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**SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine**

**Lecture by Whitfield Lovell
Summer 2005**

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

Introductory remarks by Linda Earle: ... seat; we're going to get started now... on tonight's lecture. Many of you have already met Whitfield Lovell in your studios and over lunch or dinner... and... it's a real pleasure and we're very lucky to have him here as one of the series of Governors who are making studio visits during this period. And we welcome him back to Skowhegan. Whitfield is a great friend of Skowhegan; he is an alumna of... 1985? And has been on the faculty here twice. And we're just so pleased to have him back.... He's also a favorite person around here because he is such a deeply generous person. He's... a scholar of African American life; he's a very compassionate observer of people... He has a wonderfully supple mind, as those of you who've talked to him know... And he's an intrepid traveler... And he's great warmth—and all of that is in his work and much more.... Whitfield is from the Bronx. He went to... a music and art high school in New York... and then the Maryland Institute, Parsons; and he got his BFA from Cooper Union. He studied... at the fabled Printmaking Workshop with the great Robert Blackburn... and as I said he was here in 1985. He's been showing his work since the early Eighties; and some of the places he showed *early on* sort of comprise a very important time in recent art history. Fashion Moda, Kekeleba House, ABC No Rio, Just Above Midtown, Cinque Gallery—it was an exciting period when alternative spaces

were making new territory for new work; and... Whitfield was very much a part of that. He's also shown at the *non*-alternative spaces, like the Walker, the Whitney, the National Museum of American Art, the Center for Fine Arts in Miami... Grey Gallery at NYU, Bronx Museum, the Neuberger... and the University of North Texas Art Gallery, where he did a sort of—I think—turning point... breakthrough installation called “Whispers from the Wall,” that many of you may have heard of. He's... also won numerous awards; but I'll refer you to the library for all of those... We have information in the library notebooks about him. I just want to say that I think his work is incredibly powerful because not only is it beautifully wrought—he's a—as you'll see... one of the great draughtsmen... but it's deeply felt, and it's smart, and it comes at you... in—on different levels at the same time. In her intro essay for his show at the Bronx Museum a couple of years back... Susan Hoeltzel writes, “Lovell tells stories based on the familiar, and explores the past for a better sense of the present and the future. The work is both narrative and metaphorical. It is about relationships primarily.” And I would also add that it's about history and the way it is played out in individual lives... and the specificity of his drawing and his evocative installations is very much part of the power of that project. I want to introduce you to Whitfield Lovell. (Applause)

Speaker: Thank you. Okay, can you hear me okay? Great. Thank you, Linda... very much. I didn't know all of those things. So... I'd like to start out by showing some of the things I collect. I've been collecting... objects, and... family stories pretty much all my life... since I can remember. Around the time that I graduated from... Cooper Union back in 1981 I was doing... You know, I had studied sculpture and painting... and I began working on a series of sort of... sort of abstracted, sort of... sort of abstracted figuration... sort of... weird kind of Cubistic... types of things. And... at a certain point I became less and less interested in the idea of painting or... you know, just the... act of mooshing paint around; and I became much more interested in... you know, making a personal statement. Then coming to... Skowhegan back in 1985 was a real turning point for me. I began to work from... family photographs. These were photos that my father... had taken. And... I worked on that for a number of years until finally I started with the... the works I'll show you. So... the... the first piece—Oh, can we—will you turn that on?

SLIDE

The first slide... is of... part of my collection of... (pause) Okay, this is part of my collection of crayon portrait enlargements. As I said I've been collecting stuff for years. I have a huge collection of hands... like hand amulets... I wear of a Hand of Fatima around my neck and... And I have hand sculptures all over my house. Anyone who's ever been to my... home knows that I'm an avid collector of things. And... these portraits were created before mechanical enlargers were invented. The photographer, in order to get an image of this size, had to project a very faint image onto the photographic paper, and then go back in with Conte crayon and draw in the details. So I was really intrigued by these portraits—the one in the center in the silver frame is of my... my grandmother's aunt. And I sort of talked my grandmother into giving me... this piece. I was intrigued with it because it looked so much like a... a photograph; but it also looked very much like a drawing at the same time. And I grew up really, you know, helping my father out in the darkroom. So photography, and looking at photographic imagery, was always sort of a very important part of my visual awakening.

SLIDE

This is a photograph of my grandmother when she was about nineteen years old, on her first trip to New York City.

