayhew: West Greenwich Village, that's where it was.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:14:15

Mayhew: West Greenwich Village. It's a little storefront there, which we rented as a group because—but before that, we was going to meet in each other's studio[s], and that got a little cumbersome. So we all got together, maybe, and chipped in to rent this storefront in the West Village. That was the beginning of a center for Spiral.

We set up the paintings on the walls there. Actually, we set up the paintings not for an exhibition; it's to see each other's paintings, because nobody knew each other. A lot of the elders didn't know the youngsters, so this was where we got a chance to see all the work. Strangely enough, all the paintings were abstract, of all the groups. They tried to find out, Well, where's the Afro-American symbolism here, in terms of—but you have to realize, all of the elders there, such as Hale Woodruff, did giant murals for years—it was very figurative—about African American history. Many of the others always did figure work, but at this point they were involved—they said, "What is abstraction of African American?" It's involved with expressing the unique sensitivity of the culture and work, and how much that's involved with painting a figure. It's involved with the expression of color and form. It's like in music. How do you express African American in music? Someone says, "Well, where's the figures here?" I said, "Where is the African American image in music? What is the African American [image] in writing? What is African American in theater? What does it look like?" In the theater sometimes, sort of you see them; but also in music, what's—who are they? So this is the justification. Or maybe not justification, but clarification of why they was doing abstraction. It's involved with a certain feeling of the sensibility of that person and that culture.

Cooks: Did you see your work as really fitting in with what the other artists were showing?

02-00:16:28

Mayhew: Well, you have to realize, in the middle sixties, the exhibition I had later on was part of the work that came out of the association with them, which my

work was very abstract. But it was involved with nature at the same time. It's a combination of simplicity of the natural phenomenon of the mood of nature.

Cooks: So maybe now would be a good time to look at some images that you've collected of different people.

02-00:17:04

Mayhew: Well, how much of my images are on there?

Cooks: Yeah, we have your images, too. Of course, you were part of this group.

02-00:17:13

Mayhew: [laughs] Good, because what happened in the course of that, my painting was too late to get to the publication of the catalogue.

Cooks: I know. Then you painted over your painting.

02-00:17:25

Mayhew: Well, later on.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:17:27

Mayhew: Later on, I painted over it. It was a bush, *Morning Bush*, just a black bush.

Cooks: Right.

02-00:17:33

Mayhew: And there was a white background or a gray foreground at that time. But I painted over it and painted it green, and I put more color into the painting, which is now in the Whitney Museum.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:17:49

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Well, let's go through these people that you know very well, who were part of Spiral.

02-00:17:53

Mayhew: Well, each of these artists became very close friends. Not only friends, but in terms of creative consciousness, each one had a unique kind of sensibility. Later on, you have to realize, see, out of this think tank, each one is influenced and spread their wings in different directions. I became an interdisciplinarian, and each of these artists had their own kind of sense of direction. You have to realize, many of the younger artists here—you can go on and think about these artists individually—but later on, all these artists became teachers at universities. Because in 1960 was the first time that artists were accepted in the universities. Before, it was art education and art history, but no studio

areas in the universities. That's including photography, as well. But all of these—well, we can get to that later; I can talk about them individually when we do that—they all became professors at universities.

Cooks: Well, let's start with Charles Alston.

02-00:19:09

Mayhew: Well, Charles Alston was one of the very important persons up there. He's the one that had the special school in Harlem. Many of these artists studied with Charles Alston's school in Harlem.

Cooks: So was this part of the WPA?

02-00:19:27

Mayhew: No.

Cooks: No? Which school was this?

02-00:19:29

Mayhew: It was self-producing financially. Then later on, I think he got outside funding.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:19:40

Mayhew: But Jacob Lawrence and several others studied with Charles Alston. Well, it wasn't just Charles Alston, because Charles Alston had other—I forget. There's several women that were there in Harlem at that time, which was part of it.

Cooks: Was Augusta Savage part of that?

02-00:20:03

Mayhew: Augusta Savage.

Cooks: Okay. She was an important part of that moment in the thirties.

02-00:20:05

Mayhew: Augusta Savage. She was part of that early beginnings there, teaching.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:20:10

Mayhew: So there was a whole development there. What they were teaching is involved with this unique, internalized creative expression, which comes out of their culture. Because this was questioned: what's that?

[refers to slides] This is actually showing Charles Alston's work. If you see these slides, these are an example of several different directions that he was painting in. He was very clever and very unique, and each one he didn't {inaudible}, in terms of going from one direction to the other. There's a whole

series of paintings, each painting you see here, that he did, which was excellent. He never got the credibility he was due. So I feel very sad about that, because he was an excellent artist and a fantastic teacher. Later on, most of his later life he was teaching in New York City, university of City College [of New York]. He was one of the top professors there.

Cooks: Now, this painting here—

02-00:21:28

Mayhew: Is a figurative painting, [*Walking*, 1958]. You can see that as itself, but if you look at it, it's like a collage of different patterns of abstract space, which is very well done. There're verticals patterns there you can see, in terms of the movement of the design. He is very controlled over composition and design and color.

Cooks: Was this the one that was in the Spiral exhibition?

02-00:21:56

Mayhew: No.

Cooks: Okay.

Tewes: Do we know the name?

02-00:21:58

Mayhew: Most of the ones at Spiral, yeah, right.

Cooks: I'm not sure; do you remember the name of this painting?

02-00:22:06

Mayhew: No, I don't.

Tewes: We can find out.

02-00:22:07

Mayhew: Okay.

Cooks: This is also Charles Alston, this person at the piano?

02-00:22:11

Mayhew: Right, right.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:22:17

Mayhew: Now, Romare Bearden, he was like the teddy bear of the group, in terms of solid and committed to the organization being more knitted together as a harmonious kind of relationship of unity of ideas and concept. Romare Bearden was very good that way. He was kind of knitting everybody together. So he's like a happy teddy bear.

Cooks: Emma Amos has told a story about Romare Bearden coming to a Spiral meeting with all of these different pieces of [magazines and pictures for the group to make a body of work together].

02-00:23:03

Mayhew: Well, that's later on.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:23:05

Mayhew: Yeah. Because Romare Bearden in the beginning, he's—that's what I'm talking about, knitting everything together. He said, "We should be more cohesive about what we do. Because everybody—" we hung our paintings and when we looked at it, there were all different directions; they were all abstract, but the styles all looked different. So he said, "Why don't we make a big collage together where everybody would do their thing on this one collage?"

Cooks: What happened to that idea?

02-00:23:36

Mayhew: Well, he set up on the floor and said, "How about we do this?" And everybody had their own feelings about, Mm, no, Romy. I wanted to help, I wanted to support him, so I got on there and tried to cut out some papers and glue things the way he was doing it. I said, "Romy, this is not my thing." Then actually, he really insisted on doing it. So his collages became very important, because Reginald Gammon was a graphic designer and showed him how to do pasteups.

Cooks: Wow. Okay.

02-00:24:17

Mayhew: So the first pasteups that they did, Reginald Gammon helped him do that. That was part of the Xerox copies cut up in pieces and glued together.

Cooks: Did that come out of a Spiral meeting, did they meet there?

02-00:24:33

Mayhew: That was one of the first—

Cooks: Wow.

02-00:24:34

Mayhew: —paintings of Romare Bearden. He insisted on pursuing this, because he showed it to his gallery at the time and the gallery said, "Wow, what are you doing? What is this?" So he encouraged him to go along with it. But these are no more [than] about eight by ten inches.

Cooks: Right.

02-00:24:58

Mayhew:

Very small works in the beginning. Then he got more into it, so they became larger and more involved, with a combination of paint and pasteup magazine cutups, and also different cutouts from material. He put all this together. It was fantastic. Reginald Gammon had done this, but with pasteups—not pasteups, but gluing pasteup over canvas. So there was that kind of a rapport between Romare Bearden and Reginald Gammon, which gets lost in history. Before Romare Bearden died, he says, "Oh, there's somebody that helped me do a little bit of this," and he mentioned Reginald Gammon. [laughs] So they're together finally! It was kind of a joke at one time, but there was a serious concern about that at one point. Well, anyway.

Cooks:

Here's some more.

02-00:26:02

Mayhew:

So that was part of the unification of the—because Romare Bearden's work was very abstract. Very beautiful, very sensitive, and very strong. But there again, it was a good example of the sensibility of African American culture that he wanted to project in his work. So all the collages that came after that, it started a movement, actually. A lot of artists got involved with it, in terms of what was going in Europe, in terms of that kind of sensitivity [that] was taking place in the development in the arts in Europe and France at the time. It had some similar of collage.

Cooks:

Are there any artists that you remember that you might have in mind who were in France who were also doing this kind of work?

02-00:27:04

Mayhew:

Well, the prominent artists there at the time, maybe you could say, they were two very prominent artists that everybody knows.

Cooks:

At the same time in the sixties, or earlier?

02-00:27:19

Mayhew:

Earlier. No, because they were painting in that direction.

Cooks:

Well, I think of [Georges] Braque. Is that one of them?

02-00:27:24

Mayhew:

Braque. Yes, Braque was a good example of it, yeah.

Cooks:

And [Pablo] Picasso.

02-00:27:29

Mayhew:

Yeah.

Cooks:

Hannah Höch?

02-00:27:30

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:27:31

Mayhew: They were part of that kind of movement you find then, what Romare Bearden was doing; you'll find some of the collage effect of that kind of design space.

Cooks: And he knew so much about art history. He, of course, knew about their work.

02-00:27:51

Mayhew: Well, Romare Bearden did a design book with Carl Holty.

Cooks: Yes.

02-00:27:57

Mayhew: Some of these ideas that was going out of Europe that he was involved in analyzing going back to the Renaissance period, of how they constructed space and design and color—which was very good for me, because I was involved with that when I went to Florence, Italy. I was looking at the Italian Renaissance paintings and the composition, how they did [it]. But that's later on, because when I got involved with color—because color was involved with basic two-dimensional design, in terms of shapes. I was learning that.

This is what happened with the collage that Romare Bearden was doing. He was using this kind of design space, which was in his book with Carl Holty.

Cooks: [refers to slides] Some later work: jazz musicians.

02-00:28:52

Mayhew: Yeah. There was a kind of freeform, and he was responding to music on this one here, and the feeling of the space. Each one, you find, it was part of also what was going in Europe, in terms of not collage, but intersecting structural space.

Now, Felrath Hines is the one I said that he brought me to Spiral. I didn't yet know who this man was. I didn't realize that he was one of the original organizers of Spiral. He gets lost in the shuffle now; we think it was Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff. It was Felrath Hines, one of the organizers. Felrath Hines is actually one of the most famous conservators in the country. He became the head of the conservative development at the center in—

Cooks: Was it in New York?

02-00:30:07

Mayhew: No.

Cooks: Boston?

02-00:30:09
Mayhew:

In Washington.

Cooks:

Oh, in Washington. As part of the Smithsonian?

02-00:30:13
Mayhew:

The Smithsonian. He became the head conservator of the Smithsonian.

Cooks:

Wow. How did you meet him?

02-00:30:22
Mayhew:

I told you, he met me. I told you in the beginning. He brought me to Spiral.

Cooks:

Did he come to one of your exhibitions?

02-00:30:30
Mayhew:

No, he and I were in an exhibition in the Bronx. He saw my work and he didn't see any other Afro-American in the show, and he says, "Who are you?" And I asked, "Who are you?" Then we met and he brought me to Spiral.

Cooks:

Okay. I remember.

02-00:30:48
Mayhew:

That's where it began.

Cooks:

I remember now.

02-00:30:50
Mayhew:

How I met him, he took me to his studio. Almost the size of this room, there was this large painting there of—because there was a fire in the Museum of Modern Art, and Monet's paintings were affected with smoke covering. He hid his large painting in his studio. He was taking the smoke covering off the top of Monet's painting.

Cooks:

That's fantastic.

02-00:31:26
Mayhew:

That's where I got to know Felrath Hines. I think he certainly brought me to Spiral. Then so later on, he left New York City. You don't have much connection with him being part of the debating group in New York because he went to Washington to become a conservator at the Smithsonian. First he was the conservator for the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian. Then he became the head of the conservators [at] the Hirshhorn Collection in Washington, became the head conservator. I stayed very close in contact with him constantly. I used to go back and forth to Washington to talk to him. He never talked in terms of any frivolous conversation; it was always very sensitive and profound. It gave me another sense of communication and understanding. We became very close friends. He would take me to the studio there, and he was showing me how some of the early paintings there, of the

function of some of the artists. They put so much oil in their painting—and this is like seventy, eighty years later—it's still wet. The oil did not dry whatsoever.

Cooks: That's incredible.

02-00:33:06

Mayhew: Yeah. Then he was showing me how he can take a painting right off the canvas. Separate a painting and put another canvas on, how that can be done. The others, he just backed it with another canvas, and how that's done. Oh, so it was fascinating, just to go to his studio there to see how he worked.

Then I went to his own studio when he was doing paintings. No dust, no dust in that room. I said, "How do you do this?" So I went for fun, I put my hand smooth over the tables; there wasn't dust on there. [laughs] And he laughed. He had a way of keeping dust off of things. I don't know if it was a blower or something, but anyway.

Cooks: Well, his work was very different.

02-00:34:00

Mayhew: He was so sensitive. But I had discussions in New York with Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff and Noman Lewis about the creative consciousness of society. And it's not just about Afro-African sensibility; it was about the consciousness of creative thinking, which is universal. That was very stimulating. Now, so that's why I said that there was no frivolous conversation when I used to meet with Felrath Hines. He kept me on track to [not] getting involved with dumb, nonsense stuff, because he would never talk about it. I enjoyed the exchange with him because he was always very stimulating and profound for me. It got me on a track of thinking that way and functioning like that.

Cooks: Did you talk about his paintings with him? Because he seems—

02-00:34:59

Mayhew: He talked about his paintings. He was involved with an optical phenomenon of two-dimensional illusion. If you stare at that for a while, it'll move. It advances on the eye and retreats, based on color and shape or edge. It had to do with the eye and how the eye focused on something. As a result, it starts movement. He would really get heavy into that whole idea. Not only with the shapes, but with color. So if you study a painting for a while, it just moves in and out, back and forth, and slides across each other. I didn't realize that until I went and stared at his paintings sometimes in his studio. You have to realize, I was doing a lecture in Washington at one time, and I'm talking about Felrath Hines, about what a great conservator he was and what he was doing in conservation and so forth. So after my talk was over, he came up to me, he says, "I'm an artist, not a conservator." [laughs] He said, "People aren't going to know that I'm an artist, not just a conservator."

Cooks: Wow.

02-00:36:24

Mayhew: So that was very good, to hear him respond to that.

Cooks: Right.

02-00:36:28

Mayhew: When he died—I'm going to jump into that—his wife gave all his paintings away, because no one would buy them. No one bought them. So his wife gave all the paintings to various museums around the country, and they were pleased to get them.

Cooks: Sure.

02-00:36:49

Mayhew: She's still alive. She's in Boston. I talk to her on the phone once in a while. Oh, I just remembered, she promised that we were going to trade, so—

Cooks: Oh, call her. [refers to slides] Okay, now here is the next artist. You've mentioned him.

02-00:37:08

Mayhew: Norman Lewis became a very close friend. A very warm, sensitive man. At the same time, he'd cuss you out and then hug you. Bill Hudson went to visit Norman Lewis, knocked on his door, and Norman Lewis opened the door and said, "Who the hell are you?" And he slammed the door. Bill Hudson walked away. Then after he walked away, Norman opened the door and he had gone. He does that. He'll reject you first, but then hug you. But Bill Hudson never met him because of that.

Cooks: Oh, that's terrible.

02-00:37:51

Mayhew: Yeah. Bill Hudson tells a story right now about that.

Cooks: Well, what did Norman Lewis think about all of these artists getting together?

02-00:38:00

Mayhew: Norman Lewis was an excellent teacher in Harlem. In his last years, he became a teacher at the Art Students League. I left the Art Students League to teach at Hunter [College], and they didn't want me to teach at both places at the same time. They asked, would I either give up Hunter or give up the Art Students League, so I gave up the Art Students League. They asked me at the Art Students League, "Who would you recommend?" I said, "Norman Lewis. He's one of the great teachers." They knew about that, because he's very abrupt and abrasive at times, and he was thinking about that. "Well, he's not easy to get along with." I said, "No, he's one of the most sensitive persons you could ever meet." So they took him. He taught at the Art Students League

until he died. I was at Penn State, so I never knew what was happening with him. But right after he was there for the first time, I went to visit the class. Because at the Art Students League, you have a monitor, other than a teacher, to take care of the roll and whatever the students might need. But also, you have to remember that at the Art Students League, you don't have somebody that registers for your class for the whole year; it's for each month. If you have a following that registered for you for all that time, that's great. You have to realize that when I left there, I told my monitor, I said, "This is a great teacher. You're going to have to register for his class." I came back after a couple months. After a month, I come out and I talked to her, "How is he, how's he doing?" She says, "He taught what you never taught. He gets inside your head. You were involved with lecturing and demonstrations, but he works on you individually." I said, "Oh, that sounds fantastic." That's when she said it. She said, "He'll cuss you out and hug you."

Cooks: Did you and Norman Lewis have similar ideas about making art?

02-00:40:27

Mayhew: He was involved with the inner world of creative consciousness, and that's what I got from him. He could be very abrupt about it. But then I got used to him and I knew that this is a very soft, sensitive man, really involved with the dedication of creative painting or creative art. He thought of the art as like a human being living right there with you. [refers to slides] It's like the painting right now, in terms of progression, I think.

Cooks: Yeah, this is one of the *Procession* paintings, black and white.

02-00:41:05

Mayhew: Yeah. It was the progression of people moving, and of sensitivity.

Cooks: Was this the painting that was in the Spiral exhibition?

02-00:41:15

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:41:16

Mayhew: It's involved with such special sensitivity. Well, if you look at the design patterns of it, also. Because several paintings after that, he was taking that on. When he died, all these paintings were in his studio, and he couldn't sell them. He was in one of the prominent galleries in New York, which was the mythic [place for] artists; some of the great artists were in that gallery with him. But people would come there, they never showed his work; they would show other work. He did it on purpose; he sent a friend over there, in terms of buying, which is a white collector, in terms of looking at some of the work. They showed all the other work, but they didn't show Norman's. Now, this is Norman's friend. So after that, Norman took all his work out of the gallery.

Cooks: Now, why do you think they didn't show his work?

02-00:42:14

Mayhew: It was discrimination. Because what happened, one of Norman's paintings sold, and this collector said, "Ooh, I'd like to meet the artist." Met the artist, she cancelled the sale. That was part of the idea of this gallery then responding to this. He took all the paintings back and put them in his studio. So when he died, a lot of these paintings were in his studio. He couldn't sell them for \$2- or \$3,000. Now they're \$450,000.

Cooks: Right. Do you remember the name of that gallery, which gallery that was?

02-00:42:51

Mayhew: Oh yeah, but I can't at the moment.

Cooks: Okay. That's okay. [refers to slides] Here's some more of his work that we're looking at.

02-00:42:58

Mayhew: Yeah. So each of these paintings you find that that's what he taught me, and I was learning, in terms of—he'd say, "You're not just painting, you're living the painting. That becomes part of your inner soul, that painting." So I have learned to [think] you're inside the painting out, not the outside painting in.

Cooks: Is that something you feel about your own work?

02-00:43:23

Mayhew: Yes. It didn't automatic[ally] intellectually do this. I found myself doing that as part of it, being inside the painting instead of outside of it. He said, "If you really want to be really involved with the sensitivity of the uniqueness of it, you have to be inside your art piece." So all of his paintings are like that. Like this one. In terms of music, it's a very rhythmic, continuous sound. Not that one, but one like that, he was saying, "You can hear the melody. Listen, it continues." [sings] I said, "Wow."

Cooks: This is the one with the kind of parentheses shapes.

02-00:44:16

Mayhew: So each of these elders I learned so much from. Romare Bearden had his own thing; Norman Lewis, there was this kind of insight of personal sensibility, which was very unique, and is the inner world of creative thinking. So how much you're living a painting. You're living a painting. Right. These are music paintings from him. Music notes.

Cooks: It looks like the sky and all of these colors, yeah.

02-00:44:52

Mayhew: But it's continuous music. [sings] All right? [laughs]

Cooks: Some water for your performance? [offers water] Now, you've mentioned William Majors before.

