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CONVERSATIONS WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS: DON GORVETT, PRINTMAKER LECTURE FINDING AID & TRANSCRIPT

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Video Description

Filmed during the second year of the *Conversations with Contemporary Artists* series, this video records a lecture by Don Gorvett presented at the Cape Ann Museum in which he discussed his printmaking process, his ties to Gloucester over the years, and a slideshow of his works. Don Gorvett's primary medium for his art is reduction woodblock printing, and he provides a very detailed and

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comprehensible narrative of the many steps this technique requires with several of his works as examples. In a brief autobiography, he relates that he was born in Boston and attended the Museum School of Fine Arts, Boston, where he met Cape Ann native and fellow artist Peter Vincent. He subsequently lived and worked in Gloucester from 1970 to 1989, a setting that immediately sparked his fascination with the unique personality of the Cape Ann people and the historic nature of their surroundings. In the concluding slide show, he examines more of his drawings and woodcuts, images that are both complex and striking. Gorvett is a fluid speaker and expresses his thoughts in an interesting and engaging manner.

Subject list

Don Gorvett	Conversations with Contemporary Artists
Jeff Weaver	Reduction woodblock printing
Peter Vincent	School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
William Duffy	Stillington Hall
Leslie Buswell	

Transcript

00:08

Audience chatter

00:37 Linda Marshall

I'm Linda Marshall, I'm the director of programs, and I just wanted to mention upcoming program that next weekend on Saturday, May 2, we're offering a lecture about Virginia Lee Burton, and we will have Barbara Elleman here to speak about her. And this year is the hundredth anniversary of Virginia Lee Burton's birth, so this is sort of the beginning of a series of programs that we'll offer related to her and also to the Folly Cove Designers. I also wanted to mention that outside in the lobby, there is a table with information about upcoming programs, this pink brochure. There's also information about membership. So if you're not currently a member, I would really encourage you take a look at those materials, and please feel free to ask us questions about that. And there's also some materials that Don had brought about his studio.

1:32

Today's program actually marks the second year of a series called Conversations with Contemporary Artists, and we're actually very pleased to have Don with us today. It looks like it's going to be a wonderful presentation. Don is a graduate of the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and a board member of the Boston Printmakers. He has exhibited with the

Charlotte Printmakers of North Carolina and was invited by the Fitchburg Art Museum to participate in the New England Impressions exhibit which traveled to West Germany. His works may be found in the Cape Ann Museum collection, as well as the Boston Athenaeum, the Portland Museum of Art, the Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Duxbury Art Complex, the Currier Museum of Art, and numerous corporate and private collections. Don actually lived and worked in Gloucester for a period of about ten years, 1978 to '89. He now actually lives up in Maine, and maintains a studio in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. So we're fortunate to have him visiting us today. So please join me in welcoming Don Gorvett.

(Applause)

02:48 Don Gorvett

There's actually one correction, that was excellent.

02:52

But the one correction was that I did arrive here in 1970, and lived from 1970 to 1989. It makes me a little older. But I really want to appreciate everyone, the staff of the Museum, this is a magnificent museum. And all of the people who have come here today, it's a, man, it's a beautiful, beautiful day. And the fact that you're here too, to look at these and to hear me is something. I was going to do a little bio material, but I thought maybe I would dive into what it is I'm doing, and then give you some bio material. And then go into some slides. We have a few images of things, and I can sort of connect the dots. One of the things that's challenging is to try to keep everything in an order here. Sometimes I end up with kicking it in reverse and then going back, and then going forward, which is kind of what this method is like that I work in. I will tell you that one of the things I can say from the beginning is that when I arrived in Gloucester, and it was in 1970, I'll go into that later on, but the thing about the city, which was really magnificent, was apart from its sense of the layers and under layers of history, and remnants of things past, and the extraordinary island feeling that Cape Ann has, among its residents, even, there was this wonderful feeling of democracy. When you came to Gloucester, you could be whoever it was that you were or are with little consideration of having to have an appearance of something other than what you are. And so it's a very blue collar town, and really, really an exciting place to come and work. One of the things that interests me about Gloucester as well is its history. And oftentimes it weaves, it's integrated throughout what I do, and then weaves in and out throughout, is the sense of the past. And I somehow look at all these magnificent buildings. Somebody said to me, one time he said, "Why," he said, "Your, all of your things, your work reminds me of some time ago of another time or era, and you have all these old buildings, etc." And I said, "You know, actually, we sort of live in a large theme park. We actually inhabit buildings that people lived in 100, 200, 300 years ago." So there's something also mysterious about that. You know, you wonder and you say to yourself, where are they? Where did they go? And their buildings are still here. The wharfs are still remaining. And, and yet, there's a sense of a ghostliness about it all. And that I'm struck by, and occasionally it shows itself I think in what it is I do, but I do have that interest in history. And there are a few images, or probably two or three images that I have here, that were actually

derived from some magnificent photographs that came into my hands. One of them actually came into my hands by Jeff, Jeff Weaver. I keep coming to Gloucester to see what kind of photographs he has, or has found. But one of them was this wonderful image. The other was this screen that you see, was really inspired from the Henry Peabody panorama that was taken in 1906 [1905], thereabouts from, is it, Banner Hill, looking across Rocky Neck and the sea. And I was in a bookstore while I was visiting, and I saw a poster. And there was a poster for the reissuing of the late 19th century history of Gloucester, and this photographic image which was cropped from the panorama was very exciting to me, and I thought, wow, this would be—I love that image. And so I bought the poster, I brought it home, and I kept looking at it. And I then thought, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to be standing there on that hill and being, having had the opportunity to do what Henry Peabody did. So I took the photograph, and I blew it up eight feet by three feet.

07:30

And it actually held together. It just got grayer, but the original source was so extraordinary that it didn't turn into dots. So on the wall, I had an eight foot by three foot image of what Henry Peabody saw. And I had a large table, and I put a very large piece of plywood on the table. First I made some preliminary drawings, some large drawings, and then I put a large piece of plywood on the table. And then started to paint what I saw and interpret that photograph, and I ended up with one large painting. And I've worked on it for over a month. And some friends came in, and they looked at it, and they said, "Well, you know, what are you going to do now with it?" I said, "I'm going to cut it up. I'm going to make the woodcut from this. I'm actually going to cut this wood surface where the paint was," and they said, "Don't do that." And it's the Briggs, Jeff and Lindley Briggs. And Jeff said, "What are you going to do that for?" And I said, "I'm not going to do this all over again. I don't do that." And actually, I did. I saved the first large painting, then I did a second painting. And if you look at that piece of wood behind you, if you look at it very carefully, maybe when the talk is over, you will see fragments of colors and paint. And you'll also see when I do the slides what that looked like when it was painted. But I actually cut the painting up to make the woodcut. And what you see here are, these are a reduction of one block woodcut. It's called a multicolor reduction woodcut. And the way, a woodcut is a relief technique as opposed to an intaglio technique. If you use an intaglio technique for instance, in etching, what you'll do is cover the plate with an acid resistant ground. Then you'll take a stylus and go through the ground, then drop it into an acid bath and the acid will attack all of the exposed parts of the plate, and slice in it, making a line, then you'll pull the plate out. If you leave the plate in longer, the line is deeper. If you leave the plate in for a short time, it's thinner, not as deep. Then you pull the plate out when you like, wash off the acid resistant ground. Then you will have a plate if you hold it up with incised lines. You rub ink into the lines. Then you clean the whole surface of the plate, and you print the lines. With the relief technique or planographic technique, you print the surface. Wherever you cut, won't print. So you'll take and you'll cut the surface, you'll ink up the block, put paper on top, in my case I put it through my etching press. When I pull it out, all of the ink on the surface would have printed, and places where I cut away would remain white, theoretically. So that's what a woodcut is. It's probably the earliest, one of the earliest known methods of printmaking that we can trace back to China.