SLIDE

I think that was like 1923. So I began to actually... look at photographs—photo albums with my grandmother; and... sort of collecting family stories that I was getting from her and from my mother and from my... grandfather.

SLIDE

And... so... at a certain point I stopped working with my father's photographs, because I felt that the artworks I was making were too tied to personal narratives; they were too much *about* people that I knew, and so my statements were not as broad as I needed for them to be. So I started to collect photographs of people from antique shops and flea

markets. And these are some examples of some of my photographs. These are cabinet cards, which are photographs that are adhered to a stiff piece of matte board.

SLIDE

And this is a tintype. I was very interested in the sort of... poses of the conventional photography—studio photography of that time.

SLIDE

And also very interested in that time period, because it was like the... period between the... Emancipation and the Civil Rights Movement, a time period that was... you know... certainly discussed in history books very little; and... certainly not dealt with in any art... very much at all.

SLIDE

So. Okay. So in 1993 I went to an artist's retreat in... Capriata D'Orba in... Italy. It's right outside of Milan... And I was invited by a Swedish gallerist who owned the villa to... just come and hang out with the—her Swedish friends, and make art and... you know, drink wine—you know, do the artist thing. And... when I—I actually went there with the intention of making a bunch of little drawings that I would take back and show or something, or... you know, make into larger pieces. And when I got there I learned the history of the villa. It had been built by a slave trader who... dealt in Africans taken from Brazil well into the 20th century. And so... just the history of the place where I was sort of... irked me so that I... had to make a statement about that. And I had—so I had to... sort of do something unusual, just to comment on that. And so I went around making these self-portraits on the... walls. Some of the rooms in the villa had what they call *grotesque* decorations of... bare-breasted women—you know lining the moldings and... Africans with bones in their noses... and things like that. And so I wanted to put a certain dignified, less stereotypical image of a Black person in that space.

SLIDE

(pause) Okay. And then in 1995 I was... invited to Houston, Texas to be an artist in residence at Rice University. And... within a month I was approached by Rick Lowe, the director of Project Row Houses, to do an installation. Project Row Houses is a... a project which has twelve shotgun houses; and six of them were converted into housing for single mothers... and the other six were—or still are used for rotating artists' installations. And so, you know, I had been wanting to do some more site-specific wall drawings, but I was waiting for the right opportunity to come along. And so, when I walked into the house... and I sort of got a feeling for the space, it was... It was... really exciting for me, because I could feel the presence of the people who had lived in the... in the house. And so I used images from photos that were found in local flea markets; and... I made these—These were my first wall drawings on wooden walls, wooden interior walls.

SLIDE

And I left some of this rubble, which had been left in the house.

SLIDE

So... the... director of the Havana Biennale... in Cuba... saw the installation in Houston and invited me to be in the Havana Biennale. So... I... I went down to Havana with... a box of charcoal and... a couple of items of like old clothing... and... a tape deck; because I wanted to use some sound and I also wanted to make wall drawings. And aside from that I really didn't have any idea what I would do; I really wanted to go in and sort of feel the space and get an idea... you know, like let my ideas flow once I... once I got there. The glitch that I came up against was that in... in Havana they don't have any antique shops... which is—you know—where I was accustomed to getting my... my... found objects from. So I had to really borrow... a lot of... borrow and sort of beg for—to use a lot of the old furnishings that I was able to gather.

SLIDE

This... This was in an old... 18th century fort called “La Cabana” in old Havana....

SLIDE

(pause) And one of the very few things that I brought with me was this funeral program which I found in an antique shop the night before I left for... Havana. And I... I placed it on that table on top of the flowers; and it seemed to provide a very sort of appropriate focal point for the installation.

SLIDE

Okay. So... somewhere along the way... in my going into old houses and doing wall drawings, I... I began to sort of... pry the wooden planks out of the walls and present these wall drawings in other situations, in other venues, like... like in gallery situations, and what have you. And so... these works that I create in my studio are—have been referred to as tableaux... because they are not full scale installations that the viewer would enter into; but they're... They incorporate the two-dimensional drawing with... with three-dimensional objects.

