SKOWHEGAN
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview
LOIS DODD

By Liza Zapol
New York, New York
December 1, 2011

Oral history interview with Lois Dodd, December 1, 2011

Size: Sound recording: 2 sound files (1 hr., 25min.) digital, wav 96khz, 24 bit, 2.75 GB, also available in mp3.

Transcript: 28 p.

Photographs: 4 digital photographs

Summary: An interview of Lois Dodd conducted 2011, December 1 by Liza Zapol for Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, at Dodd's studio in the East Village, in New York, NY.

Biographical/Historical Note: Dodd (1927-) is a well-known and respected painter and was, along with William King and other Skowhegan artists, very active in the Tenth Street avant-garde movement in New York City. Dodd visited the School regularly before becoming a faculty member in 1979. Dodd served on the Board of Governors from 1988–2009 after which was named Governor Emeritus.

Liza Zapol (1978-) is an oral historian in New York, NY.

Content: Skowhegan: summering at a home at Lakewood Colony with Alex Katz, Bill King, Jean Cohen, and others, during the summer of 1951 and 1953; running the Accent Gallery at Lakewood; Willard W. Cummings (Bill); landscape; painting outdoors; possible connection between the Accent Gallery and the Tanager Gallery. Connection to Maine: home in Lincolnville (with Alex Katz and Jean Cohen, and then Ada Katz); home in Cushing; visiting Skowhegan for lectures. Bill Cummings' funeral.
Skowhegan Faculty member in 1979: all women faculty members; memories of Red Grooms, William T. Williams. Becoming a member of the Board of Governors, 1980-2009: Speculation and discussion about the tensions between the governors and the trustees; Jack Eastman; Rackstraw Downes, etc.

Indexes: Name index available.

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Interviewer Notes: Lois Dodd has given an oral history (life history) in 1988, held by the Archives of American Art. As a result, this interview focuses exclusively on her narrative about Skowhegan in particular. She was also informally interviewed by Skowhegan, by Elizabeth Mooney in the summer of 2011 at Charlie DuBack's home.
Lois Dodd's cat, Nefertiti, was in the room- and interruptions by the cat can be heard in the audio recording.

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an oral history that was conducted by the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, an artist's residency program in Skowhegan, Maine (www.skowheganart.org).

Skowhegan began an oral history project in 2011. The Skowhegan Oral History Project includes a collection of thirty to forty interviews with artists, staff, and members of the Boards of Trustees and Governors to document the stories, observations, and insights concerning the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. These interviews elucidate the organizational and structural development of Skowhegan, as well as the personal resonances of Skowhegan within the biographies of key individuals.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral History is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Zapol: This is for the Skowhegan Oral History Project. This is Liza Zapol. It is December 1, 2011. If you can introduce yourself, please?

Dodd: I'm Lois Dodd. I first saw Skowhegan in 1951. When I came there with Bill King -- I was married to Bill -- and Jean Cohen and Alex Katz. And all three of them had been students at the school. Bill was there in 1948, Alex was there in 1949, and Jean was there in 1950. They'd all gotten scholarships from Cooper Union, so they were all very enthusiastic. We had a car that the four of us rode in. Bill King was the only one that could drive, an old Chevrolet. We got in the car and it took us, it seemed to me, two days to get to Maine on Route 1 because there were no super highways then (*laughs*). I think we went right through Boston and right through Portland, and boy, that really slows you down. I think we slept out on the beach at Ogunquit. In those days there was really nobody around. It was fine.

When we got to Lakewood I was exhausted. It was June, it was cold and wet. The three of them got out of the car. Bill Cummings' mother, Helen Cummings, had one of the cottages in Lakewood. They all raced over to her place because there was a party. This was after the endless ride from New York. I just went to bed, and thought, 'God, what's so great about Maine? I don't get it.' So it took a few days. After it stopped raining and the sun and the light came, then I began to realize, 'Oh, this is pretty fantastic.' We stayed in a cottage at Lakewood. Bill Cummings had a garage in Lakewood and he let us use it to make a little gallery. So we had a little gallery and we had some art and some antique furniture that we got from a friend of Bill's in Skowhegan, John Fish. I still have one of the tables in my place in Maine. We also had a little jewelry and we also made some woolen outfits, getting wool from the Cummingses factory, up in Guilford. We went up there Jean found a seamstress who made things for us.

Zapol: Bill Cummings' father's mill?

Dodd: Right, the woolen mill. So we did that that summer, 1951. The next summer, in 1952, my son was born, so I was in New York. Then the following summer we were back at Lakewood. At that point Bill King and I were separated. He'd found somebody else, at Skowhegan. I didn't have such a good feeling about Skowhegan for quite a while. At the end of the summer of 1953, the Katzs and I thought -- real estate is quite cheap in Maine -- we could get

our own place. We could go over to the coast, and look around there. The people that we saw around Lakewood at that time were Tom Boutis -- he'd also been a student -- Blackie Langlais, and Charlie DuBack. Charlie had married Daphne Mumford, who was a student at the school. The next winter, Charlie and Alex went up to Maine and they started looking around at real estate. They came back having found all kinds of stuff. Jean and Alex and I decided to get the place at Lincolnville and Charlie and Daphne bought a house at North Waldoboro. That's how we got to the places on the coast. I shared that place, first it was with Jean and Alex, and then they parted company. Then it was Alex and Ada and I. And Eli, my son. I was there for a number of years and then, at a point, found the place in Cushing. So that's how all that happened.

In 1979, I got invited to teach at the school. That was a very interesting year because the faculty were all women *(laughs)*. Bill Williams was directing the program. He and Pat were in the farmhouse, and we were the instructors; Lynda Benglis, Susan Shatter, and Frances Barth. Would there have been anybody else? I'm trying to think. There had to be a sculptor. No, I didn't name any sculptor. What was Elaine DeKooning doing? She wasn't there.

