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## Interview no. 132

Charles C. Stewart

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Charles C. Stewart

INTERVIEWER: John H. McNeely

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Artist.

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Autobiography.

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(Interview with Charles C. Stewart by John H. McNeely on May 22, 1974.)

M: You were born in Toledo, Ohio?

S: Toledo, Ohio, back in 1922, May 23rd.

M: Did your father have a business there?

S: In the early days, he had a little grocery store. Then he went to school and finally wound up being a tool maker, which was quite a profession. That gave him liberty. They always asked him if he would like to be a foreman or a boss. He said, "Well, once rabbit season comes (or hunting season or fishing season), I can leave; and if I were a boss I would have to be here." That gave him a freedom, so he said, "If you don't like it, you can fire me and I'll just go down the street and get another job." It's a type of profession that is in demand. When he retired he had given all his tools away; he knew the day and hour he was going to quit and he did. They couldn't lure him to stay on.

M: You went through the public schools there?

S: Yes, brilliant student that I am! (Laughter) I also went to the Toledo Art Museum, which is a very fine museum. At one time it was the third best in the nation. It had the backing of Libby-Owens, Ford Glass, that makes all kinds of things. I went to the museum till they ran out of courses, and that was about World War II time. I never really thought much about being an artist, so when I got back from the war, I met a friend of mine. We had done the school yearbook together, illustrations and like that. I asked him what he was going to do and he said he was going to the Art Students' League in New York. Of course, I was on the G.I. Bill, so five days

later I was gone--packed up and moved. I suppose out of the four years, I was there about two and a half; then I came to Taos, to a friend of mine who was coming to Taos. They had two art schools here: Bistrum had one and Louis Ribak, who was from New York, had opened up a school. So I came here off and on.

M: Did they have art courses when you were in high school?

S: Yes.

M: You took those.

S: Yes. I got an F the first semester and then A's all the rest. I don't know how the F got in there. I thought I was doing great! (Laughter) But I asked myself, after having gone through all that, what did I really want to do? So I thought the thing that would make me the most happy and satisfied was painting and sculpture. So that is what I pursued.

M: Then you served with the Army.

S: I was in the tank destroyers. I was in Normandy, D plus 11, and at that time we had three-inch towed guns. Then when the Third Army was formed in Normandy with Patton, why, we became part of this Third Army. That was exciting. It was a great thrill to liberate people from concentration camps and things. I thought that I was contributing to humanity and people, and I saved as many Ann Franks as I could.

M: You actually saw fighting, then.

S: We had 11 official days of being on the frontline. We crossed Normandy, crossed France to Chartre, and then to the Moselle. As a matter of fact, I have sketches of those. We had towed guns at the

time and the tank destroyers were supposedly (ha ha) strictly a defensive thing, and we would always be on the flank, on the weak point, on the shoulder. Then at Metz we got M-10s which mounted 90 millimeters. Then Patton thought we had open turrets; we were not a tank at all.

M: A tank destroyer is a vehicle, then?

S: It's a track vehicle mounting 50 caliber anti-aircraft and a 90 millimeter, which is a little larger than an 88. Although an 88 has more muzzle velocity than a 90, we had the same penetrating power. As far as our outfit is concerned, we got more of them than they got of us, because the German Army was a formidable force--fanaticism. Somehow or other you had to equal it. But through all of it--I wouldn't want to do it again, but it certainly separates the men from the boys. I think in painting and in sculpture, in creative fields (the whole field) you have to be really a dedicated person. You have to take the good with the bad--good times, bad times. It's either feast or famine.

M: What did you do on the tank destroyers?

S: Well, I was in the security section which brought up supplies, took over tank duty. We all were able to either drive the thing or fire the guns, which we did.

M: Did you admire Patton?

S: Well, his guts and our blood! (Laughter) Yes, well, since we were a defensive force and his whole attitude was offense, he really didn't know what to do with us very much. So a lot of times he would send us out to do tank duties, which we were not designed to

do. Our mission was to hold and to destroy. "Seek, strike, and destroy" was our motto. If you're fighting tanks you also have to contend with the infantry. So a lot of times we were doing the infantry's job just to get into position to use the tanks. I would rather have been in a tank destroyer than be in the infantry or in the tanks, because you didn't have to pack everything and you were usually in a town or some protected area. The elements are just as difficult to fight as the enemy. It gave me backbone and courage to do what I'm doing.

M: You went through all this without a scratch?

S: Well, there were two places. We were out hunting deer down around St. Denise, which is quite far south of where the Germans counter-attacked at the Bulge. Nobody ever told us that a one single wire around an area meant that it was one of our own mine fields. So we were out running these deer around in the mine field. I tripped a hand grenade which they had put at the base of a tree, and all I got was a little fragment through the front part of my lower leg cuff; whereas the guy behind me got quite a bit of shrapnel. Of course, I figured 13 times within a fraction of a second, I wouldn't be here. The other closest thing was when we were at Fraulauten, near St. Louis along the Saar River. There was a rear guard action that the Germans initiated to allow their horse-drawn infantry to escape and get across the bridges on the Saar River. We were attacking the tanks in this town. My driver had a bazooka, and I was bringing supplies and directing things. The street came forward right toward you, then it broke off into a Y shaped thing. In the

Y area was a little garden along the wall of this house. And I was coming along there with an overcoat--it was colder than the dickens--and there was a sniper there. If I hadn't slowed up to make the turn on the walk, I would have walked right into it. The bullet hit the wall and just threw plaster all over my face. It was just like sand paper. I hit the ground so hard (laughter) that I lost my helmet and my equipment. But that was the closest that I ever came, that I know of.

M: He only fired that one shot at you, no more?

S: That's all the time I gave him. They tell you that you should go one at a time. Well, you either go first or you all go together. Because what happens is that the first man goes, and if he's spotted, then that gives him time to get into position for the second man. And being a dodo, I was the second man. Everything they write in the manual--it's like my driver said when he fired the bazookas, "They don't tell you that you could get killed shooting one of these things." So you learn a few things, if you live long enough.

M: When you came back, you had a friend who was going to New York?

S: Yes, Eugene Powell, who was a really good painter. I don't know what he'd doing now. I have never heard from him since.

M: You went to New York to the Art Students' League for a couple of years?

S: Yes, off and on. I wasn't there permanently all that time. I kept going back. I had gotten married and had moved to Taos. Then we would go back and see her folks and I would get a job, trying to make a living. (Laughter)

M: Besides other than painting, this work that...

S: Well, I was showing in galleries there and selling off and on. It was a contemporary art gallery on 57th Street in New York, run by Miss Frances, which was a nice elderly woman. She got a lot of artists started. Peter Bossa is one in particular, and many others that I can't recall now. The gallery was towards the east side. It no longer exists, although there is a contemporary art gallery in New York. That Howard Cook Show is in, I think.

M: Your wife was from Toledo?

S: No, we got married in Toledo. She was from Canarsie and her maiden name was Charlotte Povolofsky. Her father and mother were born in Minsk, Russia. They were of Jewish descent, and they met in New York and got married.

M: But now this name Stewart seems Scottish.

S: Yes. My father was Scotch and Irish, and my mother was Dutch. So my full name is Charles Stewart, which is Scottish. But mother had to get her Dutch ancestry in there, so it's Charles Carl Stewart.