SLIDE

(Water? Thank you.) Okay. In 1999 I was invited back to Texas again... by the University of North Texas in Denton; and there I created “Whispers from the Walls.” Diana Block, the curator there, just gave me carte blanche; I mean you know she said, “We want you to do a project here, and you can do whatever you want.” And so I researched the city of Denton, and... discovered that there was a community in the center of Denton from roughly 1875 until 1923... called “Quakertown.” And... that community—it was a very sort of self-sufficient... upwardly mobile African American settlement. And... they were forced to disperse in 1923, because—well for—for several reasons. The official reason given was that the city of Denton needed a city park... and the park needed to be right there in that spot. Some of the actual records actually show that... a major reason for them wanting Quakertown to disperse was because it was right next to a white women’s college. And... so I decided to... to build a house in commemoration of that community, for the... for the Denton Gallery.

SLIDE

I had...about... twenty... University of North Texas students working with me... and... a really incredible exhibition designer who knows how to build things really well. And we went around to... abandoned buildings and tore out some of the... the lumber... And we went to salvage yards and got... bought things—like we bought the shingles from salvage yards and.... While the house was being built... the students actually did the schlepping and they... they... assembled the house with the exhibition designer. I was at... a photo archive in Dallas, which is about... half an hour away from Denton... looking at old photographs. So I chose about two thousand photographs, and...-- I'm sorry. I *looked through* two thousand photographs; and I chose... a hundred and twenty of them. And...they—which they... made laser copies for me. And... so once the house was built... I just sort of sat in the... the house and flipped through these old photographs until the images... sort of spoke to me. And... that's how I decided which... images would go onto the walls.

SLIDE

And I spent a lot of time in the antique shops and the flea markets, looking for objects that... I felt *could have* existed in that space at that particular time.

SLIDE

Now when I was a... kid I spent every summer in South Carolina. And down there I had three great-aunts... who each lived to be a hundred and five years old. There was Aunt Fanny, Aunt Babe, and Aunt Sweet... that—Those weren't their real names, but... that's... how I knew them. And... Aunt Fanny lived in a shack up the hill from the brick house that my grandfather's sister lived in. She didn't believe in electricity. She said... electric lights hurt her eyes, so she lit her home with kerosene lamp. And... she—you know, she wore a long sort of Victorian outfit at all times, and she always had her hair covered with a—like a head wrap. And... so... my memories of the... of her house... were actually... my model for the objects I chose... to place here.

SLIDE

(long pause) And then there's—There's this hat on the bed... issue, which... I... I was raised with this sort of... belief that if—It's bad luck to leave your hat on the bed... And there were several things that that could mean.... It... One thing I heard, as a child, was that if you leave your hat on the bed you're going to be disappointed—like *really* disappointed. And another thing was, if you left your hat on the bed you were going to die; it was like you were... you know, laying your soul to rest. And... then... a third thing which I've also heard is that... if you leave your hat on the bed someone's going to jail. So... it was really interesting... My choice to put this hat on the bed created a lot of issues, particularly for African Americans... because they see the hat on the bed and it's like, "Oh, no... Get the hat off the bed!" And when the exhibition went to... the Studio Museum in Harlem, that's where I got the most sort of... really sort of juicy, interesting reactions from people... The people were going up to the guards and asking, "Doesn't this artist know that it's bad luck to put your hat on the bed?" So... finally the guards came and asked me, "Well... Well *why did you* leave your hat on the bed?" You know—"Why did you put the hat on the bed?" And I said, "Well, you know, if I hadn't put it on the—put the—if I hadn't put it there... it wouldn't have evoked that... really strong issue, you know? That sort of superstition... that sort of... of... of an issue would not have been aroused." And that's what I wanted the piece to do.

SLIDE

This is... Brian Wheeler, who was the exhibition designer; and he was able to build the house so that it could come apart and be reassembled... and... here are two of the University of North Texas students... helping to make up the bed...

SLIDE

Now... outside of the house there was about five feet of mulch... surrounding the house. And from there on... was old clothes. And... there were... One of the things I wanted to do with the... covering of the floor was I wanted to... to remove the experience of the installation from being in a gallery... you know. The floor would have certainly distracted from the experience of the... the house. And the choice of old clothes—I mean a lot of people ask me why—"Well why did you put old clothes all over the place?" And

they were... --Like for me they represent... that which is left behind when... when someone's no longer here with us. And... then I was in the... the... Holocaust Museum in DC; and there was a huge pile of *shoes* that were taken from the prisoners; and... And I said to myself, "Yeah, that's exactly what I meant..." You know? It's like... what's left behind, what's the evidence... of those lives.