Zapol: Did she lecture?

Dodd: She must have been visiting. Funny, I don't remember her. Agnes was there. Agnes Denes was the sculptor. I remember Nancy Graves spoke. Red Grooms. Red Grooms saved us socially.

Zapol: How so?

Dodd: Because we were all women. We weren't making any Friday night dinners. We weren't doing that. Usually the instructor has a wife and the wife decides to make a nice dinner party and people go to the cottage for the party. We weren't doing any parties.

Zapol: And that was something that the wives of faculty members, traditionally did?

Dodd: That is the way it seemed to work, that if you were the wife, if you were at all good at any of that stuff, you had a party. But we weren't doing that.

Zapol: How were you made aware that that was something that --

Dodd: The students were getting restive. We began to get little rumors that they weren't real happy. That weekend, when we began to be aware, Red Grooms was scheduled to be the speaker. So we thought, 'We should all go with Red and the students to the big bar up on Route 201,' which we did. That took care of it (the unhappiness). *(Laughs)* But it was funny, the fact that we were all women meant that there was just less socializing at instructors' places. That's the only time, I'm sure -- In those days I think they chose the faculty not by sitting around and discussing it. They probably all decided, 'We will make a list. We'll vote, and whoever comes out on the top, we'll hire them.' I think that must be what they did because it doesn't seem like you would do that, if you were thinking about what was going to happen. It was a good summer.

Who else was there? George Schneeman was there, he was the fresco instructor. George was also a great mushroom hunter. Lucy Lippard, Elizabeth Murray, Red Grooms. *(Looks at faculty and participant list.)* It's funny, I don't remember Elaine. She must have come and given a talk, but I can't remember it. This is nice, this list of people that were there. Wow. Some of whom I can remember, some of whom I can't.

Zapol: Do you have any particular memories of some of the participants? Any memory of a relationship with one of the participants?

Dodd: I think Ellen Hutchinson married Dean Hartung. I've seen them since, over the years. Janice I see every summer, Janice Kasper. She and Tim Kennedy. I see him a lot, too. He also went to Brooklyn College, after that, where I was teaching. Gwen Kerber, I think she went off to Europe. Never came back, maybe. Carol May. I often wonder what happened to her. I've got one of her drawings here. Irene Pijoan, I think she taught in California. Jeff Reed, he was there! Yeah, I see him. Celeste Roberge, I see her and her work. I wonder what became of Nora Simon, Sidney's daughter. She was fun, she was nice. Magda Vitale, she's in Philadelphia. Tim Watkins, I wonder what became of him! He did such wonderful imaginative stuff. Dan Witz. He was the one from Cooper Union. But a lot of them I can't really remember who they are. It's interesting.

Zapol: You were talking about this summer where there were women faculty members. Do you remember any of the relationships you had with the other faculty members?

Dodd: Yes. That's where I met Frances Barth. We kept in touch. Also Susan Shatter who taught at Brooklyn College with me as well.

Zapol: Any notable events that happened that summer?

Dodd: I can't remember any notable events.

Zapol: You do remember when Red Grooms came.

Dodd: I do remember. That was the notable event. Otherwise it was quite quiet. That was the problem. Any one of these students could tell you what -- . I've never asked Janice to look back. I see her in the summer. She's the one here that I see the most. She's in Maine, full-time. She probably has some interesting memories. Luke Gray. He was the youngest one, he was really a kid. He worked very hard. He was terrific but he was very young. You always wonder, when someone seems to be almost too young to be doing this. But he was terrific.

What does it say Nancy Grimes here for? Oh, Nancy Grimes. She went to Brooklyn also. Then I think she went out west and teaches somewhere. Ralph Helmick, he's from Boston, teaches. I guess so many of them wind up teaching. I've been back there other summers and whoever came there from Brooklyn College, I would be in touch with a little bit. Kind of mix that up with this, in retrospect.

Zapol: I have plenty of questions about this time and also the times that you've mentioned already. But if you want we can continue the way you want to tell the story of Skowhegan, and I'll go back and maybe ask you plenty of questions.

Dodd: I have to say something about Bill Cummings. He was so generous to people and created such an atmosphere of inclusiveness. I was never a student there but was invited to this, that, and the other. What I learned from that was, if you want something to really happen in this world, be like that. He was a terrific example of what you can achieve if you're really very generous, open. He was very bright, as well. He was an astounding human being.

Zapol: Can you tell me a particular story about him, a particular memory that comes to mind when you think of him?

Dodd: Well, after the school was closed, I know that he invited Alex and Jean -- . It didn't end

with the school. It was not a cut and dried thing, and, 'This is it!' and *(makes chopping sound)*. He just extended into every realm.

Zapol: In 1951 you said that there were invitations to the parties.

Dodd: Yes.

Zapol: What do you remember of your interactions with him that summer?

Dodd: I don't know whether he owned that cottage that we rented, or whether he told us about it or what. He definitely owned the garage that we were using and offered that for us to make the gallery. I don't think that we paid him any rent. Or I certainly don't remember it. Just an atmosphere of doing things and having things happen that were positive.

Zapol: You said that in that first year, at first the weather was terrible and you didn't really like Maine.

Dodd: We got there in the beginning of June. It was damp and cold and we were wearing knee socks trying to keep our legs from freezing *(laughs)*. Heavy shoes!

Zapol: How did it turn around for you?

Dodd: There was also a barn involved. There was a barn up, a little past Lakewood on 201, that we were using for a studio. Now I don't remember whose barn it was but somehow we had access to that. We would go out and paint. I do remember doing that, looking for spots along the road. I remember Henry Varnum [Poor], his house on Route 201. Probably other people will tell you, they had water that was gravity feed. The water just kept running through the sink. I guess you could turn it off but maybe you couldn't turn it off.