02-00:45:15

Mayhew: Bill Majors I met at the Pensione Bertolini in Florence, Italy.

Cooks: Right. And you met him because your son found him. It's a wonderful story.

02-00:45:27

Mayhew: Yes. Yeah, my son ran into him in the lobby. He picked him up.

Cooks: So now, his work looks very different from—

02-00:45:37

Mayhew: His work is excellent. When I saw him in Florence and what he was doing, he was [drawing] the ripples in the Arno River. Drawing, he was drawing the ripples. He was a graphic designer, which on the weekends, he would have the Spiral group come there, he would show them how to do printmaking. He came out of Indiana University in the areas around the university. So he became a master printmaker. He did this one on the basis of collage print form or printmaking, to show Romare Bearden that kind of sensitivity. Or how edges and shapes define a certain feeling of space. Each of his works is {an oil painting}. I don't know if there's any oil paintings here because he was a fantastic painter, also. Well, all of his graphic designs were just amazing. Unbelievable. Bill, I felt very sad about him. He'd had an early disease problem that he got rid of, but later on it killed him. He was one of the first ones of the group that died. He died very young. When Spiral all split up, he went to teach at the University of New Hampshire. His wife up there. That's what I'm saying, because we separated, so I didn't get to see him and be able to communicate closely with him in the later years because of that; he left the area and went to teach at University of New Hampshire.

Cooks: Now, did he have a gallery in New York?

02-00:47:49

Mayhew: None of the galleries there represented his work, that I remember.

Cooks: I see.

02-00:47:53

Mayhew: And he really deserved it. So that had to do with many of the Spiral artists didn't have gallery representation. This is why we were picketing, in terms of that. I had gallery representation because, as I said, the first exhibition I had, the gallery picked me up because of the article of *New York Times*.

Cooks: John Canaday.

02-00:48:18

Mayhew:

John Canaday wrote that article and a gallery jumped on the bandwagon, in terms of representing me. But the other artists didn't have any experience like that. Many of these younger artists never had—they had little galleries here and there, but no major gallery that made a difference.

Cooks:

And no reviews in the *New York Times*.

02-00:48:40

Mayhew:

Right, right. But his paintings are not on here, so—he was an excellent painter. He died. His wife had all his work. His wife is still alive. She lives in the Bronx, I think, in New York.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-00:48:59

Mayhew:

There's still contact with her once in a while, right? She has all his work.

Tewes:

Who's that again?

Cooks:

Bill Majors, William Majors.

Tewes:

Thank you.

Cooks:

So did he die young?

02-00:49:15

Mayhew:

He died young.

Cooks:

Yeah. But his wife is still alive, so—

02-00:49:19

Mayhew:

Yes.

Cooks:

—that would be an important person to contact. [refers to slides] Now, here's someone who I don't think is well-known.

02-00:49:25

Mayhew:

Here's someone no one knows anything about at all, Yeargans.

Cooks:

This is James Yeargans.

02-00:49:30

Mayhew:

His son has all his work now. His son, the last I heard, was a teacher in Canada, the main school in Canada, and has all his work.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-00:49:42

Mayhew:

So I was trying to get in touch with Yeargans because of that.

Cooks: Now, how did he get involved with Spiral?

02-00:49:49

Mayhew: Yeargans was part of the elder group when I came there. They had him as part of their gallery thing. He wasn't really an elder; he was younger than any of the artists there. But he was a good friend of Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff—not Hale Woodruff, Charles Alston.

So this was his work. Now, this was really based on figurative movement in the streets of New York. Just a pattern of movement of figures, and that's what he did. No one paid any attention to him. I stared at one of them and I said, "Great." Because you squint at the crowd as it goes by in rush hour, that's it. And he said that. That's it. He said, "Take a good look at New York. Look in the subway. Go to Penn Station and look down at the crowd and see what you see." Excellent. So I said, "Wow, wonderful," what he was doing. That was what he was doing: he was painting movements in a crowded space. Wonderful paintings. But again, no one ever—he tried to do some collage work with Romare Bearden at this time, right?

Cooks: Did this come out of Spiral then, his engagement with Romare Bearden?

02-00:51:05

Mayhew: Yes.

Cooks: Wow.

02-00:51:08

Mayhew: But also, he died of a heart attack. He was another one that died young out of that group. Hale Woodruff was one of my mentors. He was a real special, special man. He's the one that made giant murals, which are travelling around the country right now. I understand there's still a travelling exhibition.

Cooks: Yes, yes.

02-00:51:33

Mayhew: They're very large murals. In fact, recently I saw a print with Hale Woodruff, and Charles Alston was working on it with him.

Cooks: Oh really? On a print?

02-00:51:47

Mayhew: Yeah. No, on a painting.

Cooks: Oh okay, on a painting.

02-00:51:52

Mayhew: On a painting. Because he did the history of African American culture, slavery and so forth.

Cooks: Right.

02-00:52:00

Mayhew: Beautiful paintings.

Cooks: So he worked with many artists, then. He worked with many artists as a mentor and—did people apprentice with him?

02-00:52:08

Mayhew: Well, no, he was teaching. He was an art educator. He taught art education at NYU. That was it.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:52:17

Mayhew: He and I would sit down for hours and just talk about creative existence. He's the one who told me about, said, "You need to pull between a curtain between your classroom and your studio. Otherwise you get caught up in—" he says, "Because teaching is a creative process in itself. So you have to learn how you use that. You can be very inventive and sensitive as a teacher, or you can be just a teacher."

Cooks: And he came from Atlanta?

02-00:52:54

Mayhew: Yeah. Well, Indiana.

Cooks: Oh, he came from Indiana?

02-00:52:59

Mayhew: Mm-hmm. [He painted the large paintings in Atlanta.]

Cooks: Okay. [refers to slides] Here's some of his work. So he had figurative work with the murals that you mentioned.

02-00:53:06

Mayhew: Well actually, Hale Woodruff went back and forth to Africa, which he picked up an amoeba over there and that's what killed him and he died. It became cancerous. He died of stomach cancer. So maybe that should be cut out.

Cooks: Well but, he did so much before that happened.

02-00:53:33

Mayhew: He did abstractions of cuttings of sculpture from Africa. These are cuttings from African wood sculptures. It's part of his two-dimensional designs. Beautiful. Very effective.

Cooks: And wholly abstract work.

02-00:53:50

Mayhew:

And very free forms, yes. He was a fantastic teacher and artist. Very sensitive. I enjoyed talking to him because, again, there was another mindset. Each of these had their thing. Romare Bearden, when you talked to him, he had an understanding of a uniqueness of thinking. Hale Woodruff was very profound, very intellectual about it, right? Norman Lewis was very emotional, internal-thinking, feeling. There's different sensitivities that are involved. And then Felrath Hines was a master of preciseness and consistency. Wow. That was a whole other world for me. So I used to back and forth. I used to take a train to Washington just to spend time with him.

Cooks:

Then Hale Woodruff brought in Emma Amos, who you mentioned.

02-00:54:54

Mayhew:

Emma Amos, as I said, she wasn't part of that debating group at all.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-00:55:00

Mayhew:

Somebody said, "No women were involved with this in the thing." There was Betty Blayton and Vivian Browne became involved with the debating group. But not Emma Amos; [she] never got involved with the debating group.

Cooks:

But she was part of the exhibition.

02-00:55:16

Mayhew:

She was part of the exhibition, which was very good.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-00:55:20

Mayhew:

In her work, she was involved with the lost teenage world or the youth world in America. So those paintings weren't just a scattered figure painting; it was based on the youth of America being lost in space. I said, "Oh really?" Some of the paintings were based on the sensitivity, in terms of women not being respected, and also the youth, and don't have any grounding. I said, "What's going on?" So she kind of explained to me. She said, "Shush, shush, shush," about it.

Cooks:

So she didn't want to everyone to know? Okay.

02-00:56:08

Mayhew:

Didn't necessarily want that whole thing to be out there, but that's what she was painting. I respected that.

Cooks:

Did you think she wanted people to have their own interpretations?

02-00:56:17

Mayhew:

Oh, of course. Like all artists do.

Cooks: Yeah, right.

02-00:56:20

Mayhew: Because they look at my paintings, Oh, that's a nice landscape. [laughs]

Cooks: More than that.

02-00:56:27

Mayhew: [refers to slides] Now, Reggie Gammon and I—he was one of the first artists in New York that became a good friend. I met him one time and he was questioning about, "What do you do about art," and so forth like that. He had a whole group of artists that we used to hang out with in Greenwich [Village], and he was another Greenwich Village artist. Everybody knew Reginald Gammon. He knew the places where to eat and the places to go. He used to hang out in the bars and so forth. So Reggie Gammon and I became good buddies.

Cooks: Did you hang out at Cedar Bar [Cedar Street Tavern]?

02-00:57:11

Mayhew: He did not hang out, but I used to hang out at the Cedar Bar, so I got to know all the abstract expressionists before they became famous.

Cooks: Okay.

02-00:57:22

Mayhew: Yeah, there was Franz Kline. I was in the Cedar Bar and I came there to have a drink, right? I went to the restroom and I left my jacket on the chair. I came back and I picked up my drink. It was a horrible drink and I started laughing. So the bartender laughed. And sitting next to me was Franz Kline. He had switched drinks with him because he watered down this drink because he had heart problems, so they used to water down his drinks. [laughs] He had switched drinks with me.

Cooks: That's very funny.

02-00:58:02

Mayhew: So that's when I met Franz Kline. The bartender says, "Meet Franz Kline." [Willem] De Kooning and [Robert] Motherwell and all of them, they used to hang out there all the time, so I got to know them. Now, Motherwell and Kline were house painters, partners who painted the apartment[s]. Need a job, right?

Cooks: Did you talk to them about painting, or you just talked about whatever you wanted to?

02-00:58:29

Mayhew: Well, I didn't really get into the mix. He was just another person in the bar. I didn't know who they were in the beginning. Later on I found out these are the local artists. We were all kind of local artists, if you thought that way. But

later on, I used to go there, there was Clem [Clement] Greenberg and [Harold] Rosenberg, which were two top writers. I was there when they said it. They said, "No, you couldn't [be an artist]." I said, "Yes, I was." They said, "We're going to *make you* artists." The written word, right?

Cooks: So how did they make you an artist?

02-00:59:04

Mayhew: What they wrote about not me, but the abstract expressionists.

Cooks: I see.

02-00:59:10

Mayhew: Abstract expressionists. They wrote about them.

Cooks: So Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg—

02-00:59:15

Mayhew: That's purely by the written word, they made the local artists by how much—what they were doing and what they were thinking, and about—The Cedar Bar became famous about that. These writers did that. These artists became famous because of that, okay?

Cooks: What did you think about abstract expressionist art?

02-00:59:37

Mayhew: Abstract expressionism, because that's what—all of Spiral was abstract.

Cooks: Yes.

02-00:59:41

Mayhew: Completely abstract, all the artists in it. Reggie Gammon was more representational than the rest of them. He started using images like this. [refers to slides] This is the famous image. One of his photographs is very famous because he photographed the front of the Metropolitan Museum. In his developing the film, this image of—

Cooks: Jack Johnson.

02-01:00:11

Mayhew: Yeah. Was over the front of the Metropolitan Museum. It happened to end up in a print over the front of it, became famous.

Cooks: Was that an accident?

02-01:00:26

Mayhew: Yeah, an accident.

Cooks: It's a very famous picture. That's fantastic.

02-01:00:27

Mayhew:

Yeah, yeah. [laughs] He laughed about it. He says, "No. Now this will become more important than my paintings." So he was very creative. But his design space was good. He was an excellent figure painter. [refers to slides] This is the collage I was talking about he did with the canvas over it all.

Cooks:

Okay. This is the one of the woman with the hat.

02-01:00:53

Mayhew:

Right, right. But what this is, this is a collage, actually, of canvas over a painting, which he was showing Romare Bearden about with the pasteup, but he did it with canvas. All his paintings were very good. There was a group painting—I think it might show—which was in the—well, that's the group painting. That was in the exhibition.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:01:24

Mayhew:

But the other was Amiri Baraka. At that time, that was LeRoi Jones. He titled it *LeRoi Jones*, not Amiri Baraka, at the time, okay? So Reginald Gammon always challenged the elders, in terms of—he and Bill Majors challenged. Actually, there would be conflict between Hale Woodruff and Bill Majors. Hale Woodruff said, "Where do you come from?" He said, "Indiana." He says, "What?" [laughs] And so that's when they started to refocus.

Cooks:

Because they're both from Indiana.

02-01:02:11

Mayhew:

Yeah, yeah. But before that, they were in conflict about the whole creative process, right?

Cooks:

So was there conflict about people in the group that were interested in abstraction versus figurative art? Or was it about activism?

02-01:02:26

Mayhew:

No, just in terms of commitment and development in the arts and how much they felt the elders were neglecting artists, Afro-Americans being represented.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:02:41

Mayhew:

That's where the challenge really came in. How come we're left out? What are you doing about it? How are you doing it? This is the whole thing about challenging the system at the time, also. But the youths were challenging the elders about: they felt that they were failed in their approach, is why this is happening. That's not actually true, because the system just takes over. They had no control over in challenging how they treated African American artists. That was sort of the system.

[refers to painting on the wall] Oh, Earl Miller.

Cooks: What are you pointing at over there?

02-01:03:25

Mayhew: His painting.

Cooks: This painting. Oh, so you have a painting on the wall that's by Earl. Is that a print?

02-01:03:30

Mayhew: No, it's a painting.

Cooks: It's a painting. So very interested in geometric abstraction?

02-01:03:35

Mayhew: Earl Miller and I became very similar because we were both heavily interested in color and what color did in two-dimensional design. He was heavy. He was the first one to go and leave the group. He went to become a professor at the University of Washington because of his concept of creative consciousness in design space. [refers to painting on the wall] You see that painting over there, my print?

Cooks: Oh, this one? Yes.

02-01:04:08

Mayhew: Look at the colors over here.

Cooks: Oh, of course. They're the same colors.

02-01:04:11

Mayhew: Okay?

Cooks: Were you making them at the same time?

02-01:04:15

Mayhew: No, this is very recent.

Cooks: Oh, it's beautiful.

02-01:04:20

Mayhew: But yes, I was involved with color. So he and I had a development of the rapport because we'd discuss color and illusion of color space and how it affected the eye. Also shapes, using triangles, circles, and squares, right? Then I was doing a lecture on him, about his color. And this woman comes, she says, "I'm his daughter."

Cooks: Oh wow!

02-01:04:48

Mayhew: She's a surgeon.

Cooks: Where were you? When did that happen?

02-01:04:54

Mayhew: In Oakland.

Cooks: That's fantastic.

02-01:04:58

Mayhew: I was in Oakland lecturing about Spiral. When I was talking about him, she came behind me and says, "I'm his daughter."

Cooks: How wonderful.

02-01:05:08

Mayhew: I said, "Oh my God." [laughs] That was shocking. Both of his children became doctors. The other one's a doctor in Arizona, and she's a doctor [in Northern California] She and I have become very close friends, and also with [my wife], Rosemary.

Cooks: We've got to get more information. We need the paintings, we need the papers. We can do something now to make sure they get their due.

02-01:05:37

Mayhew: Yeah, she's a fascinating close friend now. She's Earl Miller's daughter.

Cooks: Do you remember her first name?

02-01:05:45

Mayhew: Oh, Pringl. Pringl.

Cooks: Pringl?

02-01:05:47

Mayhew: Yeah. Pringl Miller.

Cooks: That's fantastic.

02-01:05:51

Mayhew: Dr. Pringl Miller.

Cooks: Is the other doctor in the family a daughter or a son?

Gibbons-Mayhew: Son.

Cooks: Okay.

Gibbons-Mayhew: [Rosemary Mayhew, Richard Mayhew's wife] Hugh.

Cooks: Hugh, okay.

02-01:06:01

Mayhew: The son is a doctor in Arizona.

Cooks: Wow.

02-01:06:07

Mayhew: Yeah. Strange, huh?

Cooks: So was he from New York, or where was he originally from?

02-01:06:12

Mayhew: He was from New York.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:06:14

Mayhew: Right. That's where he and I got together, all about color and the illusion of space, two-dimensional space, how that affects the eye, and what two-dimensional design is all about. It's just basic structural design, the derivation of it and how you're involved with changing it around. But it's basic; it's just shapes and color. How much is involved with different emotions that comes out of that and how it affects the eye. When you look at it, how much you look at it in terms of just the design, but you're being affected by the sensibility of the space.

Cooks: So it looks like he was making collages, or maybe the illusion of collage?

02-01:07:02

Mayhew: Yeah, he was doing this early on. When they came there, what they were doing was nothing new to him. He was very bright and very unique and very sensitive. Even University of Washington hired him right away and gave him a professorship.

Cooks: So I wonder, he must have worked with Jacob Lawrence.

02-01:07:23

Mayhew: [Earl Miller helped get Lawrence the job at the University of Washington.] He was the first one to split from Spiral.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:07:26

Mayhew: Then Reginald Gammon went to Western University Michigan [Western Michigan University]. Bill Majors went to New Hampshire. I'm trying to think—oh well, we'll come to it.

Gibbons-Mayhew: He recruited Jacob Lawrence to come.

Cooks: Earl Miller recruited Jacob Lawrence to teach at University of Washington?

02-01:07:57

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:07:58

Mayhew: University of Washington. He was one of the first ones to leave the group.

Cooks: Okay. Then he went—

02-01:08:03

Mayhew: He got a professorship right away.

Cooks: That's fantastic.

02-01:08:09

Mayhew: Now, Ernie Crichlow was the organizer [of that, but he was not a part of Spiral].

Cooks: We talked about him a bit before, because you were friends and you had that exhibition in the park.

02-01:08:22

Mayhew: That's right. He organized it. He says, "Come on, put your painting on the fence with me. Come on."

Cooks: Was Jacob Lawrence part of that, also?

02-01:08:30

Mayhew: Jacob Lawrence. And Jacob Lawrence.

Cooks: So it was the three of you?

02-01:08:34

Mayhew: Well yeah, but Jacob Lawrence and I were both teaching at Pratt [Institute] together before Jacob Lawrence went to University of Washington. And Earl Miller's the one that got Jacob Lawrence to come to University of Washington.

Cooks: Right.

02-01:08:47

Mayhew: But they had become friends. I don't know what that all about anyway. [laughs]

Cooks: Okay. But Ernie was an important friend for you?

02-01:08:56

Mayhew:

Oh yes, he was good. Fantastic illustrator and figurative painter. He was always involved with painting the people on the street or ordinary activity of African American sensibility. He's like many of the artists; they never got their due. Like with Norman Lewis, that's why I organized a group to go to Philadelphia. Because when he died, his paintings, no one cared about them. So I organized and that whole group went to Washington; I had all the others come there for a memorial for Norman Lewis.

At Ernie Crichlow's memorial, I sang.

Cooks:

Do you remember what you sang?

02-01:09:51

Mayhew:

"So Long." [laughs]

Cooks:

Is this the kind of work that he showed on the fence in Brooklyn? He painted pictures of people in the community, and then you showed those pictures back on the fence?

02-01:10:05

Mayhew:

Also Jacob Lawrence's things on the fence. I was a figurative painter, too, at that time. I had a figurative painting on the fence, also, with all of them.

Cooks:

What kind of figurative painting did you have on the fence?

02-01:10:19

Mayhew:

Oh. Well, just a group of women together, shopping.

Cooks:

Okay, so paintings of everyday life.

02-01:10:27

Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

Those are paintings we don't really know of your work, and you don't know where they are.

02-01:10:30

Mayhew:

Well, they're out there somewhere. [laughs]

Cooks:

Okay. We're going to look for them.

02-01:10:35

Mayhew:

Because recently, a woman came and showed me a work where I had a woman that was sitting on the porch holding a baby that I did a long time ago.

Oh, he was very good, in terms of his feelings of what was going [on], and slavery there, right? He was an excellent illustrator, so he made a good living financially.

Cooks: Did he illustrate for books or album covers?

02-01:11:05

Mayhew: Yeah. Magazines, magazines.

Cooks: Magazines, okay.

02-01:11:08

Mayhew: Magazines. But also his paintings, look at that. Excellent. Very sensitive paintings of community figures.

Cooks: [refers to slides] Here's someone else that is not very well-known, Merton Simpson.

02-01:11:22

Mayhew: Mert Simpson—

Cooks: How did he get involved?

02-01:11:25

Mayhew: —was financially very well-off.

Cooks: Was he?