10:43

And Europe adopted the method and technique, I'm sure through trade, etc. And, in fact, if it were not for the woodcut and the press, we probably wouldn't all be reading or writing today. But it was our major means of being able to get into many people's hands documents which we could learn to read and understand by. So I have examples here, this is a, what you see up here is the remainder of a reduction woodcut. And it's plywood, there are two large outer blocks and a narrow center block. What I do usually is I have a design. In this case, I did a painting on the block so it was very elaborate. It was a very elaborate color design. Then what I would do is, I would put two pins on the outer edge of the block with a channel separating the surface from the registration points. I would make a determination about how many prints I would like to be in the edition, the edition being the final number of prints that you will pull. So in this case, I determined there would be 37 prints. So I have two pins here, and I registered 37 sheets of paper on those pins. When the pin is, when the paper falls onto the pin, it falls on the block exactly the same place every time so that the colors will line up. So that's the important thing, is that the paper falls onto the block, and that you can continue to make colors, and they'll all be where they're supposed to be. So I registered all of my sheets. In this case, I had to register three separate sheets on those three blocks. And then I would determine a number of colors that I would want to print. Usually for myself, the less amount of colors the better to achieve what I would like. So in this case, I thought perhaps nine would be good. And sometimes in the process you may change the order of colors depending upon how things are looking. You may add colors, or you may subtract colors. And it's a kind of improvisational experience. So, having registered the sheets, I determined the number of colors, then I also thought about the order that I would like to print them in. Usually it's a lot easier to print a darker color over a lighter color. So I'll start with light colors generally first. In this particular woodcut, if one wanted to know how many colors I printed, you could see a small color bar here that I made on the roof. The little color bar was inspired from the Tarr and Wonson Copper Paint Manufactory, because as we walked by it, when we were in the area, and saw, we would also look up onto the rooftop of the manufactory and you would see all the color plates up on the roof. They were being tested for light fastness. And so I thought, well that would be a nice idea for my color box. So I put it on the roof here. So you can follow the sequence of the colors if you look at these little cubes. So the first thing I did is print it white, because I didn't like the color of the paper, it was very neutral. So usually I'll mix a very beautiful white, one that I think I would like to have. And then I'll mix enough of it so that I won't run out of it when I'm doing the editioning. And if you do run out of it, you'll end up making another kind of white which might be like the one you made, but it will never be the duplicate of it. So when we did this project, I had someone help me print these because I think I would have perished if I did them myself. And actually the fellow who helped me ended up with hepatitis. So he helped me ink the blocks up and we printed them, and we had to ink up block number one, block number two, block number three, print the whole round white. Before I ever cut the block, I printed white. Then I did all 37 of these white rectangles. Then I washed the white off of the block, and looked at my design, and determined where I want white in that print, where I want it to be in the end. And I would cut

every part of the design where I want white to remain because the next thing I was going to do is ink up the block in the light blue.

15:32

So the whole block would be inked up light blue when the cutting was done. Wherever I cut will stay white, because it won't print. Then I'll ink the entire block up light blue, take the white piece of paper, put it onto the cut block. When I pull the paper back off the block, after it's been put through my etching press, the entire rectangle turns light blue with light white areas. Do you understand that? Then what I'll do is print the entire edition. Then I'll clean the blue off the block, look at the design, and cut every place where I want that blue to remain because my next color will be the brick red. So I would cut sometimes for several days before I ever ink the blocks up to print again. And, in this particular, some—not all of the prints are the same exactly, but that's what you do, you keep—you can see the remnants of some of the drawing and the painting on the block. But you keep layering colors one over the top of the other. And you cut more, that's why on the block, you see no sky, no background, there are no buildings in the block. Because the last color that I printed was this chocolate warm brown. And that's what you see here that remains. Everything else was cut gradually, little by little, as I've worked an edition—cut, edition, cut, edition, cut, edition. And you don't ever know really what you're going to have until you pull that last print. It's a very large risk, because you've spent many months on this project. And it is risky because you may wake up one day, and things aren't quite right, you end up cutting the block, but you can't get it back if it's not quite right. And it's a lot like a performance. When a pianist sits down to do a musical, but to do a performance, it's not so much—or violinist, in the case here we have Janet is a violinist, and you keep practicing and you practice and the more you practice, the more ideas you get about what things ought to be like. And the more you understand what it is, the more you understand your subject, the more freedom you have to interpret what's in front of you. With more authority. And so I guess my point was that it's like a performance in that you don't think about doing the wrong thing. You just proceed with as much vigor and authority as you can. And in the end, you hope that more things turned out the way you would hope than less. Because really, that's what life is. It's a process, it's not a perfect thing. And you do what you do, if the tool slips, it slipped. That's what a woodcut is. You know, but you do the best you can. And so this took about four months to make. And originally it was conceived as one run. I do have some that are printed on one full sheet. And I wanted to do a portfolio, I wanted this to be a book, a large folio, which when opened up—would be this size when closed. And the idea was that you would open up the folio, and there would be an accompanying diagrammatic of everything that's here, with a glossary, which would indicate to the viewer what everything was here that they were looking at from a literal, sort of historical, point of view. And there would also be an accompanying text. So that, you know, somebody who understood this harbor with some aid from me, would understand that this was a salt bark, and the salt bark would come in, in the 19th century, into the deep hole. And Gloucester was one of the greatest importers of salt in the United States because they needed it for all the salt fish. And so then there would be a clipper schooner. This would be a clipper style sharpshooter schooner, and one could identify it, you know, architecturally, and know what its purpose was, why it was built, why they were dangerous,

why they were also very beautiful. And then there are knockabout schooners, this is Rocky Neck Marine Railway, Cape Ann Fisheries, which I understand was a brewery originally, right? And then you have a friendship sloop, and so forth. So you would have this wonderful sort of history attached to the visual.