M: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

S: No, I was the only one. My father said he would have really been better off if he had made a wheelbarrow, which really doesn't set you up for life, does it? But we got along pretty well. He was a very prejudiced person. We used to fight tooth and nail.

M: Did you say he was a Lutheran?

S: No, he was an iconoclast, really. He didn't dig religion.

M: And your mother wasn't interested either?

S: She never fought him over that. Once in a while she swore. Once



she said, "You hell you," and when she said that, she really meant it! (Laughter) She was pretty straight, a great gal. She's 82 now.

M: She lives in Florida?

S: Yes, north of Orlando, in a little town on a lake between Tavares and Leesburg. I usually see her once a year; it may not be Christmas, but usually before or after.

M: You go over there or she comes here?

S: She doesn't want to travel anymore; she says it's too hard for her.

M: And your father is dead?

S: Yes, he's been dead now about 10 years. All the family plots are in Toledo.

M: Was your wife artistic?

S: She wanted to paint. She did, a little bit. She wants just to write, but she's been married several times and has quite a family. So I guess she doesn't have time for it.

M: Was her marriage with you her first one?

S: Yes.

M: But then she's gotten married since.

S: A couple of times.

M: Did you come right out to Taos from New York?

S: Yes. As I mentioned before, I got my musical education as an usher in Carnegie Hall. It'd be a long day. I'd work out, have an early class at the Art Students' League in the morning; then go to Carnegie Hall for a performance, go back to the Art Students' League for another class, and then go back to Carnegie Hall for the evening. Then

sometimes if Eddie Condon, who is a well known jazz musician who had a group, performed at Carnegie Hall, I would be there in the evenings; and the ushers would get together after the performance and go around the corner to the Carnegie Hall Bar and get loaded, or pick up a couple of packs of beer and go to somebody's apartment and drink for the rest of the night. Then at various times I had a job in the frame shops with Heydenreich, who was really the best framer in the United States. He does most of the framing for the museums. So I got an education, an apprenticeship, you might say. Framing was very beneficial for a painter. I make my own frames; basically I leaf them, and do the whole thing, which saves a lot of money; and you can design a frame that goes with the painting. You're not stuck with commercial things that they sell.

M: You have a shop where you make the frames?

S: Yes; it's part of my studio. The studio that I built consisted of around 21 rooms. In part of that I had two painting studios, one I could teach in; a frame shop with tools and molding; and a sculpture studio. So that was really kind of nice; I had everything all wrapped up. It gave a freedom to do a lot of things other than sit at the easel and paint, which gets to be a bore after a while, really. I remember Walter Uhfer; one of his complaints was that painting wasn't really physical enough. He was a huge person and sometimes you get to a point where you just get burned out, so to speak.

M: Well, you don't get much exercise.

S: That's true. But framing and all that does give it to you. That was his complaint--there wasn't enough physical exercise, so he

wound up drinking and gambling, and no painting. So you have psychological problems, particularly when you get into the middle age. I don't know, you just don't have that energy or zest. You lose a direction, too, that can become lost in a quagmire with the IRS, and all that.

M: What was the first year you came here to Taos?

S: I came here in 1947. A friend of mine, Glen Albertson, he and I hitchhiked out here. His friend was Bob Harvey, who's quite a well known painter in California. He is one of Betty Hutton's entourage. When she goes to Spain, the whole group goes; it's kind of a jet set kind of thing. He shows up at Gumps in San Francisco.

M: You said there were two art schools when you came?

S: Yes.

M: And you attended those?

S: Just one. If you attended one and not the other, you were outcast by the other. There was competition. Emil Bistum, who had a good setup, he would come here in the summer, and he would have a basic school in Los Angeles. One time he ran Guggenheim Museum in New York. He's very political minded; and really, I don't think Taos would be what it is today if it weren't for Bistum, because he's still very active. I was never really much of his group, but the people that he liked, he gets them jobs through government financing. And he is very active in Santa Fe with the museum there. Taos Art Association here is his baby. He gets things done. He's quite amiable.

M: Well, then, you began painting and selling your paintings pretty soon?

S: Yeah. I've always sold not greatly in the beginning, but I've sold to a lot of artists. As a matter of fact, even in New York, Miss Frances wouldn't tell me who she sold the painting to, but it was to an artist there. Oh, it's nice to know that other artists like your work and other artists buy them. Hopefully you stimulate them, too. Of course, I buy paintings and sculpture also, swap or sell. I swap paintings for plumbing, for light fixtures; I've done some murals in restaurants for food.

M: For their meals.

S: For meals, yeah. You know, they used to use that a great deal in Europe--Picasso, a number of artists. Van Gogh did the same thing.

M: Some of my artists have done portraits for doctors or dentists, something like that, then they get free medical attention.

S: I really haven't done that. I haven't found a doctor that...of course, I really don't like doctors. I think they're all a bunch of quacks. (Laughter)

M: Who does!

S: I think there are dedicated doctors, but I think they mostly go into medicine because at one time they were guaranteed \$20,000 a year. What is it now? \$50,000, something like that. Of course, they have their problems, too.

M: When you were first here, you didn't have a gallery of your own, did you?

S: No, I was showing in the galleries.

M: In the galleries here?

S: In Texas; El Paso, where you live, over in Dallas; Phoenix, Denver.

Colorado Springs hasn't grown that much, yet they really have a good gallery. I've shown in Tulsa, where I taught. I taught in Philbrook for about a year and a half. I took over Sunday and Saturday kiddie class, which was fun. You could do all sorts of crazy things, wear costumes. I think you learn from the children, since they're uninhibited. I think they're one of the greatest sources of learning. They don't really know what they're doing; it's completely intuitive. But with a little psychological insight, you can see what their problems are. A friend of mine by the name of Bernie Stone, who is a student of Bistrum's--he's now in Zanesville, Ohio, he has several degrees in psychiatry. He paints well. He's from Topeka, Kansas; his father is a dentist. He's running a whole department in a hospital. I'm sure he's very good for the patients. He sent me some of his pamphlets on what he's doing. He has a tremendous amount of energy. I'm interested in that, but I couldn't do that kind of thing. You can't get involved with problems; you can't take them home. I would.

M: When were you teaching in Tulsa, Oklahoma?

S: I think it was somewhere along 1963. I never have remembered that date, but I can look it up in my file.

M: Most of the rest of the time you've just stayed here in Taos?

S: Yes. I did go to Scottsdale at one time and showed with Buck Saunders and O'Brien's Gallery, who at that time had the best gallery in Scottsdale. There are a lot of others now. I showed with the Golden Key Gallery.

M: That's in Scottsdale?