02-01:11:29

Mayhew: Yes.

Cooks: Because of his paintings or before?

02-01:11:31

Mayhew: No. He was a collector and he had a gallery on Madison Avenue, selling African sculpture. He would go to Europe and find African sculpture over there, which they didn't know much about, and buy it and bring it here and sell it at the price he felt it deserved.

Cooks: That's incredible.

02-01:11:53

Mayhew: So he became an expert. Actually, he became an expert on African sculpture for the Smithsonian. Because what happened, after ceremonies in Africa, after they would finish a ceremony, they used to throw the pieces away in the jungle, and the Europeans would go and pick them up and take them home out the woods. He'd go to Europe, and they didn't know the value of them. So he would buy them from the Europeans and sell them for a higher price on Madison Avenue.

Cooks: Now, did you meet him through Spiral, or did you know him—

02-01:12:34

Mayhew: Through Spiral.

Cooks: Through Spiral.

02-01:12:36

Mayhew: Right. Merton was a good painter, also. Excellent painter.

Cooks: Yeah, I wanted to talk with you about his work.

02-01:12:44

Mayhew: [refers to slides] Well, the painting here is the conflict between white and black. What, he said, is strange about it: they become one in the conflict. They become united because of the conflict. So that was his painting, that's what it was about. Well then later on, he started doing canvas collage. He painted canvas and collaged them together. The early work was that meshing of the cultures. He said, "You realize you become one, but the politics keeps us separated, but you really became one." He was kind of unique in that area. So Merton, yeah, so he financially never suffered. But when he died, his estate became completely lost. Who took over? Because there was no heirs or anything like that; his secretary tried to claim it. He always had a French secretary, because he had an apartment in France, and anybody that went there—"Any of us want to go there, you can use it while you're in France, Paris." He used to go back to Paris like you would go back and forth on the subway in New York. So he never, financially, had any problems.

Cooks: I don't think people really understand how diverse Spiral was.

02-01:14:19

Mayhew: Oh, the different diversity of people in it.

Cooks: Yes.

02-01:14:21

Mayhew: Yeah, right.

Cooks: This is really a whole spectrum of talents.

02-01:14:23

Mayhew: So you're getting an idea now how each of these artists are different personalities and sensitivities and development. Merton was very respectful. Also he was a good musician.

Cooks: What did he play?

02-01:14:41

Mayhew: Saxophone.

Cooks: Wow.

02-01:14:43

Mayhew: Actually, he composed a piece with a trio group for Romare Bearden's memoriam.

Cooks: Oh really?

02-01:14:54

Mayhew: He played music, also. Right. Merton was very respectful and sensitive with everybody, so we respected him.

Cooks: He never went into teaching. He had his own business with the gallery.

02-01:15:10

Mayhew: I never knew about him teaching at all. What he did, he taught about the African sculpture. He'd have lectures about that, discussing which pieces are fake and which are real, because a lot of the—that's why he became a consultant to the Smithsonian. There was a lot of pieces of sculpture that were fakes. He went there and he said, "That's not real, this is real," and so forth like that. He sold them. So he sold them, right? Pieces, also.

[refers to slides] Now, Alvin Hollingsworth—

Cooks: This is someone people don't know much about him, I don't think.

02-01:15:55

Mayhew: He painted well, but he painted a lot of different directions, so there was no [defining] who Al Hollingsworth was, which was a problem sometimes. But he was a good painter. He was mainly a teacher, also. He taught at City University [of New York] most of his life.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:16:16

Mayhew: Right. All his paintings are many different directions in painting, so he was very good at adapting to this technique and that. Also, he adapted with what was going [on with] Romare Bearden, in terms of collage. He did it very well. Polyester resins is what he was using. He had stop using them because it caused [him to lose his hair], he was losing some hair in some areas because of what was happening with the reaction—

Cooks: The chemicals.

02-01:16:46

Mayhew: —of the polyester resin.

Cooks: Was this the work that was in the exhibition? This was the one that says "colored" in the background.

02-01:16:56

Mayhew: One was black and white. I forget which one it was now that he had in the exhibition, but it was also involved with polyester resin.

Cooks: Okay.

- 02-01:17:03
Mayhew: Right.
- Cooks: [refers to slides] Now, who is this person?
- 02-01:17:07
Mayhew: I don't know, this is a strange person. I have no identity for this person. Because a photograph; I don't really remember who that was.
- Cooks: This is a very handsome photograph of you.
- 02-01:17:22
Mayhew: Yeah, really.
- Cooks: We had this on the title wall when we did your retrospective.
- 02-01:17:26
Mayhew: Oh really?
- Cooks: Yes, we did. You love this picture.
- 02-01:17:33
Mayhew: Well, my corduroy jacket. [laughs]
- Cooks: You remember the clothing and everything.
- 02-01:17:39
Mayhew: Yeah, right.
- Cooks: [refers to slides] So we have some pictures. We've talked about some of these already, but I'd like us to just talk about them while we are together.
- 02-01:17:54
Mayhew: Oh, these are early paintings. I think that was done in Florence, Italy.
- Cooks: Okay.
- Tewes: What are the names of some of these paintings, as you're going through? Or can you describe them for us?
- 02-01:18:04
Mayhew: Well, these are tonal paintings. I don't know I remember the names of these paintings.
- Cooks: This first painting, I can tell you the name of it is *Interlude*.
- 02-01:18:16
Mayhew: Well, Calvin Douglas is not on here.
- Cooks: Yeah, there are some artists that were in Spiral that aren't on this—

02-01:18:23

Mayhew: Calvin Douglas is the one.

Cooks: Can you tell us about him?

02-01:18:26

Mayhew: Calvin Douglas, I was looking for him for years, because we were close friends, right? He loved my children. He used to come visit me all the time. He didn't have children, so he kind of adopted Ina and Scott. I didn't know how to find him. Then recently, the gallery in Oakland—no, in Sacramento—

Cooks: Is that the Crocker? Crocker Gallery?

02-01:18:51

Mayhew: Yeah. Got in touch with me and said he's still alive in Florida.

Cooks: Let's see. There's a Crocker Art Museum, but there was a small gallery that you had an exhibition at.

02-01:19:06

Mayhew: In Sacramento?

Cooks: Several years ago. Yes, in Sacramento.

02-01:19:09

Mayhew: Yeah. Well, Rosemary, [what was the name of] the gallery in Sacramento?

Gibbons-Mayhew: Evolve.

Cooks: Yes, Evolve the Gallery.

02-01:19:16

Mayhew: Evolve Gallery.

Cooks: Thank you. Absolutely.

02-01:19:19

Mayhew: Yeah, right. That's it. Yeah.

Cooks: Yeah. And so they put you in touch with Calvin Douglas again, and he's in Florida.

02-01:19:26

Mayhew: Well, how they found him, I have no idea. Very strange, no contact.

Gibbons-Mayhew: [His caretaker]—

02-01:19:34

Mayhew: He had a stroke. I was looking for him for years, and he had left the country. He was so devoted to his wife. When his wife died, he just disappeared.

Cooks: Yeah.

02-01:19:43

Mayhew: He went to South America and got lost in the woods over there or something. Then he came back to the country here and he went to an Indian reservation. I don't know if he has Indian relationship, but he went on a reservation. That's what he said to me when I talked to him on the phone. I called and talked to him.

Cooks: Oh, how wonderful.

02-01:20:02

Mayhew: The first thing he says, "How's Ina and Scott?"

Cooks: Aw.

02-01:20:05

Mayhew: He remembered my children. [laughs] So I feel sad, because his paintings are not on there.

Cooks: Yeah, can you tell us about his painting? He's someone else that a lot of people don't know about him.

02-01:20:20

Mayhew: Yeah, he was a good abstractionist, with some representational. No, I remember him because he was—I got him to come to teach with me at Smith College when I was teaching up there. They needed somebody else, so I asked him to come with me and he come up there. He was a very wild guy, but very intellectually profound in many ways. But I remember his apartment. I used to go visit [him at] his apartment. I came in, this hand came out and, boom, hit him. I thought he had a monkey. He had a monkey in his apartment.

Cooks: He had an actual monkey in his apartment?

02-01:21:05

Mayhew: Yeah, because it was a friend of his. "This is my buddy." His buddy. So Calvin had many aspects, let's say, personalities.

Cooks: That's very unexpected.

02-01:21:18

Mayhew: Yeah. He was a good party organizer. He gave great parties. So I remember going to his apartment. His wife was very bright and a great writer. She's the one that edited all Romare Bearden's writings.

Cooks: Okay. Do you remember her name?

02-01:21:45

Mayhew: Oh, no, no.

Cooks: I didn't know that.

02-01:21:49

Mayhew: I had been trying to find him, because he had a stroke down in South Florida, and communication was kind of hard.

Gibbons-Mayhew: Brady and Michelle Blakeley can give you the information.

Cooks: Yes, okay.

Gibbons-Mayhew: In fact, they have some of his slides.

Cooks: Okay. So the couple who owned Evolve the Gallery, which doesn't exist anymore, they can give us that information. We can make it part of this history.

02-01:22:26

Mayhew: Yeah, I was surprised how they got in touch with him, right?

Cooks: Yeah, I don't know how they—

Gibbons-Mayhew: The reason they got in touch with him was for Rick's—

02-01:22:33

Mayhew: So I'd been trying to—

Gibbons-Mayhew: —ninetieth birthday, they did a Spiral—they brought all the Spiral artists in and had a show for his ninetieth birthday.

02-01:22:43

Mayhew: How they found him, I have no idea.

Cooks: So this was about celebrating your ninetieth birthday and getting all the Spiral artists together.

02-01:22:48

Mayhew: Right, right.

Cooks: I'm just looking through the exhibition catalogue from the Spiral show that Emily Hanna put together at the Birmingham Museum of Art to see if there were any other artists that we haven't mentioned.

02-01:23:03

Mayhew: They didn't have all the artists listed here.

Cooks: They didn't have it either.

02-01:23:06

Mayhew: No, not at all. Right.

Cooks: Are there other names that you have in mind, people that were not—

02-01:23:13

Mayhew: Well, he's the only one, he's the only one.

Cooks: Missing, okay.

02-01:23:18

Mayhew: The rest of the {inaudible}.

Cooks: So I wanted to also make sure that we clear something up. We talk sometimes about Spiral having one exhibition.

02-01:23:28

Mayhew: They had three.

Cooks: But they had three. Can you tell us what you remember?

02-01:23:31

Mayhew: Yeah, but New York City exhibitions, certainly the magazines and newspapers never visited. They could care less about what was going on in Spiral. There was no interest there at all. They showed at Long Island University, they set up an exhibition there at Long Island University. Then also with the community center in Queens.

Cooks: I have Temple Emanuel in Yonkers. Is that the community center in Queens? Okay.

02-01:24:05

Mayhew: That's it.

Cooks: I just wanted to confirm that. There's unfortunately no documentation of those other two installations, but it's wonderful—

02-01:24:13

Mayhew: No one cared, so it was never reviewed. There was nothing. I didn't participate in it. I didn't want any part of the exhibition, because I felt that the artists should be in a museum, not in these outlying exhibitions in the hills. Also, Charles Alston agreed with me. He felt they should be in a museum, this group, not out in these little half exhibitions.

Cooks: Right.

02-01:24:37

Mayhew: Because no one came to [them] and it was never reviewed, so [it's] like it never happened.

Cooks: Do you know how those exhibitions happened? Because I was surprised that a Temple in Yonkers was showing the work. Do you remember how—

02-01:24:53

Mayhew:

I didn't participate in it. I was picketing the show. [laughs] Because I felt that this group so honored the elders; I felt they should be in one of the museums, a special exhibition of them.

Cooks:

Right.

02-01:25:14

Mayhew:

They could care less about that group.

Cooks:

That led to more of your activities with museums, trying to get them to recognize African American artists.

02-01:25:25

Mayhew:

Mm-hmm. Well, there was a challenge there, of them, in fact, to make exhibitions of that. We were trying to get the curators of the various museums—you know how that works in a museum: it's how much money can you put up to pay for the exhibition? That's the whole thing. It's all about money, planning the exhibition. You put up enough money, you can have an exhibition.

Cooks:

I wanted to ask you one more thing before we talk about some of these things that you did engaging with museums and organizing a panel.

02-01:26:02

Mayhew:

Also, in terms of what happened to me in terms of coming out of Spiral.

Cooks:

Also, could you tell us why the name Spiral? Where did that name come from?

02-01:26:12

Mayhew:

It came from Hale Woodruff.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:26:15

Mayhew:

Hale Woodruff and Archimedes, a Greek mathematician. Named after him, in terms of Spiral was a center with a no-ending continuation. This is what they thought the Spiral would be. It had the beginning, with no end. So when everybody was scattered to the wind, that was part of the Spiral concept, also, because each one, where they went, took along part of the sensitivity and passed it on. Because Reginald Gammon, I remember talking to Reggie about it. I said, "What about you and Spiral?" He says, "It inspired me to be dedicated and committed." And he passed that on to the students.

Cooks:

So the first exhibition that Spiral had was called *First Group Showing: Works in Black and White*.

02-01:27:09

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks:

Did you or did other people in the group expect there to be many more?

02-01:27:15

Mayhew:

Well, they was thinking about the black and white exhibition, because of what was going on in the society at the time. And why the black and white, that was the only unity of the group, is having everyone do it in black and white. That was the idea. So they thought it was something else; it had to do with what was going on with the racial interrelationship, in terms of black and white. It had nothing to do with that at all. It had [to do with] the fact that this group had no consistency and had this—but in black and white, there was a unity here, right?

Cooks:

Did everyone already have a black and white piece, or was that an assignment for the show?

02-01:27:57

Mayhew:

That was kind of an assignment for the show. But some of them had black and whites already.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:28:01

Mayhew:

But also, what came out of Spiral was the Cinque Gallery.

Cooks:

Yes.

02-01:28:08

Mayhew:

Now, Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis—guess who organized it? Ernie Crichlow.

Cooks:

Oh, Ernie Crichlow did. Okay. Was Felrath Hines a part of that?

02-01:28:20

Mayhew:

That was the three—no, Ernie Crichlow—

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:28:23

Mayhew:

—and Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis set up the Cinque Gallery. That was it. There again, it was Ernie Crichlow, right?

Cooks:

As the organizer.

02-01:28:32

Mayhew:

As an organizer.

Cooks:

Well, maybe we can—

Tewes: Do you want to take a break? Okay, let's do that. [break in audio]

02-01:28:44

Mayhew: So since Spiral was a think tank, now, what came out of it was the whole concept: why and what took place here.

Gibbons-Mayhew: Can you hear the heater?

02-01:29:02

Mayhew: And all these artists went to different places; they took some of the sensitivity along with them.

Cooks: Okay. They went to different schools where they taught?

02-01:29:05

Mayhew: Then they brought part of the sensitivity from Spiral there. Because this is what Ralph Ellison talked about. He says, "How do you digest this? And what happens after? What is the understanding of it?" Because he wrote an essay to his book before he died, which was an evaluation of what he wrote earlier.

Cooks: So Ralph Ellison wrote an introduction to his own book?

02-01:29:36

Mayhew: *Invisible Man*.

Cooks: Oh, right. Okay.

02-01:29:40

Mayhew: He wrote an essay about the evaluation of what he wrote.

Cooks: He wanted Spiral to think about that?

02-01:29:46

Mayhew: No, this isn't about—he was saying how much the Spiral would be involved with an analysis of what happened, also, the same way.

Cooks: I see. So that same method. We have this gathering of people, but then there needs to be some processing and evaluation of it.

02-01:30:0

Mayhew: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Cooks: So what was your evaluation of it?

02-01:30:05

Mayhew: Well, it had to do with, like, all these artists went and started teaching, and they brought the essence of Spiral with them. They no longer were an individual, in terms of their own creative existence; they were part of a body of a creative concept. This is what they took with them. Which each one had their own kind of idea of their experience and what they took, which was very

good, because what they passed onto students—I know the students that came out of Western University that studied with Reggie Gammon became very dedicated. I said, "Well, something went on here." I only met two of them, and two of them sounded that way. They never really mentioned Reginald Gammon, but what they were talking about, I knew that Reggie Gammon [had influenced them].

Cooks: Do you think you have that kind of influence on your students because of Spiral? What did you get out of it?

02-01:31:08

Mayhew: Oh, that's right. I've got to show you a letter I got from one of my students.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:31:12

Mayhew: He now is a professor at Penn State.

Tewes: He was one of your art students at Penn State?

02-01:31:18

Mayhew: He was one of my interdisciplinary students.

Cooks: Aha.

02-01:31:21

Mayhew: He's now a graphic designer, because of this.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:31:27

Mayhew: It was out of that kind of background. I'll have to show you the whole booklet. He wrote me a letter recently.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:31:35

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Well, we'll look at that. What do you think you brought to your students after being a part of Spiral?

02-01:31:43

Mayhew: Listen to what his letter wrote. It was unbelievable. He said that it made his whole life and what he's doing now. He said, "I've been looking for you for years, and all of a sudden I found out where you were and what you were." He wrote me a letter. The fact that he is now a very profound graphic designer because of this, he says it had to come out interdisciplinary thinking, which came out of Spiral. There is a certain foundation of order and consistency, but overlapping all other disciplines in thinking, in creative thinking. That was

part of what came out of Spiral, but it evolved later. Because while I was in Europe, all that unity started to take place over there. When I went to Lindau Bodensee and I heard what the idea of the world organization should be, in terms of government: world government should be a unified sensitivity of togetherness, which would avoid the war of the tribal provincialism that causes wars, the nationalism. So this is part of the sensibility of unity in Spiral, in terms of [the] concept of creative thinking and how that was passed on, which sounds like now. This young man that was getting in touch with me wrote me a letter, the fact that how much he benefitted from my teaching. He says, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you." I said, "Oh, my." I couldn't imagine that.

Cooks: Do you remember him specifically?

02-01:33:37

Mayhew: No.

Cooks: Yeah. Isn't that amazing?

02-01:33:40

Mayhew: He was another student.

Cooks: So you have this impact and you didn't even realize it.

02-01:33:45

Mayhew: No. That's what I'm saying. He says there's certain others that he has talked to, "that came out of your class," he said, "benefitted from your teaching." So you never know, right?

Cooks: You never know.

02-01:33:59

Mayhew: Now he's an excellent graphic designer, and he got the job to teach—I don't know if he's the head of graphic design at Penn State right now, but that's his job. How he ended up back at Penn State, he said how he ended up back there, right?

Cooks: Did you want to say anything more about the other people in Spiral who were not visual artists, the ones that were musicians or involved in the theater? Were there any other names that you remember?

02-01:34:29

Mayhew: Well, I never stayed too close in touch with them, which I should have. They died before I had a chance to really unite.

Cooks: I see.

02-01:34:38
Mayhew: Because one was a composer, which—I can't think of his name at the moment. I did see him later. There was a director of a theater there. Woody King is still around. You know about Woody King?

Cooks: No.

02-01:34:58
Mayhew: He was involved with the theater on the East Side of New York, a community center, and where Ina first did her designs for him in theater. It was a Martin Luther King play.

Cooks: Wow.

02-01:35:16
Mayhew: This was a community center on the East Side of New York. And Woody King is still alive. He's still involved in doing that.

Cooks: He was part of the conversations that Spiral had?

02-01:35:28
Mayhew: No, that kind of person.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:35:31
Mayhew: I never got to know Woody King, even though through Ina, because he was the first one who gave her a job as a set designer.

Cooks: Really?

02-01:35:41
Mayhew: Right, right.

Cooks: It's a small world.

02-01:35:45
Mayhew: That was one of her first plays she did it for, was a Martin Luther King play. So much as a teacher, you have—Spiral has influence of this, right? This is why I want to be able to show how that extended creative sensitivity that came out of Spiral has been spreading on. That was part of the Spiral concept.

Cooks: I see.

02-01:36:18
Mayhew: With a beginning and no end.

Cooks: So it's still going on.

02-01:36:22

Mayhew: Mm-hmm. So this letter from this [student], you have to see it later.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:36:26

Mayhew: You won't believe this letter. I couldn't believe that person, that there's somebody out there that made a difference.

Tewes:

When you were teaching, did you teach your students about Spiral and the concepts that you discussed then?