Zapol: I heard that his house was pretty unique.

Dodd: I'm sure it was. That was the thing I remember about it, this crazy sink with the water. There was no pump. It just ran because the spring was higher than the kitchen sink.

Zapol: What do you remember of making work at that time, in 1951? And 1953?

Dodd: I was out there with my masonite panels, making paintings. I don't know if any of them

are even -- . It was just kind of wonderful to be outside. That was first time I'd really done that.

Zapol: And how did that start? That you decided to start working outside?

Dodd: I guess the three of us -- the four of us, Bill was doing sculpture -- so the three rest of us would just go out someplace and paint. That's what we were doing. We had the one car, had to stick together.

Zapol: In exploring the environs. Tell me about that landscape.

Dodd: It was very farmy there. The lake was there. There were probably a lot of cows. I got into cows early on. It was quite different than where I am now. But it was beautiful. Just go out and sit, paint.

Zapol: What about interactions with people in the town?

Dodd: We weren't ever in the town, though, then.

Zapol: Or with people, locals?

Dodd: With locals, yes. The people at the theater community, that was one of the things that made us think we should get our own place. It was very proper, the ladies there. Eli, my son, was a baby so I let him crawl around naked in the grass. Seemed okay to me. *(Zapol laughs)* But some of the ladies came to Jean -- they didn't come to me and say, 'Can't let the baby go around like that, that's not right!' -- and they spoke to her about the condition of the baby *(laughs)*. And we began to think, 'You know, people here are just a little -- .' And we're right in the middle, we're right on the main, two dirt roads, one goes in, one goes out. Did you ever go over there? It's a little theater community, summer theater, with a whole bunch of cottages up and down. The one road goes in, it goes around, it comes out. The garage that we were using was right on that little road. I think he must have been crawling around there. I let him crawl on the rocks. He became very agile before he could walk. That was one of the things that made us think maybe we ought to start looking at our own real estate.

Zapol: What was, in your impression, the relationship between Lakewood and Skowhegan the school?

Dodd: There wasn't that much, except that we weren't the only ones renting cottages. Blackie, and Charlie, once they graduated from the school, they wanted to come back. That was one way to come back, get a cottage and share it. That's what they were doing. We had our own little group over there.

Zapol: And when would the group go over to the Skowhegan campus?

Dodd: Whenever there was a talk. We'd go over and get to the talks.

Zapol: Do you have any memories of any of those talks?

Dodd: I don't. They were always good.

Zapol: Yeah. *(phone begins to ring)* Or conversations among the group about the school?

Dodd: I think that they were interested in who was coming there and they'd let Bill know what they thought was the hottest, latest thing. But otherwise there wasn't that much involvement with the school at that point.

[Brief interruption]

My next question is about the Accent Gallery that you made.

Dodd: Yes.

Zapol: I'm curious if you can describe the articles that were made from woolens. How they were made.

Dodd: What they were. We had a skirt made, a long skirt, and a kind of a stole arrangement that came down past your waist and had a couple pockets. It was a skirt and kind of a shawl stole thing with pockets in it. It was very nice. I had one for a long while.

Zapol: Did you design this?

Dodd: Maybe Jean did. I know I didn't design it. And then she also found somebody who was a seamstress who made the things for us. Jean was very inventive that way. Organized.

Zapol: So you had this stole --

Dodd: We actually sold some stuff! That would help us in the winter. The idea was if we could do something with this we could get through the winter without jobs.

Zapol: Where did you sell them? Did you sell them in Maine?

Dodd: Right there. It was a garage that had two sides. So one side we turned into the painting gallery and the other side had all this other stuff. We also had a friend at Cooper Union that made jewelry. We had some of her stuff.

Zapol: And who came by?

Dodd: Well, it was a theater colony, so quite a few people did come by. It wasn't a bad place to have a little shop. It was good.

Zapol: Is there any relation between this and then the gallery that you helped start?

Dodd: On Tenth Street?

Zapol: Was there any connection, was this practice for that?

Dodd: The gallery that we had on Tenth Street, Bill King and I were both involved in it at the beginning.

Zapol: What year was that?

Dodd: Lakewood was 1951 and 1953. I wasn't at Lakewood in 1952, when the Tanager started. I was here in New York City because Eli was born. Isn't that curious? I never thought of the fact that the galleries overlapped in time.

Zapol: The Tanager [Gallery]?

Dodd: Yes. The Tanager and Accent Gallery. Then we left Lakewood.

Zapol: Where did the idea for the Tanager come from?

Dodd: It was myself, Bill, Charles Cajori, Angelo Ippolito, and Fred Mitchell. Bill had met Cajori at Skowhegan but then Bill had a Fulbright to Italy in 1949, 1950. While we were there we ran into Fred, who was on the G.I. Bill, and Angelo, who was there on the G.I. Bill. We met

them in Italy. Bill already knew Cajori from Skowhegan. Somehow when we came back we were all together just sitting around talking.

[Brief interruption]

We were sitting around talking and there were two ideas. One was, 'Maybe we should have a coffee shop.' Because we missed Italy, all those coffee shops. Or, 'Maybe we should have a gallery.' The idea of the gallery won out. We held a meeting at which there were a lot of people, all interested in the same idea, and after the meeting we thought, 'That's too big a group, we can't handle it. We know each other, we pretty well know what we would do, so we'll start it just ourselves.' There were a lot of co-ops that opened at that time and it was a lot of those same artists who we got to know later because everybody was on Tenth Street, more or less. We opened up first on Fourth Street, in a little teeny storefront space that had been a barber shop. That's where the Tanager name came from. There was a piece of glass that was painted orange up in the window, and the Orange Gallery, the What gallery, the Da-Da-Da gallery. Bill King said, 'The Tanager!' The tanager is hanging right there under the skylight, the bird. He made a bird, a metal bird for us. And that was that.