S: That's in Scottsdale. She never sold anything for me, but all those paintings are now sold. The problem is that you have to get someone like Charlotte Schwartz, who is a good example. She's interested in paintings; she's an exciting person; she likes to sell. You have to have that enthusiasm. You can be a Rembrandt, and if you don't get into a gallery where the salesperson or owner doesn't get enthused, your work just doesn't sell -- unless someone comes in and takes it off the wall. But selling is an art, particularly paintings. It's not like J. C. Penney's when somebody comes in and wants a pair of socks; they know what they want to start with. But in painting, you do find people like yourself who are collectors and know something about it--you're my kind of buyer. You come in, you say, "Go away and let me look." You rummage around here and there. All the good things aren't on the wall, they're sort of back off somewhere. I think an artist really doesn't know too much of what he's doing. He can't evaluate his own work. The things that he likes can be awfully bad. It takes another opinion. I just think, "Paint what you like." Do your own thing and let time and collectors or museum keepers or whatever decide what is good or what's bad. I don't think that museum people know that much, either. For instance, there is a new director at the Santa Fe Museum. Well, you have a great exodus of painters and sculptors leaving Taos to go down and introduce themselves and butter him up, the golden apple down there, tell him how great they are. I don't do that. Probably I should; I might be further along. But I feel if the work doesn't have it, the personality doesn't make it up in the

long run.

M: You didn't actually go out to Scottsdale to live, did you?

S: No, it was sort of at the end of divorce, and I had Courtney, who's turned out to be a good kid; long haired and barefoot the other day, which I don't approve of, but he's a little bit too old to exert your opinion, you know. (Laughter) But anyway, I had some child support and it was a good way to get away for a while.

M: You have a child now?

S: We became very entangled. I have two. Both wives were named Charlotte. So now I become psyched out when it comes to Charlottes, wherever they are. (Laughter)

M: You've been married twice?

S: Three times. I married the last woman twice. In my more lucid moments, I really know I'm not all there. So I went out there because things in Taos were so entangled. At that time... why, you know, you get a divorce and you're wiped out financially. I never had that big deal of money to make up the difference, so for a lot of reasons it was good. I met a lot of people, and still know a lot of people in Phoenix, Scottsdale. A lot of my friends are there now who have been in Taos at various times.

M: Your son is named Courtney?

S: Yes. He was adopted by her third husband, who she had most of her children by. His name is Hesse. I've been trying to get him to change his name, but that's something we can't force. There's no use.

M: So Courtney now is sort of your interest.

S: That's right. I bought him an old car and sent him off to Las Cruces. A very fine college they have there. I think it's financed by Carnegie. One of the Carnegie offspring is headmaster, or runs the thing. I rather think that the school trains young people through grants and things. They take the bright ones to work into their own manufacturing or whatever they do.

M: This is at Las Cruces.

S: Yes.

M: What's the school called?

S: That's a good question. I have a file on it. All I'm interested in is whether he gets good grades and keeps his nose clean.

M: I hadn't heard of that school.

S: It's near Socorro; there's a college there. It's in Las Cruces and Socorro, someplace in that area. It's New Mexico Institute, isn't it?

M: Well, it's the one in Socorro, then.

S: The one in Socorro, okay.

M: It's sort of a vocational training school.

S: Yeah. It has the usual classes. It's New Mexico Technical Institute.

M: Does Courtney use your name?

S: No. I would want him to. I have a lawyer who was incorporating this gallery. He wanted to incorporate us and I asked him whatever the necessary papers were to get them prepared. So if he ever feels like it, he'll have that. So I swapped him a small painting for his legal advice.

M: Then you have another child?



S: Yes. Carl Anthony Stewart. His mother lives in Albuquerque, and he's going to school down there.

M: He is not an adopted child, he is your child?

S: Yes. He comes from the Swiss family; Nescafe. There's a lot of wealth there. So I don't need to worry about him.

M: He's by your second wife?

S: Yes.

M: You say you married her again?

S: Yes. I'm not very bright.

M: Are you married now?

S: No, no. I found out that three strikes, you're out in any ballgame. That has a couple of meanings there. (Laughter)

M: Well, what different places have you lived here in Taos?

S: In New Mexico?

M: Here in Taos--I mean homes.

S: Oh, when I first came here, I bought a little place and kind of fixed it up. Then eventually I sold it and put that money in a bunch of ruins which I bought in Upper Ranchitos. I developed that, as I said before, into a two-story place. At that time, there were a lot of Spanish homes that were abandoned and falling down, some public buildings that were taken down. So I bought corbels, posts, windows, doors, and stuff. A number of us did that, so that the Spanish tradition which they were abandoning--you might say artifacts--we saved and put them into kind of cloisters. Larry Frank bought a morada and many other buildings that he got doors and window frames and things from. So it was kind of a little mission to save the Spanish

culture. The Spanish were moving out of adobe buildings into "better homes and gardens," plan A and B, and now it's mobile homes. It's kind of an exchange of culture. Anglos that come here buy the old Spanish ruins and fix them up, and the Spanish take over the trap-pings of the Anglos. It's kind of fascinating.

M: Were these some old ruins you bought?

S: Yes. Back in 1794 was the first date in hand written Spanish of that time. It was a large land grant. Over many years it was sub-divided through the relatives and this and that, until finally... Well, one place in there mentioned that they sold some land for a couple of sheep and goats, a leather lariat, and some old bed-springs, pots and pans and stuff. An iron pot in this area was really quite something, instead of cooking out of a cut open lard can. All the metal that came into this area was shipped from Spain to México City and then it was brought up here in wagon trains, bullocks, and the two-wheel carts. There was a disbursing shipping center at Abiquiu and then it was trucked up here and then it was sold. This was a really far out area. It was the Spanish empire.

M: Remote.

S: Oh, yes. Back in 1680 when the Indians rose up under Popay and threw out the Spanish military, the Spanish military or Spanish government would not allow the peasants to have arms. It was written in an abstract there that the little village had to form a little militia. They had to train twice a month and they had to bring their bows and arrows. When you're fighting the Comanche, the Kiowa, the Navajos, and the Apaches with bows and arrows, you're

not doing very well. If it really hadn't been for the United States Army, the Apache and Navajos would not have been subdued. Remember Kit Carson? They would have really wiped out not only the Spanish in this area, but also the Indians and the Pueblo. What Kearney did is to try to separate the races. The Navajos and Apaches were not really a very benevolent group.

M: Well, they weren't friendly with one another.

S: Yes.

M: You gave a name for these ruins.

S: Well, it was in Upper Ranchitos.

M: Upper Ranchitos?

S: Which means the river comes from the pueblo and the upper ranches and the lower ranches. Ranchito means a small ranch. So as the water falls down hill, you have a higher, upper rancho, then a lower rancho.

M: Yours was near the Taos pueblo?

S: Well, it's about two miles from there, generally speaking, along the river.

M: This was the place where you kept enlarging it until you got to have 22 rooms?

S: Yes, that's right. I built my own pueblo. I was house poor so I sold it and started a new place. My romance with adobe is over. The maintenance on it is just too much. Adobe in northern New Mexico is cheap to build. It was all right in the old days when large Spanish families every spring would get out and maintain it. But today for a single family you have to hire everything done. It's

just too expensive. I spent more time on the roof fixing the leaks.

M: You mean that it has to be replastered on the roof?

S: Replastered. There's a tremendous temperature change--you can have 50 degrees or 60 degrees between night and midday, and that's just heck on roofs. Adobe is fine in the southern part of the state, Arizona, or a very dry climate. But here it's really not a strong enough material.

M: Some people around here give names to their homes.

S: Oh, I called it Estudio Tecolote, which means Studio of the Owl, in Spanish.

M: You spoke of having a room in it to teach. Have you had students?

S: I have a studio downstairs. Then I had a friend of mine who taught there, too. I just turned it over to him. He's now in California.

M: What was his name?