02-01:36:42

Mayhew: Well, it was effective[ly] Spiral, in terms of the interdisciplinary sensitivity, which the various elements came together at Spiral because of Philip Randolph. Now, you can see where it [begins] and how it spreads: the March on Washington, by Philip Randolph. He gets forgotten. Well, the March on Washington was Martin Luther King, which is very respected, what he did. But it was Philip Randolph. We forget about him. It has to do with Spiral, how much all these elements came out of Spiral. Easy to forget that Spiral had a lot to do with this development, our continuation of creative thinking.

Cooks:

So something else very important happened to you in 1965 when the Spiral exhibition took place, is you became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Can you talk to us about that?

02-01:37:51

Mayhew: Oh. The National Academy of Design?

Cooks:

In 1965, were you made part of the Academy?

02-01:38:02

Mayhew: No, 1970.

Cooks:

In 1970. Okay. Was there another award that you got from the National Institute of Arts and Letters?

02-01:38:13

Mayhew: Oh, Arts and Letters. Oh, that was different. Yeah, I received an award from Arts and Letters because I became an academician.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:38:21

Mayhew: Right. So I received several awards.

Cooks:

So what did it mean to you? You are an artist, you're involved with this community of African American artists in Spiral, and then you're also involved in activism, but getting awards from very respected organizations. How did you make sense of all of these things?

02-01:38:43

Mayhew:

Well, I didn't really make sense of it. I felt this was part of the continuation of that Spiral concept. It's just what you're supposed to do. That's part of the continuation. You don't take in terms of a personal honor. It's part of the continuation of these other people; it's not just you. If you get involved with the ego sense that you're the one, that's the limitation of self-destruction, I think. I've always felt that way. Because I met a lot of egotists in the theater and so forth, that who they are—also some musicians that think they're great. I got to know Count Basie and a couple of others.

Cooks:

Wow.

02-01:39:38

Mayhew:

We never thought of them as being genius, but they were very humble. I said, "Wow."

Cooks:

So you feel that way, that you're humble about—

02-01:39:48

Mayhew:

Well, I haven't done it. What did I do? I was just a painter or just a teacher. Now I'm realizing my teaching was not bad. [laughs]

Cooks:

Yeah, your teaching wasn't bad and your painting wasn't bad and—

02-01:40:02

Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

Yeah.

02-01:40:04

Mayhew:

So reaping awards for painting, but I still feel that it hasn't happened yet. I love figures. I want to do figures again. And dancers. I'd like to do a whole series of dancer. So how many years I got left to do this, right?

Well, Edwin Dickinson was a teacher I respected very much. He had this retrospective at the Whitney Museum. So I was coming out and he was sitting in the lounge just outside of the—in the museum. I came out and said, "Oh, Mr. Dickinson, I've always had great respect for that man." He had his head down and he looked up. He said, "Never see yourself in retrospective; [you will] find you haven't done a damn thing." [laughs]

Tewes:

Oh, no.

02-01:41:01

Mayhew:

He still wants to do more and he hasn't done it yet, right?

Cooks:

And that's how you feel, that you still have so much work to do.

02-01:41:08
Mayhew:

Right. Haven't solved the problems of the challenges that you know you have; but no one else knows that, but you know. There's challenges there and things you haven't done that you want to do.

Part of Spiral, in terms of—is seeking the creative world beyond yourself. This is what Hale Woodruff was always talking about when he was teaching. He says he never knows what happened to the students when he taught. So there is that.

So having this letter from this person, that's unbelievable. The fact that it had some reason and it made a difference. My interdisciplinary teaching, all the years from Smith through all the other colleges I taught at, and here is a letter coming, the fact that it made a difference.

Cooks:

That means a lot.

02-01:42:13
Mayhew:

Right. But Spiral had a lot to do with this. It's part of that concept. It came out of Europe, also. It started in Europe. But you have to realize, I didn't understand. I didn't understand what was going on in the thinking, right?

Cooks:

When you were there?

02-01:42:32
Mayhew:

Mm-hmm.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:42:33
Mayhew:

Well, even now, it has evolved to another development. It's still out there, in terms of understanding the possibility and the continuation of that concept. So it's how much one is involved with, well, what is English intellectualism? What is it based on? Who? What? Where? And what philosophy that you adopt, that you can accept as being the structure of your idealism? So that's hard to pin down, right? Is it a European philosophy? Is it German philosophy, French philosophy, Italian philosophy, or an American philosophy? What are you involved with? What is your thinking? What is it based on? So there is that.

Because I have a book now on Shakespeare. I'm reading on Shakespeare: how did they get there, and how Shakespeare is like the mentor of all theater. Where did that come from? What is the basis of Shakespeare philosophy, or the groundwork of that, in terms of the sensibility in theater, and the communication, that it affects people's thinking? Because I remember when I used to come away from Duke Ellington's music, I could still hear the music. How much that music's involved with a certain way of feeling and thinking, beyond just the sound, right? So it's such a continuation. I'm always troubling

with that because—I'm not sure I want to get into that because it's no man's land.

Cooks: But it's a part of your everyday life.

02-01:44:46

Mayhew:

Well, how much is part of everyday life? I'm finding that the politics of the day, which I won't get into—but it's not a part of everyday life, because it's so confused and complex, and it's not pinned down with any special foundation of reality. If you think your reality is reality, there it becomes a problem, too, of the ego state of existence. I've always thought about that, in terms of being an ego—which I know a couple of artists that are egomaniacs. How much they feel comfortable in that or it gives them a foundation of continuation. I feel that it's destructivism, for me. It reaches a level of denial, in a sense. Because one doesn't see enough beyond themselves then. So there's a limitation here that you are the person, which is reflected in politics, as well as in the arts, I've found out, to some people. I only met Duke Ellington twice. I always felt that it was a profound sensitivity here, but there was a certain egotism there, as well, which I think is necessary to maintain that level of contribution. So there's a dual feeling about ego existence and being humble. Can you live somewhere in between? [laughs]

02-01:46:41

Spiral had a lot to do with this. Each of them were in the middle of that kind of thing. Hale Woodruff was very profound. He was never in terms of being an egotist, but there was a level there of self-great-respect, right? Romare Bearden was very humble. At the same time, there was the inner knowing that, What I'm doing is good. Norman Lewis felt that, Hell, I haven't done it yet, [laughs] which was always reaching out for it somewhere. So each of them brought a lot to me, because how much I'm a little bit of all of them. How much these other artists, how much they got involved with the continuation of this thinking. I know how *I* feel about it and how it affected me, and it's still going on. And how much, I guess, more life left that I can pursue that. All these other artists that was part of Spiral are deceased. So I can't [ask], What do you think? Felrath Hines was so profound and had a base of knowing, and didn't divert from that. I admired that. I said, "What's my base? How do I live there? What is that?" But I saw it in other people, that they knew where they were and who they were.

Which I felt about Duke Ellington. He knew who he was. He was very respected. Count Basie, he was kind of open a little bit, right? Satchmo [Louis Armstrong], I got to know him very briefly. Because I sang with his band one night. [laughs]

Cooks: Where was that? Was that in New York?

02-01:49:02
Mayhew:

Yeah, that was at one of the auditoriums. Because Leslie Scott was his singer, and Leslie Scott called me and says, "Hey, Rick, you want to fill in for me tonight?" I said, "You're kidding. There are great singers you can get to fill in [for you]." He says, "No, I can't get in touch and they're all busy. Come on. Come on, I need you," he says, "I've got laryngitis." I said, "Oh, no!" So I went there out of complete insecurity, and I went to meet Satchmo and I told him about Leslie Scott told me to come to fill in. He said, "We've got someone else here that Leslie sent, too." He says, "Come on backstage. Let me see what you got." So I went backstage. I went through a couple of notes and he wanted me to sing a certain thing. So I said, "Oh well." I went through a little bit with him, so he—it was "A Cottage For Sale." That's what it was, I remember.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:50:16
Mayhew:

Yeah. So I went out and I sang that. There was a piano player. He kept looking at me and he was winking at me. Like, go that way. Watching me. So I got through it. Then we finished that and they went on to some [other] piece, and then he came over to me, he said, "Would you like to do another one?"

Cooks:

Wow.

02-01:50:45
Mayhew:

[laughs] I'm going, Oh my God.

Cooks:

What a dream.

02-01:50:49
Mayhew:

Before the end of the evening, he got me to do one more, right? But that was it. I was frightened out of my wits. You have no idea. [laughs]

Cooks:

That's terrific.

02-01:51:04
Mayhew:

There was a world of music that I felt that I didn't learn enough about. I needed to learn to read music, because one of sax players came up to me one night I was just filling in for somebody. He says, "Man, you need to learn music. Do you read music?" I said, "No." He said, "Oh well, you're doing very well without reading." [laughs] Then also I was taking voice lessons, right? But then I learned how to control my voice. I could project to the end of the auditorium without a mic.

Cooks:

Wow.

02-01:51:46
Mayhew:

I learned how to do that, how to project that way using the diaphragm.

Cooks:

When did you take voice lessons? What decade was that?

02-01:51:56

Mayhew: It was in the forties.

Cooks:

Oh, early on. Okay.

02-01:52:00

Mayhew: It was in the forties. Well, that's when the whole thing about the bands and things—all the big bands ended up—in the end of the fifties, that was the end.

Cooks:

Yes.

02-01:52:09

Mayhew: Right. So this was in the forties.

Cooks:

Okay.

02-01:52:13

Mayhew: Right.

Tewes:

Well, is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up this morning?

02-01:52:21

Mayhew: Well, it's only the continuation of Spiral, how many people of that group continued. Like what happened to Earl Miller.

Cooks:

Right.

02-01:52:44

Mayhew: When he had a divorce, his life almost fell apart, how that happens with people. Because he seemed very solid, very profound before that. And how much Reggie Gammon seemed to grow. Then Bill [Majors] that went to New Hampshire, he got that illness again and he lost it. But if he would have continued, his art would have been very great. Never heard of him. Then there is Al Hollingsworth. Al Hollingsworth became a teacher-teacher, more so than just an artist. Then Mert Simpson just went on as—he was a good painter. In his later years, his paintings became more important than just his being an analyst of African sculpture. And Ernie Crichlow, which wasn't part of Spiral, but I always considered him part of Spiral because he was involved [as] an organizer at the end. I used to show his slides as being part in the extension of Spiral. Well, Earl Miller, when he left New York, that was the end of our communication. Reginald Gammon, he went to live in New Mexico for a while, Albuquerque. I got to stay in touch with him down there. He was trying to get me to go buy property there, and I said, "Eh." [laughs] But Reggie Gammon developed a certain solid base, which is good. He didn't fade away. Emma Amos became a professor at Rutgers University, [a professor] of art. She was caught up in the midst of that she was part of Spiral, but really, she wasn't involved with the debating part of it. But I respected her, the fact that she continued to paint. Also, she became very strong as a teacher, I understand.

02-01:55:15

Hale Woodruff I still admire as one of the great men and artists. He was beyond the norm. Again, with these exhibitions going around the country, I went to the exhibition of his murals. I talked to some of the audience there. They had no idea who he was. No idea how important those paintings were they were looking at. I said, "Oh my, look at that." The reviews, they were just mediocre. He did American art history murals. These are profound paintings. So there, I still have problems with how great artists are still neglected and not respected, and the contribution they made. His was involved with African American culture, but also profound as an educator. He was a fantastic—he would go to universities around the country to evaluate their art education programs. He was the evaluator to go around the country. I said, "Oh, my goodness. Wow." There was a special invitation for a profound—was it Illinois? I'm trying to remember where it was. Oh, in Chicago, [an] art education program, to go there and represent the arts of the United States. Hale Woodruff sent me, instead of going himself.

Cooks: So he trusted and admired you, too.

02-01:57:02

Mayhew: It wasn't about art education, it was just being represented as an artist actively functioning at this time—or that time, right? He was very unselfish. To go to that, it gave me great importance, which I had no idea going there, that that was what it was all about. So my experience is very strange. But Spiral, now, you hear it in terms of James Yeargans.

Cooks: Right, James Yeargans.

02-01:57:39

Mayhew: It's too bad about him, because he never got his due. His son continually wanted to exhibit [his work], the last I heard. I don't know, that's been about ten years ago, so I don't know what happened to his work.

Cooks: Okay.

02-01:57:54

Mayhew: Now, Bill Majors was such a—I had great respect for him and his work and so forth, but as a person—because we became very close because of meeting him—he was on a grant the same time I was in Florence.

Cooks: Right. Did he have the same grant, or was it a different grant? You had the—

02-01:58:15

Mayhew: I think it was the same grant.

Cooks: Really?

02-01:58:17

Mayhew: Yeah. Right.

Cooks: Okay. Fascinating.

02-01:58:20

Mayhew: But to meet him there, the fact that he was—oh my God, then also Red Grooms I met there. I don't know if you've ever heard of Red Grooms?

Cooks: Really?

02-01:58:32

Mayhew: Yeah, Red Grooms. You ever hear of Red Grooms?

Cooks: Oh yeah. Yes, I have.

02-01:58:36

Mayhew: Really? Well, when I was in Florence, Red Grooms came to visit me on his motorcycle, riding around the *pensione* down where I was, right? He got Scott, [my son], put on the back of his motorcycle riding around with him. I told Scott that, and he said, "No, I don't remember that." I said, "You were four years old."

Cooks: Did you know him before Florence, or you met him—

02-01:59:01

Mayhew: No. I met Red Grooms in Florence.

Cooks: All the cool people were in Florence at that time.

02-01:59:06

Mayhew: Yeah. And Mimi Gross was his wife at the time.

Cooks: Oh, my goodness.

02-01:59:13

Mayhew: Well anyway, that's part of the whole world of changes going on. Norman Lewis was such a special person in my life. Then maybe I wouldn't say it, maybe don't record this one.

Tewes: Okay, let's pause then. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break.

02-01:59:35

Mayhew: I didn't want them to hear about the other thing.

Tewes: That's fine.

Cooks: No, whatever you want to talk about. But we want to make sure you talk about your own work.

02-01:59:44

Mayhew: Well, this is a painting I think I did in Florence. I was a tonalist until my education about color and how profound the color was. Looking at a

Caravaggio painting, which had all the basic colors except orange, but as an afterimage, you'd see orange in the painting. "Wow," I said. Oh, my goodness. There was that whole theory of the afterimage, which the camera was developed because of the afterimage. Because I was part of the, let's say, Barbizon philosophy and theory, developing of illusion of form in space, which is more tonal than using color. So when I got involved with color, it was a whole change of painting in the scene.

Cooks: [refers to slides] This work is *Interlude*. So this is before you started to really change your color palette?

02-02:01:00

Mayhew: This was, yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

02-02:01:02

Mayhew: It was more surface painting and tonal painting, rather than I was involved with two-dimensional illusion and using color.

Cooks: Okay. This one is from 1964. The other ones you have on here I think are later.

02-02:01:18

Mayhew: Right. Yeah, but that more color yet.

Cooks: Yeah, this one has more color.

02-02:01:24

Mayhew: It was just subtle, subtle tonal space. But this color started seeping into developing and using space. Foregrounds being warm and the backgrounds being cool. It also has to do with shapes and what shapes meant, in terms of creating the same effect. It's the desert. I did a whole series of desert paintings for a while.

Cooks: Did this come from some of your road trips?

02-02:01:54

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

02-02:01:55

Mayhew: It's going through New Mexico and Arizona. Also I was on sabbatical, and I stopped in New Mexico and I taught at the Indian school there for a time, [the Santa Fe Indian School]. I was there for two or three weeks.

Tewes: What did you teach?

02-02:02:15

Mayhew:

Well, creative design. These were Native American students there. They came from every tribe in the United States, which I was—oh, unbelievable to see that. Because their thinking was different, in terms of their area they came from. So I was teaching about painting. They was questioning. Very good questions. How? Why?

Cooks:

Was this in the 1970s?

02-02:02:46

Mayhew:

This was in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Cooks:

What decade was it? The seventies?

02-02:02:51

Mayhew:

Oh, eighties.

Cooks:

Eighties, okay.

02-02:02:54

Mayhew:

In the eighties, right. So their questioning was great because of their own kind of environmental development. And their thinking, their tribal thinking, also. It was very refreshing.

Cooks:

Were they already making paintings? Did they have art to show you?

02-02:03:15

Mayhew:

Well, crudely some of them. Some were a little more advanced than others, depending what background they had. But they understood right away design space. Which that blew my mind, because some that was younger than I remembered that I understood design space. I said, "Oh wow, okay."

[refers to slides] Oh, there's the path. We come back to the path. That's the path untaken.

Cooks:

What decade is this painting from?

02-02:03:59

Mayhew:

Well, that looks late, no?

Cooks:

Yeah, it looks more recent to me, too.

02-02:04:03

Mayhew:

Yeah. In the eighties or the nineties, right?

Cooks:

Yeah.

02-02:04:07

Mayhew:

Well anyway, the path untaken shows up in my paintings all the time.

Cooks: Well, what does that mean to you? Do you feel like you have a path untaken?

02-02:04:19

Mayhew: I could've been an entertainer.

Cooks: Yeah.

02-02:04:21

Mayhew: A singer, dancer, actor.

Cooks: A dancer?

02-02:04:25

Mayhew: Yeah, I like dancing.

Cooks: Talk about dancing.

02-02:04:27

Mayhew: I learned to dance, tap dance.

Cooks: What?

02-02:04:29

Mayhew: Yeah. [laughs] I was learning tap dance, and also mime.

Cooks: Come on.

02-02:04:38

Mayhew: How to move.

Cooks: Rick.

02-02:04:41

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Where did you learn to do this?

02-02:04:44

Mayhew: Well, what happened, when I came back from Europe—I had a studio on Twenty-Second Street—when I came back to my studio I had before, when I came back there, there was a lot of noise going on. I said, "What's in there?" So I went to the door and I said, "What's going on?" The mime master of Paris was there teaching mime.

Cooks: Wow.

02-02:05:10

Mayhew: He said, "Come on in." So I went in and they was teaching mime. He was trying to develop a mime theater in the United States. That failed. There was no interest in it.

Cooks: Richard, his name was Marcel [Marceau]?

02-02:05:28

Mayhew: Yeah. He was the one who taught Marcel.

Cooks: Oh, the one who taught Marcel.

02-02:05:32

Mayhew: What was his name? I can't think of it. [Jean-Louis Barrault.]

Cooks: I don't know. We'll figure it out.

02-02:05:35

Mayhew: Yeah. Well, he was trying to set up the Mime Theater of the United States [American Mime Theater]. It just failed.

Cooks: What about your tap dancing? When did that start?

02-02:05:48

Mayhew: Oh, there was a group there involved with movement and dance, so I went there, in terms of tap dance. But it had to do with movement, how you move, and also how your feet was hitting the ground. Different steps and how to move and so forth. But it was all involved with the body being able to move well, right? Your timing, your coordination. So it had a lot; it was very good. It was good, very good for me.

Then singing and taking voice lessons, right? Then acting, I went to acting classes, too.

Cooks: Okay. Can you tell us something about your acting path not taken?

02-02:06:39

Mayhew: Well, I went to acting class. There was a woman which was the acting teacher for Broadway. This is what she did on the side. She felt I was interested in this group that wanted to learn acting, so she was monitoring us and she was very good.

Cooks: Was this in the fifties or was this later? What decade was that?

02-02:07:04

Mayhew: Oh, that was in the forties.

Cooks: So all very early, you were trained.

02-02:07:08

Mayhew: Oh, it was in the forties, the theater thing, for me.

Cooks: What did you think about yourself as an actor?

02-02:07:15

Mayhew:

I was acting all the time. That's what she was trying to say. You go to the store, you talk to the clerk there, you're acting. You talk to your family in a different way than you talk to anybody else, you're acting. Like if you become a teacher, you're acting. So they talked about how is one playing different roles and how your voice quality changes from one stage to the other. She was very good, for that reason.

Cooks:

Were you very good? Do you remember how you felt when you were acting?

02-02:08:04

Mayhew:

Well, we had little skits and doing it. I was enjoying the possibility of it, but then found out the greater extents of that. As an African American actor, there was no place to go, right? They're still dealing with that. But it was enjoyable and captiv[ating], but the fact that you're always acting, I had fun with that. I thought, Well, if I'm always acting, I'm going to really put it on the act. But then I was controlling how to speak and the voice quality and so forth. I became a good speaker, as a result of that. It was voice training.

