Oral history interview with Mary Page Evans, October 11, 2013

Evans, Mary Page, born 1937
Painter

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MARY PAGE: —all the right to privacy stuff.

MARGARET: Oh I know, people are really concerned. This is Margaret Winslow, Associate Curator for Contemporary Art, interviewing Mary Page Evans on October 11, 2013 in the artist’s studio in her home at 1000 Warwick Lane, Wilmington, Delaware. And I think we’ll actually, maybe I’ll leave it there, I’ll just leave it there so we’ll be sure it picks up our audio. Okay so Mary Page I know that you’re not a native Delawarean but have lived here in Wilmington since 1961.

MARY PAGE: 1961, that’s right.

MARGARET: And you moved, when you moved to Delaware you moved right to the city.

MARY PAGE: Right to, well yes.

MARGARET: Downtown, yeah.

MARY PAGE: I did not, well I moved to, it was, actually we lived in Lancaster Court.

MARGARET: Oh okay, okay.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.
MARGARET: Okay. And so tell me about, I know that we’re going to focus on the 1970s and ‘80s but let’s start by talking about your recollections of the ‘60s, what the contemporary art scene was like in the ‘60s.

MARY PAGE: Well I know that since I didn’t know—I did know one person here in Wilmington and she was very involved with the Delaware Art Museum and that was the first place I went to draw the nude.

MARGARET: Oh really, okay

MARY PAGE: And I think it was, maybe have been with Henry Peacock.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: So you know how long. So I’ve been affiliated with the Delaware Art Museum from the get-go.

MARGARET: Really since the beginning, since you moved here.

MARY PAGE: Since the beginning.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And Marion Johnson was over there with education. She was great. And I think it was Bruce St. John—

MARGARET: Bruce St. John would have been the director.

MARY PAGE: He was the director then.

MARGARET: Right, okay.

MARY PAGE: And I remember just that was the first place going to draw the figure. And then through that I met Ed Loper.

MARGARET: You met him at the Delaware Art Museum? Was he teaching there?

MARY PAGE: I feel like I did meet him. I feel like he was teaching there.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: But we would go out and do the landscapes. See when you’re a landscape painter like I am, I mean you paint directly from nature so you’re outside.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: So we would go down to Brandywine.
MARY PAGE: And I love—I’ve learned so much about Cézanne or I’ve looked at Cézanne so much from my art history at Hollins University it is now—it was Hollins College. And so Ed, having been trained at the Barnes [Foundation], was very much involved with Cézanne and that whole school of thought. And I happen to love Cézanne. I really love to draw and so here is probably why the line comes in, and I started working with Tom Bostelle in probably around 1967.

MARY PAGE: ‘Cause he was freer. Again, through my friend Frankie Reamer who was on the board of the Delaware—Frankie Ketchum she was then.

MARY PAGE: She was close to Bruce St. John.

MARY PAGE: Around that era.

MARY PAGE: Around the ‘60s.

MARY PAGE: I’d seen some portraits he did of her children and I thought they were just—I just loved the way he painted. And I saw some other works of his.

MARY PAGE: How interesting.

MARY PAGE: And so then—and it was not in the studio that he has now that was on the Brandywine, it was in West Chester.

MARY PAGE: In a big Victorian house in West Chester. I remember going up there.

MARY PAGE: And were there other artists gathering around and with him at the time that you—

MARY PAGE: Yes Tania Boucher.

MARY PAGE: And Tania died unfortunately. Phyllis Hartzler, I think she’s with the Studio Group.

MARY PAGE: I’m trying to think, some Pennsylvania artist.
MARY PAGE: But Tom was involved with the Delaware Art Museum. He had a wonderful show them.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And then he would always call it the Society of the Arts.

MARGARET: Oh right, the Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts.

MARY PAGE: The Wilmington, he’d just say, “Oh the Wilmington Society.”

MARGARET: Oh really?

MARY PAGE: And then you knew that was the Delaware Art Museum.

MARGARET: Oh interesting.

MARY PAGE: Uh huh.

MARGARET: Oh that’s interesting. So skipping ahead a bit, was your show in 1969, the Gallery at Centerville, was that your first exhibition?

MARY PAGE: That was my first exhibition here.

MARGARET: In Wilmington?

MARY PAGE: In Wilmington.

MARGARET: And that was a solo show?

MARY PAGE: That was a solo show.