20:21

You can see also here, I live in Ogunquit, Maine, a half an hour from Portsmouth. Portsmouth is a river city. And it's really interesting, the difference between Gloucester and Portsmouth. And Gloucester is that island town. It's like a big town, and it seems to some large extent insulated from the rest of what's happening. I know that Charles Olson lamented the Route 128 highway and the bridge, that Piatt Andrew Bridge that came over to Gloucester. But it still hasn't done it. There's still a lot here. And take it from me. And when you go to Portsmouth, you're more connected, you can get right off the 95, and in one minute you're right in downtown. And the thing about Portsmouth is it's a river city. And Gloucester, as dynamic as it is, is somewhat stationary. And you have this beautiful harbor. But it doesn't seem to be rushing and moving on you. It's rising and lowering. And this is sort of a stationary quality to it. The Piscataqua River is probably one of the fastest flowing rivers in the United States. So, I'm right at the edge of it in my gallery. And so you can sense this thing is rushing by, all the time this way, then it's rushing by that way. And then you have big freighters going down the river and freight is going back and forth, and tugs moving things around. So it's a very, very different feel, and yet, it's still a very typical early American town. It's a big town, Portland is a small city. But we have freighters all the time. I'm just down the street here from around the corner of this warehouse. So I'm right across the street from Moran Towing Company. And the tugs are right there, and they're going in and out continually. The traffic is really amazing actually. And so I have the advantage of being able to see these freighters pull right up to the wharfs in front of me, and they're very accessible. This is a woodcut, which I did, this is the drawing that I did of the woodcut. And I did this in my car, on the dashboard, looking out the window. And then, about a year or two later, I decided to do the woodcut of it. But I start usually with the drawing from life. I don't work from photographs very much. I don't because even if you—a lot of wonderful work has been done based on photography, and there's even a school of photographic realism.

23:01

But there's something about the firsthand knowledge that you get when you actually sit in front of that object. And the wind, and the weather, and the light. And something happens between you and what you're drawing that can't entire—it happens in a different way with a photograph. You're deriving a lot of your ideas from the photograph, but when you're outside deriving it from the actual object, it's a different process. But all in all, as you can see, you know, much can be done from a photographic inspiration. This is a drawing on a piece of plywood, which has been here for about three years. I haven't done it yet, but it's a very elaborate woodcut, and I hope to do it soon. But this is what the drawing would look like on the woodblock before I ever cut it. And you can see here, the pins, the pin registration on the left. So what I would do is register all of my sheets. And then I would do as I had mentioned to you, you know, think about an order of colors and number, and then go on. The other thing about

what my process is that a lot of really fabulous work has been done by artists who actually, they don't copy they, well, how would you say it, they do a drawing, and they're extremely faithful to that drawing on the block. If there's black here, they leave it, if it's white, they leave it, they really are steadfast and true to their actual image on the block. But when I do a drawing on the block, I like to use it as a point of departure. So I'm never a slave to the actual drawing on the block. I will go—because I don't know what I'm gonna—I made, the lines are there, the darks are there, but someday I may wake up and decide I want the lines to be somewhere else, and I want to start cutting somewhere else, and doing something different. So this is really a point from which I will go forward. It's a good—the more drawing that I have, again, the more I understand what I'm doing, the more I can depart from what I actually have in front of me. So it's, in a sense you are, you have a kind of freedom from knowledge. Knowledge is freedom, basically. So, I also will show you, this is a drawing. This isn't a woodcut. This is just a wash drawing that was actually based on a photograph of the Harbor Cove, an old photograph, you would never know it if you saw the image. But they are things that tip off in my imagination, ideas. And this is really about, I mean, there are ship ideas and it's the Harbor Cove, but it's more kind of about architecture, which is one of my real interests, is really line, texture, color. It's interesting in music, which I listen to a lot, I saw a concert that had a Schumann *Rhenish Symphony* on the program and I think there was a Harbison on the program. But there was also an early ballet of Stravinsky, it was the *Firebird*. But the most modern work on that concert was the *Rhenish*, not because, it was a period piece of sorts, it expressed a certain idea and a sentiment of its time and day. But the inner workings of that piece was so complex and interesting that they were by far more modern than the modern pieces. So, it's, in a way you never judge the book by its cover. I don't. I always judge it by its inner workings, what's happening inside to make that image. So the work, I think fundamentally, has to have a powerful and strong abstract sense when you're doing it. Otherwise, what you do is you do a work which imitates life, which in a form is an illustration, in a way you superficially create an image which, you know, sort of

27:03

is like what you're looking at. But I find that the work has to have inherent abstract qualities. And it's interesting in the art world, you have people who are very, it's, they don't see it that way necessarily. Sometimes they in fact, are very literal. They see a work that if it's recognizable, they have little respect for imagery. So it's not modern. But if they don't recognize it, it is modern, whether or not it does have any abstract inner workings. You see, it's a very superficial way of looking at work. And not all work is a work, modern works come in all different styles. Art moves in many different ways and has many tributaries, not just one, not one rush. And I know that a lot of American artists have paid a price at one time or another during the 1930s and '40s and '50s. Well, you had The Ten, and then you had, you know, wonderful, what are called regionalist artists, whose works were to a large extent being overshadowed by the activity of abstract expressionism, which was also wonderful. But it was being overshadowed. And so you'll see that happen a lot. People have difficulties with imagery or, you know, but I find the way I judge a work of art is by its inner workings, whether it's abstract or realistic. This is a large woodcut fantasy that I did of Gloucester, a harbor fantasy.

And I want to show you a couple of images that I have in process. You know, I don't always take proofs of the prints as I go along. But I saved a couple for this block. Now, already there are, say three colors here, on this block. And I, this is, I saved this, so that you could see how it progresses. Then, I go generally from light to dark. And then this is when I started to get a neutral color onto the block, so things were starting to come, it materializes out of the mist. And, I'll put this here. This is actually a ten color woodcut but I saved some of these dates, they give you a little bit of an idea. And you can see where I cut the red, the red pipes remain after, then I printed the gray. So then you see, it materialize more and warmer colors start to come in and develop. I probably should be holding these up. You know, but you can see, actually Paul, where's Paul?

29:45

I can see, he's standing up, Paul can help. But you'll see. So you can hold those two up. See?

29:56

These are a couple of stages. Yep, see? And then, this is another, see?

30:08

And then at the end, this is the last pull. This was the last print here. But you can see that the image gradually grows, and pulling the last print sometimes is very, very exciting.

30:29

Also, it's sometimes very depressing because you can't do much about it except for cutting, cutting more away. The other thing is that in many of these prints, there are darks in these, you know, I've chosen, there are dark elements to the last colors. I don't ever use black, and black is very much of a color, it's something unto itself. When you use color with black, it becomes color, black color. Because it's so tonal and it influences so much each color. You can make beautiful paintings using black, but I don't use it, because it would be very alien to all of the colors that I use in the entire process. When I think of the dark in the end, it usually is possessed of all of the colors in the setting that I started with. So there's a predominant, warm dark, it might be a cooler dark, it might be a grayer dark. And generally I would mix my darks, in this case, I used Prussian blues, and I used magentas, and reds and oranges, and I made chocolate, and then I introduced blue for the chocolate, and then I get a certain tone, so you would be amazed, if you saw the palette, you would see six or seven areas of dark on the palette all being different from one another when you can see them together. And the other thing I also do is I usually mix some white, a beautiful yellowy white into my black, because what that does is it gives it life, makes it less dense, so light can pass through it. So it becomes more a color than just a black patch. So those are some of the things, actually the folio is here of the eight foot woodcut that can't really be opened up for you, but this is what it looks like here. That's a book, and see, what it will do, well maybe, see what it will do is it will open up like so. See? And then the backside is blue. Oops!

32:32

That's all right. This is a prototype. See the backside is blue. Yeah, help me Paul. And then it will open up like so, again. See? It's a little bit more, as you can see. So it's a little bit more inside of something as a package.

32:59

Yeah. We can completely fold it back. This was delivered to me yesterday. The lady, who wasn't entirely experienced in doing this, came in barely able to hold it. And she had quite a time. But this is the first kind of prototype for the folio idea. But the Italians beat me to this a long time ago. This is nothing compared to what they did.