[refers to slides] But see, there's this painting here, in terms of the path not taken. It keeps showing up in the painting. What if I went that way? Oh yeah, it was okay. Also not the path untaken, but the worn spots in the field where people walk. It creates memories because of those particular paths and footsteps. It's like the shadow underneath a bush. There was a plantation where slaves were back in 1800. They were talking about this place was where slaves were. There's a whole tree area there. I said, "I wonder what would happen in that area where that was." So someone says, "Well, you have to realize that was a big field at one time, a cotton field." I said, "Really?" Now it's a bushed area. I said, "Well, I would like to learn the memory of what's under that bush." So there was this kind of strange kind of reacting to being there where that happened, but the worn paths is always a place where people leave their mark in a field or anywhere. So I think I usually use that sometimes for that reason.

Cooks:

Would you say something about the sky in this?

02-02:10:47

Mayhew:

Well, the sky. Well, it has to do with color. I like to challenge the eye in relationship—you're looking at it, in fact. You have to realize, two-dimensionally, the sky is coming forward but the green is receding, so you're caught between two things optically. Psychologically or association with nature, this is foreground, that's background. But optically, the reverse is happening.

Cooks:

Because the sky is red.

02-02:11:19
Mayhew:

Right. So it creates a different kind of mood space by doing that, right? Where your background's coming forward, but you know the foreground is in the foreground. But it's green. Color-wise, it's doing the reverse. So it traps the emotion of the—the Italian Renaissance painters did this a couple of times with landscapes. I was looking at that. I said, "Wow, look at what they're doing, how long ago that was."

Cooks:

Do you remember the name of this painting or what decade?

02-02:11:57
Mayhew:

Oh well, that's like the eighties, really, or nineties.

Cooks:

Okay. [refers to slides] Well, this is a familiar painting.

02-02:12:07
Mayhew:

That's a watercolor, I think. I'm not sure. Is that a watercolor?

Cooks:

I'm not sure.

02-02:12:13
Mayhew:

Well anyway, lots of times I played with shapes, so you see the various shapes there. It creates a certain interaction of space, because ragged edges create a certain feeling, right?

Cooks:

Is this the painting on the cover of Halima Taha's book, [*Bayside Meadow*, 1995]?

02-02:12:34
Mayhew:

I think it might be. Because I have that book. I don't know.

Cooks:

Okay. It might be that one.

02-02:12:39
Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

She wrote this book on collecting African American art, [*Collecting African American Art: Works on Paper and Canvas*].

02-02:12:43
Mayhew:

Right, right.

Cooks:

Your work is on the cover of that.

02-02:12:45
Mayhew:

I just heard from Halima, and she's working on a new book.

Cooks:

I talked to her recently, too. She told me that this book has gone into its sixth printing. But I think that in addition to her amazing research and scholarship,

the reason why the book is so eye-catching is, in part, because of your work on the cover.

02-02:13:07

Mayhew: Oh really?

Cooks: So many people know about your work because they know about her scholarship in that book.

02-02:13:13

Mayhew: Oh really?

Cooks: So it's very important.

02-02:13:16

Mayhew: Yeah, that was one where I created some interest in my work.

Cooks: [refers to slides] This is another very colorful one. It looks like it might be from the same period, I don't know.

02-02:13:32

Mayhew: Mm-hmm.

Cooks: Okay.

02-02:13:35

Mayhew: Well, I guess the color's a little lost there, too, right?

Cooks: Okay, that was the last one. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

02-02:13:48

Mayhew: Well—

Cooks: We're going to talk about some other paintings.

02-02:13:50

Mayhew: Oh, it's endless, what I haven't said.

Cooks: Well, let's take a break, and we'll try to get back to more of that after a break then.

02-02:13:59

Mayhew: Right. But that's why I said—

Interview 3: March 9, 2019

Tewes: Okay, this is a third interview with Richard Mayhew for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Bridget Cooks and Amanda Tewes at Mr. Mayhew's home in Soquel, California, on March 9, 2019. So, Bridget, take us away.

Cooks: Rick, we wanted to talk about art and activism. We've been talking a bit about Spiral and some of the questions and concerns that members of the group had, thinking about the art that the artists were making, and also the larger community. We wanted to hear you talk more about some of the activities that you did. There was the *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition. You were part of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition with Benny Andrews. Do you remember the *Harlem on My Mind* show and why you were picketing with some of the other artists?

03-00:01:04

Mayhew: Well, we were picketing due to the fact that African Americans were left out. Also, [it was] one of the exhibitions that was curated only by white administrators and left out any African American administration there, in terms of valuing what work they're putting into the exhibition. So that was [what] the protest was about, about omission and denial.

Cooks: Some of the people that you picketed with, they were part of Spiral. Benny Andrews wasn't part of Spiral. How did he get involved?

03-00:01:38

Mayhew: Benny Andrews was not part of Spiral. But this was not part of Spiral; this was a picketing of—Benny Andrews and myself was involved with another coalition. We was part of that, which included the picketing group, which is Reginald Gammon, which was part of Spiral, and so was Norman Lewis. Norman Lewis and Reggie Gammon was Spiral, but the other was the active coalition of opposition to the omission of African American artists in New York.

Cooks: Were there other black artists that didn't agree with picketing the exhibition? You were picketing the exhibition with a group of people; were there other black artists that didn't agree with you?

03-00:02:27

Mayhew: Not with that exhibition. They agreed [with] our approach to it. They said that we should be involved with large posters and so forth and going to the administration and actually blocking the doorway for people coming in there. We felt that that's not what we wanted to do. We wanted to do it another way, but not in terms of blocking doorways so no one could go to the museum. So that was part of our argument, was how to approach this, in terms of protesting what's going on.

Cooks: Okay. A couple of other activities in 1971 you were involved in that we wanted you to talk more about. There was a very historic panel that you organized called "The Black Artist." You organized this for the Art Students League. There were a number of artists that you had invited to be part of this. Could you talk about who was part of this panel you put together?

03-00:03:37

Mayhew: Well, we actually invited artists that were part of the Harlem coalition in Harlem, so that was part of Harlem artists. Then also Barry Gaither from Boston. He was involved with the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] at that time. They brought him down as one of the speakers there. So he's bringing in sensibility from a whole other area. Then what was going on from Harlem, we brought some of those there. Also there's women's issues there, because of what was going on [with] women being left out of galleries and not being evaluated at all. Because we were challenging some of the galleries: how come—like, Betty Parsons is a woman dealer—how come she never had women in her gallery? We were challenging different galleries on the basis of things like that. So we had several women put on the panel, just to voice their particular feelings and experiences.

Cooks: Can you tell us, who were some of the women on the panel?

03-00:04:41

Mayhew: Well, there was Vivian Browne, Betty Blayton. Let's see. Dana Chandler? No, that's not—

Cooks: Faith Ringgold, I think was one of them.

03-00:04:56

Mayhew: Well, Betty Blayton and [there] was Vivian Browne and—

Cooks: Right. Was Faith Ringgold part of it?

03-00:05:07

Mayhew: Faith Ringgold, right.

Cooks: Okay.

03-00:05:11

Mayhew: Yeah, Faith Ringgold. Well, the women that I mentioned there were women who were pretty outspoken about women's issues, so it was very important to have them on the panel.

Cooks: Okay. Did you organize the panel by yourself, or did someone—

03-00:05:29

Mayhew: I organized the panel, and I had others to suggest people to come to the panel. I was teaching at the Art Students League, so they allowed me to have a large room there for this panel discussion and filming.

Cooks: Okay. And we—

03-00:05:50

Mayhew: Actually, it was also set up to support Oakley Holmes, his thesis at Columbia University.

Cooks: Right.

03-00:06:00

Mayhew: So there was a dual purpose here. He needed some visuals, so this was perfect. Also the dialogue that was taking place was perfect for him and his writings' relationship to Columbia University at the time.

Cooks: So Oakley Holmes made a film—

03-00:06:19

Mayhew: Made a film.

Cooks: —of "The Black Artist" panel, and that's the paper that you're holding, is from him, because he has his own archive, including the film.

03-00:06:29

Mayhew: Right, right.

Cooks: Do you remember what kinds of questions you asked as part of this panel?

03-00:06:36

Mayhew: That he asked?

Cooks: No, that you asked, organizing it.

03-00:06:39

Mayhew: Oh well, I wasn't the individual asking. At the time we set up, in terms of each one was expressing their feeling about what was going on with African American art and about the exclusion, and what women are talking about, and problems. It wasn't so much questions; they had their own agenda to present, each one. So we had that. Certainly, after a while some questions came from the audience about it. Then we had an alien that came on that. He was a drug addict. They purposely included him. He was on the panel. If you see the film, you'll see him. We asked him, "What's your name, brother?" He said, "God." So there was this kind of game going on between the different feelings of someone outside of the loop, in terms of the arts.

Cooks: You invited him to be part of the panel?

03-00:07:34

Mayhew: We invited him to come on the panel because he was criticizing what was going on there. We said, "Come on up here, brother," and we put him on the panel.

Cooks: Who else was on the panel? Because there were over twenty people, right?

03-00:07:50

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: This was a really big group.

03-00:07:52

Mayhew: Yeah, some of these on here, I question. I don't know if they were all on the panel.

Cooks: Okay. Which ones do you think were on the panel? Which ones do you think were right? You named some of the women, and then who were the men that you invited?

03-00:08:05

Mayhew: The ones I invited was the women that were on it and Benny Andrews and certainly Mel Edwards, Dana Chandler, Al Hollingsworth. So there's like Nigel Jackson, Alain Locke, and James Porter. Some of these, I'm not quite sure that we invited them on the panel.

Cooks: Okay.

03-00:08:33

Mayhew: So there's listings on here which weren't on the panel.

Cooks: Do you remember what the outcome was or what the feeling was?

03-00:08:42

Mayhew: Well, the audience was a public audience of people that come to the National Gallery. So you had that. It was a mixture of people from the street or ordinary people that were students there and some of the faculty and administrators. It was a mixed audience. Their reaction was quite varied. Because especially those many people that came in off the street was very alien to the art problems and about the artists and the omission and denial. So you had kind of mixed questions and answers about that. Each one on there was kind presenting their own agenda and what they were thinking. Because Norman Lewis, when he came, he says, "Well, [being] artists is like being a poverty person on the street. There's no respect for them and how much they made a contribution because the community, which is in this audience, don't even know who we are." So you had this kind of discussion that was going on.

Cooks: So in the next month—because the panel happened in March—in the next month, the Whitney Museum of American Art had an exhibition that was called *Contemporary Black Art in America*. Do you remember anything about this show?

03-00:10:29
Mayhew:

Well, it had to do with that it wasn't curated properly. Who curated the shows, it was being [determined] in terms of some of the galleries that were involved with presenting their own artists there. So you had this kind of thing: who was in the show and who was left out. A lot of artists that weren't in galleries certainly were not in the show, so you had this kind of omission going on. So we picketed that on the basis of how it was curated.

Cooks:

Okay. Do you remember who else was picketing with you? Who else was picketing that exhibition?

03-00:11:09
Mayhew:

At the Whitney?

Cooks:

Yeah. So you were picketing. Was it Benny Andrews? Was it the same group?

03-00:11:15
Mayhew:

Benny Andrews. We mentioned Reginald Gammon and Norman Lewis, but there was other artists there which were not listed, right? There was a lot of street people that turned in to picket, also. So you had that. They wanted to support the artists. It wasn't just the artists out there; it was other people joined them. So how much that made an impact on that—because that was part of the problem. You're doing this, but what impact does this make, in terms of the museum response? It ended up with no impact at all.

Cooks:

But one of the things that you were involved in was another exhibition: *Rebuttal*.

03-00:12:05
Mayhew:

At the Metropolitan?

Cooks:

No, this was called *Rebuttal to the Whitney Museum Exhibition*. It was held at Nigel Jackson's Acts of Art Gallery in New York.

03-00:12:15
Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

So my notes say that you were invited to be part of the Whitney exhibition, and then you declined.

03-00:12:25
Mayhew:

Well, that was because, see, it was how it was being curated and people being left out.

Cooks:

Okay.

03-00:12:31

Mayhew:

I was in a gallery, so there again, a gallery dictation of who would be in and who would not be in. So this was part of it. It was just kind of the boycotting it.

Cooks:

Then instead, you were part of the *Rebuttal* exhibition.

03-00:12:45

Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks:

What's interesting is last year, in 2018, the exhibition was revisited at Leubsdorf Gallery at Hunter College. You had two works in that exhibition. There was a work called *Post Meridian* from 1969, owned by Smith College; and *Eclipse* from 1965, which is part of the Nicholasa Mohr Trust in New York. You and Rosemary were able to go out to New York. Can you talk a little bit about that trip and what you did, revisiting the show?

03-00:13:29

Mayhew:

It was only that we went there and it had to do with the exhibition and what was going on with it, and also the input of dialogue of others, which was a little confusing because many were not involved with it, but they participated in it. So there was some of that, which you can object to it, but this is part of what was going on with the community in New York at the time, right?

Cooks:

When you were at Hunter last year, were you able to talk a bit about what happened in 1971?

03-00:14:09

Mayhew:

Yeah, we made some comment about it, actually. We didn't want to put it down too much so people would really appreciate what's going on there or how much to destroy that, but just talk about how much we were opposed to the approach tradition in the beginning. This was the counter response for it and the rebuttal. So that was just how we had it play it: with soft shoes.

Cooks:

One of the things that happened when you went back to New York last year was you saw Oakley Holmes, the filmmaker who made the film about your historic panel. Can you tell us about that?

03-00:14:52

Mayhew:

This was the shock of seeing Oakley Holmes after many years. I was looking for him for years. I didn't realize that he was in Virginia all the time. I'm trying to trace him down there. Where was he? He had a doctorate and he was teaching in high school with a doctorate in art, and he should have been in the college down there. This is why I sent my protest down about that, the fact that he should be teaching in the University of Virginia. Well anyway, I don't know, didn't get any immediate feedback from that. So when I saw him, met him, I was so pleased to see him. The fact that he did that panel—actually, that film is unbelievable. It's classic, really.

Cooks: He was a student at the time at Columbia, when he made this.

03-00:15:43

Mayhew: That's right. He made that. He was a student at Columbia University.

Cooks: Yeah. That's amazing.

03-00:15:50

Mayhew: I helped him get his doctorate.

Cooks: By putting [him] on the panel and having him make the film.

03-00:15:56

Mayhew: But this film was part of his thesis. Although the paper he wrote, also, in terms of the essay on African American culture and how it evolved and how it developed and the contribution it's making, which is good, he wrote about the contribution, which I think was an excellent paper.

Cooks: I wanted to also ask you about another major exhibition at the time, which was David Driskell's exhibition in 1976. It was a survey exhibition of black artists called *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. It opened up at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] in Los Angeles, and then it went to Brooklyn. Do you remember this exhibition?

03-00:16:47

Mayhew: I don't remember.

Cooks: Okay. Is there anything you wanted to say in addition to what you already said, about being an artist and being involved in these activist programs?

03-00:16:58

Mayhew: Well, it was hard just to be an artist because you're talking about Norman Lewis, how he was completely being omitted, and how collectors, when they found out he was African American, cancelled the sale. Things like that, how oppressive that can be. So we was very involved with the various areas of reaction to African American art in collecting or—also challenging the African American community: How much do you know African American artists? No one knew them. We went to a meeting in Harlem and in Bedford-Stuyvesant, discussed—which was a town meeting for the community. They had no idea about the artists. I think in Bedford-Stuyvesant, they knew about Ernie Crichlow. "Oh, there's an artist lives in the brownstone down the street." That's all they knew.

Cooks: Was this in the seventies that you had these—

03-00:17:57

Mayhew: That was in the seventies.

Cooks: Okay.

03-00:17:58

Mayhew:

Yeah, right. You can see it was a concern then: the Afro-American community is not aware of what's going on with the arts. Which is true right now. [laughs] It was how much the white community is aware of the African American artists. You don't have the black community concerned, and the white community could care less. So there's this problem, in terms of complete omission and denial. That became the folk word: omission and denial.

Cooks:

I want to change the subject a little bit, to talk about your long career as a teacher. Because you've been able to balance teaching and art making, and you've had a tremendous impact on more students than you can remember.

03-00:18:54

Mayhew:

Well, art teaching subsidized my family that I had, and also would pay for my painting supplies, so it was a subsidy that way. So how much teaching became an infectious disease or part of the joy of the encounter, was stimulating. I found myself liking to do it, because maybe you're making some contribution. Only now I'm realizing, maybe I did make a contribution here.

Cooks:

Yes.

03-00:19:29

Mayhew:

But also, I was challenging the system all the time. I felt academia, with the arts in it, was not relating to the reality of inventive education. The art form is part of inventive sensibility, but it's not part of academia. So that was my challenge, where I got involved [in] interdisciplinary study, which there was no books on it. I don't know [about] today. I wanted to go up to the university and find out what books are written, why are they using—they have interdisciplinary study at University of California Santa Cruz now. I want to know what books they're using or if they have any books they're reading about it. Also Cabrillo College, which is a junior college, how much they're starting it. What do they use in their reference, in order to build this? When I started, mine was the *Apollo Magazine* and a couple other writings which was involved with dual sensibility. But how much the academia was involved with writings that was involved with this subject matter and dealing with that subject matter. When I was at Smith, I tried to do it, because this was a Five Colleges complex there. I thought maybe I could introduce it. There was some concern at University of Massachusetts at the time, but there was no allies for me to push it there. I was at Smith and that was like the lower level of the whole Five Colleges, because it was a women's school. They had this attitude there. So is Mount Holyoke, right?

Cooks:

So you were at Smith. You started teaching there in 1969.

03-00:21:22

Mayhew:

Right.

Cooks: Before that, you taught at the Art Students League in 1965.

03-00:21:26

Mayhew: And Pratt Institute.

Cooks: And Pratt in 1963, and also the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

03-00:21:32

Mayhew: That's right.

Cooks: You had studied there.

03-00:21:33

Mayhew: Pratt Institute was very important, because I was teaching at the Art Students League and Brooklyn Museum, which are art academies. Now, Pratt is a combination of academia and an art center, art school at the same time, which was very unusual at the time, the mixture. When I went there, it was unique because of that mixture of academics and also the arts. And Benny—not Benny. Who is teaching there now? Oh, I can hardly think of her name now. She's now a very important congress[wo]man in Washington, D.C. She was teaching at Pratt Institute at the time. She's an African American woman. Well anyway, she was teaching there in politics.

Gibbons-Mayhew: [Rosemary Mayhew, Richard Mayhew's wife] I don't remember.

03-00:22:34

Mayhew: I wrote it down; I did have it here.

Cooks: I know it. She has short hair. She's a congresswoman.

03-00:22:40

Mayhew: Yeah, that's right. And she's very bright, very brilliant. But she was teaching at Pratt.

Cooks: Eleanor.

03-00:22:46

Mayhew: Eleanor Holmes Norton.

Cooks: That's right, Eleanor Holmes Norton.

03-00:22:48

Mayhew: Yeah, she was teaching at Pratt when I was there.

Cooks: Okay. That's fantastic.

03-00:22:52

Mayhew: And Jacob Lawrence and William [A.J.] Payne, but you don't know who he is, but he was an anthropologist. He became one of my best friends, and he's the one who teaching at [Sonoma State University], then also at Irvine.

Cooks: Right, in anthropology.

03-00:23:13

Mayhew: But he was at Pratt Institute at the time.

Cooks: Well, since it was part academic, part art, were they more receptive?

03-00:23:22

Mayhew: Well, engineer school, architecture, other things was going on there.

Cooks: Were they interested in your approach, looking at different disciplines?

03-00:23:31

Mayhew: Well, this is when I started to get involved with that concept. To apply it is something else again. Because in the classroom I was talking about, in terms of the drawing technique, I started to introduce the idea or concept of line and space and how that's relat[ed] to values of understanding and thinking and of openly visualizing what you're doing, and how much you're involved with the consciousness or you're involved with the physical. So I had to get involved in terms of body motion in relation to how the mind is relating to what you're doing. That's a hard thing, because many are not aware. The motion of the hand sometimes is controlled by the mind; but other times, it's very spontaneous. We were talking about that area. They said, "What are you talking about?" [laughs] Because that's in relationship to, let's say, the engineer students who was there. I said, "What are you working on?" He said, "Well, I'm an industrial engineer." I said, "What is that?" "It's working with a report." I said, "What are you doing with the parts, if the parts are taken and sawn down, [how does that] change of reaction to what you're doing?" He said, "What are you talking about?" Just it's true. If you're involved with a machine doing certain things, it's how much you're physically controlling it. That got involved in terms of line and space and form and movement and consciousness. So I lost half the class right there. [laughs]

But there with that woman from [Pratt], listening [to] and watching her on television, she's brilliant. She's really brilliant.