MARGARET: Okay. And tell me a bit about the Gallery at Centerville because that—I don’t know if I know that gallery.

MARY PAGE: It was again owned by—it was owned by Mary Sharp and Frankie Reamer and Elsie Johnson. And some of the first paintings I ever did in Wilmington were in the Sharp’s garden. As a matter of fact the painting that was in the show at the Delaware Art Museum, the big one with the line drawing, it’s called Sharp’s Garden.

MARGARET: That’s there, okay.

MARY PAGE: But I spent a lot of time in that garden so it’s just—and also in that greenhouse.

MARGARET: Okay.
MARY PAGE: And it made sense. You know they asked me to have a show there.

MARGARET: Right. Now the gallery’s at—so you showed there in ‘70 and ‘72 as well. When did the Gallery in Centerville close?

MARY PAGE: You know I’m not sure, probably in the late ’70s.

MARGARET: In the late ’70s.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Okay. And then your first exhibition at Carspecken-Scott [Gallery] was in 1974?

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: And again that was a solo show.

MARY PAGE: That was a solo show.

MARGARET: That was a solo show.

MARY PAGE: Yes. I wish I could think of some of the paintings that were in that show. It was all landscapes, doing landscapes around here in Chester County.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: See Tom would take us out to just landscape at a friend’s meeting house. And I still have—I have some pictures probably from that, with a big boy leaning against the back of my car and painting that landscape.

MARGARET: Painting the landscape and that strong line within the work.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm. And the plowed fields, using line for the plowed fields.

MARGARET: Okay, yes.

MARY PAGE: That still is coming back if I’m painting that kind of landscape.

MARGARET: That’s coming in, oh interesting.

MARY PAGE: The different fields, yeah and hills.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: Cause that happens down at the VCCA [Virginia Center for the Creative Arts], but they’re mountains now. The artists call them “the echo to Virginia.”

MARGARET: Right, okay.
MARY PAGE: But I didn’t start going there until the ’90s.

MARGARET: Okay. So how did you meet Fred Carspecken? Because I know in terms of the history of that gallery, it seems like at the invitation of John Schoonover—

MARY PAGE: Schoonover.

MARGARET:—came up, they started the frame shop together first.

MARY PAGE: Yes.

MARGARET: And then I know Fred started the gallery with Howie Scott.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: But then was fairly quickly on his own for the gallery. So how did you meet Fred?

MARY PAGE: He came to the show I had at Centerville.

MARGARET: Oh okay.

MARY PAGE: He might have bought a painting of mine. I think it was with the umbrella, so here we are going back to those, you know putting them in with—mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Okay, with the clowns, okay.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.

MARGARET: So that would have been at Centerville and so really then since 1974 he’s been representing your work in Wilmington.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: But during that time you were also showing at some other contemporary art spaces. You include Fifth Street Gallery, Robert Jones’ gallery at Fifth and Market in your cv. Do you remember what years you would have shown with him? He had the—

MARY PAGE: Well now how long was the Fifth Street Gallery?

MARGARET: It’s a little tricky to find, to pinpoint exact years. It looks like his earliest activities that I have been able to find documentation for were in the winter of 1974 and the last exhibition took place in 1979.

MARY PAGE: Okay.

MARGARET: But really he was most active in ’77 and ’78. Those were really the two strongest years.
MARY PAGE: I just remember the openings down there. It was something like you’d see in New York. It was, like SoHo. It was very much like SoHo.

MARGARET: And it sounds like the space was like that as well.

MARY PAGE: The space was like that.

MARGARET: Big open loft.

MARY PAGE: And he would play music and he would just draw a lot of people and he was a work of art himself running around.

MARGARET: It sounds like he had quite a large personality.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm, larger-than-life.

MARGARET: Yeah. And it seems like was really interested in creating a scene, bringing energy into downtown Wilmington.

MARY PAGE: Oh he was. And he made it fun so everybody wanted to be there. It’s just like they were talking about with the Museum tonight, Delaware Art Museum. You want to get the young people in there and you want them to have fun because if they have fun they will come back and then they’ll get art in on it too.

MARGARET: Right. Now that’s interesting because my—one question I have is that when speaking to people about Fifth Street it seems like there was certainly a creation of energy and enthusiasm that maybe didn’t always translate to actual support of the artist in terms of patrons purchasing work from the gallery.