33:28

I can give you a little bit of biographical, uh—

33:33

I was born in Boston, and I lived in Boston, and its environs, Cambridge, Somerville, Medford. My parents moved every year. And everyone's dream at that time, I had come from a family, none of my relatives had ever owned their own home, we all lived in three story walkouts. And so my mother's dream and my father's dream was to have a ranch house in the suburbs. So, when I was in the fifth grade, we moved to Burlington, Massachusetts.

34:10 Audience member

It was a cape first.

34:12 Don Gorvett

It was a cape, no, that was Tewksbury, you're right. You're making the story more complicated. I told you we moved a lot. But we ended up in Burlington,

34:25

in the ranch house. And I, when I went to school in the city, we had very old schools. And you know, my grandmother went to the school I went to, and there were small, all wooden desks with places where the ink would go in the wells, and in the hole, and the doors creaked and swung, and it was really pretty Gothic. And when I moved to Burlington, we went to new schools. And there was actually a hot lunch, which I didn't know anything about. So we have here, we have hot lunches. And then when I went to the eighth grade, there was a new high school built in Burlington. And I also found out that there was such a thing as an Art Department. And when I went to Burlington High School, when I was in the seventh grade, evidently a teacher in the school showed Elinor Marvin some drawings which I had done. So Elinor said, told me that she couldn't wait to get me as a student when I got to the eighth grade. Elinor Marvin is my teacher, and she's been my teacher from the eighth grade to the present. And now we take care of each other. And we had an extraordinary Art Department at Burlington. The sculptor, William Duffy, who is in Baltimore now and extremely successful, and does very large bronze figures in flight, very much like Walker Hancock, you know, very much in that vein, and you know, Manship, and he does wonderful, wonderful bronze figures. So that

was just one of Elinor's students. Another was my brother Ralph, who is here in the audience, who is an extraordinary draftsman. And Jeff Weaver was also a student of Elinor's. So those are just a few of the people that Elinor's, that Elinor had as students. And also, she changed a lot of people's lives. And she worked very hard. She used to bring me down to the Museum School every year, and they would look at my work and you know, evaluate how I was doing, etc. And they would continually send Elinor back with letters indicating to the principal that there ought to be an important emphasis placed in the school on the visual arts. Finally, when I got to leave the high school, Burlington High School had a major in art, and they built a new high school, and I think they have fourteen teachers on the art staff. And they had ceramics and they had design and they had, and it was just an extraordinary department. But largely it was due to Elinor and the wonderful help that she had, also our other teacher was Miss Kilgore. So between the two of them, they certainly changed things for a lot of people and for Burlington. Then I got a junior fellowship to the Museum School. And I was three years ahead of Bill Duffy and Jeff Weaver. And I went to the Museum School. And at the Museum School, Ralph went a year before I did. And the year he was there was 1967. And it was the year before the great revolution took place in art schools and in colleges and universities. You all, if you're my age, you remember how absolutely insane it was in schools when I was, when I was going there the curriculums completely disintegrated. The students were running the design, departments, we were having review boards with students and teachers, and it was just very tumultuous. And it was quite different from most of my extremely important art education I sort of feel I'd received prior to them arriving, to have arrived at the Museum School. There was really something else. And I think I'm sort of a conservative nature. And while it was very dynamic and exciting there, and I look back at it with great fondness, I was not entirely in approval of generally what was taking place in and among, but that's what art schools are generally like. And I met Peter Vincent there. And Peter and I, and my brother, we used to get together, and we would discuss work, and then we found out Peter lived in Rockport. And we also decided at some point in time that we wanted to live out here while we went to the Museum School. We spent more time here than we did at the Museum School,

39:01

which wasn't unusual at the time. So, we moved to Gloucester, at that time Jeff was attending the Museum School, and he came out to Gloucester, and Bill Duffy came out to Gloucester, and we all lived together. We spent times living together and times apart. But you know, we always had a kind of camaraderie. And Peter would, I would make some dinner. And Peter would come over and keep showing me all these wonderful paintings that he was doing that were in progress, you know, many of which we may not see again, they're in private collections, but these wonderful paintings. And then we would discuss things, and I was leading up to, I spent my summers in Ogunquit, Maine, since 1968. But I would be here during the winter and spring and fall.

39:53

And it was at some point, where was it? It was in maybe 19, uh, 80?

40:02

Maybe, Ralph, you have a better recollection. But Ralph worked up at Stillington Hall for Mrs. Buswell, and she grew very fond of him. And they enjoyed one another's company. And Ralph had mentioned to Mrs. Buswell that I will be coming back from Maine. And you know, the guest house was empty, and might not I, you know, might I stay there? And so Mrs. Buswell said that would be very nice. So I came back from Maine. I don't know if many of you know what Stillington Hall looked like, but I came back from Maine, walked down the cloister, the guest house was there, I met Mrs. Buswell.

40:39 Audience member

Actually, you became resident artist and you lived in a suite of rooms underneath the theater.

40:46 Don Gorvett

Yeah, I was under the theater.

40:47 Audience member

And the stage was your studio.

40:49 Don Gorvett

And I worked on the stage, I had a small brand etching press.

40:52 Audience member

And you painted sets for opera and concerts.

40:57 Don Gorvett

Well, I was getting there, I was getting to that part. He's faster than I am.

41:01 Audience member

You come from the Burlington experience of the shows.

41:06 Don Gorvett

Yeah, we had gained a lot of experience, that was one of the other wonderful things about the high school is that we did a lot of, they did a lot of plays. So I got to be on stage and do a lot of sets, which I loved, it was the greatest training you can get in painting, was doing the sets. But at Stillington Hall, I did, I lived under the suite of rooms, which were probably dressing rooms, for this theater. Mr. Buswell had built a theater onto his house, the Jacobean estate, which even many of you may not know exists. You can't see it from Western Ave., but there's a pond below it. And there's a wonderful Jacobean estate, and Mr. Buswell, Leslie Buswell, was a great theater enthusiast. He decided he would build his own theater. And he did, it's a magnificent theater. He had, you know, the most, the greatest luminaries of their time came and performed. You know, Ethel Barrymore and Jascha Heifetz was there, and so forth, and any number of people who also, Piatt Andrew would have been familiar with them, and Sleeper. But there was, and Mr. Hammond, there's a whole history, that's another, that's for another

time. But when I got to Stillington Hall, it was the twilight of Stillington Hall at that time, Mrs. Buswell was not, she was very elderly, and they would go to Florida, and then come back in the spring. And so then, for the first time, a year or two later, two years maybe, I met Peter, and Peter came in, and we became fast friends. And Peter was very interested when his mom died about how we would continue to maintain Stillington Hall, and try to create some revenue in order to keep this great whale afloat. So we conjured up the idea of doing events. We did events there. And in exchange for the events, we got to do concerts. So we had a great time doing musical concerts. Actually we have people who were married at Stillington Hall right here.

43:05

Yes. As I look around the room, all the pieces are coming together.