Cooks: Are you talking about Eleanor?

03-00:25:36

Mayhew: Eleanor Holmes Norton.

Cooks: Yeah. What was she teaching when she was at Pratt?

03-00:25:40

Mayhew: I think she was teaching sociology; I'm not sure.

Cooks: Okay, okay.

03-00:25:44
Mayhew:

I'm not quite sure, but I think she was teaching sociology. But I was the head of the Black Students Union at Pratt.

Cooks:

What?

03-00:25:54
Mayhew:

That's right.

Cooks:

Well, tell us about that. Was that an activist—

03-00:25:57
Mayhew:

Well, it had to do with they didn't have any order or direction, and they had no faculty that would support what they're doing. So I said, "I'll take it on." "Oh, would you?" I said, "Yes." Their activity and what they wanted to do—so I said, "This is good. That's not going to work. This is going to work."

Cooks:

What kind of things did they want?

03-00:26:17
Mayhew:

In terms of picketing or challenging the faculty or actually, in terms of who stood to be admitted to Pratt, things like that. I was supporting the Black Students Union there. And how many women were in there and were being left out or not coming into Pratt. I played the game there.

But you have to realize, when I did that, Bedford-Stuyvesant wanted to come in and use the facilities at Pratt. I was in between the community and Pratt Institute.

Cooks:

So there were artists in the community that wanted to use the facilities?

03-00:27:06
Mayhew:

No. Just the roughies in the community of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Cooks:

What did they want to do?

03-00:27:19
Mayhew:

They wanted to take over the recreation facilities and the fields and things like that. Some of them were really tough people that was coming there. They was confronting me that I was helping the police department. Because the police department asked me to come there, and they saw me go to the police department. They said I'm siding with the police department. I said, "I went to the police department and told them to leave the students alone," because they were talking about them picketing. I said, "Leave them alone. They're not doing anything wrong. No one created problems. Your coming there only makes them more agitated." So they backed off. But they were saying that I was helping the police department, so I became the enemy. In fact, I was almost knifed one time because of that.

Cooks: Really?

03-00:28:12

Mayhew: Right. I had to explain that my mother lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant, I told them at the time, and I lived here and I'm in the streets. They did not know that. So they backed off of me, and I got more of the support then from the community. They were pretty hard; they're pretty tough. They wanted to come in and take over the fields there, and the recreation facilities and the gymnasiums and so forth.

Cooks: Did they work out a deal where they could use some of the resources for themselves?

03-00:28:46

Mayhew: Yeah. I made a compromise with them where they would come in and help train some exercise activity and stuff like that, and utilize some of the fields and basketball. Because a couple of them were the top basketball players in the area. I told them to come there if they wanted to work with—so there was a compromise, and I was in the middle of the compromise. But I was the enemy—

Cooks: Wow.

03-00:29:10

Mayhew: —of the community, so I had to make peace with them. Also, the fact that I was from outside of the community, against Pratt, so I had—well, I had to go through a whole change here of smoothing out everything, quiet down the community, and then kind of cool off Pratt at the same time. Then I had Jacob Lawrence, but he said, "I don't want to know." I needed an ally. He didn't want to know.

Cooks: It sounds like an extension of your art and activism balance—

03-00:29:49

Mayhew: Yeah, my activism.

Cooks: —but in an unexpected way.

03-00:29:51

Mayhew: I was always involved with organizing stuff, right?

Cooks: Yeah.

03-00:29:55

Mayhew: I did very good with the art students group there. I got involved with picketing and not getting the results of their picket, and how to do that without alienat[ing] the Pratt or the community. So that kind of worked out.

Cooks: Wow.

03-00:30:18

Mayhew: I kind of did good with it and they appreciated it, so I felt good about that.

Cooks:

So I'm going to ask you about another place you went. In 1968, you joined the faculty at Art Center in Northern New Jersey, in New Milford? Is that correct?

03-00:30:34

Mayhew: Oh, you're talking about the Helen Hay [Whitney] Foundation?

Cooks:

I think that's the Helen Hay—

03-00:30:41

Mayhew: Helen Hay Foundation, which is the Rockland Center for the Arts.

Cooks:

Yes, okay.

03-00:30:45

Mayhew: I got on the board of Rockland Center for the Arts. I needed allies on there, so I asked Toni Morrison to join the board.

Cooks:

What happened?

03-00:30:55

Mayhew: She joined the board. Also John Houseman. I don't know if you know, John Houseman is one of directors and a filmmaker and an actor. I don't know if you know what a fantastic man he was. He lived next door when I was in town. He used to wait for the kids. Who's this man [waving at] the kids? John Houseman, one of the famous actor[s] and a producer and director, he was right there. I asked him would be on the board. He said, "Use my name; I can't be physically active." So I did, I used his name.

Then in Hillburn, New York. When we went up there, we had all these heavies to be involved with going up there. Now, Hillburn New York, we took the art program there, in terms of theater program and visual arts and structural development. We built a geodesic dome in town for their center, community center.

Cooks:

Well, what kind of community was that?

03-00:32:00

Mayhew: So I'm going to get into that.

Cooks:

Okay.

03-00:32:02

Mayhew: Now this community was a mixture of Dutch, African American, Native American. It's the most extreme sort of thing. They called them the "Jackson Whites." I don't know where that name really came from, but anyway. So we went there, and the town was completely divided. They had three churches there: one was Methodist, one Baptist, and one Episcopalian. And none of

those people talked to each other. So the art program we brought there brought all these people together, in terms of them exhibiting their work or involved with different activity. Many of the women never talked to each other, so we set up a thing where they would be involved in knitting a giant quilt, where all the women would be involved with doing it, knitting and crocheting and so forth, and making this quilt. It's the first time some of the people ever talked to each other. So this part of that uniting kind of thing. Then we had an exhibition of all the artwork they did. Now, this is right on the edge of hillbillyville, let's say, Appalachian mountain area. We got the people up there, which is not part of the community right there, to come down and exhibit. The carvings of those people were unbelievable, and the weavings of rugs and such from those people from the mountain area. When I first went up there, they thought I was a sociologist. I said, "I'm an artist." "You're an artist?" [laughs]

Cooks: So this was a program that wasn't for students—

03-00:33:42

Mayhew: So these were the hillbillies [who] came down to this community, which it would never be close to them, right? They would shoot at each other first. They came down and we set up an exhibition with them and the community, which was a mixture of this—but they didn't want to be associated with this mixture, but they came down and they came together with the musical thing, with guitars. They brought all their own instruments and things, which they made. We had one evening with the dancing and music with all these people which never even talked to each other. They exhibited there, all the different artifacts, which is excellent, fantastic art forms.

Cooks: So is this more of a community program with adults?

03-00:34:30

Mayhew: This was recorded by CBS, NBC at the time.

Cooks: So you got national attention.

03-00:34:38

Mayhew: There's no film copies of what happened.

Cooks: Well, I hope they have something in their archives. Okay. So these were adults. They were not students. Or was it a—

03-00:34:52

Mayhew: All adults.

Cooks: All adults, okay.

03-00:34:54

Mayhew: Well certainly, the young people were there. Because [some] young people they invited to work with them on one of the cameras. Later on, I was in New

York in Times Square for group meetings down there, and there was this young man on camera who was one of the young men who was at Hillburn. He was a cameraman at CBS.

Cooks: Wow.

03-00:35:19

Mayhew: He was a drug addict at that time. There's this young man [behind the] camera. He said, "Do I remember you?" I said, "I remember you." [laughs] So this was part of an extension of success, we felt. It's raining?

Cooks: It's really raining.

03-00:35:42

Mayhew: You hear it?

Tewes: Oh yeah.

03-00:35:43

Mayhew: Is it on there? [laughs]

Cooks: So let me ask you about—you came to California—

03-00:35:55

Mayhew: Well, I didn't finish about Hillburn.

Cooks: Oh yeah, please go ahead. I didn't mean to cut you off.

03-00:35:59

Mayhew: Yeah. In fact, the community came together then and we thought it was great. Was it three years later? We came back. They never used the geodesic center, and the people were right back to where they were several years ago, not talking to each other. So we was wondering how much this made a difference. Here and there, there were certain changes, because a lot of children there got an education at the college, which wasn't involved with that at one time. And others were involved with buying houses there that they couldn't buy before. So we felt we had some kind of impact. Then seeing that young man in Times Square that was on the camera there as a cameraman, well, maybe there's several things we just didn't find out, the contribution we made. But you can see how much the arts can play a great part in what we were doing there, and how much that can—is able to continue. Because when I left, and the community, when we pulled all the things out, the art programs away, I felt there should've been a continuation of input back and forth between the art center and there, and no one was doing that. That's when left for California. But I stayed there and made sure that there was a continuous program going back and forth. I felt that it was a problem. That needs to be constantly supported. So that was a good lesson. That was recorded by someone that was writing about it, or an essay on it—and I can't find that woman's name; she did that—in terms of how the arts play an impact or the community support

relationship and how that needs to be continued. You can't drop it all of a sudden.

Cooks: Was someone writing a book or an article about what happened in Hillburn?

03-00:38:14

Mayhew: This woman, she was writing an [essay]. I lost her name, but I remember that she did that and recorded that, and also wrote about: don't stop, keep continuing to support what was going on there.

Cooks: Do you think it helped that you were an outsider? That you were coming from a different community and had a different background to this place?

03-00:38:35

Mayhew: Well, we tried to work it in terms of what they were doing was part of the inside sensibility. Because the African American community was—James Van Dyck, another Dutch name, okay? It was a black community. Then you can see the Native American influence there. But then the hillbilly situation completely separated it from the area. Those people were very insensitive. There was one old man named—and they asked him about it. They said, "We're looking for artifacts up here." He said, "Well, I do a little carving." It's unbelievable carvings he did. Fantastic. He just takes a piece of wood, a branch and carves and makes designs on it and make it—so we got him to bring his stuff down there. He was so happy about [being] able to make a contribution. So that was that. I was wondering what happened to him and the other people that was like outsiders—they weren't really part of that inner community—and how that happened. I heard something about it. One of the guitarists up there became part of one of the famous bands later on, was one of the ones from the hill area. So I said, "Maybe there was some making a difference," because that was part of what we brought down to participate in: a music evening. As I said, maybe the whole thing doesn't work, but there's little things that develop out of it.

But that woman doing that essay said it needed to be continued to be supported. The center, Rockland Center for the Arts, certainly didn't—when I left there I was the agitator, instigator. It didn't continue because several of the new—they changed hands, also, at the center: a new director, new associates, and they weren't involved with that program. So that was part of it, too, kind of failure. Then the writer Toni Morrison, she couldn't be involved with participating in a lot of it. She was sympathizing about needing to continue to help support these programs, but she was involved with some other activity, which I respect.

Cooks: Do you remember meeting Toni Morrison? Because you knew her and you invited her. Can you tell us about that?

03-00:41:31
Mayhew:

Well, there was a program at the university there in Rockland County up there. There's a school, part of New York State University is up there. I went there and I met her with some other writers and things, part of the university. Then when I got to her, well, she lived in the area there. She was like just a neighbor, really. She had two little boys. So I was talking about that. One of her boys, I found out, became an artist. And she wrote a children's book with her son doing the illustrations.

Cooks:

I didn't know that.

03-00:42:17
Mayhew:

I wish I'd stayed in touch with them; I could have been more active. I used to leave notes about it, but—I tried to get Scott to go photograph her, because I wanted to do a portrait of her, but she didn't want to allow any photographs. So I missed out on several things, a lot of continued contact.

But she was very supportive of that and part of the Civil Rights movement. And one of the top Civil Rights women, Angela Davis, was there.

Cooks:

Yeah? Do you want to tell us that story? Angela Davis?

03-00:42:51
Mayhew:

Yeah.

Cooks:

Was she there, right? Okay. You have a story to share about Angela Davis?

03-00:42:57
Mayhew:

I went to knock on the door to see Toni Morrison, and another woman answered the door.

Cooks:

Well, they're both heavy hitters. It's good to know they're in conversation with each other.

03-00:43:14
Mayhew:

Yeah, right.

Cooks:

Is there anything else you want to tell us about Hillburn?

03-00:43:18
Mayhew:

Well, there might be. Another woman had come there was actually a Civil Rights woman.

Cooks:

Sure.

03-00:43:24
Mayhew:

It had nothing to do with anything else, because you might misunderstand about that, that's all.

Cooks: But it was a place for very intellectual people to come together. Seems like there was some energy there. People of different talents wanted to be in conversation.

03-00:43:38

Mayhew: Yeah, right.

Cooks: Is there anything else you want to tell us about that, before California?

03-00:43:44

Mayhew: Well, there was a special area there of development. Because that was my first time of unionizing things, right, putting things together. That was my first challenge. Which I felt very bad, because I didn't able to continue with that. Hillburn became a challenge for me, an impact, very important development of community and the arts. Because many people there were musically talented but never used their music talent. Others were actually really good painters and sculptors. The women made this giant quilt. You can't believe how fantastic that quilt was.

Cooks: What happened to that quilt, do you know?

03-00:44:33

Mayhew: I have no idea. That's part of it, see, with no follow-up.

Cooks: Right.

03-00:44:39

Mayhew: And then the geodesic dome, we found that was—we went there, it was filled with sand and cement. They were using it for a storage area for that. I think later on, that dome must've been torn down. Yeah, I remember Ina and Scott working on that dome. They were up there building it. [laughs]

Cooks: The people that built it were from different communities.

03-00:45:11

Mayhew: The area.

Cooks: Yeah.

03-00:45:12

Mayhew: We set up the plan and they had everybody in the community build it, the geodesic dome. Oh well, anyway.

Cooks: Do you want to talk about moving to California?

03-00:45:28

Mayhew: No, because that was the time I came to California, during that time.

Cooks: Okay, okay.

- 03-00:45:33
Mayhew: I went to San José State.
- Cooks: Yes, San José State.
- 03-00:45:38
Mayhew: No, Sonoma State [University] first.
- Cooks: Well, I have California State University, Hayward, 1974; and then I have San José State, 1975; *and then* Sonoma State, 1976.
- 03-00:45:53
Mayhew: Well, I went to Sonoma State first. Because I left from San José State to come to Penn State.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 03-00:46:02
Mayhew: Okay. So there was that difference.
- Cooks: Okay. Why did you come to California?
- 03-00:46:10
Mayhew: Because Hunter College, unless you were tenured, they stopped all tenure. I was coming up for tenure.
- Cooks: So you were at Hunter College. You started teaching there in 1971.
- 03-00:46:23
Mayhew: Right.
- Cooks: You were teaching there, and then also doing this program at Hillburn. Were you going back and forth to Hunter?
- 03-00:46:31
Mayhew: Yes, yes.
- Cooks: You were not tenured.
- 03-00:46:35
Mayhew: Tenure was coming up, right? They cut off tenure at all New York City University. So anybody who was coming up for tenure, that was it. I saw the College Art Association listing. There was an opening at Hayward, and I came there and they wanted to make me a chairman there of the art department. I said, "No way." He said, "We'll just split it." He said, "You'll be half chair." I said, "No, I don't think so." I didn't want to take that on.
- Cooks: Now, why did they want you to be chair? Because of your reputation?

03-00:47:13

Mayhew: Well, I was coming from New York, I had a heavy background, and they thought that I could bring all of that there, you know?

Cooks: Sure.

03-00:47:19

Mayhew: In terms of organization and so [on]. Because when I went there [I was] talking about organizational activities I was involved with. So right away, Oh, here's somebody who could be chair here, right? The chairman said, "Well, how about we split it? We'll share it." I said, "No, no, I don't think so. I have to see if my family wants to come out here." I called back to see if the family wanted to come. The kids were just getting ready to go out of high school, finishing, and to go to college, so they didn't want to split right there. So then I went to Sonoma. That's when I met Bill [William A.J.] Payne, the one that was teaching at Pratt when I was there, as a sociologist. He and I really hit it off, had a good relationship. So when I came up there, I found out he was one of the heavy people in the department there. Then he became the mayor of Cotati, the town that the university's in. He became the mayor.

Cooks: Okay. So while he was an art teacher, he was also the mayor?

03-00:48:37

Mayhew: Mm-hmm.

Cooks: That's incredible.

03-00:48:41

Mayhew: He wasn't an art teacher, he was a sociologist.

Cooks: He was the sociologist.

03-00:48:45

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Okay. So he was a professor and the mayor at the same time.

03-00:48:49

Mayhew: Anthropology. Sociology and anthropology, that's what he taught. He was heavy. He was very good. I had great respect for him. I knew his family at the time. In fact, I lived in his house there. He had another room he rented out to me.

Cooks: So what did you think about living in California? This is a big move for you.

03-00:49:12

Mayhew: Well, I said that I used to drive back and forth across the country to California. California had all the terrain factors the rest of the country had, and it was nice and warm here.

Cooks: So it was an exciting move.

03-00:49:28

Mayhew: So I liked that. And the people were friendly.

Cooks: Were the students different?

03-00:49:33

Mayhew: I thought they was aliens out here, but they were friendly.

Cooks: Were the students different from the students on the East Coast, or they were all similar in some way?

03-00:49:43

Mayhew: They were more laid back out here. New York is like, [sings]. So it's more laid back out here, so I kind of enjoyed that. Anything you did, they did it. It's okay, let's do it. That was good.

Cooks: So you liked that.

03-00:50:05

Mayhew: Yeah. Well, I found out I got things done, right? They went along with it.

Cooks: So then after you left California—is there anything else you wanted to tell us about that time before you went to Penn?

03-00:50:19

Mayhew: Oh yeah. I was teaching at San José State [University]. Actually, I really wanted to stay there.

Cooks: Now, why is that?

03-00:50:29

Mayhew: I liked the area and things were going on, and I was going to bring my children out there. I asked them to come out. They were getting ready to go to college and they went to New York, they wanted to be in New York. So that didn't work out. I had mixed feelings,[about] what to do or where to go at the time. What was going on at San José State, that's when I developed my Creative Center for the Arts and Science out of San José State.

Cooks: So we talked about that, we talked about—

03-00:51:03

Mayhew: That was organizing again.

Cooks: Right, another opportunity to organize. That was one of your dream projects, and working in the Bay Area.

03-00:51:12
Mayhew:

Right. But also, when I first came out here, I was the interim chairman of the National Academy [of Design] in New York. I set it up.

Cooks:

When did that happen? While you were out here in California?

03-00:51:30
Mayhew:

Yeah.

Cooks:

Okay. Tell us about that.

03-00:51:35
Mayhew:

Well, what it is, there's a lot of members of the Academy out here, but most of them are architects. They're prominent architects that built a lot of the main buildings, like the aquarium and several other main buildings, was built by these California architects. Like, [Frank] Gehry built the whole center northern part of California, which the—I got in the middle of that, which was a problem of architects were very conventional and Gehry was an outsider because of how he built buildings and how he thought about structure, right? This committee that was formed was to elect people to the Academy. That was the idea. So six people became part of this committee. Well, all it was, I was out here and I thought I would like to meet the rest of the academicians in California. I sent notes out for them to come together, and they responded. They all wanted to be together. I think, Okay. There was eight of them in the beginning, because there was a visual artist there. Most of them were architects.

Cooks:

Do you remember their names, some of their names?

03-00:52:58
Mayhew:

Oh, I don't.

Cooks:

No? Okay.

03-00:53:01
Mayhew:

Yeah. But there was a lot of the prominent architects out there. The only one I remember now—because Gehry was rejected by this group because he was an alien. Finally, we pushed him through. He became an academician. But the committee out here—any committee anywhere, like in New York—recommends someone, but then it has to be voted on, submitted to a committee in New York for them to vote on, for the election to take place. We set up a committee to elect several people. We elected several graphic designers from out here and painters out here, and then architects from here, also. How much that went through New York. Most of them that we recommended became academicians. So we [did it] like that.

But the fact that they didn't know what was going on when this committee that sent them back there, that who's the chairman of the committee out here? Me. I said, "Wait a minute." I talked to the architects. They were elected much

earlier than I was, in terms of the Academy. I said, "Would you like one of you being the head here?" They all pointed at me and I didn't know, so I ended up staying with it. When I gave it up, no one picked it up; it just stopped right there. So I said, "Well, wait a minute. What's going on? Why doesn't somebody keep this going?" No. Because to become the chairman of the National Academy on the West Coast means California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico. I didn't have any idea what I was getting into. Because as soon as I did, I sent out notes to the southern part of California, and to Arizona, New Mexico, and Washington State. I got letters back, "Yeah, we'd like to be part of it." But we can't have a meeting of all those people coming, so it has to be a letter exchange. So I had to get a secretary. I got a secretary, because I thought, I can't do this. Then I said, "What am I doing?"