MARY PAGE: Oh that’s right. He was really interested—well he wanted people to purchase to keep him going, but he was more interested in the scene.

MARGARET: In the scene.

MARY PAGE: Well he was a performing kind of person himself.

MARGARET: Oh yeah. And I don’t know if you know, he was the drum major, kind of. What is that—now I’m forgetting—I guess like the drum major for the University of Delaware marching band. So you know that kind of bandleader personality.

MARY PAGE: Extrovert.

MARGARET: Extrovert certainly, so bringing the scene. But it is interesting that when speaking to artists, there wasn’t necessarily a lot of purchases from their exhibitions, necessarily.

MARY PAGE: And if they were, I think pay was very slow.
MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: And forthcoming. You don’t have to put that, but it’s true.

MARGARET: Right, right.

MARY PAGE: As far as I remember.

MARGARET: Right. And so you participated in group shows at Fifth Street. Do you remember any of the other artists you were showing with?

MARY PAGE: Oh dear. I really can’t.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: Have you talked to any other artist who was showing there?

MARGARET: Julio [daCunha]—

MARY PAGE: Julio, yeah.

MARGARET:—showed quite a bit with Rob and I think he was at the University of Delaware when Rob was in the program, in the fine arts program. And it seems like Julio was almost a kind of mentor to Rob.

MARY PAGE: Probably was.

MARGARET: Certainly in terms of his own artistic—in terms of his own practice, artistic practice, but also in regards to the gallery as well. So Julio had several solo exhibitions there.

MARY PAGE: Have you talked to Julio?

MARGARET: I have yes.

MARY PAGE: He’s wonderful. I love Julio.

MARGARET: He is absolutely incredible.

MARY PAGE: And I love his enthusiasm, and he’s a good writer too.

MARGARET: Oh see that, I haven’t read a lot of his—

MARY PAGE: See he wrote the story for his wife, you know being from South America.

MARGARET: I did not know that.

MARY PAGE: Yeah that would be—
MARGARET: Oh that’s interesting. I’ll have to ask Julio about that. I mean he’s been incredibly prolific.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.

MARGARET: And the way to work has just changed modalities.

MARY PAGE: I love the past down at the DCCA [Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts].

MARGARET: I know the last show that he had was really just incredible. And it was really exciting for me to talk to Julio about that time period.

MARY PAGE: Yeah you would get a lot of info from him.

MARGARET: I certainly did. You know it’s interesting, there were certainly, in terms of Faith Street, in terms of the exhibition program, there were a lot of University of Delaware faculty and students, since of course Rob had that connection to the university. A lot of artists working in Wilmington, a lot of university graduates who had moved up to Wilmington to kind of take advantage—

MARY PAGE: They were probably—made up most of the shows. So that’s probably why I didn’t know.

MARGARET: Yeah it does seem like there were certainly a lot of University of Delaware faculty and undergraduates, certainly.

MARY PAGE: But it was a great venue because the space was so good.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And he really cared about exposing art.

MARGARET: Right, which is exciting and really in terms of showing really cutting edge contemporary art, he was the only space in downtown Wilmington that was really open to any of the, you know, the 9 to 5 foot traffic that you would get within the city. Do you remember the installation of the Market Street Mall and the renovation of the opera house?

MARY PAGE: Oh yeah. I was involved in the renovation of the opera house.

MARGARET: Oh would you mind—

MARY PAGE: Yes I was on the board of the—but I mean, I didn’t do what Kitty May—I mean you can talk to her and Toni Young.

MARGARET: I have spoken with Toni.

MARY PAGE: Yeah because Toni—
MARGARET: And I know she wrote a book about that as well.

MARY PAGE: Yes she did.

MARGARET: Okay. But tell me a bit, if you can, just speaking to your memories, of some of the motivations behind that because I think it’s interesting. There was really—it seemed like a concerted effort to renovate—

MARY PAGE: Oh Bobbi Riegel, she’s another one who was very involved with it. Those three, I mean if you could, if you want to know more of opera house background.

MARGARET: Okay. There’s really this concerted effort to renovate, revitalize downtown Wilmington with art institution organizations.

MARY PAGE: And performing arts.

MARGARET: And performing arts, yes.

MARY PAGE: I love to see that coming back.

MARGARET: I know.