43:11

And, but we did wonderful musicals, and Sam read for us, and Janet performed there, and Sam used to help us with the concerts. We would call up various agents, get people to come, Paul Badura-Skoda came, we had the Talich Quartet come, none of them spoke English. I don't even know how they found their way down and back. But we had some wonderful concerts, and then, you know, as all things come to an end one way or another, and Peter became ill, and then we, you know, considered remaining in Gloucester. I found it very difficult to find housing here actually, that was suitable. And we kept inching our way up the coast, and since I'd been in Ogunquit for so many years, knew everyone so well, we actually found a very, very nice house there that we reside in, but it is certainly my intention to spend more and more, and as much time as I can, here on Cape Ann, in addition to my gallery in Portsmouth, which is half hour from Ogunquit. And I opened up the gallery two years ago and about three or four months. And largely, I opened the gallery because I found that it was very compromising to be trying to educate people or to bring them along with what you did. And even if the gallery was a very good gallery, it may not, they may not have found that what you do would be suitable for that gallery. So it's always difficult to find a good match. And it was very difficult. I decided I would open up my own gallery, and it's been really great because people can come in to Piscataqua Fine Arts, and they can see a large body of your work, uncompromised. They can meet you, they can gain an understanding about how it's done, what you do, and it's just a, it's a very, very good situation. And I have a young man who also works in my gallery for me, and he just graduated from UNH and he's a spectacular etcher, fabulous artist. So we have two etching presses in the studio, and we make work there. We give workshops. And it's a very well-traveled place. So a lot of people can come by. And a lot of people see what you do. And as a result of that, it's quite interesting, you know, phone calls that you get. And someone called the other day that they're doing a movie in Boston, and they wanted to have images in the office about shipping. And they wanted to know if I could, if they could use some of my woodcuts for the motion picture in the office, because they thought it would be apropos. But it's really strange when you're, when you're more exposed to people, how many other things can happen. For the large part when I was living in Gloucester, and as Jeff, you know, Jeff has basically, apart from your sign painting, as a painter of landscapes, and is a fairly recent

phenomenon. I mean, as little as four years ago, people were saying, “Oh, Jeff’s having a show? You mean the guy that does the signs.” Right? When they don’t know Jeff as a painter. And so for a long time, when we were in Gloucester, we were really on the periphery of everything. We were not entirely entangled in any social happenings and goings-on terribly much. We were the guys that were always around the wharfs. And you’d see us sitting at drawing, you know, so we were a little bit, don’t you think so, we were kind of on the periphery of things. And when we did the signs, and actually Jeff and I work together on some of these early projects, some of the murals, Tony’s Fruitland things, the truck. And I’ll never forget that truck. I gotta tell you this. Tony parked the truck at that time where Ralph was staying in Hawthorne Lane, and he said, “Okay, you guys paint the truck. I’ll be back at the end of the day.” So Jeff and I and Ralph would work on the truck. We were off painting, and Ralph is a great draftsman. He doesn’t see color that well. So he had to keep saying, mix up, make me a color, make me a color. So we’d make him a color, he’d put his brush into it, and he’d work away. Well, Gino came back at the end of the day. And we had all these wonderful fruits, and we had, and Ralph had painted a great big black boy with a watermelon. And Gino looked at that truck, and he said, “Yous, yous gotta be kidding me. You can’t do this. I gotta go through South Boston every day.” And he was horrified. I didn’t think that much about it.

47:37 Audience member

You weren’t that correct back then.

47:38 Don Gorvett

That’s right. He was. So that was one of our funny projects that we did at that time. But what I’ll do is I’ll show you a few slides of some images. Do I even know how to work this?

48:00 Audience member

Pull the screen down.

48:02 Don Gorvett

That would be a good start. What would we do without you? Is that right? Yeah. And then we’ll do darkness. And I’ll turn, let me turn these lights off, and we may get a better image.

48:37

Those are the warehouses, and the Moran tugs are right across the street. And those are the warehouses that we’re in. And that’s Piscataqua Fine Arts right there. And these buildings were built in the early 1800s, like 18 one, two, three, and four. And they’re old warehouses, and when you go inside, there are great big beams which are running over your head horizontal all the way from front to back. Does anyone know who Ceres was?

49:08 Audience member

Roman goddess?

49:09 Don Gorvett

Very good, which one?

49:11 Audience member
(Inaudible)

49:12 Don Gorvett

No, Ceres was the goddess or the Roman goddess of the harvest. And this is called Ceres Street because across the street is where all these wharfs, and ships would come in and out, and they would unload all of the grains, molasses, and they would all be stored in these warehouses, which are now apartments and shops, etc. And a lot of the time you can see inside these warehouses, the very old machinery, machinery being wooden, wooden wheels, which were elevators that brought grains up and down. And when they were built in the 18 one, two, or three, for about six or seven years, they were the tallest buildings in the United States, if you can imagine that. This is amazing. Okay, here we go. So that's Ceres Street. These are, I just thought I would show you these slides, this is Edvard Munch who was a wonderful Norwegian painter. And he did a lot of woodcuts and etchings and lithographs, but Munch was one of the very early innovators, not early, but one of the innovators in the woodcut medium. And what he often would do was he would cut puzzles, he would cut blocks up into pieces, then ink each piece the color that he wanted, then reassemble the block and put it through the press or printer. That's how he did some color prints. One of the ways. Then there was Picasso. Pablo Picasso was probably the greatest innovator of this method of one block reduction printmaking. I was, I think Elinor took me to the Museum of Fine Arts, I think it was in 1963 or 1964, and a very young computer company had bought all of these reduction linocuts of Picasso. So I got to see a whole exhibition at the MFA of these works. And the one block you can see, he started with the gold, then he cut, then you get the gold and the brown, then he cut. And then you see, so bad back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And so that's kind of how reduction linocut is done. And he did it in a magnificent painterly way, which was very immediate and extremely improvisational. And he had people printing these works very quickly so that he could move rapidly along with them as if he were painting.

51:40

There's the finished product there.

51:45

Now, this is an artist, can anyone guess who did this? Okay. This is an early Jeff Weaver. And he did it when he was a student of Elinor's.

52:03

That's a Jeff Weaver linocut, a very happy crocodile. And we have here a few other works that Jeff did. The reason I show you these works is when Jeff and I were living together up above Dalessandro's Used Furniture and Antiques, I was doing a lot of outdoor painting. And he was doing a lot of these linocuts and drawing. And, I saw him doing these, and I thought to myself, I would like to revisit this medium. I didn't do it till several years later. But I find myself now

working largely on the reduction woodcuts and linocuts. And Jeff is doing largely the paintings now. But I wanted to show you, these are a couple of the things, and we have another one here. This was me. This is a woodcut that Jeff did of me when we were rowing around in the dory. That's Rocky Neck over there to the right, the railway.

53:06

This is the image that inspired, this was a detail from the Henry Peabody photograph, the panorama. The panorama is about this big, [?] has the actual image, which is, it's like platinum, it's magnificent, in perfect condition. It's about this big, this portion of it was that big. But it was the cropping of the image and the detail which really excited me, whoever cropped this did it really beautifully, and that's what inspired me to do the woodcut. So you have here a city at its zenith, and the fishing industry, and it's wonderful, all of these buildings, this land, these two buildings on the left finally fell into the water two years ago, unfortunately. And so you see this pageantry, which was, you know, the late 19th century, all the pennants flying on ships in the distance, all the beautiful, the big—oh, what were they called, shears all throughout the harbor, you'll see these big shears, which looked like nutcrackers, and what they were is they were used to pull spars up to step into ships. So you look at this photograph carefully, you see them all throughout the harbor, but that's what inspired me to do the eight foot woodcut. This was the first painting. This is the first painting, this is eight foot by three foot. I say this one was actually the first one and then I cut up the second one. The second one is the next image here. It's a variation on it. But this is what that board looked like before I cut it up.