SLIDE

This is one of the tableaux—There are three tableaux that are part of this installation. This one is called "Two Chairs;" and... I'll just explain to you how the tableau pieces come together... There are several ways that something can happen—that one of them can happen.... One way is that I could have... an idea that—Okay, I want to do a piece with... a couple... on... a white... background, with two chairs sitting in front. And so I would have to go out and look for those elements and... --You know... That's one way that it could happen. I mean I could have the complete idea right away and then go out and try to pull it together. Or I could have the *photograph* of this couple; and I could look at the photograph and I could say, "Well... this would really work well... on a white background with two chairs," and then I have to go and look for those elements. Or I could find the two chairs first, and then—and decide, well... you know, these two chairs are so special that... I would like to place them... in front of an image of a couple. So... those are three basic way that the tableau pieces come together; it's always... I guess I would say that the... the thrill of the hunt is the most exciting part of it for me... when I *don't* have the complete idea... from the start... when I'm able to allow the piece to sort of magically—you know I find something here, and then I place it and it really clicks; it really works with the image.

SLIDE

This... was interesting in terms of the way it came together, because I wanted to have sound—I mean—Okay, in the... the house, inside of the house, there is a sound element; and the sound element is... sort of echoes... and... whispering voices and... doors opening and closing... and, you know, not really audible conversations. That seemed to work well inside of the house; but I also wanted to use music in this installation, and I

didn't—But I didn't want to just have music coming out of nowhere. So... that was sort of in the back of my mind. And so I... I had some time while the house was being built, and I started working on this drawing of this young man on this door... And... then one day I walked into the antique shop, and there was this... this machine sitting there, with a sign on top that said, "It spins." And... I was like, "Hm! Interesting." So... I took—I purchased it, brought it home... and you know I just—As soon as I saw the sign that's saying that it spinned [sic] I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it. And so I brought it home and I set it right there in front of the drawing; and I turned on a recording that I had of a scratchy old Blues tune, which would be just perfect for that installation. And... I turned the knob on the record player, and it—as it spun it sort of felt as though the Blues tune was emanating from the record player. And so... the—those three elements: the sound, the... the object, and the drawn image just seemed to really click and work together. So that was one of the most exciting sort of processes... is letting things happen that way.

SLIDE

Okay. And this is... The next few slides are of... tableau pieces from... a museum show that I had... back in—Oh, I don't know... something like 2001 or something like that. And... So what I want to do is I want to just...flip through them, and I'll tell you the titles... and—And also I should mention that... the figures are always at least life-size. They are rarely even smaller than life size. This one is called "Bringer;" and those are oil lamps...

SLIDE

This is "Ode," O-D-E.... A very large piece. I don't know—I guess you could tell by the... by the chairs.

SLIDE

This one is called "Bliss;" and this is real whiskey. I—Part of this piece for me is the aroma of the whiskey... and I had actually—I had to pull this piece from the museum exhibition because the... Well, the museum had issues with having alcoholic beverages

on display. It's a long story, but—I mean I felt that part of—You know, they asked me to use colored water, and I just said, “Well, no, I'll just pull the piece from the show;” because a lot of... the piece is... you know, is... missing without the aroma of the whiskey.

SLIDE

And this is called “Hope.” (pause)

SLIDE

And this is “The Threes.”

SLIDE

“North.”

SLIDE

This is called “Strive.” And those are boxing gloves.

SLIDE

(pause) (laughs) Okay. I should also mention that... that the... Harvard Business School bought this piece. I don't know—I just thought it was a kind of a... interesting...choice.
(laughs)

SLIDE

This one is called “Brethren.”

SLIDE

(long pause) “Potion.”

SLIDE

“Trap.”

SLIDE

(pause) This is “Shine.”

SLIDE

“Wise Like That.” This is—This... Some of the titles are a bit... poetic. Sometimes they’re a little cryptic... “Wise like that” is a line from an old... Blues tune. I—I tend to... to stray away from giving my pieces titles that... like... can *limit* the way that the pieces are interpreted... So you know, actually titling for me is the most... --I don’t know—*annoying thing* that I ever have to do; because it’s... It’s... You know, I don’t want to give things titles that say too much. I don’t want to say—But I want to give them titles that are *compatible*, and that sort of enhance the... the meanings of the pieces.