MARY PAGE: Some people are nervous about it. I mean I went down to the symphony, two or three weeks ago I was telling Margaretta [Frederick], and she was there too ‘cause I saw Margareta with Bill and Nancy and there was such a spirit that night of coming back into the opera house because—see the symphony with the problems they’re having, that David’s [Amado] having, and when you go, it was great here at Tatnall because it’s a wonderful hall, but it’s not like being in the opera house and being downtown.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And I said, I was talking to somebody, I think Dan Crystal, I said, “Aren’t you going—“, cause I’ve seen him at the symphony before out here. He said, “No. Aren’t you worried about going there?” I said, “Heavens no.” I mean I went to Harlem all the—to the dance theater in Harlem and it’s—I don’t worry about going downtown.

MARGARET: So it’s interesting—

MARY PAGE: And I hate that that people—they have legitimate worries.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: I mean they have legitimate reasons but I don’t want that to be a hindrance for things happening.

MARGARET: Right. So do you remember the ’68 riots in Wilmington?
MARY PAGE: Oh yeah.

MARGARET: Can you talk to me about that because it seems like, I know there were riots throughout the mid 1960s, but of course tension certainly elevated after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. But it really seems like those riots and then all of the other kind of subsequent actions, what have you, that pulled people out of the city, it seems like that was really kind of the start of some of this fear of downtown Wilmington. Do you remember what the ’68 riots—

MARY PAGE: I remember the fires down there. I just remember, from where I lived, cause then I was living in Westover Hills on Greenwood Road and you could see the smoke.

MARGARET: You could?

MARY PAGE: You could see the smoke, mm, hmm. From the—

MARGARET: From the fires?

MARY PAGE: From the fires. They call it in the valley, the valley is not exactly downtown. It’s—

MARGARET: In the valley?

MARY PAGE: They called it the valley. I guess it was a lower, below Trinity Church, in between Trinity and Market Street.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: And to tell you the truth it was because of those riots that I started working, you know, more in a day care center on the other side of Wilmington. That’s why—because Tommy [Tom Evans] was involved with the black community here and so he introduced me to a lot of them.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: And then I started working at the women’s prison. And that’s Joyce Brabner because he introduced me to Joyce Brabner.

MARGARET: Yeah. So tell me more about that. So was Joyce—

MARY PAGE: And I loved—I mean that was so interesting because they would do performances. We did art. But they were theatrical themselves. And then they had some poems that they wrote. I am still very good friends with Angela Walker, Angie Jackson she was then, who I had met in the prison. And I have a poem that one of the prisoners had written to me, Jo Ann White. She was kind of a con artist but anyway I can find that.

MARGARET: Okay.
MARY PAGE: From when I worked in the women’s prison. Angie and I, we talkers, we get together. I want to take her down to the theater. She’s out. She got employee of the year.

MARGARET: Oh wonderful.

MARY PAGE: But all that started with prison fellowship.

MARGARET: Okay. And so tell me more. So remind me again, how did you meet Joyce Brabner?

MARY PAGE: I think Tommy knew her from somewhere. I can’t remember. And he said I want you to meet this person and so we met and then that’s how the women’s prison’s work started.

MARGARET: Okay. And tell me about, tell me a bit more about that program. Was Joyce identifying artists and then letting you develop your own program? Was she shaping the program?

MARY PAGE: They really weren’t artists in there. They were artists, you know, con artists, half of them.

MARGARET: Yeah.

MARY PAGE: But through writing and theater.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: I think she was very interested in them expressing themselves and some of their poems. And Angie and I—Angie was so smart and she was taking the rap for her boyfriend for some murder in Shapley. I met him later too. I mean I got—I still know the family. And we’re, 35 years later we’re still very good friends. She’s working for Tom Gordon I think now.

MARGARET: Oh wow that’s incredible.

MARY PAGE: We went and campaigned for Obama up in Chester and all kinds of places.

MARGARET: Oh that’s wonderful. So you were working with Joyce Brabner. Who else was working with her? I did speak to E Jean Lanyon.

MARY PAGE: Okay.

MARGARET: And I think she was—

MARY PAGE: What she in the prison? Did she do the—?

MARGARET: I think she was in the prison in the WCI arts workshop project as well. And I believe Carson Zullinger has mentioned working in that as well.
MARY PAGE: He probably did. But I don’t remember Carson down there in the women’s prison. I remember Joyce. And Jean too has done you know a lot of stuff.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: I just don’t remember working with her in the prison that much.