54:39

And this is the woodcut.

54:40 Audience member

Wow.

54:42 Don Gorvett

This is the black, this is, I pulled four prints when there was still enough left in this area of the block. I pulled four prints, five in black. And then I cut out the entire background and mounted the sheet to another piece of paper. So it makes a very interesting, large abstract print. These, some of these are not good reproductions, it doesn't really give you a feeling of the print. This is a little map that was in the glossary of a history book of Gloucester. And this was the, this is in the vicinity of, and I think it's the rooftop of the electric company that exists there right now off of Rogers Street, little red brick building, electric company? This photograph, which I will show you next, was taken from the roof of that building, looking west, you'll see the two gas meters here. You'll see one of them in the photograph. And this is the entrance to the narrow Vincent Cove. And there's the photograph. So you can see one of the ships being built right here. There's a ship docked down below, one way in the back, and here's the rooftop, and you're looking at one of the gas meters there. You had Pierce Street, you had Water Street. All of those buildings have been taken down. It's now the A and P, or what was the A and P parking lot. And then there were two streets there with all these wonderful old buildings. And urban

renewal. You know, they took out all these buildings, and Vincent Cove was finally filled. It was always low when there was no water, in it, there was no water in low tide. And then when it filled up and filled in high tide, they would launch boats. And it turned into, it kind of turned into a dump when the fishing and boat building industry ceased to be, largely, its purpose was no longer, was not important anymore. And so it became run down, and it was like Puddle Dock in Portsmouth. We have a whole area which are all gardens now. And then there are fields, and at one time it was the Puddle Dock, there were wharfs and a whole waterway that went all the way into Portsmouth, where ships would be, come back and forth. It's all filled in. They did the same to Vincent Cove because they became dumps. They were hazards, and people would throw all of their rubbish in there, bottles, etc., all kinds of things. So that's what happened to Vincent Cove. It's filled in now. But these are, this was a woodcut that I did. This was a painted study that I did using the image. It's a very lengthy, this is about five feet by four feet. And it's an image of whimsical fantasy. And then this is the first woodcut that I did of it. And then there were a few things that I felt I needed to change. I would like to revisit the woodcut again. So I did this one. And they don't look different on the screen, but they do look different in purpose, I mean in person, but this is also, I wanted to have the red sloop down below. And it's the only red in the woodcut, but it seems to work because of the dramatic lights and darks. This is the beloved Copper Paint Manufactory, we wish them well. And we're all willing to do whatever it is that we can do to try to keep it as a memory of an icon in the harbor. And this is also another version looking down the road. And then the final one, which I did recently. And this is a drawing, this is a watercolor and wash over a India ink drawing, and this is the woodcut, which I did. All of these wharfs have gone, this was all ripped out. And not long after this work was done, they cleaned the whole area up, the buildings were falling into the water. And this is the woodcut that I did of it. And this was a very, this was a real fantasy that I did, I used to take the dogs out fishing, and I was at Stillington Hall in the dory over by Hammond Castle. So I did this great big woodcut of all of this sunset, dogs, and fish. This is the old Rocky Neck Marine Railway, which is gone now. The *Mayflower*, when it came in on the quays I used to, I did a drawing many years ago, and I pulled the drawing out, and I actually thought, gee, it would be interesting to do a woodcut of it. So I did *The Mayflower*, also at Rocky Neck.

59:08

And also the old stone castles out in Wingaersheek Beach. But these slides are not very good. And this is Portsmouth. This is *Twilight, Portsmouth's Finest Hour*, and the gallery is actually right here, right in there.

59:26

And, this is another freighter, a salt freighter in the snow. And that's the same freighter. The *Abaebka* I guess, it's really *Abaebka*. A big Russian guy came in when I was doing the plate. Changing the video—

(Skip in audio)

59:52 Don Gorvett

—respect for imagery. I love it, it's what inspires me, but if actually you were to be with me working on these woodcuts, you would really get a sense of the abstract experience that it is to do them. It really is.

60:09

And this is a, I did this under the bridge, the center bridge. There are three bridges that span the Piscataqua. One is Sarah Long, the old Memorial Bridge, which they're in a big discussion about right now as to what to do with it. Kittery, Maine, doesn't want it, they want a new bridge, and Portsmouth wants the old bridge restored. So you have the Memorial Bridge, Sarah Long Bridge, and then a great big bridge that's really high that goes over the 95 bridge. And this is one of the streets in Portsmouth. That's the Moffatt-Ladd House. Actually one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence planted that chestnut tree when he visited Moffatt-Ladd, which is an interesting thing to see that it survived. And these are, you know, these are woodcuts of, you know, that's the old *Wanamaker* that was beside, there's the Memorial Bridge. There's the *Ionia*, that's the street again, you know, in the snow.

61:04

And the *Turkiye*, which you saw, and this is Badger Island, it doesn't look like that anymore. Things change quickly, don't they?

61:15

And that's the woodcut, the black and white woodcut, we're looking from the the bridge down onto Strawberry Bank, its—

61:26

and this is the Wentworth Hotel.

61:30

It's all restored now, this is pre-restoration. I wouldn't draw it now. It's very sanitized. Great that it's there, but it's very sanitized. And it's a Marriott. And this is a drawing I did of Plum Island, the old Simpson Cottage, the first cottage on Plum Island up on the hill. And this funny little old rattly building here in the foreground, a little old lady would always come out and sit on the porch there, and people in a car would pull in, and they'd take care of her, you know, the home health aide would come in. And then I walked over to her and asked her if she had heard, if she had read, there's a lady by the name of Weare, she's one of the Weares, and I have a friend David Weare, it's her, it's his aunt. And she wrote *Plum Island As I Remembered It* [sic], because she was brought up in Plum Island on the southern end where the wildlife refuge was. There were hotels, there were farms, people lived out there. When the state took it over, everything was taken down, but she lived out there as a youth. So I was telling her about the book, I kept asking her, did you read the Weares' book? And I kept saying it louder and louder. She couldn't hear. So I was yelling throughout the neighborhood. You know, "No, I haven't." But this is the woodcut of it.

62:46 Audience member

Wow.

62:48 Don Gorvett

And then this is the old Hatters Point down on the Merrimack River.