Cooks: So it was a lot of work.

03-00:55:29

Mayhew: It was a lot of work. I didn't realize what I was getting into.

Cooks: How many years did you do that?

03-00:55:34

Mayhew: It was no more than three years because there's no way to continue this.

Cooks: So at the end of those three years, did you—

03-00:55:44

Mayhew: This is, again, organizing. [laughs]

Cooks: Yes. This is a new project.

03-00:55:47

Mayhew: I said, "What is this sensibility that goes on there with me trying to be an organizer?"

Then certainly, I got involved with interdisciplinary study. That's what I was trying to introduce to the universities, in terms of that concept. I was rejected everywhere I did it. They [asked], "What books are you using?" I said, "I'm not using books; it's intuitive." "Intuitive?" I said, "This is analyzing the structure of the university, in terms of the possibilities. This is a natural form of that, which is actually part of the university structure." It is really part of the university structure, but it's never been implemented, that's all. So that's what I was saying. They says, "What kind of background did you have to get to this point?" They was kind of questioning my degrees and where they all came from, right? How was I involved with the educational structure? Did I study at Columbia? I said, "No, the only study I did was art education and art history." Where did you get involved with this concept? I was being questioned about that any time I went anywhere: What's your background? What books do you

use as a reference? I had no books of reference. So they was constantly eliminating any time I tried to raise that whole development.

Actually, there was a College Art Association meeting in LA, and I went down there, and there was an opening at Pennsylvania State for a full professor. I said, "Whoa, I'm not going to get involved with that one. I don't have degrees in the areas of what I want to do." All the faculty in tone, I think they liked my background and so forth, in terms of I'm an academician and I taught at a lot of different schools. So they recommended me, the committee that was there, the faculty.

Cooks: So did you apply for it? You let someone there know you were interested?

03-00:58:19

Mayhew: No. When you go to a meeting there, it's a matter of you applying for the job situation.

Cooks: Okay.

03-00:58:25

Mayhew: I went to the meeting, and there was this opening for a full professor at Penn State in the art department. The faculty there, they kind of cozied up to me, I think, in the support relationship. I didn't seem threatening, that's where it was at. So they recommended me. They arranged for me to go to Penn State to meet the dean and the rest of the faculty, and also other administrators. This became a challenge there. I told them that I'm an interdisciplinarian. Everybody in the room looked at each other, and they looked at me, and right away, I had to quiet that down a little bit. That I taught at the Art Students League, where all the American impressionists studied in the early years; and I taught at several different universities in New York and so forth. And then they was certainly checking on papers and credentials right away. They said, "Well, we can't give you a full professorship. Maybe in a year." I said, "Well, put it in writing." So I came back to California. By then, there was no acceptance out there at that time. I think two weeks later, they called me and says that, "The committee feels that you would be a good fit for the university." I said, "[What] about the professorship?" they said, "Well, would you wait a year, and then we can evaluate you and give you the full professorship?" That's when they really want you to sign that I'm ready. I had them sign it that I'm ready, that [I will get it in] one year, otherwise I'll leave. I said that. They said, "Okay."

Cooks: This was 1977.

03-01:00:39

Mayhew: 1977.

Cooks: Okay. That's what when you first started—

- 03-01:00:42
Mayhew: 1978 I became a full professor and tenured at Penn State.
- Cooks: Wow. And you taught there the longest. That was the longest place.
- 03-01:00:51
Mayhew: Fourteen years.
- Cooks: Fourteen years, okay. So you were there—
- 03-01:00:54
Mayhew: I don't know if that's the longest. Because at the time, I wanted to stay. But you have to realize, when I went there, I was ten years younger.
- Cooks: You were ten years younger?
- Tewes: Do you want to pause? Okay.
- 03-01:01:13
Mayhew: I felt I was supposed to retire at [fifty].
- Cooks: Right. So you're born in '24, and you started at Penn in '77.
- 03-01:01:35
Mayhew: Right.
- Cooks: Right? So that made you fifty-three?
- 03-01:01:39
Mayhew: Yeah. [laughs]
- Cooks: And you thought maybe that seemed too old?
- 03-01:01:44
Mayhew: Mm-hmm.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 03-01:01:47
Mayhew: Yeah, I thought I was getting older. But I didn't say that because I had that on the books when I was at San José State that I was younger. So when I went there, I went along with it.
- Cooks: Okay.
- 03-01:02:00
Mayhew: Oh well, anyway.
- Cooks: So what classes did you teach when you got to Penn?

03-01:02:05

Mayhew:

Right away they gave me design classes and basic art and design classes and painting classes. But I wanted to teach interdisciplinary study, and the dean loved the idea, so she said, "Do it." They supported me to be involved with—1978 and '79 I did [an] interdisciplinary studies program, along with the other classes. So it was very heavy. The faculty found what I was doing; they added another class to try to cut out what I was doing in interdisciplinary study. But I stuck with it. So I did that too, right?

Cooks:

Did you collaborate with other faculty in other departments to make your classes work?

03-01:02:59

Mayhew:

Oh yeah, because it had to do [the] with business area, the science area, architecture—well, architecture was part of the arts area—also, what was the other—sociology, anthropology. They were all for it. I set up a lot of different programs. The faculty that came there in science, I tapped them as the visiting person and had them to come to my class. So I used them. They said, "How could you possibly use them?" I said, "Well, that's part of an open policy when you have guest lecturers come here." They said, "Mm." [laughs] So I used them. There was a mathematician that came there; he was fantastic. He came into my class and he was talking about what was going on in math, it's just completely primitive in what you're teaching. He went along without my talking to him, in terms of the inventive consciousness is beyond the norm. That was his attitude. Anything beyond the norm, do it. Wow. He was very supportive for me. So when they kind of stepped on him not to come to my class, he said, "I want the challenge of what's going on over there." Wow. So he came to me, he said, "Do it." I said, "Wow." He was kind of special man from Brown University. He was a mathematician. I wish I could remember his name now, but he's from Brown. I think he retired after that. He was brilliant.

Cooks:

So over the years while you were there, did your colleagues in the art department start to really understand what you were doing?

03-01:05:03

Mayhew:

No.

Cooks:

No.

03-01:05:06

Mayhew:

There was no support from them for what I was doing, and there was no involvement with them, what I was doing, also. So there was no support, that's all.

Cooks:

But how did the students react?

03-01:05:22

Mayhew:

Oh, the students loved it. Because the class of interdisciplinary study is only doctorates, post doctorates, and master's degree students; no undergrads. The

other faculty kind of resented that, the fact that this was the top of the scale. The post graduate people and graduate people said, "Hell, how come we didn't have this in undergrad? How come we never had this?" They were very supportive. Anything I wanted to do, they went along with it, so it made it easy. Because the doctoral students, they were almost in that area anyway, so it was easy for them to move into it and take advantage of it, in terms of the scientific expression and the advancement technique of ideas. They loved it.

Cooks: Were there any students that you remember who stood out for you, or any projects that you did with students that you'll always remember?

03-01:06:29

Mayhew: That student like that, that wrote to me, he wasn't part of the grad students, but he used to come sneak into the classes. I remember him now. That's the first I saw him. He would sneak into the other classes that I was teaching, okay?

Cooks: He remembered you.

03-01:06:54

Mayhew: Yeah. He would sneak into the other classes of what I was teaching at. He wasn't supposed to be there. I remember him now. He was a little alien.

Cooks: But [Rodney Allen Trice] says in this letter and this brochure of his work that you had a profound impact.

03-01:07:11

Mayhew: He had what?

Cooks: That you had a profound impact on his career, as—and you really encouraged him.

03-01:07:14

Mayhew: Oh, that's good. Well, because I didn't reject him. I saw him when he came in. There's a woman, also, used to come into that class. She didn't have a doctorate or a master's degree, but she was fascinated about what was going on. I didn't kick her out of being there—and also him. Let them stay there.

[points to painting by Beverly McIver] Oh, that's me pointing at the scene on the wall in there. That's one of my top students.

Cooks: What about Beverly McIver? She was one of your students at Penn.

03-01:07:50

Mayhew: Yeah. She was one of the better students that I had, yeah.

Cooks: Wow.

03-01:07:56

Mayhew: She would go along with anything you said. She was like, "You want me to do that, I'll do that. And I'll do this. And what about that?" She was excellent. Actually, what she's doing now is what was [Henry Ossawa] Tanner's technique.

Cooks: And what's that?

03-01:08:11

Mayhew: Tanner.

Cooks: Yeah. What was his technique?

03-01:08:12

Mayhew: You take a brushstroke and make an image right there. Perfect spot.

Cooks: Beverly's very prolific.

03-01:08:21

Mayhew: Right, prolific now. Then, she would do very well. Not only that, very exacting. She can make a face with three strokes. You can see that in that one over there. [refers to painting]

Cooks: It's incredible. Did you teach her that?

03-01:08:37

Mayhew: No. I saw the talent, and then where she wanted to go. We'd set up still life bottles and stuff. It's a matter of how much—just using one stroke of paint, you can do that. So she did that. Great. Make an orange, in terms of three strokes, four strokes and you've got it. I was supportive of what she was doing, and I liked her as a student. She was very open. If you said, "No, don't do it that way, do this this way; it gives you more freedom," she'd go along with that.

Cooks: Are there any other students that come to mind?

03-01:09:25

Mayhew: Oh, there's several students, like [Rodney Allen Trice]. I didn't even know that they were really responsive or learned, because you just don't know. That's why I said to hear from somebody, that's something else again. Also, Beverly, the fact that she became very successful. There's a couple other students that I see that are successful, but I never hear from them. But several of the students I know that were students, which are very bright, became administrators; they weren't painters. There's one I see all the time. He keeps writing and telling me he jumps from college to college as a top administrator. He's changed now from three different universities in doing that. But he was one of my students, in terms of that aggressive projection of ideas and going beyond the norm.

Cooks: I want to talk about what happened when you decided that you were ready to retire. There's so much art that you've made since you left Penn in 1992.

03-01:10:39

Mayhew: There's no such thing as retirement for an artist or a writer or a composer. Not if you haven't done it yet.

Cooks: Well, when did you and why did you decide to leave teaching, formally teaching at Penn?

03-01:10:54

Mayhew: Well, I regretted it after I left there.

Cooks: Why?

03-01:10:58

Mayhew: That I couldn't stay there longer. But I wanted to come back to California. So when I came back here, I went to UCSC [University of California, Santa Cruz]. I was teaching art history, using Samella Lewis's book.

Cooks: That's excellent.

03-01:11:16

Mayhew: So there again, they didn't know who I was up here. They felt I was just another faculty member they brought in to do art history. I didn't have the support of the faculty here, so I didn't like that whole atmosphere at all because of that.

Cooks: You were a visiting professor.

03-01:11:36

Mayhew: "We'll give you a little figure painting class," that's what they told me. I said, "Eh."

Cooks: You were at Santa Cruz at a visiting professor for one year?

03-01:11:46

Mayhew: Where's this?

Cooks: At Santa Cruz.

03-01:11:48

Mayhew: Yeah, yeah.

Cooks: Okay. So then you left that.

03-01:11:52

Mayhew: Well, they offered me to stay there and teach a drawing class. I felt that they weren't giving me the status. The fact of being an instructor instead of a professor after I just retired as a full professor? So the faculty was not

supportive at all. Then the chairman of the art department, she was just like a new person. So, who-are-you [laughs] attitude. She was really flippish. So I said, "Okay, I don't need this."

Cooks: What did you decide to do after—

03-01:12:32

Mayhew: I just retired, that's it.

Cooks: And you turned to painting fulltime.

03-01:12:37

Mayhew: Well, painting fulltime, I was always painting fulltime, really. Because as a faculty member, you teach two or three days a week, and the rest of the time you paint. Well, unless you have committee work you're involved with. Sometimes committee work takes a lot [of time].

Cooks: Well, let's talk about—

03-01:12:58

Mayhew: But I also wanted to do it at Penn State, like what I did at all the universities. I took the students from Penn State and I drove the van with fifteen, twenty students in the van, and made contact with the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art head, to meet with my students from Penn State. I drove to Washington doing the same thing, taking my students to the Smithsonian and all the parts of the Smithsonian. I had the heads of those areas to talk my students.

Cooks: Well, tell us why. Why was that an important meeting?

03-01:13:42

Mayhew: I thought that was important for the students. It was all part of the educational process for them to be exposed to, I felt, the real world. It was really the real world. If they're involved with the arts, do you know about the museums? You know how they work? Some of them are very discouraged. They said, "Whoa, I wouldn't—" had no idea that this is the world out there, they had no idea. Because the ones I took to New York was not—I had to take them to the galleries, and they found out how artists are treated with galleries, and the percentage of money and sales and so forth. I took them to the gallery. I was involved with the Midtown Gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street. They were very impressed. I took them there and had them talk to the owner of the gallery. Tell them about what I was doing there and how much the paintings cost and so forth, and the percentage that the gallery takes. Then how to get into a gallery in the first place. So the students were getting a complete education. They said, "Oh, you're crazy. I'm going to change my major." No, really. I had a couple that did change their major; not going to be an artist. That's a weird world out there. This is part of an educational thing, not just in the classroom. So I took them out of the classroom. I did that at Hunter, also, in New York,

and none of the students had been in the museums. That was my organizing, again, attitude, and extending the learning process in some way.

But the one going to Washington, D.C., that was quite a trip. The van, I remember, I almost got a ticket because I—where to park the van and take my students out and so forth. All this kind of stuff, right? And the tolls over the bridges and deal[ing] with that. I know going to New York in the snowstorm, I drove the van in New York and ran into the side of the embankment going over a bridge. Crazy.

Cooks: A lot of adventures.

03-01:16:05

Mayhew: Well, it wasn't severe, actually, it was just a bending fender, but it was the university property.

Cooks: Yeah, that sounds like an adventure.

03-01:16:14

Mayhew: Actually, then also housing for the students overnight in New York. I planned all of that, where they go to youth centers in the city so they could have a very cheap overnight rental before I took them back to Penn State. Later on I said, "What am I doing all this?" But I felt it was important.

Cooks: So, Rick, I want to bring us back. I want to talk about—thinking still chronologically—after you retired you came here. Because you're still in Santa Cruz, right?

03-01:16:57

Mayhew: That's right. Right.

Cooks: So you wanted to come back to California; you haven't left. You still travel quite a bit, and you show your art.

03-01:17:03

Mayhew: I travel back and forth to New York and see my daughter and my son back there. Also all my friends are back there.

Cooks: And you have exhibitions.

03-01:17:15

Mayhew: Constantly exhibitions.

Cooks: Constantly having exhibitions. So would you say that your art, the art that you make now—how is it different from the art you made fifty years ago? How have you developed as an artist? Or would you even think about that?

03-01:17:32
Mayhew:

Well, it's a matter of [being] able to maintain the consistency of that commitment of nature being a metaphor for emotional sensitivity, and how to keep that in form and not deviate from that, where it just becomes landscape and it's no longer involved with that concept. There's a trap there, where the form and subject matter becomes the form and subject matter, and not the sensitivity of the emotional involvement. So you find you get caught up in that kind of thing, and the application of paint, whether to do oil painting or acrylic paint or watercolor. And how much each one media would be involved with expressing how you feel. This is always a dilemma, or even—because when I go in a restaurant—I didn't do it last night—I sketch people in the restaurant. I always do that.

Cooks: So do you make art every day?

03-01:18:42
Mayhew:

Yeah. I sketch the people in the next table or something over there somewhere. I always do that.

Cooks: What kind of paintings are you working on now? What are your paintings like?

03-01:18:54
Mayhew:

Well, I just showed you one on my phone.

Cooks: Okay.

03-01:18:59
Mayhew:

Right? If you want to go over and take a look at it.

Tewes: Well, can you describe to us—

03-01:19:02
Mayhew:

I'll drive you over there and back. How's that?

Cooks: Well, for the record, though, not everybody who watches this is going to be able to go to your studio. Do you work on multiple canvases at the same time?

03-01:19:14
Mayhew:

About three paintings at a time.

Cooks: Okay. Tell us why. Why do you do that?

03-01:19:20
Mayhew:

Well, this painting is drying and it's not finished, and the color there is good; I can use it on this other painting, right? So that's sometimes a reason for it. Also, what's going on with the different feelings. But there's a problem sometimes, because I work on this one and I feel that maybe some of the designs would be over there. So I get caught sometimes between doing that.

And also the color, in which this color would be good over there and it's not what the color is there right now; but maybe if I use this color over there, it would—so there's that. The moods and spaces change.

Cooks: So I have a couple of questions about your painting, because I wanted to know how much your mood impacts the art that you make.

03-01:20:18

Mayhew: How much what?

Cooks: Your own mood, your individual, personal mood. How does that affect the way that your paintings look?

03-01:20:27

Mayhew: Well, it has to do with my communication here. Talking to you two, this is like ice cream cake. [both laugh] It's happy, because I don't always have this kind of exchange, or [am] allowed to have an exchange. That's what I miss from New York, because I could go down the street and meet some of the artists that are involved with open dialogue. I don't have that here. There's artists here; they're dilettantes. It doesn't make me more brilliant than anybody else, but they're not involved with that extended sensibility where I live, that's all. Because someone says, "Well, you're [living in] a bubble back here, [living isolated from the Santa Cruz art community]." I say, "No, not at all. No. Just the communication is not what I'm used to, that's all."

Cooks: One of the things that I know many people associate with you and your work are your red trees and the red bushes in your paintings. Can you talk a bit about those red trees? Why do you think people respond to them the way that they do?

03-01:21:47

Mayhew: Well, there was an exhibition at the Penn State museum [Palmer Museum of Art], and there was a red tree there. It's *Love Bush*.

Cooks: Yes, *Love Bush*.

03-01:22:02

Mayhew: How much the feeling is that. I said, "If you want to get involved with the sensitivity of [it], turn around three times and then look at the painting." [laughs] Just getting involved with a certain kind of response for fun. I found there were some people who were doing that. I would take them from outside to somewhere in the museum. There's a woman, she turned around three times.

Cooks: It sounds like a magic trick.

03-01:22:36

Mayhew: Yeah, right.

Cooks: But so many people are drawn to those works. When they think about your work, they think about—

03-01:22:44

Mayhew: Well, it has to do with emotional feelings. They'd like to have that red tree. If that's an example of a love feeling, okay, then excellent if they have that response to the image. So that's good.

Cooks: Could you say something about your exhibitions that you have today? How involved do you want to be in the exhibitions? Do you choose what you want to be in a show or do you allow—

03-01:23:15

Mayhew: Well, there's a whole body of work at the time and it's how much that body of work represents what I'm doing at that time, that's all. Now, the show I just had in Chicago, there's a lot of new paintings in that, right? How much that is representative? Now in Chicago, there's a whole other audience than would be in New York or California. When I went to this house that was being done, and one of the mansions there in Chicago, high-rise mansion, was the Afro-American millionaire.

Cooks: In Chicago. Is this the most famous African American millionaire, Oprah [Winfrey]?

03-01:23:58

Mayhew: That's right. At the reception, all the other African American millionaires showed up. Must've been about ten or fifteen of them.

Cooks: This is the reception for your paintings.

03-01:24:12

Mayhew: That's right. And the woman who owns it invited her friends.

Cooks: Well, how did this make you feel? This sounds like a big moment.

03-01:24:20

Mayhew: I think they bought one painting.

Cooks: Really?

03-01:22:26

Mayhew: Yeah. The rest suggested they would buy it, but right now I know it's only one. But to see all the African American millionaires, that was very nice to see, and who they are, right?

Cooks: Are there any particular exhibitions in your career that stand out for you? Exhibitions where you showed your work that you really remember?

03-01:25:00

Mayhew: Oh, I think the first one was the first impression.

Cooks: At Morris Gallery?

03-01:25:08

Mayhew: I was sort of shocked, yeah. Then the first show I had at the Midtown Gallery. To be on Fifty-Seventh Street, this was like an unbelievable possibility, when I had the first show there. Then I was trying to think: when I showed out here at different museums. Also my work that's in the Transamerica Building.

Cooks: Right.