MARGARET: Okay. Any other artists you remember working with?

MARY PAGE: In the prison, no not really but I’m sure they had plenty of them.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: I was kind of over there by myself working with, in there. But Joyce seemed to me—she was more on the writing end of things.

MARGARET: Okay. And do you remember—

MARY PAGE: Of course they would do good, interesting stuff you know?

MARGARET: Oh of course, yeah.

MARY PAGE: Expressive.

MARGARET: And it’s just a wonderful program. I’m just so interested in this program.

MARY PAGE: Well it’s so positive because art is so positive and it does shape people’s views on things.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And they’ve proven that if they have arts in the school and things like that there’s not as much crime out there. It is a no-brainer. And why do they cut those programs first chance?

MARGARET: Short-sighted.

MARY PAGE: Short-sighted.

MARGARET: Removing all of those creative outlets for people who are incredibly creative at that point in their lives.

MARY PAGE: Yeah, exactly.

MARGARET: And need that kind of outlet.

MARY PAGE: It’s so positive.
MARGARET: It really is.

MARY PAGE: And it’s, you know, an appreciation of beauty. Oh, it just drives me crazy. I just think it’s inexcusable if that would be the first, but it’s always the music programs.

MARGARET: Always the first things to go. They really are always. I think—it sounds like what Joyce Brabner was doing was just incredibly interesting. Do you remember how long you are involved in that program, how long you went into the prisons? Was it a couple years?

MARY PAGE: It was about, I don’t know, it was about six years I think, yeah five or six years.

MARGARET: Okay five or six years.

MARY PAGE: And then I’ve maintained this one very strong friendship.

MARGARET: Right. That’s just incredible.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.

MARGARET: So you were saying that seeing the fires in the valley, knowing about the riots, those were some of your motivations to go in and do some of this kind of work in the community.

MARY PAGE: But I met them because Tommy was involved and he had the whole United Negro College fund out to the Wilmington country club before.

MARGARET: Oh.

MARY PAGE: Before they had any—any African-Americans had gone into the Wilmington Country Club. They weren’t very happy with them. The people had a great time. It was one of the best parties they ever had out there.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: But I think some of the, you know, hierarchy—

MARGARET: Was uncomfortable.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: Ridiculous. And you see how things have changed.

MARGARET: Mm, hmm, yes, yes. But there was really that kind of—that fear of downtown Wilmington and it seems like it lasted after the riots.
MARY PAGE: But then with the opera house though, people went down all the time with the opera house.

MARGARET: Really?

MARY PAGE: Oh yeah.

MARGARET: After the renovation?

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: Oh, that was kind of a happening place for a while. I wish it continued to be. That’s why it was so exciting the other night. Yeah, two Friday nights ago for the Delaware Symphony, there was that spirit in the air again. I think it was getting that orchestra back in there. And David was magical. He was fabulous. He’s like a dancer anyway you know when he’s up there at the podium.

MARGARET: Oh I know. I have only been able to see him once, but it was an incredible performance.

MARY PAGE: He’s fabulous. Yeah he’s great. I just hope that continues, because I think the next venue—I’d gotten something, it’s going to be at Archmere [Academy].

MARGARET: Oh okay.

MARY PAGE: I’ve never been in the Archmere before.

MARGARET: I haven’t either actually.

MARY PAGE: But it’s not going to be—you know it’s not like the acoustics is so fabulous.

MARGARET: It’s just not the same.

MARY PAGE: And Eugene Ormandy came there to record one time I think.

MARGARET: Oh really?

MARY PAGE: The acoustics are fabulous.

MARGARET: So it’s so exciting that the renovation project happened. Did it seemed like there was a lot of energy when the Market Street Mall was installed as well, because I think that was the motivation behind it—to make it pedestrian friendly and encourage people into the city.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm. And then they’ve got that LOMA, which seems to be pretty active on Friday nights sometimes.
MARGARET: Right, right. And I think it is interesting that you know like we were saying—

MARY PAGE: And the Queen of course.

MARGARET: The Queen is incredible. So it's been that kind of thirty-year cycle. It seems like we're at the point where kind of similar things were happening in the 1970s. Now the DCCA and the Delaware Theatre Company were both founded in 1979. Given your involvement, certainly with the arts, but with the opera house, were you involved at all with the DCCA or the theater company?