Zapol: Thinking that through, are there any connections that you can think of between the gallery, the Accent Gallery and the Tanager? Were there any other connections in terms of the people involved? People at Skowhegan involved in the Tanager?

Dodd: Later, Alex was part of the Tanager Gallery. Jean got involved with a gallery called the Area Gallery, along with Charlie DuBack, who was also a friend from Skowhegan. I don't know about Blackie. At that point he and Helen may have been living in Maine full-time. Or maybe not! I just can't remember. There were a number of galleries in that block in Tenth Street, and there is that kind of background on some of the people. Jean and Charlie DuBack and some other friends of theirs -- after Tenth Street was gone, years later -- they opened up something called the Landmark Gallery down in SoHo. That went for quite a while. Once you have some knowledge about how to do this stuff -- . I think now it would be impossible. It is so interesting, everything is so much more complex and more expensive. There's no way.

Zapol: It is hard for artists to --

Dodd: -- to do that!

Zapol: - to take those things on their own.

Dodd: We were all putting in ten bucks a month and we were running it. On Tenth Street.

Zapol: But it's interesting, what you say in terms of Bill Cummings, kind of like seeing it, saying, 'Why don't you do this?' And actually giving you skills that you can use as you go along as artists. In some way, really, being a gift.

Dodd: Exactly! Right!

Dodd: Exactly.

Zapol: How did you come to be asked in 1979 to be a faculty member at Skowhegan?

Dodd: How did that happen?

Zapol: Yes.

Dodd: I think what happened is the Board of Governors -- which I was then on, later -- they get together and dream up a faculty for the coming year. That is their job, to figure out who the faculty is going to be. I wasn't a member of the Board at all at that point. So I got this invite.

Zapol: At that time had you had relationships with the people who are on the Board?

Dodd: I think I always knew some of the people on the Board. Who was on the Board then, I wonder. Do you know?

Zapol: Yes.

Dodd: That'd be interesting because I don't know. I never asked who put my name out.

Zapol: You don't know how it happened.

Dodd: No. I didn't want to know. It seemed like something you don't have to know.

Zapol: But as far as you know, you were just asked. At that time had you had a relationship with Skowhegan?

Dodd: Not much, at that point. Not really.

Zapol: What was your decision-making process in deciding to come?

Dodd: At that point, in 1979 I was at -- where the heck was I? Was I at Cushing? By then I was in Cushing. We would go to Skowhegan for various talks and so forth, but that was about. That was the connection then.

Zapol: You would go over when you were living nearby in the summer?

Dodd: In the summertime, when the lectures were going on over the summer. I think that was about it as far as any connection was going on. Things went on in the winter, too, and there were auctions and benefits and stuff. They always invited me to put work in, which I always did because that was always a nice thing. There were things in the winter that happened and there were always events around Skowhegan. So the connections were always kept up in some way.

Zapol: Do you have any particular memories of some of those winter events? The balls or galas or auctions that you may have been involved in in New York?

Dodd: Not really. I can't think of anything.

Zapol: When Bill Cummings died, were you aware of that?

Dodd: I went to his funeral, which was a beautiful, appropriate, fine funeral. It was very beautiful, at the church. Sad but very beautiful.

Zapol: What are your memories of that?

Dodd: There we all were and there was music and people spoke. Then they carried his coffin. There was a horse and wagon. They carried it down the road. The cemetery is right down the road from the church. It just was very beautiful.

Zapol: It was at South Solon?

Dodd: Yes.

Zapol: That must have been a very emotional time for many people at Skowhegan.

Dodd: Yes.

[Interruption]

Just to resume, we were talking about Bill Cummings funeral and where that was.

Dodd: Not that it matters but so frequently people's funerals are kind of hilarious because it's so inappropriate to that person that you can't believe it. So it is kind of funny. Maybe he had something to say about it. Probably he did because he had lung cancer and he was sick for a long time. He probably did. But it was just so beautiful, that's all. It was really right.

Zapol: You remember that people spoke and it was appropriate but when you --

Dodd: There was poetry.

[Interruption]

Zapol: Were you aware of what was happening to Skowhegan after Bill Cummings died, some of the restructuring that happened?

Dodd: I was kind of aware. When did he die? What year did Bill die?

Zapol: 1974, I believe.

Dodd: I was there in 1979. I forget what year they asked me if I wanted to be on the Board of Governors. It had to be in the early 1980s. We were always were kind of aware of Skowhegan and what was going on.

Zapol: And when you say 'we' -- it's this group of friends who you were often getting together with in Maine.

Dodd: Or here! Yes.

Zapol: Those were largely people from Skowhegan, who you were seeing.

Dodd: Alex, Ada, Charlie DuBack, they were all here in the city in the winter. Blackie and Helen were, too, but I didn't see them quite as much until they got to Maine full-time. They're down the road from where I live. Hannah and Robin are in the house now, doing work for

Colby.

Zapol: And then you were on the faculty this summer.

Dodd: Then I was on the faculty.

Zapol: What do you remember of where you were staying? Your studio that summer?

Dodd: I had the Walter Murch cottage, which was lovely. I did a couple paintings in there. I did quite a few paintings that summer. It was a good summer altogether. The cottage was very nice.

Zapol: And what was your day like as a faculty member?

Dodd: It was pretty strenuous hiking around all the studios, the days that you were on, and then the other days I would be painting.

Zapol: Describe what a day on would be like for you.

Dodd: So you'd get up and you'd have your schedule that you got, from whoever. Was it Bill Williams? There had to be a secretary in the office. You'd start going around to studios and talking to students. It was always enjoyable but it was pretty exhausting by the end of the day, especially when the weather got boiling hot in August. But it's a good set-up.