S: That's a very good question. I'm trying to remember. Mel Brenner.

M: Then you did teach and have students who vary in ages?

S: Yes. Then a group of artists, Milford Greer, who is now dead and who was a very fine painter; Jean Stankey, who is in Sante Fe, a very fine portrait painter and gets good prices for her work--her husband's name is Blair and it's Blair Galleries near the compound--they built a whole complex of condominiums, private apartments. He's worked with Lumpkins, who's a well known architect in Santa Fe and the New Mexico area. They designed and redesigned and saved a lot of historical sites along the river. That urban renewal development--what would it be?--South Santa Fe? We used to get known people to come and pose for us and we would all paint them. It

was a lot of fun.

M: Famous people, you mean?

S: Yes, like Dame Brett and Jane Mingenback, who is an architect's spouse in Taos, Leone Kahl, who really made the transition from the Aspen school and is documenting things in Taos to the contemporary art that we have today. She was really something. She knew all that group in France and Paris. Who wrote The Old Man and the Sea?

M: Hemingway.

S: He and all that group. She was a reporter in Dallas and knew the wealthy people there, and sold a lot of paintings to those collectors and people in Dallas. It was really a great time, kind of like the period in France where the artists always used to sit under the umbrellas in the street and drink absinth, coffee, and talk. Well, back in the post-Depression times.

M: Taos has attracted some prominent and very wealthy people from all over the United States.

S: Oh, yes. When Mabel Dodge Luján was here she brought many artists, well known artists, here of that period.

M: She was of a wealthy family?

S: She was the Dodge automobile heiress. Her idea was at one time, it seems, to marry a male of all the races. When she married Luján, a Taos Indian, he said, "If you divorce me, baby, I'll kill you." So that stopped that surge. (Laughter) She stayed with him clear to the end. They made a great pair. Of course, he was a large Indian. He was probably some Plains Indian, too. He was Taos, but Taos pueblo is on the northern flank of the Pueblo group. It's

only 20 miles to Cimarron, so there's a lot of Plains Indian mixture in the Taos pueblo, genetically. He must have been 6'6". When I saw him, he must have weighed 300 pounds, at least; a huge, huge man.

M: Did he live in the Taos pueblo when she found him.

S: Yes.

M: Lucky Luján.

S: Right. Then, of course, we had D. H. Lawrence and Dame Brett. When I came here, Millicent Rogers was still alive and she used to give parties at Brett's studio and invite Indians over to dance and entertain. She was a Standard Oil heiress and she inherited \$12 million. When she died she left \$7 million. She really had a ball with that \$5 million.

M: Just as you go in from the highway to the Taos pueblo, there's a large property with a big wall around it. Who does that belong to?

S: That's Van Vechten. She married Lineberry, who was a carpenter that was building that home for her. She is a fascinating person. Her signet is a butterfly, which, of course, symbolizes rebirth. She was an adopted daughter, adopted by this family. She's really a night person; she rarely comes out in the daytime. She has a fabulous collection of the old Taos artists. She has Sharps, Berning-houses, and all the old group. She has a number of Fechins, very good ones. They're getting in their 60s. She spends most of her time in California. I think it's Los Angeles. He doesn't like California--too much traffic, too many freeways, too fast, and all that.

M: So he stays here?

S: He has quite an investment here. Basically he stays in Taos. He goes to visit these days. The marriage is continuing, but it's not that close. I don't think it ever really was that close of a relationship.

M: She's a person of inherited wealth?

S: Yes. That family, it seems you never got the principles. You live off the principle. The basic money--it's like the Cabot family.

M: In trust.

S: In the Cabot family, only blood relatives inherit. Like Ted Cabot, who built this building as a restaurant. He was married to Charlotte, too. This area here was a restaurant and the rest of it was a newspaper, then the printing office was over in the back. He married a very nice Spanish woman, he never had any children. Now the children or his wife will not inherit. They will only live off the income. While she was married to him, they invested a lot in property, which she owns and receives money off of that way. But the basic money stays wherever it's at, New York or Boston or somewhere. Oh, we had Mrs. Helen Wurlitzer, the world's organs, here, too. She has a foundation. So Taos did have a lot of well known people from all over.

M: What you have here (in the brochure) must be a misprint. Of those that have collected your paintings, it lists Mr. Charlotte Cabot. You mean Mrs.

S: Yes. That I had hired done, and I didn't really go over it as I should have.

M: These are the Cabots that came originally from Boston?

S: Yes. They really never talked to anybody. The Boston Cabots only talked to God and the other group.

M: Have they been coming out here for a long time?

S: Well, one was kind of a black sheep of the Boston Cabot family. As I understand it, he was interested in archaeology and anthropology. Then he contacted a very fatal disease, Hodgekin's Disease or something. He would hardly ever speak or he couldn't speak. He was just a very sad case.

M: What was his name?

S: Ted Cabot. Hugh Cabot is an offspring and I think that he is now in El Paso. He's a good painter, a draftsman, and a bronze sculptor. He had a brain tumor. I think it was successfully operated and I think he's sort of back on his feet.

M: There's none of the Cabots around here, then?

S: No, no. No Cabots that I know of anymore here. But I'm sure some will show up. They'll get tired of the rat race back East.

M: I think we need to discuss something about your paintings and the themes you've developed here, the themes you're basically interested in. Of course, one of the main ones is these Indian themes. Did you get started early on these after you came here?

S: Yes. When I came here, of course, my subject matter was from back East: harlequins and clowns, landscapes, and then abstracts. Abstracts I would attempt to do now and then, but they didn't really mean that much to me. I attempt them all the time. I suppose, you might say there's two basic trends in my work: the abstract and the things based on realism. I like sculpture, too. Most of my sculpture



is semi-realistic. I really prefer to do sculpture more than painting, but I've painted so much that I have equal interest in it. One of my projects was that I ran a frame shop for many years to provide income. So framing supported my painting and then hopefully my painting sales will support my sculpture. I haven't really gained too much yet, but when Virginia was running the gallery we were in partnership; she ran the gallery and sold. This turned me loose to paint or sculpt. We had a really good team working, but she became ill and had to leave. So now I'm doing the whole thing, or trying to.

M: This was Mrs. Virginia Welch?

S: Right. She's now changed to her maiden name, Morrow. Ms. Welch, she was a countess. Her name was Bergen von Welch, which was Finnish. Bergen is in Finland. Now that town was named after him and Bergen. New Jersey is also named after his relatives. There was a battle with the Russians or something and he was a hero, so he was made a count.

M: This was her father?

S: No, it was probably the great-great grandfather of her husband.

M: Her husband.

S: Yes. They were back East and then they settled in Dallas, and they lived there a number of years. She was originally from Tyler, Texas. When the marriage broke up, she went home. She came to Taos to run Hotel Saint Bernard, in the ski valley, with Jean Mayer for a number of years. In the summer time she was on a retainer and she would work in various galleries. I was showing in some of those galleries

so I got to know her. It got to the point that wherever Virginia goes to sell, I go too, because she was really a marvelous salesperson. She liked my work, which again is very helpful for sales; you know that. She sold you some very good ones of mine. That's so important for whoever is selling in a gallery--to have enthusiasm. It just rubs off.

M: How long did your association with her last?

S: About three very good years.

M: And she's been gone for about a year or two?