62:55

It's an old, it's a factory where they made hats. So it's being made into condominiums now, this is the Marginal Way in Ogunquit. And, you know, the cold, spring is cold in Ogunquit. This is Boston Harbor actually, I did a whole set of paintings, tempera paintings of Boston Harbor, and I decided to take a couple of them out. In 1968, I did these, before the harbor was gentrified, and I took these out, and I decided to do myself as I was then, in the form of a reduction woodcut. So that's why this has a bit of a hybrid quality to it, because I was actually doing me then. And, that's right, this is one of those. And this is a street in Portland, Wharf Street. And, we got that again. This is Ben Butler's Toothpick out in Salisbury Point. It's a wonderful place to go and to draw. This was evidently Ben Butler's, it must have been his idea to have that marker out there in black rocks. And Salisbury, very dangerous area, very shoal, lots of shoals. I mean, the whole idea of coming in through Plum Island, through those jetties is a nightmare. And they did it for years. It was a major port, Newburyport, but what a treacherous place, and all of Plum Island and the mouth of that river is just endless, a graveyard for ships. And I have a picture of this Ben Butler's Toothpick completely surrounded by water, an old photograph in the 19th century, it shows you how rapidly that whole area changes, how the sand moves in, how the sand moves out, how the river mouth changes from one place to another. And this is a little commission that I did, there was a Bing Crosby golf course that was being restored, and they had rooms in the hotel, in the condominiums, and they wanted me to do this woodcut for the different rooms. So that's what this is. It was an enormous amount of work, it actually, it turned out to be like an eleven color print. These are some drawings of things out front of where I am, and there's a wonderful island right at the mouth of the Piscataqua River. And there are these huge railroad ties, which enclose enormous rocks, granite rocks, and they're every, like, fifty yards. And they go all the way out to this island and there was a submarine that sat there during the Second World War. That's what those pylons were for, to hold the net. And so you could kayak from the beach right over to this abandoned Coast Guard Station in about eight minutes. And so when you get out there, there's all this wonderful subject matter. So these are quick drawings that I did. You can see the old railways that came out of the boathouse have all been twisted from storms and banged up, and this is another one here, from the front side. There used to be a retaining concrete wall all around this little station, probably had filled in turf and lawn. But it was built at the turn of the century, and now it's all in ruins. It's quite exciting to go through it.

66:09

This is another view of it. And you can see the Whaleback Light to the left.

66:18

And that, “End of slideshow, click to exit.” Okay. I can do that.

66:29

So I can entertain some questions, if you have any questions at all, I can answer them, which, shall I start here?

66:40 Audience member

I was kind of curious about layering colors on top of each other, do you use transparent colors at all?

66:47 Don Gorvett

Very rarely, I use colors like a painter, he scumbles with a brush over color. So color comes through, but it's scumbled. The complexity of the woodcut, the way I treat it, would become ten times more complex with transparencies. Can you imagine laying color down as a whole new color which is not exactly what you had as a sequence of order? So in order to keep some order and some organization, I tend to put, to make the color as I kind of see it as I go along, without it being influenced through a real transparency. And the complexity comes in with just the, you know, juxtaposition, color one next to the other. It is shocking though what happens when you lay a color down. It's amazing how every, all the other colors change.

67:40

Ladies?

67:42 Audience member

Hi, it seems you obviously made the right choice in making woodcut your medium. How did you make that choice and when, to go in that direction and not another?

67:53 Don Gorvett

Probably when I was up at Stillington Hall, I did some great big woodcuts which were based on Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungen*, which I enjoyed immensely. And that was my first big woodcut. And then I continued doing them. I don't know why. I draw all the time. And, but it was challenging to do the woodcut, it's like painting three dimensionally. You're cutting the line and carving it in the color rather than just, you know, immediately putting it down. And process, it's process oriented. And the question, yeah?

68:25 Audience member

I have actually two questions. First one is, could you speak a little bit about your palette colors, how you've chosen those, you seem to have blues and salmon types of colors in the background? And second, how you've come up with the number thirty-seven? (Inaudible)

68:45 Don Gorvett

No, it should have been, it probably was started as forty, and then you end up, every time you experiment with this medium, you have to use one of your prints. So I may have, out of an

edition of say if there are twenty, I may have five that look, one that may have colors that others don't have. Because I'll take an impression, I might take two, or I might take three and then go, "Wait a minute, I'm not going to continue printing these, I need to cut more away in this area. And I need to change the color that I've been using." Now, I have three prints that are not going to look like any of the others. Then I continue on. So a lot of the time, you'll get a number of variants in your printing process, depending upon how much you experiment. And so, but generally my editions were small because I was doing all the printing, half of my time was literally taken up with printing. And it was really laborious. Now I actually have my printing, my gallery manager can actually print for me. I'll print along with him, he'll ink the block up, I'll take the paper, put it in the dryer, and then he'll ink it back up, I'll take it, but when you have, it's unbelievable to have somebody doing that, and you're not pounding that block. We can do in one day what it took me three days to do by myself.

70:08 Audience member

What kind of wood do you use?

70:10 Don Gorvett

Plywood, birch plywood, but not all the time. You might use a very simple underlayment. I might use a piece of wood, for this freighter I used a piece of pine, which is underlayment pine, very primitive, but you might use furniture.

70:29 Audience member

Can you speak about the ghost ships?

70:32 Don Gorvett

The what?

70:33 Audience member

The ghost ships.

70:34 Don Gorvett

The ghost ships?

70:35 Audience member

In that print behind you, in the sky.

70:37 Don Gorvett

Oh no, because I don't have the block. I was going to bring the woodblock to this because it illustrates very well the process, but I thought it would be a bit too redundant. But I have these two ships in the sky. I saved them. I didn't want to cut them out. You know, this whole sky is all gone on the block, but I was cutting out the ships, I was actually able to save the ships so that if I were to demonstrate to someone with this block how you remove things, I could put the ships right in their places like a puzzle. Like if you were a kid, and you had blocks.

71:08 Audience member

The second part of the question, about the palette, how you come up with your, you have a lot of salmons and blues.

71:15 Don Gorvett

Well, actually they're, my use of the color is actually a part, very much predicated on the grayscale. When people say, "Wow, these are more colorful," or "Oh you're using more color," what they, what they're saying is you're using more brighter colors, more primary colors, reds, warmer and warmer colors, but that's not what color is. Color is beautiful reds, oranges, browns, blues, but they may be gray reds, gray oranges. Whenever I do blue, whenever I do that red, and I want it to be a beautiful red, a soft red, I put the beautiful white sky blue, the light blue of the sky gets whipped into my red. So the sky permeates all of the colors in the print, all the colors integrate with one another. So you get this harmonic use of color rather than a very direct, vibrant, I mean, there are many ways to use color. I happen to use it more on a harmonic scale, where the colors marry with each other tonally. So that's why you see these kinds of, you know, color combinations, etc. And that's what I do a lot.

72:30 Audience member

I just thought, in terms of, you mentioned, like a continuation of idea, of like, I think the lady was thinking that you painted and then decided just to go into woodcuts, but I remember, and maybe you could comment on, how early on, I think even in in high school, you had a propensity toward the printing and wood carving. Certain things and so forth. So always from early on, you had kind of a very strong graphic use of those kinds of materials, right?

72:58 Don Gorvett

Yeah, I always, I mean, I always liked making linocuts and prints, and, but I hadn't imagined doing it to this degree as I have. But Elinor had an interesting comment, my teacher, she said she liked my work very much because I painted and drew ideas rather than pictures. So that's what I try to do. It's an idea. It's really a kind of a fantasy about something that you see that's much bigger than life. And when you try to do it, it's in no way, shape, or form an illustration of life. Actually, you can't get, I was saying to Sam, I heard a concert, I heard the Mahler, which for some people is an appalling thing to hear and to listen to. But I happen to love Gustav Mahler. He's a great 19th century, late 19th, early century Viennese composer, Austrian composer. And Mahler's symphonies. I listened to the *Sixth Symphony* this year. And we were right on top of the stage. And it was to me this great pageant. It was unbelievable. It was like watching Albrecht Altdorfer and one of those enormous battle scenes that he used to paint and, and it was full of incredible pageant and dynamic sounds, and you know, it was so intense, and I thought to myself, as an artist, you cannot be intense enough. We can't do it. We can try. But we can never, and even in that *Sixth Symphony*, you know, it's just not enough.