03-01:25:36

Mayhew: To see my paintings up there, that was very impressive.

Cooks: You show work in Detroit, in Chicago, you've shown work in San Francisco. Has the community of black gallerists had an impact on your exhibitions?

03-01:25:58

Mayhew: What is that?

Cooks: So I was thinking about the number of African American people that own galleries. Has that been a part of your career?

03-01:26:08

Mayhew: Well, there's a mixed emotion there, because many of them got involved with it just for money, not for the arts. So I have a problem with that. One especially in Detroit. So there is that. It was just no concern really for the arts; it was just how much they could make money on it, which is with a lot of dealers in New York, too, the same way.

Cooks: Right, whether they're black or not.

03-01:26:33

Mayhew: Right, right.

Cooks: Yeah. Have there been some dealers, gallery owners that you really like working with?

03-01:26:43

Mayhew: Well, there's a couple of dealers which some of the artists that was part of Spiral that were these dealers, and they cheated them. Which is a game that a lot of gallerists play, unfortunately, not paying the artists. Or selling the painting, not paying the amount of money that—and also not paying the percentage. So you have that constantly. Which is the dealers involved with business. It's a businessperson.

Cooks: Do you have any good experiences with dealers that you could say something about?

03-01:27:25

Mayhew: Yeah, I had a couple good experiences, yes.

Cooks: Okay. Anything in particular?

03-01:27:31

Mayhew: Well, [Robert] Isaacson Gallery. After that first exhibition, he took my paintings on, and he'd take it on as an emotional commitment to the artist and their work. And he liked my family. He loved the kids when they were little, so there was that kind of little bit of a personal commitment there. So that was one gallery. Then when I went to Midtown, the man that was the owner of Midtown, he's the one that went to the Isaacson Gallery and saw the work and he said he'd like to exhibit the work. He was very involved with the work. It wasn't just being a dealer, getting another artist. So that's very nice, when you see that going on.

Cooks: So I'm going to ask you about in 2009, you had three exhibitions at the same time.

03-01:28:31

Mayhew: I didn't know that.

Cooks: I'm bringing this up because this was an important moment, I think, particularly in the Bay Area, for people to know about your work. But I just want to read the titles. So it was *The Art of Richard Mayhew: After the Rain*. That was here in your community at the Museum of Art and History at Santa Cruz. There was *The Art of Richard Mayhew: Journey's End* at the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University. Then the bigger retrospective: *The Art of Richard Mayhew* at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco.

03-01:29:08

Mayhew: Wow. I didn't realize they were all at the same time.

Cooks: They were all at the same time.

03-01:29:11

Mayhew: I didn't know that. She didn't remember.

Cooks: I think we all remember. This was a big moment, and there were many people that worked together to make this happen. Did you want to say anything about that moment, in terms of your exhibition history?

03-01:29:35

Mayhew: Oh, at the—

Cooks: We had it in three different places. So I curated your show.

03-01:29:45

Mayhew: You curated—right.

Cooks: At MoAD. Karen Kienzle curated yours at the de Saisset, and then Susan Hillhouse—

03-01:29:50

Mayhew: You curated the other exhibition, also?

Cooks:

No, no, no. Karen Kienzle curated the one at the de Saisset, and the one here in Santa Cruz was Susan Hillhouse.

03-01:30:01

Mayhew: Oh yeah, that's right. Okay.

Cooks:

And we have a catalogue from that show.

03-01:30:05

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks:

So was that a significant moment for you in your exhibitions or—

03-01:30:13

Mayhew: I talked to some of the people that come there, they didn't even understand what the museum was trying to do. Nothing to do with just me, but the museum there.ⁱ

Mayhew-Gibbons: Can we take a time out?

Tewes:

Sure, let's pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break.

Cooks:

So, Rick, we have been talking a lot about your paintings, but you also work in different media. You have some prints. Could you talk to us about printmaking?

03-01:30:47

Mayhew: Well, that printmaking probably is a problem because of the process of that. It's not spontaneous because it has to do with different layers in order of doing it and working out the different colors. Usually, the printmakers that do my prints never match the values and the separate patterns. Like, the one I have on the wall over there is different than what the painting is like that they're making prints of, or how much the print that I set up is not done properly. The only one that I know is, Bob Blackburn really did great printmaking and actually really represented—like, the two prints I have here of drawings that I did. He's so accurate and involved with the sensitivity of the drawing that—the other printmakers don't do that, so they lose the sensitivity of the work in the printing. So I have a problem in the process. It creates that division of separation, unless one is a master printer like Bob Blackburn was. Most of them are not, unfortunately, so many lose that. Like, Bill Majors was a great printmaker. He valued the possibility of losing some quality in the print process. So there again, you have that difference. So many prints have been made of me, and the value is lost. I know recently, I went to—they showed me the print they was going to do of a watercolor that I did. It was completely another color, not the color that's there, because [of] the way they was overlapping the separations of the different printing process. So I had to work

on them in order to get it back. Even when they finished, it was good, but it's not what it should've been, right? So I just have problems in printmaking for that reason. It's not that spontaneous to create that sensitivity. Sometimes if it's direct printing, where the artist is working right there on it and makes it, you can probably get it right; but otherwise, the process eliminates the uniqueness of the work.

Cooks: Are there any other media that you enjoy working in? Painting. You mentioned drawing. You do drawing.

03-01:34:00

Mayhew: Oh, drawings. I've always excelled in doing drawings. In fact, I have fun now when I do drawings of people in restaurants. It's not like Picasso would do a drawing in a restaurant; it pays for his meal. He used to pay for his meals that way. I don't do it for that reason. I do it because it's enjoyable to be able to exercise that imagery, right?

Cooks: So have there been important collectors for you in your career, people who collect your work that you have relationships with, who you really value?

03-01:34:44

Mayhew: Pamela Joyner.

Cooks: Pamela Joyner.

03-01:34:47

Mayhew: Her book said I was the first one she collected, and everyone else in the book was after that. She's been supportive all these years. She has ten of my paintings.

Cooks: Ten?

03-01:35:00

Mayhew: Ten.

Cooks: Wow.

03-01:35:03

Mayhew: Then she's setting up a room just to have my paintings at the Museum of Modern Art. So there's a kind of a support, dedication. But the room will be in her name; this is her room, but my paintings are going to be there. Then in that book, originally my painting was on the cover; but I like [Sam Gilliam's] to be on the cover and not mine, because—

Cooks: The *Four Generations*: [The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection of Abstract Art] book?

03-01:35:41

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

03-01:35:42

Mayhew: My painting was on the cover in the original, and they took it off because I felt that that was proper. I feel [Sam's] painting on there should be better, because it was representing abstraction, the whole book, so it went better than my painting being on there.

Cooks: So she's been incredibly supportive.

03-01:36:03

Mayhew: Yeah, all these years.

Cooks: Yes.

03-01:36:05

Mayhew: Right.

Cooks: Then are there other collectors that come to mind?

03-01:36:11

Mayhew: I think one is a long time ago. I started at the Robert Isaacson Gallery, and he was a collector. He collected a lot of my work. Then when I was in Florence, Italy, since he was handling my work at the time, he used to send money like the painting was sold, and they said he just put it under his bed. He didn't [say] [laughs] that they ever sold that way.

Cooks: What about Stan Lathan?

03-01:36:50

Mayhew: Oh, Stan Lathan has ten of my works, also.

Cooks: Okay. So he's been very supportive. When did you meet Stan?

03-01:36:56

Mayhew: Oh, I'm trying to remember when we met Stan. I think it was involved with one of his programs that he was directing.

Cooks: Okay. A TV program?

03-01:37:08

Mayhew: Yeah. Then after that, we became good friends. Well, you curated that retrospective of Spiral there. He was in the audience there with his daughter, which is a famous actress.

Cooks: Yes, Sanaa Lathan.

03-01:37:24

Mayhew: Right. Okay, right.

Cooks: Absolutely.

03-01:37:26

Mayhew: So that was very supportive, him coming. He said, "Don't start anything until I get there." I remember that. So he's been very supportive and he's a very good friend.

Cooks: What about Ed Littlejohn?

03-01:37:47

Mayhew: Ed Littlejohn never—he did some collecting of my work, but not a great amount. We did a lot of prints and drawings.

Cooks: Okay. But Stan and Pamela Joyner have been big collectors of your work.

03-01:38:04

Mayhew: Well, especially Pamela Joyner, more so.

Cooks: Okay. I wanted to talk about something else that happened that was very significant when you moved to California, which is that you met Rosemary Gibbons. Can you talk a little bit about—or a lot about—Rosemary?

03-01:38:27

Mayhew: Meeting Rosemary?

Cooks: Yes.

03-01:38:29

Mayhew: Well, Rosemary's [help] is the fact of why I'm reaching the age of ninety-five. She's kind of helped me maintain my longevity.

Cooks: So she saved your life? Is that what you're saying?

03-01:38:42

Mayhew: Yeah. She can be bossy sometimes, but she's very sweet and charming most of the time.

Cooks: She's very supportive? Would you say she's very supportive of you?

03-01:38:54

Mayhew: Very supportive. Yeah. Because that's what you need as an artist. Or as a human being. If you have a good partner in life, it makes a good difference. Because if they're not there, you find that you're losing something. I know when I first started losing my father and then my mother, and then recently my brother, it's a void. You didn't realize how much you're depending on certain people in your life, even though you don't see them every day. Because it has to do with friendship, also, the same way.

So Rosemary, what it is, there was a friend that I met in downtown Santa Cruz. He said, "There's a meeting at a house down the street. Why don't you

come over there with me?" I said, "Okay." So I came over there, and Rosemary had a meeting of friends there, right? She was talking to them and introduced me. He said, "Well, she owns this house." I said, "Wow." I looked at this house. I don't know if you've seen her house in downtown Santa Cruz. I said, "She owns this house? Oh well, I'd like to meet her."

Cooks: Well, what was this meeting about?

03-01:40:15

Mayhew: It was Native American sensibility and a meeting about [Native] American activity. So that was good. That was kind of right down my alley, because I was trying to make some identification with that part of my family, right, and here's a woman that's into it. And then she owned a house.

Tewes: She was quite a prize.

Cooks: So something that you share is interest in heritage?

03-01:40:53

Mayhew: No, but I found out we had a lot in common in many ways. There's a little sensitivity that she's involved with. She didn't know much about the arts, but she's learned very fast. Boom, boom, boom. Which is surprising, because of lay people just don't understand what's going on with the arts at all.

Cooks: But she's a filmmaker, so she's got an eye.

03-01:41:19

Mayhew: She's a filmmaker. You should see all the cameras she has. [laughs] Great film cameras. But also how much she's involved with the other activities, which is very good to hear and support. But she's great with the grandchildren, Rosemary, with the grandchildren.

Cooks: The subject of her work, she makes documentary films about—

03-01:41:51

Mayhew: Well, her documentary filmmaking, and she's supposed to do another one. So we're waiting for the encore here, as she gets into the next one. But she's a good photographer. She takes pictures of my paintings like no other does. She's very good at it.

Then also, we were in a restaurant. In some of these restaurants, there are paintings all over the wall and everything like that. She looked up, "That's Ernie Crichlow." There was an Ernie Crichlow painting on the wall in a restaurant and she spotted it, recognized it.

Cooks: Wow.

03-01:42:35
Mayhew:

I said, "Wow, it looks like an Ernie Crichlow." Strange. So she has this kind of sensitivity. She did it again very recently, too. She recognized something that I couldn't imagine that anybody would see that, right? So she's got a good eye. [laughs]

So there's that support situation, which you need. Then as artist, what is it, in terms of communication and association? I found out being out here and not having what I used to do when I was in New York. It's really a void, not having that kind of dialogue. I remember when I was in New York, on Twenty-Second Street there was several artists there that used to go to breakfast in the morning. That was nice to meet with them there. They were talking about the street down there and—but it was involved with a good kind of sensitivity exchange. Like Ed Clark.

Cooks:

He was one of the artists, also an abstract artist, and that you had a rapport.

03-01:44:02
Mayhew:

Yeah. We could talk about many things other than that. But I had that with musicians, too. Like the artist bass fiddle player. And there was other musicians I used to meet. They would talk about—oh, there's a great jazz pianist. I can't think of his name at the moment. He just passed away, unfortunately. That's one of the greatest bass players in the country. Yeah.

Cooks:

His name—

03-01:44:48
Mayhew:

Larry Ridley. [He is actually still alive.]

Cooks:

Larry Ridley, that's right. He played at one of your openings at the Studio Museum.

03-01:44:53
Mayhew:

This is the opening, which was one of the first one-person exhibitions at the Studio Museum.

Cooks:

That was 1978?

03-01:45:04
Mayhew:

No.

Cooks:

When was that?

03-01:45:05
Mayhew:

In '78. It was in '78.

Cooks:

Was it? Okay.

03-01:45:07
Mayhew:

It was in a loft. It wasn't on—

Cooks: In Harlem?

03-01:45:15

Mayhew: Yeah. This was on a side street up there in a loft, which was part of their exhibition center at the time. Now, the head of Spelman College, she's the one that wrote the catalogue.

Cooks: So you have this big community in New York; you retired, in a way, to Soquel; and you're here with Rosemary. She's part of your main support system now. You have your two beautiful children, you have grandchildren, you have this family. What do you hope is your legacy? What do you want people to really remember about you, with so many things that you've done? Do you ever think about how you want to be remembered?

03-01:46:06

Mayhew: Well, it doesn't matter, because I won't be here to know what they think. [both laugh] Someone says, "How do you want to be remembered?" I say, "Well, what's it make any difference? I won't know they appreciated what—" because everybody has this thing: well, I want to be remembered for this and so on. What does it matter if you're gone and no one cares? So you don't know about it, how much they enjoyed what you left. So I just hope while I'm still alive, that there's some memory and a respect, if there's any respect there. So that makes a difference. How much joy the other people around is like—like you two, the fact that you're involved with the arts and your sensitivity, that is the joy of life, really. If you don't have that, there's a just empty void. So when I came out here and I had no one to talk to, it's really—I didn't realize how much I'd miss those—I sometimes, "Oh, I don't want to be bothered with them." Sometimes I miss them. So there's that kind of thing that you feel, that how much you enjoy certain things, you don't realize how much it's part of a joy with existence that you have. So I think this is very good.

I just hope that the Studio Museum here really does very well, this museum here in California.

Cooks: Well, there's the Museum of the African Diaspora.

03-01:47:53

Mayhew: They keep changing directors.

Cooks: Yeah. I was at the Museum of the African Diaspora a couple weeks ago, and they have some works from the Studio Museum there. So I think that they are continuing to develop more audiences and—

03-01:48:14

Mayhew: Well, the staff there seems very good. They're the ones maintaining consistency of it.

Cooks: Right.

03-01:48:19
Mayhew:

While the directors come and go like on the winds. Like someone changing garments, they're changing directors. How much the staff is really what's maintaining and keeping that place alive. I see the structural changes in the area and the exhibitions. They just had the exhibition of the Studio Museum in Harlem there.

Cooks:

Right. Yeah, that's there now.

03-01:48:48
Mayhew:

Right, which was good.

Cooks:

Yeah, it's good.

03-01:48:52
Mayhew:

Who set that up? I don't know.

Cooks:

Are there any other things you want to say? We've reached the end of our time.

03-01:49:04
Mayhew:

It has to do with the joy of the visual arts. The only thing that disappoints me is the fact that it's an isolated area. Performing arts on television or wherever, the performing arts is much better appreciated and constantly seen. The visual arts, if you're exhibiting in a gallery or museum, the lay public doesn't really see that. So there's a void here and separation, and I feel that is a problem. Because when I go to museums, I have great—I'm really enjoying the encounter. I've found that the lay public doesn't have an opportunity to have that enjoyment. So that's one of the feelings I have a problem about.

Oh, there's one thing. Al Hollingsworth. We didn't talk about him. Al Hollingsworth, he had a Sunday morning program to show museums, people in the museums. He'd walk around and show the museum.

Cooks:

This was a TV show?

03-01:50:18
Mayhew:

Yeah, a TV show. That was discontinued because it didn't have enough support. But this is an opportunity for the lay people to see the museums. I still feel that someone should do that. I'm not going to take it on. That's what I'm suggesting now. But I'm certain there's other people that could take that on and have Sunday programs, a walk through the museums. Different Sundays would show different areas of the museum and different artists of the museum, or different museums across the country. He started that. I don't know what happened. I never asked him what happened, how that program was stopped. It has to do with sponsors and so forth. But anyone can pick that up and take it on. It's still a void out there. It'd be great for someone to do.

Cooks:

So Rosemary has some other things that she wanted us to—

03-01:51:25

Mayhew: Well, that was part of, again, my organizing situation.

Cooks: Okay.

Tewes: What is this?

03-01:51:30

Mayhew: But I won't get too heavy into it now.

Cooks: Okay. Well, this was just marking an important symposium you did at Penn State.

03-01:51:38

Mayhew: Yeah. At Penn State, right.

Cooks: Okay.

Gibbons-Mayhew: You could take it out of the—

Cooks: Okay.

03-01:51:44

Mayhew: This was organizing. It was started at another museum other than Penn State, and Penn State took it on and put on a much more extensive exhibition of the program. Oh, you don't have to take it out, do you?

Gibbons-Mayhew: Well, I'll take it out.

Cooks: I think I got it. It was a piece of tape. There we go.

03-01:52:08

Mayhew: Oh okay.

Cooks: You want to hold that up?

03-01:52:15

Mayhew: It was just one more organizing situation. But I didn't organize the whole thing. I'm the one that suggested the artists to be in the show.

Tewes: So that's called *Since the Harlem Renaissance*.

03-01:52:31

Mayhew: Yeah.

Cooks: There we go.

03-01:52:37

Mayhew: Oh yeah, okay.

Cooks: This was another event that you organized. This was in the—

03-01:52:43

Mayhew: Well, I didn't organize the whole thing. There was a college about ten miles away from Penn State that did this program first.

Cooks: Okay.

03-01:53:03

Mayhew: Then when it came to Penn State, they didn't have all the artists that I suggested, because they left them out. They didn't know who they were. So I suggested who they were and gave me a listing of African American [artists]. That was my input on this. So when it came to Penn State, they had all these artists come there and visit, and all the seminars and everything that took place during that time. It was great.

Cooks: Okay. Then there's one more.

03-01:53:28

Mayhew: Yeah, that's my biggie.

Cooks: Okay. Well, let's show this one, too, then. Here's one.

03-01:53:36

Mayhew: Yeah, okay.

Cooks: I'm going to hand this to you. I'm going to take this.

03-01:53:41

Mayhew: Okay.

Cooks: I think it's upside-down.

03-01:53:45

Mayhew: Yeah, that's okay.

Tewes: Can I see it more this direction?

03-01:53:51

Mayhew: This is my interdisciplinary program at Penn State. It was the first time it was done anywhere, okay? I have requested to go back to Penn State as a closure of my university existence. I don't know if they have accepted that idea, for me to come there and do that.

Cooks: This is dated 1979.

03-01:54:19

Mayhew: This, yeah.

Cooks: Okay.

Tewes: So is that the name of your course, The Art Science Interface, or a program you were trying to start?

03-01:54:24

Mayhew: The graphic design department changed it. I wanted it to be an interdisciplinary program, instead of how they put it out.

Cooks: Was that the name of your interdisciplinary program, The Art Science Interface?

03-01:54:41

Mayhew: That's what they—

Cooks: That was their title, but not what your title was.

03-01:54:43

Mayhew: That's their title.

Cooks: Okay.

03-01:54:46

Mayhew: Well, The Art Science Interface. But okay. So I did everything you can imagine, mixing up that. That was all part of taking all the students to New York and Washington, D.C., also.

Cooks: Okay. Rick, is there anything else that you want to say before we finish?

03-01:55:08

Mayhew: No, that's fine. There's no end. It just continues.

Cooks: Okay. Well, to be continued.

03-01:55:18

Mayhew: Life continues. That's it.

Tewes: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.

[End of Interview]

ⁱ There was a three-part retrospective in California of Mayhew's art in 2009: *The Art of Richard Mayhew*, Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, October 10, 2009-January 10, 2010, curated by Bridget R. Cooks; *The Art of Richard Mayhew: After the Rain*, The Museum of Art & History at the McPherson Center, Santa Cruz, September 12-November 22, 2009, curated by Susan Hillhouse; and *The Art of Richard Mayhew: Journey's End*, de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, September 26-December 4, 2009, curated by Karen Keinzle.