Zapol: So you would go from studio to studio.

Dodd: I'd have a couple of buildings on any particular day. I forget how many times I saw people over a period of time, how many times I would go back to the same people.

Zapol: And were there specific people who were your charges or did you try to see all the students?

Dodd: No, I went to see all the students.

Zapol: Do you have any memories of particular critiques that summer?

Dodd: No, I don't really. I remember that that is where I met Janice. She was painting totally abstractly, very cool geometric things. She's changed so radically. Tim Kennedy, I remember what he was doing. Several of them, I can remember what they doing. Ralph Helmick. Dean

Hartung. I remember what Dean was doing. I can't remember what Luke was doing, I just remember being impressed, he was so young. Tim Watkins, he was doing wonderful stuff.

Zapol: What do you remember of what he was making?

Dodd: I don't know if it was that year or maybe a few years after he was out of the school. He was friends with Janice and he married Carol May. Anyway, a year or so later, he made a river outside. It was across a lawn. It wasn't water, it was very imaginative. He was wonderful. I wonder what's become of him! Why haven't we heard of him? He was Canadian.

Zapol: What was the river that he made?

Dodd: I think it was some kind of metal that he put it up on stilts. It had this thing flowing along. It was good. He was doing environmental stuff, kind of ahead of his time, really. He probably teaches somewhere now.

Zapol: What about the work that you were making that summer? What do you remember of that?

Dodd: I did paintings of a couple doors *(laughs)*.

Zapol: Had you already begun doing that at that point?

Dodd: Probably. I think I'd already started doing work like that while in Cushing. The woods. I know I was painting in the woods at Cushing because I went out in the woods at Skowhegan and found it was absolutely impossible. It was so weird.

Zapol: Why?

Dodd: I don't know why. I can't tell you why. All I know is that it just didn't work. I still have a painting, it is the barn, in Cushing. Every so often I haul it out and I think, 'This time I'll fix it.' You never fix. That isn't the way to paint, anyway. Fixing things doesn't make any sense. But it just drove me mad. It was birch trees. I don't know. It just didn't work.

Zapol: Different trees, different forest.

Dodd: And I've tried that. I go out to Blairstown, New Jersey, I tried painting the woods there,

too. Same problem. Some part of the woods across the road from me in Cushing are spruce trees, which are like telephone poles with a bit of stuff on them. They work well for me. But the other kinds of forest trees, it's very strange! I think I'm painting the woods but I guess I'm painting stripes.

Zapol: What were you painting, of those doors?

Dodd: The doors were great. Just the doors and the reflections or whatever the heck was in the door. That worked well. I got a couple of good paintings out of that summer. I do remember about Nancy Graves. Nancy kept talking about where the works of art were and who had bought them. But that's not such a good idea. Nobody wants to hear that. They want to hear you say what you were feeling, what you were thinking, how you made it. It was funny, it was really odd. Maybe it made her terribly nervous, giving a talk to begin with. It made me terribly nervous, giving a talk there.

Zapol: You spoke that summer?

Dodd: Yeah, I think I had to. Everybody that's on the faculty has to. I'm sure it was such a state of panic *(laughs)*. I can't tell you what I said or anything about it. Somehow you figure, 'The people that come there are very good students, they know what they're doing, and there's nothing to tell them.'

Zapol: The perception of the audience is --

Dodd: -- intimidating, this audience is. Which of course isn't true. It's not very good to get yourself in a state of panic when you're trying to give a talk.

Zapol: No. But I can imagine it being a challenge, especially when you're used to working with people one-on-one. It is a different kind of teaching.

Dodd: That part is fun. It's very nice, seeing what people are doing, talking to them and finding out where they're coming from and what they think they're going to do. It's nice.

Zapol: You said that William T. Williams was there that summer.

Dodd: Yes, Bill.

Zapol: What are your memories of him and his wife up at the Red Farm?

Dodd: They weren't doing a ton of socializing, either, *(laughs)* so that completed the group. None of us were having parties. If you need anything in that Red Farm, it's somebody who's social. I think it must have been agonizing for Bill, the whole damn summer, He's a quiet, reserved person.

Zapol: Because he only served that one year.

Dodd: He only did that one year.

Zapol: Do you remember anything about his relationship with the students, or with the Governors? Hearing anything about that, at that time?

Dodd: No.

Zapol: I don't know anything. I just know that he was only there for the one year.

Dodd: One year. I don't think it was a lot of fun, trying to do all that. But at that point there was a real gap in who was going to do it and he agreed to do it.

Zapol: Tell me about what happened next. You became a member of the Board of Governors.

Dodd: Right.

Zapol: How were you approached?

Dodd: Somebody must have called up I guess. Somebody from the Board of Governors. Whoever was the Chair at that time. I thought about it and I thought, 'Okay, I'll do that.'

Zapol: What was a part of your decision? What made you choose to be a part of it?

Dodd: The thing that is interesting at Skowhegan is when you're there and you're on the Board of Governors, they're discussing who to get to teach. So you become aware of what's going on in the art world. The art world has become so vast that you can't keep up with it. You can contribute your part. But then there are all these other parts to the art world and the Board of Governors will be in touch with the various other aspects, so it is very good and interesting that way. And the same for the students, looking through what the students send -- which used to be

slides -- and you could watch year after year the trends that were coming out of the various art schools. It would change as the years go by. It was very interesting. There were the years when people were all painting dogs *(laughs)*. Things like that. Things would change. There would be cooler paintings and then there'd be more expressionistic periods. It was interesting, being on the Board.

Zapol: What do you remember of those days of selection?