SLIDE

This is called “Fancy.”

SLIDE

(pause) “Peace.” P-E-A-C-E.

SLIDE

“Walking Blues.”

SLIDE

(pause) “Wreath”

SLIDE

(pause) This one is called “Having;” and the... boxes are filled with pennies. Can that be focused? (pause)

SLIDE

Okay. And then I was invited to Richmond, Virginia to do an installation—to do a project. They actually asked me to do the project on... Jackson Ward, which was the first major entrepreneurial Black community in the country. They... They boast the first Black... banker, the first Black doctor, the first Black scientist, the first Black tailor—you know, just... everything—the first Black everything... started in Jackson Ward. And... so... it was... an interesting experience for me because I had twelve university... common—Virginia Commonwealth University students who were signed up to work for me—work with me on the project. And the first day I arrived I was asked, “How is the—How do you think being in the seat of the Confederacy will affect your work?” And... my initial answer was, “I didn’t come here to deal with the Confederacy. I came here to deal with Jackson Ward.” You know, I did not want to be strayed from the—you know, from that.... But within a day or two of being in and around Richmond, I realized just how... potent the Civil War history is in that city. And Richmond is probably the—I mean I’ve never been to a city where the residents know so much about their history. You know... You could be at Shockoe Bottom, some neighborhood downtown... and they’ll tell you what happened in 1865 in this spot. And it’s like everybody knows this information. So... after a day or two I realized that the (unintelligible) that the Civil War was just such a strong part of Richmond that I could not ignore it. And... so... I did this image of a—of a... Union soldier; and... on this pedestal there is a book called **Southern States of the Union**; and it’s open to a page that discusses the... the abolitionist movement and the theory that slavery would have ended naturally had it not been for the... sort of intrusion of the—of the abolitionists and the Civil War.

SLIDE

And this one is called “Restoreth.” The... The... objects on the shelf are tonics and pills and powders and... sort of healing tonics.

SLIDE

(pause) And this piece, which is twenty-three feet long... was taken sort of like a composite from a bunch of different picnic photographs... of people from the Jackson Ward community. And it’s called “Our Best.” The boxes contain pennies. There were

hundreds and hundreds of dollars worth of pennies in those boxes. And... And any Richmonder would—who... visited this... exhibition understood the pennies because Maggie Walker was the first Black woman to open a bank—the first woman, period, to open a bank. And... her bank was called the Penny Savings Bank. And so that was something that every Richmonder seemed to pick up on....

SLIDE

And there was a parlor.... (long pause) And these... these drawings are... I call them coins; and they are... sort of scattered around on the floor in this installation. (pause)

SLIDE

Okay. Now here are some more tableau pieces. This one is called “Tea.”

SLIDE

This is called “The Missoura...”

SLIDE

(pause) “Mine.” M-I-N-E.

SLIDE

(long pause) This is called “Epic.” And those books on the shelf are... great epics in American history.

SLIDE

(pause) And here are some more of the coin pieces which... until I ran out of these... foundry molds that I did them on... I had a really great time making these sort of constellations with them.

SLIDE

(long pause) And this piece is called... “Glory.” (pause)

SLIDE

This is “Trigger.”

SLIDE

(pause) “Beauty Without Regret.”

SLIDE

(pause) This is “You’re My Thrill.” They’re bomb shell casings.

SLIDE

(pause) And this... is an installation that I did at the Virginia Beach—The Contemporary Art Center of Virginia Beach; and... it was called... “Sanctuary: The Great Dismal Swamp.” This was a fascinating project for me. The Dismal Swamp is a twenty-two thousand acre... --Sorry, thousand square mile... swampland, which... which spreads across the borders between Virginia and North Carolina. And... it’s literally called the Dismal Swamp. They called it the Dismal Swamp because it was—the climate was so dismal; and it was actually... a hideout for generations of runaway slaves. There were... They were called Maroons... and... there were generations of people who were born in the swamp and who died in the swamp—but that’s where they hid... away from slavery. And... they... they made their—They got provisions from the outside by making... shingles out of... cypress trees. And so I covered the entire floor with... mulch... and... pine cones and... --What do you call those?”—cypress knees... The... We managed to find thirty-five trees that were slated to be cut down, so they were cut down and we brought them to the gallery and stood them up. And... you know, they—We also had Spanish moss, which you can see on some of the branches.... And these basins with the drawings in them are filled with water...