74:37

And that's the way I sort of feel, you know, what's outside, it's just, we are really, we can do what we do, but it's pretty pathetic.

74:55

No offense Jeff! No offense Paul, Ralph, or any of you who paint and draw! It's a far cry from what, you know, but in our own way, when we forget that, we can all sort of sometimes look at what we've done and feel sometimes good about it, or not so good.

75:09 Audience member

Your analogy about the complexity of music, and you put the complexity into your work?

75:16 Don Gorvett

Yeah, and what I like to do with a sound, like Sam was saying, if you listen to a great orchestrator, I mean, one who loves color, what you will find is that the areas of sound that get smaller and smaller have greater and greater nuance. What you think is making a sound, one instrument, maybe it's being made by eight instruments, but as a result, it has a certain ambience. While it sort of seems to characterize the sound, it's glowing, and it has ambience because that person has learned to make these various instruments all make this one beautiful sound. And so I like to do that in the woodcut. When I go into smaller and smaller areas, I like more and more to be happening inside of them. So that you say, when people look along the woodcuts, they'll say, well, I'll say, "Well, how many colors do you think are there?" They'll say, "Four." Because all they're seeing is the impact, they're seeing the light and the dark. But if you actually look at that woodcut for a long time, after you get by the strength, or the light and the dark quality, then you can go into the nuances of it. And then you start seeing actually, the layers and what's happening underneath. So you get beyond the impact. It's a lot like Wagner. When you listen to Wagner, you know, people, Wagner always gets great credit for his great big crescendos and enormous sound. But actually, he's known, to me he's a greater artist for his silences. It's the quietude that you find at times in his music which is extraordinary. But you have to, sometimes, you know, you have to go through a lot.

76:50 Audience member

I just wanted to acknowledge that Paul Miller was an artist and an integral part of the experiences on Cape Ann.

76:55 Don Gorvett

That's right. Didn't we mention that I met Paul at the Museum School and he lived with us?

76:59 Audience member

We were so poor, we had about five classical albums amongst the five or six of us, and we would negotiate in our free time in exchanging them.

77:09 Don Gorvett

Yeah.

77:10 Audience member

But we could easily hear them being played in the next room.

77:13 Don Gorvett

Yeah, that's right.

77:15 Audience member

That's a little bit of materialism.

77:20 Don Gorvett

What were you going to say, Sam?

77:23 Audience member

You were talking about music before, the complexities, and also you can even extend it to Mozart, which to someone who doesn't know music, sounds very simple. But it's extraordinary.

77:35 Don Gorvett

Yeah, yeah. Who was it, Conrad told me, right? Conrad is out north some, and he makes flutes for Brannen Brothers. But he was a longtime musician. He played oboe in orchestras and played clarinet. And Conrad said, "If you ever want to really get the orchestra to understand and know how to play, let them play Mozart." You know, listen, and then, you know, and then they'll gain some understanding. Yeah, sometimes things appear to be extremely simple, and even they may appear to be not so, there are a lot of underlayments to things. I don't know if any of you saw a recent documentary of that ballet dancer that Degas did? She danced in the ballet, they have a whole history of her, did any of you see that? Well, they have a whole history of that dancer, it's the bronze ballet that—Edgar Degas, who followed the ballet knew very personally this ballet dancer, that girl. And he did the bronzes of her, which he did not want cast in his lifetime. He did not want those cast. And they went and cast them. So every museum has one. And he knew that young lady, and there was an entire documentary on her life as it was documented, and how actually terrible it was, in many, many ways. And this sculpture was a, kind of a manifestation of that, which you might not gather upon looking at it. But when you get all the pieces together, you realize that actually something else is happening when you look at this work. And this happens a lot with a lot of wonderful works of art. And even in Winslow Homer works, you look at them, and you think you know what's happening, but you really don't. You have to find out, and then it's not what you thought it was. You know, there's all these double meanings and various, you know, undertones, and things that go on.

79:28

Any, any more?

79:29 Audience member

I was just wondering what kind of paint do you use?

79:33 Don Gorvett

Yeah, these are painted, painted—you got me! Now, these are printing inks, and they're oil-based etching inks. I like to use oil-based etching ink because it doesn't dry. And I can make it do what I want. I can make it thinner. I can make it creamy. Usually when you buy block printing ink, it's a certain consistency, and it's kind of buttery, and I don't really like the way it falls apart when I'm working on. So I'd rather take an etching ink that's stiff, and make it a little less stiff, and make it sort of the way I would like it to be. And then roll it out. And the other thing about these, technically there are many, many questions and many problems in order to lay colors down on a sheet of paper, you have to make sure that at the very beginning that you're mixing that color as thin as possible, you're thinning it as much as possible because you're making one layer over another, and if you're not careful, and you don't thin the inks and take great care in the printing of them, you could end up with what looks like a very bad shower curtain. If you know what I mean.

80:38

So that's a very, so that's just one of the parts of it when you're working and trying to get just the right consistency, when you take the, peel the paper off the block, does it look right to you? Is it nice and thin, is it nice and satin, and then also the use of color in these woodcuts is somewhat dictated by the process itself. If you don't have a good command with color, you can get yourself in a corner that you'll never get out of. Sometimes you can progress in the woodcut coloristically because you can mix just the right color to get the next, you know, value and tone. And if you can't do that, you're not going to be able to print in multiple colors and have it really turn out very well. So there's a certain number of processes that you need to be aware of. And you are governed to an extent by the woodblock, by the paper, and by the ink, so that all the material, all materials have their limitations. And such as it is with this medium. This, as you can see, this is the woodblock to the freighter. And all you can see is the raised surface. That was the last color, everything else was cut out. Feel free, after, you know, if you want to go up and touch the blocks, you can, you know, feel free to do so, because when you touch them you get a feel for what it would have been like to do them. You know, I don't mind, and children come into the gallery sometimes, and the mother says, "Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" I say, "That's all right, go ahead and feel the woodblock," you know. They can put their, they oil it up. And we have a wonderful lady here who has been in our shop, and she's taken, she's done some woodcuts, she did a woodcut, didn't you do a reduction woodcut down at Piscataqua Fine Arts? And she took a course, and we had some people come in today who want to do it.

82:35

Now she's going to do an etching. But I really appreciate the fact that you took the time on this beautiful day to come here and attend this.

(Applause)

82:48

Oh! Virginia Lee.

82:57 Audience member
Virginia Lee Burton.

82:58 Don Gorvett

And it really was an honor to be able to do this talk on the hundredth anniversary of Virginia Lee Burton. And what more amazing place to have done it than here with the letterpress, the acorn press, and all these magnificent prints all around. It's a completely apropos thing, it could never happen again. So I really appreciate your having invited me.

83:26
Thank you.

(Applause)