Dodd: There'd be long days of sitting there looking at slides. The faculty would come out of meetings of the whole Board but a group of four or five did the slides. You couldn't have everybody or it would go on and it would never end. There are so many people that want to come to Skowhegan, it's a huge number of applicants. There are so many good people that it is always difficult. There's only room for sixty and there are many more that are very good and would get something out of it. But it's just the way it is.

Zapol: Do you have memories of any discussions or strife among those making those decisions?

Dodd: Not really, no.

Zapol: So how was it done peacefully, then?

Dodd: I think there's usually quite a bit of agreement among artists, oddly enough, even covering completely different points of views about what art is. Whether the thing has quality or not, somehow that, everybody can see. Across the Board. It's interesting. There is always some disagreement but nobody ever came to any knock-down, drag-out fights. The majority would rule in that case. That was the way it was done. You gave numbers and then they were added up in the end, and the people with the best -- whether it was a low number or a high number, can't remember which. It was a good system. A very good system.

Zapol: Did anything change in terms of the way that the Board of Governors was run during the time that you served?

Dodd: During the time that I served it was pretty much the same system. I think the big change was way back there, where they all tried to do it together.

Zapol: The Board of Trustees.

Dodd: The Board of Trustees was trying to pick students, too. That doesn't make any sense. The artists were trying to raise money. That was a big flop. Once we figured out that we have different chores here, there are different things that we know how to do, and why don't we divvy it up and make two Boards. It's interesting how something like that is not so apparent at the very beginning when you start something but then as you go along you begin to find it out.

Zapol: You said that Rackstraw [Downes] was involved in that?

Dodd: I think so. I guess you'd have to check on that but I'm almost certain that he had the idea that we should have two Boards.

Zapol: Do you remember any particular stories that you heard about those difficulties in terms of the transition? After Bill died? Or into making these two Boards?

Dodd: Into making two Boards, yes. Every meeting people would come away, 'Oh, my god!' *(laughs)* I blocked it out. There were disagreements over who should be running the place and stuff and stuff and stuff.

Zapol: A lot of that happened before you came on, right, when Jonnie -- ?

Dodd: When was Jonnie? When was Jonnie running it, anyway?

Zapol: I think that was right before Bill T. Williams. That was that summer.

Dodd: Oh, that's right. Jonnie was there the summer that we were all there. But she stayed for several years. Right?

Zapol: What I see is that, in July, Jonnie was asked to leave the Board.

Dodd: Of that year?

Zapol: Of 1979.

Dodd: So then who took over?

Zapol: Then Bill T. Williams was sort of the stopgap Director in that time period.

Dodd: Oh, I see. She was doing what Bill was doing. Right. Of course. What am I saying?

Sidney did it at one point. When did Sidney get into the thing?

Zapol: Sidney came immediately in 1981.

Dodd: After Bill.

Zapol: Right.

Dodd: There's 1980, though.

Zapol: I think that Bill might have been there again that summer. I'm not sure who was there that summer.

Dodd: Then after Sidney did it for a few years, it seemed to me.

Zapol: What are your memories of Sidney Simon?

Dodd: I thought he did a pretty good job. I thought he was able to handle it pretty well. I guess he just got tired of it, maybe, at a point.

Zapol: Well, he died in 1983. [Note: this is incorrect. Simon died in 1997.]

Dodd: Oh god, right. That was when he was really --

Zapol: And then Roy Leaf took over.

Dodd: Wow, a lot of people were doing it in between.

Zapol: It seemed like there was a lot of change in that time.

Dodd: And then after Roy came Barbara [Lapcek], I think.

Zapol: Yes, I think so. So you saw a lot of change there.

Dodd: When Bill was alive it was one Board, I think. So when did the Boards become two Boards?

Zapol: It looks like the Boards became two Boards, not before Bill died but after the fire in 1961. I think that it became clearer, this joint committee idea. I think that happened in 1980. That might have been something you were involved in. There was a creation of a new joint

committee of ten Trustees and five members of the Board.

Dodd: There's always a Board that's a little of this, a little of that. You mean that wasn't there when they first split the two Boards up. So then you still need a way to communicate. But what was the year when the Boards became two?

Zapol: It looks like 1961.

Dodd: 1961, huh! Way back then!

Zapol: When there was a fire and then there was a financial problem.

Dodd: When the barn burned down?

Zapol: Yeah.

Dodd: There was a fire, wow. 1961.

Zapol: There was a possibility there, because the finances were kind of so rocky that they might close. So then they had to figure out, 'Okay, how are we going to take care of the finances?' The Board of Trustees really helped take care of that aspect. Is my impression.

Dodd: They had to do that. It's way back then. That's interesting that it's split into two. Was Rackstraw even involved at that point? Maybe he was. Isn't that funny. It's dates that do get you. I'm trying to remember what dates things actually happened.

Zapol: What I'm curious about is that you said there weren't that many changes while you were on the Board of Governors. What was the experience of being the Chair? What was that like for you? What were your responsibilities? Any particular responsibilities?

Dodd: God, it was so long ago, what was I doing.

Zapol: Accomplishments that you felt like you made?

Dodd: You were chairing meetings, basically and going to more meetings because you were on the Board that was between the two other major Boards. It was making decisions and being on the Board and conducting the meeting. So I only did that for a brief amount of time.

Zapol: Did you enjoy it? What was your sort of feeling? *(both laugh)* Not really?

Dodd: Not really, no.

Zapol: Two years, it looks like.

Dodd: That was enough.

Zapol: Rackstraw joined, this says in 1981.

Dodd: That's when I thought. This split, it was much later.

Zapol: So maybe it's that there was another kind of --

Dodd: Probably. I'm sure there were more things that happened then because of the fact that they were all trying to work together. It seemed to me that went on for years. Then probably the money problems would come and go.

Jack Eastman. He was there right after Bill, or -- ?

Zapol: Yes.

Dodd: Jack was kind of difficult.

Zapol: What do you remember of him?