SLIDE

(pause) This was a sort of a centerpiece of the installation. This man is sort of representing a woodcutter. And... in the center of the Dismal Swamp there is a lake...

which is... about a—I think it’s a mile wide, and it’s an oval lake.... It’s fascinating because it’s no deeper than six feet *anywhere* in the... in the entire... you know—in the very center it’s no deeper than six feet. So it’s been referred to as a “sheet of water.” And... so... I built this pool in the center; and in it I placed these wood carvings... and sort of like survival... objects.

SLIDE

And... that was an interesting project to do because... even people who lived right in the Chesapeake... area, right near the Dismal Swamp, did not know about the Dismal Swamp... and... they didn’t know the history of the Dismal Swamp. And... I visited the... Dismal Swamp... Wildlife Preserve—or Reserve—whatever you call it, and... the people there who were working at preserving the swamp did not know that there were generations of runaway slaves who had lived there. So it was a really fascinating sort of a... uncovering of history... And... that’s the last slide. So... do you have any questions? (Applause) (long pause) Yes...

Question: In the works you... you were using like images... these photographs from a particular time period... and you said with the titles... you want to keep the reading for the audience to be a little bit open; you didn’t want to hone it down too much to one particular idea... And so I—With that I wanted to know how... Well why you continue to use these images, and also... how the works that you’re doing connect to our contemporary life. Like how can—How do you want... us to learn... from your works, using the imagery and the found objects that you’re using—How does that relate to us today?

Speaker: Okay... Well let’s see... That’s... that’s a lot of questions. Your first one... Why do I continue to use these kind of images...? It’s been a fascination for me; and you know it’s... It’s interesting because... someone came to my studio and... -- I mean, I think that what you can—the most you can do is sort of... you know, follow the things that fascinate you and... and try to stay... amazed and... enthusiastic about those things. I don’t always know *why*, you know. I mean I don’t always know—you know I don’t always plan that this is... what I want the audience to get out of it. Sometimes I’m—you

know... looking for things in the dark, just like you are. But some—some—A curator came over to my house... and he said... that he... wanted to write an article about... why a lot of artists of my generation were using these kind of images—I mean African American artists. He was talking about... Radcliffe Bailey... He was talking about... Lorna Simpson... and... Albert Chong... You know—people like that. And... so... of course he asked me the *question*: “Well, why do you think you guys are—you know—Do you think something’s in the air? Do you think there’s—You know. What do you think that’s about?” And I was like, “I don’t know. You know. I mean I don’t know. I think—I mean... “I kind of wanted him to do the work. I mean I wanted him to... sort of... figure that out and write about it from that perspective, and I wanted to be *feeling it*. I wanted to be feeling it and doing it, not analyzing it quite as much. But... I mean I met with someone today, here—one of you guys here, who was... doing some work with 1970s images. And... the last time I taught here was 2002, and there were about three African American participants who were using—you know, they were twenty-something... thirty-something... you know, in that age range. And all three of them were using these images from the 1960s and 70s. And... so I—I feel that it has something to do with trying to understand where we came from, you know, trying to... looking back at the time just before we existed, looking back at our parents’ time... and trying to understand where they came from, and... and how... the world affected them, and... then they in turn affected us. (long pause)

Question: Do you do a lot to treat or to age... the objects and the panels that you paint on and use in your... tableaux; or do you keep them pretty much as you find them?

Speaker: What’s your question?

Question: I’m sorry. Do you *treat* or age the... objects and the panels... that you use in your tableaux, or do you keep them as they were?

Speaker: I... I look for actual... and—What I like to do is I like to find actual antique objects, because... to me there is something very spiritual and very powerful about the fact that someone has handled this object over time... you know, whoever it was. Now...

if—if I need a rusty nail... and I don't have any, I might soak it in water, you know; but... generally I tend to use... genuine antiques. (long pause)

Question: How do you think... your images would look—I don't know how to ask this question. How do you... I'm wondering how you could—if you think there's a way to contextualize... [sic] 2005 in a similar way to you are—that you are... images from the late 19th century and early 20th century. Is there—Do you think it's because it's hindsight that you can kind of feel like you can do these huge portrait installations? Or... do you think it's the—that the medium is something that you could carry on to talking about the present also?