MARY PAGE: Yeah definitely with the theater company, even more so with the theater.

MARGARET: Really?

MARY PAGE: Because Cleveland was a great friend.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: I remember Carol Balick asked me for lunch one day and said, “Will you be on the board?” I said, “No but I'll help and we'll have—“ we had actors staying with us all the time.

MARGARET: Oh really? That’s wonderful.

MARY PAGE: Yeah.

MARGARET: And that was Cleveland Morris?

MARY PAGE: Morris, mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: In fact he’s having a show at Fred’s in a couple weeks and he’s coming for dinner two weeks from tonight, yeah.

MARGARET: Cleveland Morris is?

MARY PAGE: Cleveland Morris—M-O-R-R-I-S.

MARGARET: Is he still in Wilmington?

MARY PAGE: No. He’s in Stanton, Virginia. He left because after—I mean he was with the theater for 25 years. He’s the one who really got it going. You need to meet Cleveland.

MARGARET: Yes I would—

MARY PAGE: He’s a piece of work. He’s brilliant. He went to Yale Arts School.
MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: But it was Carol. He’s very close to Carol Balick.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: And Ann Skank. They are the ones to talk to about the theater. They can give you all kinds of good background.

MARGARET: Okay. It does seem like when DCCA and the theaters had their, were just starting out that there were a lot of, kind of some more exciting energy between the two institutions because they were—

MARY PAGE: And now they are still close together.

MARGARET: Yeah I know, which is so exciting.

MARY PAGE: Physically, yeah.

MARGARET: When I spoke to Mitch Lyons he was telling me about some sort of joint art weekend that they had between the DCCA and the theater company and he created the world’s largest coil pod, something like that, out in the streets and all of the activities between these two organizations.

MARY PAGE: And it makes sense.

MARGARET: Right because they were close in proximity. It seems like there was still this concerted effort to put energy, artistic energy, into downtown Wilmington, really focusing since they were both there on Front Street.

MARY PAGE: Somehow down by the waterfront, in that area, seems to draw more people than Market Street for certain reasons, you know. I mean to me it’s not founded, but for other people I think they read about the crime in the paper and they—and I’d like to know where it is, you know if it’s on Tatnall Street, its way down some. It’s not on Market Street. And don’t you think they have plenty of protection on Market Street, especially when they have things at the Queen?

MARGARET: Oh certainly. And when they have events and the whole downtown visions program, all of those people that you see with the—I think they have kind of a yellow something, some sort of insignia on their jackets. They have a strong presence on Market Street.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm. People would be crazy to try to come down there and try to pull anything.

MARGARET: Oh no, I know. But it’s just so interesting that still this fear of downtown Wilmington has continued.

MARY PAGE: But in the 70s people didn’t seem to mind going to the opera house.
MARGARET: That’s interesting.

MARY PAGE: But now it’s kind of come back with all the publicity about the crime downtown.

MARGARET: Right and there is that renewed fear.

MARY PAGE: But I feel like down at the waterfront there seems to be plenty of protection there. We’ve got to move house down there. It’s fabulous.

MARGARET: Oh sure. And same thing, they have security on foot and on bikes monitoring the Riverfront space.

MARY PAGE: The Riverfront seems—I’d like to see that take off. It’s coming, it’s happening.

MARGARET: It’s coming. I don’t know if Maxine Gaiber has told you this but she mentioned this idea to me like five years ago and I think it’s a fabulous idea, that there needs to be some sort of pedestrian bridge between Market Street and the Riverfront to encourage pedestrian traffic between the two.

MARY PAGE: Crossover mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Because you have Martin Luther King Boulevard that just cuts those two spaces in half. And it was—

MARY PAGE: Yeah. And then it’s kind of tricky getting over there.

MARGARET: It is. It’s difficult to navigate. Wilmington is not bike friendly or pedestrian friendly, unfortunately.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm, that’s a good point.

MARGARET: I mean once you get off just Market Street, I mean even on King Street or, the other side on Shipley it’s not very pedestrian friendly. And of course we have 95 in the middle. I was speaking to former mayor James Baker on Wednesday and since he was in the VISTA program and here in Wilmington in ’66 actually as well, so just a little after you came here. And he was talking about the divide that 95 really had, the impact that it had on the city as well.

MARY PAGE: Oh okay, interesting, yeah.

MARGARET: So kind of thinking about those—

MARY PAGE: Yeah. You don’t think about stuff like that until it’s brought up to you.