S: Yes. She's now settled in Albuquerque. She's selling at someplace in Winrook, "Gifts Unusual," a store. I got a call from her about 1:30 a.m. a couple of nights ago, saying that she sold \$1,200.00 of this and that in one day, so the owner should be very happy with her.

M: Well, we still haven't developed your themes.

M: The basic things are, since you live in New Mexico, the place rubs off on you--the cultural aspects. The Río Grande people really don't wear masks like the Hopi and Zuni. They wear certain costumes, but they don't wear facial masks anymore. Again, back in 1680 during the rebellion, in fear of reprisal, the young people that could make it to Hopi and Zuni left the Río Grande Valley. The old people that couldn't make it, it seems there was a fortified area around La Cienega and they stayed there. While they were in Hopi and Zuni, they were there for five years more or less, and again, when they came back to reoccupy the Río Grande Valley, a lot of the Río Grande people stayed in various villages that they built in Hopi and Zuni. Everything became mixed up at that time. So you would have

some Río Grande kachinas that became part of the Hopi and Zuni depictions. They brought back masks. Of course, in the Río Grande, the church was very strong and frowned on Indian dances and masks and any religion in general. So it wasn't long until masks were not used in dances again--they would wear out, or through political or religious pressures. So the Río Grande people really just used body paint and feathers. The only kind of masks they would wear are those tablitas, which are cloud things that the women wear on their heads.

M: That's what the Navajo women wear, those bushy things on either side?

S: No.

M: The Hopi women, their hairdress?

S: The butterfly thing, that's Hopi. A young girl wearing that is a maiden, a non-married person. When they're married, then their hair hangs down. I did a painting sort of based on that, which I call, "The White Cocoon." It's a large white painting and the young girls with the headdress and the kacharis, which are the ancestral figures -- the bodies are painted white with black stripes around them -- the symbol being that the womb is a cocoon. And the whiteness of the painting--the whole thing is sort of a cocoon. I thought that was symbolic and worthwhile doing. First, they have a butterfly dance, which is almost like the sipapu dance of the Río Grande. It's kind of an emergence thing. It takes place in the spring, when the seeds are planted in the earth -- the earth's cycle, renewal, when the sun comes back.

M: The largest one of yours that I have is the "Butterfly Dance." I

wish we had it here, to discuss the meanings of it. It seems to me that one of the pictures is a tree.

S: Well, the pine tree, the blue spruce has the most power and the color really relates to the blue of the sky, which is a turquoise "mobile" out there. Speaking symbolically, the Indians call the sun a lake. I thought that was an interesting symbol. They call it Sun Lake. Since the pine tree doesn't lose its leaves in the winter time, it's a symbol of everlasting life. When other trees lose their leaves they go to sleep. The winter time is called the "quiet time," when the earth is at rest. People generally don't do anything, because there isn't much you could do when it's 35 degrees below, except bring in the cord wood and make fires. It's a very slow time. But symbolically the earth is asleep, it's resting; and since the earth is mother, like corn is mother, symbolically and mythologically the whole thing is very interesting.

M: You would then, Charles, go out to the pueblos and reservations and watch the dances.

S: Oh, yes; the whole Río Grande. A number of years ago they were a lot more friendly. But since the activists have become more active, you get a lot of very hard looks and very unfriendly feelings these days. They want to be left alone, which is fine; but I think mostly the days of ethnologists and anthropologists are kind of coming to an end. The latest thing I've heard was that the Navajos want to put in for becoming a state, separated from the federal government, in Arizona and New Mexico. I think it

would be a good thing. It's big enough so it could be autonomous, that it could be self-supporting. They're all looking for their independence. Most of the Indians, they're bright young men, have been educated to be doctors and lawyers, so that they can fight the cases, their point of view, in Congress or wherever it's needed. It's a hard thing for them, in many respects, to try to maintain their world culturally and religiously, and to bridge the gap into the white man's society; it's not easy. It's not easy even for Anglos to maintain themselves in an Anglo society.

M: I've been reading how the Navajos and the Hopis have a dispute over land.

S: Oh, yes. Navajos have taken this prime case of Indian and Indian, where the Navajos have usurped the poor Hopis ever since they arrived. "Navajos" in Hopi means "head bangers" or "head crushers," and that's the way the Navajos killed all the Indians. All those abandoned pueblos north of the Mogollon Rim didn't get abandoned just because of the drought.

M: The Navajos drove them out?

S: Yes. Sort of genocide, really. Of course, they adopted a lot of Hopi customs, like farming; but they're still pressing the Hopi to take as much land as they can. The Hopis are real uptight about it and you can't blame them. There's a dispute over a million or two million acres. Now, the Hopis have got a lot of bright young men and they're opposing it. They're not just going to let them have it. They've been shooting the Navajos; there's quite a number of skirmishes. The biggest thing is that there's not much

water out there, and a lot of the springs--wherever they were--usually the Navajos just went in there and turned them into a sheep and goat corral. Well, as religious as the Hopi are, they're very unhappy about that and this has been happening all over. Their religious areas, whether on hill tops or caves or springs, have been completely desecrated--not only by the Navajos, but by the Spanish and Anglos, too. They're very unhappy about it and that's very important to them, since earth is mother and they don't really desecrate it. They try to leave it as it was when they came, as much as possible.

M: In earlier days, when they were more friendly and you would go out, did you get to know individual Indians?

S: Yes, sure.

M: Are there any friends, any of those you can particularly remember or their names?

S: I'm no linguist.

M: Would these Indians that you would talk to explain to you the symbolism?

S: Very little. They put it on the basis that they don't sell their religion. They were much more open in the old days. But you have a resistance there. They're very strong people to live in a desert area where food and rain is hard to come by. You have a very strong group of people. Being traditionalists as they are, the church and the white man have made "in roads," of course, but they still stick very closely to the... . The only way to protect themselves is to go into secrecy. They may not have the outside stone tablets that

they used to have in front of the kiva steps they painted--rain gods or whatever the ceremony was--but they remember. They don't have a written language, but they train their young that are interested through constant repetition, and memory-wise they haven't forgotten very much. So now, since civil rights and all that, there's been a resurgence of all the Indians, wherever they're at, to discover their (backgrounds); like the Blacks are trying to rediscover their lineage and where they are.

M: You would have to read about it, then, to find out the meaning of the symbols.

S: Yes. Thank goodness photographs came in early enough. Now, if you're going to do a painting of a Zuni ceremony that took place back in 1800 or something, you have to resort to the old photographs. You can work at it this way: there wasn't silk and satins and ribbons, and the high colors, their body paints, were all based on earth colors. So when the dyes came in, that changed the whole thing. So if you're going to do something back in the early 1800s, all they had was their cotton weaving skins. So there's a lot of research involved. Anything the white man brought in that they wear, you cannot use, because it wouldn't be true to the time in which you're depicting it, which is a help in many respects. What it does it puts you back into school and college again. You use the old analysis approach. It wasn't tin that they made into bells; it was little bronze and little copper bells. They were all brought in from old México around Snake Town or Casa Grande, in the south of México.

M: What we were trying to develop was about the themes that you use. I

was just wondering...these pictures that you make of Indian dances, are they the way the Indians would appear now or do you do them from these earlier photographs?