Speaker: I think that it can be tackled; I don't think it's my sensibility at this particular time... in my life... I am attracted to... antiques for... you know, a number of reasons. I mean I liked antiques before I started using them; and the fact that I'm using them in my work is like—I don't know—it just makes perfect sense to me, because... why am I collecting all these old things? You know. There must—I feel that there must be a reason why I've been so attracted to these objects, and so I'm now using them in my work. I... I'm also... I sort of tend to shy away from... from Pop culture... you know? That's just not my sensibility. I don't relate to it. Ever since I was... ten years old I was listening to Sarah Vaughan. I was not listening to, you know, the contemporary—I wasn't listening to disco, you know. So... you know... So my answer is yes, but maybe not me. (laughs)

Question: And then... my other question is, is there... in your mind like a dream project that you're working towards... something like... the Hampton Project for Carrie, where it—you know, you just have... something that's so massive and is such a resource that you—of material you can work with—that... you don't know what you're going to do when you start it? It's—Do you have anything like that that you're like... hoping somebody asks you to do someday?

Speaker: Oh, absolutely... absolutely.

Question: What would that be?

Speaker: Yeah... I mean I don't have a *theme*... but... I mean I want to... be offered like a lot of money to come up with a theme. (laughs) (laughter)

Question: But is there like a place... or, is there something that you've come upon in your research that you're like wondering... that you'd like to investigate for it? This is the Hank Thomas Show. (laughter)

Speaker: Well... there—there is a very—very, very interesting... -- I mean I get little... little tidbits of things... like historical events, that excite me. When I was in Texas I was approached by someone who was... promoting... a play that was written about... sixteen Black World War... World War I soldiers, who were hanged for some sort of clash with the police in Houston, you know. And they wanted me to consider doing something like a memorial. These sixteen... soldiers had been buried in the graveyard at the fort, and they took me to the fort to see this. It wasn't until 1979 that some caretaker decided to put flags on their graves also... you know. I mean they don't even have names on their markers... you know. So... And of course, you know, the story is that it was a frame... you know, and it was just a real injustice that... took place. You know. So I get—I get things like that, you know, that I... I—I might want to bite. But... when I get the... offer for the big money, that's when I'll... you know, decide.

Question: It seems like there's two different sorts of photographs that you reference in your work, that there's portraits and then there's documentary photographs... Do you see that difference with those at all, between the two sorts of images you work with?

Meaning portraits—meaning like the earlier work where people *sit* for the portrait; and then the documentary photographs being the images of rural poor later—like the Maroons, for example.

Speaker: Like the Maroons...

Question: Is that—Is that a distinction that I'm just imagining, or--?

Speaker: Yeah. I mean, I—I tend to be more—I tend to gravitate toward the studio portraits more so... than—than the... than the other. And that's because of my... my... upbringing, with my father, you know. He—He had a—like a studio portrait setup in

the—a portrait *studio* set up in our house; and... so—studio portraiture is something that I identify with. And... And... I just—I tend to stay away from like action shots... you know....

Question: Can you—I know you’ve talked to me about this before; but can you talk a little bit about your move from... using direct autobiographical resources like your family portraits to... the more found photos. Why...?

Speaker. My move from... direct autobiographical... images to what I’m doing now...?

Question: Like... yeah....

Speaker: In... 1984 I had three deaths in my family. And... then I came to Skowhegan. And you know, when you come to Skowhegan you sort of sort out all of these things... and somehow you leave here doing something that you never dreamed or imagined that you would ever do. And... And so I left here... making these allegorical family portraits... you know, working from my father’s photographs.... That seemed right. It seemed to make a lot of sense. What I had been doing prior to that... in retrospect didn’t—you know I mean it—it—I was dealing with color... I was dealing with formal issues. But it really wasn’t personal, you know.... So me being such a personal person anyway, it just made sense (laughs) to be dealing with my autobiography in my work. I worked through that period, that sort of... stage, for a good eight years, and... when it’s time to move on you know it... you know. You know it, but also I mean I think that what happens is that if you—you remain engaged and open... and your goal is to be working and to be doing good work and to be growing, you will find something else to move into. So... what—the way that I stepped into that... that villa in Milan... and... somehow got excited doing the wall drawings—After that I mean I didn’t want to look at my father’s photographs any more. You know. I wanted to look elsewhere. (long pause) Good. (Applause)

END OF RECORDING