MARGARET: Right, right. So let’s move little bit into the 1980s. So in the 1980s we have the foundation of some other contemporary art commercial galleries—Somerville-Manning.
MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm. See they want me to show there but I can’t do it with my background with Fred. I do have meetings there though.

MARGARET: Right. Of course, oh of course.

MARY PAGE: I like them very much but I can’t. That’s not to be publicized but they—

MARGARET: Yes Sadie [Somerville] and Vicki [Manning] are just really incredible. And when I spoke to them what I think was really, it was wonderful.

MARY PAGE: It’s the best gallery because it’s professional. It’s so professional.

MARGARET: Oh they’re incredible. And what I didn’t realize was that they offered a place for so many artists who are from this region that had in some ways developed their reputation outside of Wilmington. They offered a place for those artists to come back and show their work in a way. And it was wonderful to hear them articulate that and understand what they were providing for the local large community that some other commercial galleries weren’t because they had different interests.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: The other gallery that was founded during this time was Susan Isaacs Gallery.

MARY PAGE: Oh I had something in Susan. Yeah, I had several paintings in her gallery.

MARGARET: You did. So you showed with her. Did you have solo exhibitions or were you included in group shows?

MARY PAGE: Yeah, I was in group shows.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: I don’t think I ever had a solo with Susan, yeah. Yeah, she was a force too.

MARGARET: She was, and it seems like she picked up where Rob—

MARY PAGE: She didn’t like the DCCA.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: And she has such a knowledge of art history, Susan does.

MARGARET: She really does.

MARY PAGE: No, I love hearing her talk.

MARGARET: Yes.
MARY PAGE: She was with the DCCA for quite a while wasn’t she?

MARGARET: She was. She was their—

MARY PAGE: As a curator.

MARGARET: —curator for quite a while.

MARY PAGE: She put on a lot of good shows and I like Susan a lot.

MARGARET: She did. What I think is interesting was that she, after Rob, she was the next gallerist to come in and establish a large SoHo type space in downtown Wilmington.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: Now unfortunately, and I would love to hear your thoughts on this, unfortunately you get to the late’ 80s, early’ 90s and things just—

MARY PAGE: Kind of dropped.

MARGARET: They dropped. So Susan Isaacs Gallery closed. Of course thinking nationally, internationally, artists are met by the culture wars. So you have decreased funding, you have criticism of the type of social work that they are doing. But do you have any recollections in regards to that moment in Wilmington’s history? It just seems like a, kind of a quiet, dead time.

MARY PAGE: Probably because of the lack of funding.

MARGARET: And lack of funding.

MARY PAGE: Lack of funding seems to be the major thing that happens. I mean it was going on then. I’m so happy though, I think people are really taking a huge dislike to [Ted] Cruz and his rampage.

MARGARET: Right.

MARY PAGE: I think it’s done more for Obama.

MARGARET: I know.

MARY PAGE: And healthcare.

MARGARET: Mm, hmm, certainly.

MARY PAGE: So I love that.

MARGARET: Yeah. So too, one thing I want to make sure not to miss, you were telling me about Andy Warhol’s visit to Wilmington. This was when he was doing the portrait project with Jamie Wyeth.
MARY PAGE: He and Jamie were painting, their show was called *The Beauty and the Beast*. We know who the beauty was.

MARGARET: *The Beauty and the Beast*.

MARY PAGE: *The Beauty and the Beast*. That was in, at the Coe Kerr gallery in New York because I went up for that opening. I always had this—Andy was down here staying with Jamie and it just happened to be when I had that show, because then they had something afterwards. We all went out there, but I remember when they came in the gallery and Andy was just looking around at everything. And we were standing there talking. He always had his hand—he might’ve had the little dog with him, I don’t know. But we were talking about being out at Jamie and Phyllis’s in the beautiful countryside. And I said, “Oh Andy don’t you love being in the country? It’s beautiful, the landscape is so wonderful.” And he just, in this quiet little voice, “cause he talked like this, very quietly.

MARGARET: Very quietly.

MARY PAGE: Very quiet, “No. I prefer the trees in New York because they have to work hard.” I’ll never forget it. It was so perfect.

MARGARET: That’s incredible. So it’s interesting to think about—

MARY PAGE: And you know Arthur Mitchell too felt the same, because Arthur was a very good friend of the dance Theatre of Harlem. He used to come down here.