Dodd: Just that he was difficult. *(Zapol laughs)* He'd be very nice but I think he could create a lot of trouble. It seemed like that and I think he maybe did, really. Then there was a lot of controversy over everything, pretty much, for a while there.

Zapol: What were, what seemed to be leading these different factions?

Dodd: There was always a controversy over who was going to run the thing. Who was the guy that they hired one year. He would have been doing what Bill and Barbara and Jonnie did. They hired somebody. Half the Board was really enthused about him and half the Board wasn't. I can't even remember his name. That was kind of bad. Jack was sending messages here, there and everywhere, things were flying through the --

Zapol: You were getting messages from Jack to the Board of Trustees about what his opinions

was about things?

Dodd: Gee, I should look. I've kept a lot of old stuff. I might have thrown it out by now.

Zapol: What do you think it was about? What was that?

Dodd: It almost seemed like he liked to make things difficult. *(laughs)* Some people's disposition. I don't know. I don't understand, I never understand what that's about, when somebody gets --

Zapol: And the larger controversies at Skowhegan -- ?

Dodd: Maybe he wanted to run the whole thing a certain way and there was no agreement, and he couldn't compromise? I don't know what it was. But I know Mildred [C. Brinn] and John Payson, they could tell you exactly, because they were the ones that helped us. I thought they got it straightened out. Or maybe I was Chair then. I don't know what it was. I got very close to them at the time. They were, I thought, very fair, effective, and good.

Zapol: How were they fair and good?

Dodd: They didn't indulge themselves in character assassination and they just didn't indulge in the kind of stuff that it seemed like Jack was doing.

Zapol: It sounds like you stayed affiliated with the Board of Governors for these other reasons, to have your pulse on the larger art world.

Dodd: Over time that's what it's been.

Zapol: What other changes have you noticed in Skowhegan, the school, over that time?

Dodd: More studios. Things have been improved physically. Which is true of any place, I guess. It can't shrink. It has to either improve, grow, or whatever you want to call it. You have to keep it up. That's definitely gone on. The people who come up there, it's always amazing. At this point in time I never know any of them because now I'm out of it, so to speak. It's not my generation anymore, at all. It's always very interesting to meet the people who become the faculty. I got off the Board of Governors because I didn't know who people were talking about anymore. While it was very educational, I wasn't contributing a damn thing except sitting there

like a lump on a log. So I stopped.

Zapol: But you're still able to be involved in some ways as a Governor Emeritus.

Dodd: Yes.

Zapol: And in what ways do you -- ?

Dodd: It's down to when they have the big party in the summer in Maine, I definitely get invited. It's such a wonderful party. *(laughs)*

Zapol: Tell me about that party.

Dodd: The party is behind the Red Farm and there's some tents there. Everybody's out there. Everybody in the state of Maine who's involved in the art scene seems to get there. You see people that you haven't seen in ages and you see people that you saw yesterday. It's just a lot of fun. The current faculty, who you probably haven't met before. Then there's the talk. The talks are different over the years. Sometimes they're people who talk forever. I remember one year, at the end of it I think I and maybe three other people were sitting there *(laughs)*. I forget who the speaker was but it was amazing. He really drove us right into the ground.

Zapol: Marathon!

Dodd: It was a marathon talk.

Zapol: But you stayed, so there must have been something keeping you there.

Dodd: I stayed, I stayed. *(laughs)* It was the staff --

Zapol: You felt bad.

Dodd: I felt bad. I felt obligated. That's always a wonderful event.

Zapol: Are there other lectures at that event you remember?

Dodd: Now it's at the point where it's two hours to go over there and I'm not going to drive. Well I could drive. Barbara Sullivan is very generous and I've stayed with Barbara Sullivan any number of times, going over to the [Governor and Trustee] weekend. But it is hard to find people

that want to drive for two hours. I can drive for two hours and then stay overnight and come back, it's no problem. But to just go over there on a Friday night and then come home, that's four hours driving. We're all too doddering, the people that I know, to be doing that. So I miss everything but the weekend one, when I stay over. Yvonne and I go over there and hike up to the studios and see what's going on. But now she did her hip in. I don't know what shape we're going to be in next summer. But it's a wonderful place and good to go back to.

Zapol: When you go back there, or even when you go back there on your memory, is there a particular time or memory that comes to mind?

Dodd: No. There's a lot of them. Different ones.

Zapol: What features in the landscape kind of come to your -- ?

Dodd: What features in the landscape? Let me see. I used to love to walk up in the woods up at the top. That was where I tried to paint that time, didn't work out. I remember one person put some sort of big glass sculpture up at the path there. What is interesting now is nobody makes sculpture that you put out anymore. It doesn't exist. There's no such thing, it seems, which is too bad because there always used to be big lumps of something or other on these various points in the landscape. Now with computers it has become non-physical in some way. I don't know about that. It seems too bad.

Zapol: What was the glass structure that you were talking about?

Dodd: I think he hung something like a mirror in the middle of the path. You can't see the thing but you suddenly see yourself, just so nobody walked into it. There used to be a spot right behind the barn, on the crest of that little downturn, where there was always a piece of sculpture, behind the fresco studio. Nothing seems to be there anymore. There's less sculpture but the trees are growing up that weren't there. Everything sort of subtly keeps changing, year by year, just a little bit. But it is a beautiful spot.

Zapol: What do you think it is about Skowhegan that attracts these interesting artists, that has brought about such wonderful friendships?

Dodd: Because it is a wonderful place to spend some time and because it has a very good

reputation. And they pay you to go, as well! And the meals are good. It's all very positive, from the point of view of teaching there. It is very nice.

Zapol: So it's not difficult to attract good people.