S: Well, they're from photographs, and they are early. I try to use the costumes and colors you learn about after a period of time by seeing them, the dances, and keep it in period. If you do the Jicarilla Apache thing, well, I might even use a pickup truck, which is a contemporary thing. In doing a lot of research, which I have done over the years, I've become more interested in the earlier version of the dances, because those things are lost; even the Indians themselves do not know anymore what happened in those times. So part of my research in documentation is to revitalize it or put it down as well as I can, so they can learn, too. By recreating these things, I have a lot of Indians stop in, checking and seeing what they did in the old days. As a matter of fact, I was talking to one of the Southern Indians and I asked what he thought about my work. He said, "I wish my people were doing more of it." But you have the old village religious leaders not wanting the young to paint anything about their ceremonies. So it's very difficult for the young people to do anything, because then they're opposing their religious leaders, and then they'll be ostracized like they're stoole pigeon, in that respect. So they're not doing it. So I hope that what I do, and if I can be able to do enough of them over a long period of time, will have some historical value, documentation value, to bring it into light. A lot of the research is only descriptions of them. That's not easy, because you get into the kind of thing of what costumes did they use, what paraphernalia, what kind of



trappings; and if you want to keep it as realistic and honest as possible without faking or fudging the thing, you cannot always paint with tongue in cheek, either. But a lot of things that I have done, I have sort of painted with tongue in cheek, but with later research I find that subconsciously or something I was right. It's fascinating. I do a lot of other things. I've become interested in a lot of other things now. Now there's a new series of books. I've become interested in the occult and Japanese Buddhism, Zen. Man, Myth and Magic is a series of books which is new and it's kind of an encyclopedia of time--what the artifact found in an excavation is, what it's meaning is. Joseph Campbell and his many books on Hero of a Thousand Faces. There's one in there called "Creative Mythology," which brings things sort of up to date. Since I'm Scotch and Irish and Dutch, I wonder what the druids were. There's not very much written on druids. It's such an old thing. I just don't paint Indians either; I get off on other things, a whole series of things based on my understanding of Zen. I mentioned Leone Kahl before. Well, back when Los Alamos was recruiting young people to come to work in their various projects, she was the director of the Stables Gallery. She got to know the man in Los Alamos by the name of Bob Meyers and they put on a show together called "Art and the Atom." I was going through an "astro period" of outer space, because at that time the space program came into being. They took various paintings to use in their various programs to advertise for young scientists to come to Los Alamos in Scientific American magazine. One that they took of mine they reproduced in November and December. One's in color and one's in black and white. That's kind

of an interesting aspect. They would buy the copyrights. Say the painting was \$400.00. You would get one quarter of that, or a hundred dollars. Then when they reproduced it twice, I got \$200.00 in copyrights. Plus I eventually sold the painting to a man in Colorado, so that made it a \$600.00 painting. Then they put together a show that traveled throughout the country. They printed 25,000 catalogs of the show called "Art and the Atom." From that show I sold a large painting in the palace of Legion of Honor in San Francisco, as well as other members who sold things from that show. So in this respect, through NASA, it gave me a nice writeup in their publications. You sort of contribute to the country through an aesthetic way, so you feel you're part of the whole movement. That's a very gratifying aspect too, other than a private collector who likes your work enough to buy several paintings, and like yourself comes back once in a while and buys new stuff. I had people coming in saying, "Look, I like what you do, but I can 't afford to buy it." There's a couple of ministers from Colorado that come in just to see what new things I'm doing. I just don't paint one thing. Sometimes it's nice to open the door in the morning. (Laughter)

M: Have you limited these Indian things you do to certain tribes, to the ones around here?

S: Well, basically. I've been wanting to do some Plains Indians things, based on their hide and skin paintings. They're much more vigorous than the Pueblo. I've done one; I've got one done. There's an Indian maiden standing by her tepee. I call it "The Suitors." And

there's two young braves coming in on horseback with all their trappings flying. I want to do more, but there just isn't any time to do everything.

M: Will you paint Indian themes in a realistic way, or how the Indians would have painted them, in their style?

S: I use their style to a certain degree. But since I'm no Indian, Anglo gets in there. I like the design and what I do is more design than what they've done. I try to integrate a whole canvas into the composition of the whole thing. They don't see that really. Their costumes are well designed, but as a compositional total... . Some of what I do is kind of based on cubism, too, which is one aspect of what I try to do. I try to do it on a western term so that the Indian or ethnic thing is more readily acceptable to the white man. I hope to be sort of a catalyst in this area. Nobody is doing what I'm doing. I'm the only one, which in some respects is good; but in some other respects, when it comes to sales, unless your work looks like a Russell or Remington, that kind of thing, people are very suspicious on buying, and you can be too much alone. That's just what I do, so you have to take your knocks. But then you have other people coming in and falling in love with what I do. Some people say, "Why waste your time on the abstracts? Just paint Indians." Then you have people coming in and saying, "Why do you waste your time on the Indian thing? You should just do abstracts." So it winds up that you're the one who's doing it; you can't hire someone to do it for you. The old masters in some of their schools did that, but the field of art is not commissioned from a school,

as it was. Titian had a school. Finally the only thing Titian did on a painting was sort of lay it out and come in and sign it at the end. You don't have that kind of thing now, these days, except for some of those familiar things that are done in Europe that come into the country. They are sort of watery street Paris scenes and that kind of thing. It was kind of a poor man's Monet.

M: Let's speak of this picture I have that appeared in this photograph in your brochure. Just what is that meant to depict?

S: This is going back to the butterfly thing of birth. Starting from the left, the first object is the "God of Germination." To the right of that is the rainbow with zig zag coming down--it's a kind of altar. Then you have a male and female figure on again another rainbow, and an altar with wings, eagle feathers on either side. So the whole thing is the plant life, birth, and human or animal birth.

M: It's a Hopi thing?

S: This is Hopi.

M: Then as I remember, isn't there a serpent?

S: Yes. The plumed serpent is taken from a base line for a mural that you find in some of the kivas, the ancient kivas. It symbolizes water as the plumed serpent. If you look at the scales on a snake, you get a little feather affect. Of course, it's much more elaborated. The cloud dragon in Chinese is a fertility symbol. This is not fertility, only in the respect that it represents water, and water is needed for animal and plant life. Usually where you find a serpent you find a spring or something close by. The Hopi

snake dance, that's what it represents. It's not a tour de force to see whether you can keep a snake from biting you or not. In this particular thing, they keep the snakes in the pit. When they handle the snake, they handle it very gently, kind of on the basis of when they go hunt a deer. In the old days they would have a little prayer that they were not taking the deer because they just wanted to kill a deer. They were telling the god that they needed that for their subsistence. When they got the deer there was a ceremony. They covered it with a blanket, put grass in its mouth; so the whole thing had sort of a tender quality. Then they would treat the snakes that way. They would tell the snakes, "You're part of the ceremony. We're not going to hurt you," to calm them down, and you can handle them through a vibratory thing such as Castañeda [describes] in Journey to Ixtlán, in those books about Don Juan. He talks about living in harmony with nature, with anybody; even a vicious dog you can talk to and calm down, and this is the approach.

M: You usually associate the plumed serpent with the Aztecs.