MARGARET: Arthur Mitchell did?


MARGARET: Yes.

MARY PAGE: And we talked about the same thing. I mean he’s such a city person. He really didn’t love—this was not his cup of tea.

MARGARET: Do you remember what brought him down to Wilmington?

MARY PAGE: Yeah. We asked him to. I met him with a friend in Washington.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: So we suggested he dance at the opera house, and the company came and we had a party for him afterwards. It was wonderful. The whole company came.

MARGARET: Okay. And so that was a performance—

MARY PAGE: They were all so hungry. All the food went like crazy because dancers work so hard.
MARGARET: Oh yeah, especially after a performance.

MARY PAGE: After a performance.

MARGARET: You know you can’t eat before.

MARY PAGE: And they all smoke too.

MARGARET: Oh of course you have to keep that thin figure.

MARY PAGE: And I asked why, okay you would know. And I asked, I said, “Well why there’s so many smokers here?” And that was in the late’ 70s. You know I was smoking then, but then I stopped. Things were getting more anti-smoking. And it was instant gratification. They want instant gratification. You get it from a cigarette. I love that. I remember that one too.

MARGARET: Oh that’s so interesting. Oh that’s so interesting. Do you remember Dance Theatre of Harlem coming back for any other performances or were they just in Wilmington that one time?

MARY PAGE: They did, no they came back for another performance.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: And actually Virginia Johnson is running the company now. She was one of Arthur’s dancers. And they were having something and I think it—last year they came to something at the opera house and I would’ve been there. I think it was that opening for my show, maybe at the Delaware Art Museum.

MARGARET: Oh okay. And I would have been with a very small child at that point so that’s why I would’ve missed that. I didn’t know that.

MARY PAGE: Yeah. They did a lecture demonstration at the—it’s now the Cab Calloway, but it was the Wilmington High School because I was down there you know with—and they had some other dance companies. He was doing a lecture demonstration and I had Page, our daughter, with us. And I remember Arthur looking. He said, “Girl you’ve got dancing legs.” I loved Arthur. I’d like to see him again. I really—this reminds me, I’d like to because he’s—Virginia has taken over the company.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARY PAGE: She was one of the principal dancers.

MARGARET: Right. Now one thing I forgot to ask you about, and again this is just if you have any recollections about this, Joyce Brabner of course later married Harvey Pekar. She was involved with Xanadu Comics and ran that it seems like with Tom Watkins.

MARY PAGE: Yes. And I wasn’t involved in any of that.
MARGARET: Okay. You know of them?

MARY PAGE: I know of them yeah.

MARGARET: And it seems like that really was kind of a different scene.

MARY PAGE: It might be a legitimate scene.

MARGARET: Oh certainly. But there were connections between Rob Jones and Tom Watkins. But the Xanadu Comics, Rondo Center, it was really kind of focused on comics, on the creation of ‘zines and on xerography, so xerographic art. It wasn’t completely outside of what was happening at Fifth Street but it was definitely kind of its own little scene within the bigger context. Okay.

MARY PAGE: I don’t really—

MARGARET: Okay. And also Mary Page you mentioned that you did have work at the Museum’s Art Sales and Rental Gallery.

MARY PAGE: Oh yeah. I sold quite an amount of work there at the Sales and Rental Gallery.

MARGARET: Okay. And so Alice [Hupfel] was running then.

MARY PAGE: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: And that may have been how many of your works entered corporate collections in Wilmington.

MARY PAGE: Could be, because a lot of them came in there. That was a very active place.

MARGARET: It really was. I think what Alex was doing—I remember it when it was at the Riverfront when we were in that space, but I unfortunately was only in the previous Delaware Art Museum once and the space was completely empty. I got a quick tour when I started as an intern so I don’t have a strong sense of what the previous building was like.

MARY PAGE: And it looked great, you know. They had all the racks and everything, good storage space and good exhibition space. I think it was an asset.

MARGARET: I think so. There was a lot o— and of course there was a lot of corporate buying in the 1980s. There really was.

MARY PAGE: Yeah that was when things were—yeah there was some money around.

MARGARET: Yes. Okay. Oh this is wonderful. So Mary Page, I think we might have touched on everything that I wanted to ask you about specifically, which I think is good so I’m going to pause this now.
[End of Audio]
Duration: 39 minutes