Dodd: No, I don't think so. Unless they're busy doing something else. It is so interesting to run a school where every year the faculty is different. They can't come back, which is the same for the students. So you're creating this new thing every year. No one can relax and think, 'Oh, I'll just repeat what I did.' It's quite amazing, that idea that it is always going to be fresh and new. Maybe that's why it's still got this reputation.

Zapol: What do you think that does for the kind of art that's produced, the fact that it's always this new experience?

Dodd: Just that it's always new. I don't know that it does anything for it but it provides a place for it to happen. As all those young students are there, meeting each other from all over the place, there's that wonderful thing, too. I'm sure things come out of the connections that are made there over the summer.

Zapol: We spoke about that spirit, Bill Cummings' generosity. In what way do you feel like that influences or does it still influence what Skowhegan is about?

Dodd: The people that start things, somehow or other, their mood continues. There were those few bad years there. But still it's like, 'Okay, here's the founder of this thing, and his friends, who started it.' I suppose an idea like that is so positive that it just -- . It's hard. God knows it can't be easy to be maintaining this whole thing but it's always going to attract people. People are always going to want it to succeed.

Zapol: Can you talk about the role of that place in your life, how you think it has affected?

Dodd: That's how I got to Maine, so that's pretty basic. Good and bad. Good and bad things happened. But it's basically a positive kind of place.

Zapol: Thinking forward, what are your hopes for how the place may evolve or how you envision the future for Skowhegan?

Dodd: The framework seems to be very viable. It should be able to continue unless people stop making art. Different people come there, and different personalities, but the framework is -- I suppose it totally depends on who's involved, at this point in time, what will happen. You can't know until you know the people that are going be in charge. The thing about the constant change, I think that's very positive, probably. The two Boards can't keep changing, they have to be steady. So far, so good, it seems.

Zapol: So the leadership really has to maintain the vision, has to have the consistency of vision in some way. It sounds like you'd like it to kind of stay kind of steady.

Dodd: Yes. As long as they maintain the openness of the framework, it seems like that idea is always a good one. Nobody can make it 'their' school, if you know what I mean.

Zapol: It's a very fluid thing. When you say that, it makes me think of Bernarda Shahn. She wrote an essay about the Skowhegan idea being a place that is run by artists for artists. I wonder what you would say the Skowhegan idea is.

Dodd: Well, that's the idea. She put it in a nutshell. That's who started it and that was their idea and it still works that way. But it wasn't just Bill and Sidney and Henry and Annie, saying 'We're going to do this and this is the way you're going to paint and this is what you're going to learn.' They started inviting all these other people to come and teach and that was the openness of it. I think that is where the real strength has been. Therefore, the Board, being artists, that changes over time and new people get on. It's got that very lively quality to the way that it functions. So it should be able to function forever. It should be able to go on a very long time, until people decide that art is totally worthless and, 'Let's get rid of the whole thing! Not have any artists.' When the society decides they've had enough of artists.

Zapol: 'Enough of this nonsense!'

Dodd: 'Enough of this art stuff!'

Zapol: Those founders created it as artists. But they were also artists of a very particular style.

Dodd: Yes, they were.

Zapol: When you first saw Skowhegan in 1951, what was your feeling about the kind of work

that was being encouraged to come out of that?

Dodd: God, I can't even remember what was being encouraged, to tell you the truth.

Zapol: If there was a kind of particular style to the artists?

Dodd: I don't think they've ever fallen into that because it isn't a "school school" with the same faculty every year. It doesn't maintain a look. Never did, it seems to me. The look is definitely connected to whatever is going on outside in the current art world. It connected to that but you wouldn't say of somebody's work, 'They studied at Skowhegan'; like you could say, 'They went to Yale.' When I went to Cooper Union, it looked like everybody had studied with Picasso because that was the prevailing look. Or they'd studied with one or the other of the teachers and the work looked like that. But I don't think you could say that quite as much of this because you wouldn't spend so much time with one person. At the beginning it was much more toward nature. As they kept inviting different people -- . I had a friend, Bill White, who lived here. He was there at one of the very first years as well and -- what's his name? The sculptor, at the very beginning -- ?

Zapol: Jose de Creeft?

Dodd: Jose de Creeft. Jose was there, and they all met to do sculpture and there weren't any tools. So then Jose started to show them how to make tools. And they started making tools. But I guess after a week somebody went to Boston and bought some tools. It was much more primitive at the beginning, how to make art out of what's right around you. Now everybody has a computer. I'm not a computer person so I can't be making judgments about other generations and what they do.

Zapol: The sense that it was sort of a rudimentary --

Dodd: 'You don't need anything!' Supposedly. Except a paintbrush and some paint and stuff. But times have changed.

Zapol: In terms of the larger technology.

Dodd: They can't be totally out of touch with the world. It is not really a place where you go to meditate.

Zapol: Why?

Dodd: If you have a computer, I don't call that meditating. You'd have to get rid of all that stuff.

Zapol: You can't be isolated.

Dodd: If you're going, go cold turkey.

Zapol: The sense of isolation has changed now because of technology.

Dodd: That's true. I wonder.

Zapol: But still, they're there for that period of time.

Dodd: Right. They're still walking up that hill in the pitch dark at night. Stumbling over rocks and wondering who's going to come out of the woods. A lot of it is the same.

Zapol: I wonder if there are other stories or particular questions that you'd like to share that I haven't asked you about?

Dodd: Off the top of my head I can't think of anything.

Zapol: Or particular memories of people or conversations or events that happened there?

Dodd: I can't think of any else.

Zapol: We've had a pretty extensive discussion *(laughs)* as well. I'd like to definitely thank you for your time for taking this trip from the rainy first day at Lakewood to the Governors and Trustees weekend, and to Maine now.

Dodd: You are very welcome.

Zapol: You've been involved for a very long time. Thank you for sharing these thoughts.

Dodd: You're very welcome.

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