S: It went all the way down to Peru. So this thing was kind of proliferated. It really didn't get up to the northwest coast Indian culture. It didn't hold too much with the Plains Indians. Basically it's with the four corners area down through México, Mesoamerica; and how far south the culture went to South America, I don't know. I've never seen much in Chile or Brazil or Argentina. The symbol was always the same--life, water.

M: Another picture of yours that I have, the first time I came out here you were painting it. It has four figures and a woman. She's

kind of dressed like a Pueblo Indian. But the other Indians have these Plains headdresses on. I think you call it "Cheyenne Dance." Do you remember that picture?

S: Yes, generally. Now, what you have here is an exchange of religious dances. The Río Grande people have a Comanche Dance, a Kiowa Dance, and in more peaceful times you have a group of Kiowa traders coming to trade. So they would perform a dance ceremony--it might be an eagle dance or some sort of visionary thing. Then the Pueblo people would see this. If that was good medicine--meaning power and strength, not drugs or healing, although they did have healing ceremonies--if that was good for the Kiowa... They were performing the dance for the Isletas, let's say. Then the Isleta people would wear the headdress or make up their own, or they might buy a Kiowa headdress, and then the rest of them would make these costumes. So you had an exchange of a religious kind of thing this way. So then the Kiowa would see the Isletas perform some kind of complimentary dance. Then they would take that home or take home the idea of skin painting or various costume things, so you have a crazy kind of mixed up thing. Since the Río Grande people were close enough to the buffalo, they hunted buffalo once in a while, so they would have a buffalo dance. Again it would be like the primitive. If they were going to hunt something, they would study and dress themselves like a buffalo, which did a lot of things. If they were wearing a buffalo skin, the man's odor would not upset the herd of buffalo. It was kind of like, if you wear a buffalo skin, you gain the power of the buffalo. You were able to stop him and get closer to shoot him with a bow and arrow, which wasn't

easy. Buffalo are pretty tough animals. I saw one killed for a movie up at Boy Scout's Ranch in Cimarron, and I don't know how many rounds it took to even get the buffalo down--shot in the heart. They're just tough. They don't die that easy. An hour later he was still pawing. He was completely unconscious, but it was like a reptile--they don't stop moving until it cools off. A lot of Indians were killed hunting buffalo.

M: Another one of your pictures I have it's a tall, narrow one that features corn stalks in it and a tall figure. You know the one I'm talking about?

S: Yeah, it's a Pueblo male Indian planting corn. Of course, the corn is much mature, with the digging stick. They really don't dress that way; it's a ceremonial. That is, when they're out in the corn field they don't wear ceremonial costumes, but they do perform that in various ceremonies, since corn is a big thing in their lives. With the Pueblo Indian, that was their basic diet, and of course they grow beans, squash, and pumpkins and things like that.

M: Corn has some sacred quality?

S: Oh, yes. Corn, woman, and earth all relate to the concept of mother, and they're all interchangeable. There was a ceremony that is not performed anymore, where the chief's daughter is on the altar. They would pile up the perfect corns, and of course white is pure. It's the most precious, but since the Indian corn comes in all colors, that relates to the directions: North, South, East and West, Above, and Below. The young girl would sit on the corn and this would give the feeling of fertility, and the women have their societies. That one

rabbit painting--since rabbits produce so many offspring, symbolizing it was all done by maidens for their fertility to perpetuate the race. That's the original I found in Bertha Dutton's book, the excavations down here at the Coronado Monument where we found the murals on the walls; and many of them stimulated that painting. A lot of research goes into that. You can spend a week just reading about it from various sources that you get. You get a little bit here and a little bit there, this book and that book. To keep it authentic and to keep it so that you're depicting the right time of day, the right color of the painting, the background and the costumes, you bring a lot of what happened let's say in the 1900's when that mural was done, to present day. They have lost various artifacts of shapes of this or that, so it's kind of a compilation of a lot of things. It's not just an historical documentation, but it's a work of art; and you bring in the aesthetics and all that. What I'm trying to say is, there's a lot of background. So it's a real project and it's something I'm interested in, and hopefully I get some pleasure out of it, because much of it is a drag, to do and read all that stuff, and then to put it all together so that it becomes alive. It's like a play in a way--well, there are plays. The whole ceremony is a play, a religious play. I haven't acted that much, but I have been in various plays; but every performance has to be alive again, has to be recreated. You can never get dull or take it for granted; each thing has to live--paint, brushes, and all other tangible aspects of it. You can get wound up in textures and whatever, but that's only a means to an end. If it doesn't come off in the end, if it doesn't



live in its own terms, in its four edges, it's lifeless and it'll have no meaning. "If it doesn't have any meaning to you, it doesn't have any meaning to anybody else." Quote, unquote, Ribak.

M: What about the "Mountain Spirit Dance?"

S: A common term for it was the Devil Dance. A lot of meanings get lost in the translations, but the closest to it is the Mountain Spirit Dance. That's Apache, and basically they live in the mountains. The Navajos mostly live in the plains and desert, although some do live in the mountains, but very rarely. Since there is thunder and lightning, clouds and rain, it's a more dramatic kind of thing, more violent in the mountain areas than it is out in the Hopi country. Apache are a southern branch of the Navajos. The Navajos basically stayed north of the Mogollon Rim, and the Apaches were south of that. So this is a puberty rite and it usually takes place during the evening. It's very dramatic--the fire and the dance around the fire. Lightning has a great place. When lightning strikes a tree, you know there's big medicine. (Laughter) So you have that kind of mystery and force and power, so it makes them spiritually moved. Theirs is a much simplified version from the Pueblo. You have more free time if you're growing crops. Now the Mayas, it only took them 75 or 76 days to grow a crop of corn, so that they had the rest of the time to build their big ceremonial temples. Now, the Plains Indians, since they're moving around following the game, they didn't have that time. So they were hunting, just grubbing out life. You can relate that to the Sioux. They had their Sun Dance which took place usually in the fall of the year or mid-summer in that area, which was kind of a social thing. All the various tribes and clans would get

together before fall. Also it was a time when the young boys and girls would get together from the various clans, since they could not marry within the clan. Not that it was frowned on, but basically what that was for was to build up alliances with other clans, so you would have a bigger group to defend themselves. Like a state fair, the same kind of thing where everybody would get together and would have marriages.

M: It is characteristic of the Apaches, whether they were the Jicarillas or the Mescaleros or those San Carlos and Fort Apaches, that they have these puberty rites for girls when they reach adulthood. That was probably in their main ceremony.

S: Yes. Then you would have, at that time also, races. Most of the Hopi and Zuni all have races. Part of that was for helping the sun and the moon run around in its orbit. Of course, the Aztecs had mass executions, mass sacrifices. The blood greased the wheels of the sun as it moved through its orbit. Part of that was political, where if you conquered your enemy, you take the young men and you eliminate them as a military force. So they would be sacrificed under the guise of helping the sun and the moon go around. Coming back to the races, here at the Taos pueblo we have a north village and a south village. Whichever side won would elect a governor for that side. The Apaches had two groups--one representing the moon (which represented the plant and insect life) and one representing the sun (which represented the birds and animal life). The race really wasn't run to win anything. Perhaps the one who was the fastest might be offered or could hopefully select a girl to marry. But that was all part of it too.

M: How about these that you are doing on this Blue Lake theme?

S: Well, I was in Oklahoma for about five months working there. Then when I knew I was going to come back I got homesick, so I started doing some sort of dream paintings. There are a lot of areas. Some of them are in Arizona, some are in Taos, some of it's down around Santa Fe or Los Alamos--just kind of a compositional feeling of being true to landscapes in our area of mesas. I have an idea, a subject, but to do it on hopefully a more etherial basis, keep it a very broad, general compositional painting. Yet it should still have the feeling of earth, sky, and water and not get caught up in putting pine needles on trees and things; keep it broader, more aesthetic, to make it kind of religious, which the land is before it's all cluttered up with used car lots and that kind of thing.

M: Well, they're sort of landscapes in abstract.

S: Yes. I asked Milford Greer, who is really a very fine painter, who he thought was the most religious painter in Taos. He said Andrew Dasberg. Now Andrew Dasberg hasn't drawn a figure for the last 20 or 30 years. What he does is uses an actual quill pen made from a feather. His pastels (he hasn't been able to paint in oils for a long time), his basic output, is landscapes. I thought, "Gee, a new idea." Dasberg's landscapes are the essence of the religious aspect. It's fascinating--they're just beautiful things and they're really a religious experience. And I was hoping I could get some of that.

M: Where is the Blue Lake located?

S: It's located in the high mountains above Taos Pueblos, in the village of Taos Pueblo. It sort of lies on the other side in the Cimarron area. It much more accessible through Cimarron. Matter of fact, the

river stream from Blue Lake does go into the Eagle Nest area. Many years ago when I first came to Taos, Don Mirabal and Alex Concha, who are Taos Indians, pack tripped out there to Blue Lake. The Taos Indians just recently, after an over 60-year struggle with the forestry service, through an act of Congress and signed by President Nixon, got full title and use of Blue Lake. Blue Lake symbolizes the source in many, many aspects. They have a spring ceremony. It's like opening up the irrigation ditches. They have a ceremony for that, too, but Blue Lake is the Taos Indians' source of religion. Here you have the water symbol again. It's a ceremonial area where they go to refresh and strengthen their spirit. For all those years and all those struggles, when they got it they had a real ceremony at the pueblo. They had a friendship dance; everybody in town that had helped them through petitions was there. It was a really big ceremony.

M: They acquired 50,000 acres?

S: Not quite 50,000 acres. They wanted over 50,000 but I guess to the white man... It was a big struggle because all that was virgin timber up there. The loggers were kept at bay for many, many years, and of course timbering is big business. The lumber men and local lumber yards were all drooling at the mouth to get that. On one hand they would say, "Well, you can't leave it to the Indians to control because that's the watershed." Well, the Taos Indians, or basically Indians leave things as it is. They change it very little, so they weren't about to lease it to loggers to come in; and so you had counter threats from all sides. Of course, from the Spanish point of view, the Spanish people who were ranchers wanted that area

to run their cattle in. So all that virgin timber was more than the loggers could stand to lose, and they have a tremendous lobby. But finally they were given the title back to Blue Lake, which symbolizes more than what I just mentioned, just the timber on it. To go through a virgin area where a tree is left where it falls, to see it as it was, is a very aesthetic and spiritual experience.

M: The Taos Indians go up there during the year and have ceremonies?

S: Yes. It is a matriarchal society, which means that they're not caught in surnames like the white man is. They don't really have those possessions, like the land is held in a community. White men, you know, you have a big bank account, hopefully; you have cars and things so your sons carry the name of the clan. Stewart is an old clan, McNeely is an old clan; but they're not caught up in these names. They have many names. They are given certain names at birth, the grandparents give them a name when they get a little bit older that people know them by, the father and mother give them a name; and when they come of age they're given a name. They give themselves a name, so they're not caught up in surnames. So in a matriarchal society there is no illegitimacy. So that is a freedom that they have that I don't enjoy. Of course, you have Negroes these days like Muhammed Ali--I don't know what his original name was--and Jabbar, who is the basketball player; he's taken his own name. Most of them are kind of Moslem inclinations. And then there's a whole group of young hippies who take all the same name--Morning Star or whatever. Now, it was a spring ceremony. When they opened the gates and planted the corn, it was also a time for planting the human seed.

So Blue Lake meant a lot. If anybody wanted to go to Blue Lake, male or female, they would make the trip up there, spend several days in a religious ceremony and lovemaking; it was kind of an initiation for males and females. So that's the source; that's the whole impetus to renew life, like the earth would become renewed. That, I think, is basically the significance of wanting Blue Lake and not being trespassed on and looked at by a bunch of gawkers hiding out in the bushes--blue-eyed gawkers hiding out in the bushes.

M: And they still go up there now?

S: Yes, they have full freedom. So that's another difficult thing that helps to tear the pueblo apart. You have the old way, which I just explained, and then you have the Catholic or Christian way, based on the church. That was one of the big problems out at Uribe back in 1906 when the B.I.A. wanted to give head rights to certain families to be owned outright. Before then it was all held in common, as it was with the Plains Indians or wherever. Certain clans were given certain areas by lottery or whatever to farm this as long as they maintained it. If they wanted to give it back, then it went back and they drew lots. Then that plot would be given to another clan or another family or somebody. That's one of the things that broke up the reservations in Oklahoma. When they were given head rights, that land for a Cherokee or a Western Plains Indian didn't mean anything. They were given a reservation, and so what happened was that this land was not sacred to them. It wasn't their hunting grounds. So they sold it to the white man and that broke down the

reservation. Of course, one of the reasons they were given head rights is because they found oil out there. That was one way of breaking down the reservations, you see. But there are still some pretty good areas, extensive areas of Oklahoma that are still reservation.

M: How about your picture over there on the peyote. Maybe we could get in a little last word on that.

S: Well, that's a little of my research again. I became interested in Castañeda's Don Juan, and being in Oklahoma where you have the native church, peyote is a very strong impulse in the Oklahoma or Plains Indians, which again is kind of an escape from reality, from the hardships that they've gone through. It was like taking the sun dance away from them, and even the sweat lodges. It was a way of breaking down man's physical force, to be disciplined to take a lot of steam on some hot rocks and stay in there. The Plains Indians very much, and the Mexicans, too, are visionary. These are kind of revelations. It kind of related to Saturi in Zen, where all of a sudden the forces of nature are revealed to you, so that you understand. There's a strengthening of the soul, finding of the individual, and this comes about a lot quicker through torture. Whereas the peyote sort of blows your mind and you get the whole thing in technicolor. So that painting is based on my research, Castañeda's research.

M: Well, the head on it is supposed to represent what?

S: That's Don Juan.

M: Don Juan, the Yaqui Indian medicine man.

S: Right.

M: And then below there are flames?

S: Yes. From the bottom you have the arch, the moon shape, the crescent shape, which is the peyote altar. Then in there is a fire, and then floating in this kind of illusion is a ceramic vase with a wind design on it, a spiral. It's also water, too, the spiral. Then there's two peyote buds, and then above that there appears Don Juan's face. His hair--he's an old man, and I tried to give him a feeling of smoke, so that out of this dark, mysterious kind of atmosphere appears these things.

M: Then on the side you have a bird?

S: It's the peyote bird. One side is blue and one side is yellow. That's the summer and winter symbol.

M: This bird is a symbol in this peyote religion?

S: Yes, it carries the spirit.