MARGARET: This is Margaret Winslow, interviewing Margaretta Frederick, on October 4th, 2013, at the Delaware Art Museum. So let’s start off by having you tell me how you met Rob Jones.

MARGARETTA: Well, I was in my freshman year of college and I needed a summer job. Actually, I remember my dad was convinced that I wasn’t going to find a summer job, but I was determined to find a summer job just so I could tell my dad I had a summer job. I had written to a couple places around Wilmington. I wanted to do something in the arts. I was an art history major. I didn’t know anything about the Wilmington art scene, so really it was basically looking in the yellow pages, copying out anything that said gallery in it and sending them a letter.

I must have gotten a response from Rob, because I went down to talk to him. He needed a studio or a gallery assistant, basically someone just to be there during opening hours. I thought I had landed the job of a lifetime.

MARGARET: And so this would have been 1978.

MARGARETTA: Right.

MARGARET: And so in 1978, looking through the yellow pages for commercial galleries in Wilmington. That would have been a fairly short list.
MARGARETTA: It was. It was Hardcastle’s [Gallery]. That’s the only one I can think of right off the top of my head.

MARGARET: Carspecken-Scott [Gallery] would have been open at that point.

MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: But Station Gallery had not opened yet.

MARGARETTA: No.

MARGARET: Somerville-Manning [Gallery] had not opened yet.

MARGARETTA: No.

MARGARET: So it was really, those two primarily.

MARGARETTA: Mm, hmm.

MARGARET: And any of those other galleries—

MARGARETTA: And I wouldn’t have known the difference between Hardcastle’s and Fifth Street Gallery until I went there.

MARGARET: Okay, me neither.

MARGARETTA: I had no connection with the Wilmington art scene except that I grew up outside of Wilmington.

MARGARET: Right, so had your parents gone to Fifth Street prior to your going?

MARGARETTA: No.

MARGARET: That’s interesting.

MARGARETTA: In fact, my dad made a special trip to look it up.

MARGARET: Oh really?

MARGARETTA: Yeah, after I told him I got the job.

MARGARET: When you started in the summer of 1978, Fifth Street had—so Rob had already been programming at the gallery. It seems like his first, at least recorded exhibition that we can find is in 1974.

MARGARETTA: Oh wow.

MARGARET: That early.
MARGARETTA: Okay.

MARGARET: Yeah, but he wasn’t to this point yet, where he was establishing a year-long exhibition program. At least that’s what it seems like so far. He did a fair number of exhibitions in ’76. He graduated in ’73, ’74 was the first show. I’ve only been able to find two exhibitions in ’75. ’76 a few, ’77 a few, but then it seems like in ’78 he really has this strong program of exhibitions and is announcing the program.

MARGARETTA: That’s interesting, because then—

MARGARET: Which is interesting.

MARGARETTA: That would be why he could afford to have a very inexpensive gallery assistant.

MARGARET: Right, so this was not internship?

MARGARETTA: Oh no, oh no.

MARGARET: It was a paid gallery assistant.

MARGARETTA: Yes.

MARGARET: And did he any other employees?

MARGARETTA: Oh no, no. It was me and Ruy.

MARGARET: It was you and Ruy, the dog.

MARGARETTA: Yes, and in fact, generally, Ruy and I were the only people up when I would get there in the morning.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: Rob and his partner at the time, and I’m kicking myself, because I cannot remember his name, Gary maybe? Really, really, nice person. They usually didn’t put in an appearance until much later.

MARGARET: Okay, and was Rob living on the third floor, upstairs?

MARGARETTA: They were living upstairs, yeah, absolutely. But Ruy lived in the gallery.

MARGARET: Okay, and so your responsibilities were basically watching the gallery during open hours.

MARGARETTA: Yeah, and saying hello to the very few people who came in.

MARGARET: Okay.
MARGARETTA: Yeah. I might’ve done some—I think I did some kind of very, very low-level, low-skill kind of office work for him. He had, in addition to whatever the exhibition was that was up, he also had stock. Like a stock of—he carried—there were artists that he represented and there were examples of their work not necessarily hanging, but kind of in a stock room area.

MARGARET: Oh that’s interesting.

MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: So he had inventory?

MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: Do you have a sense of how many artists were represented?

MARGARETTA: I don’t so much, but I know from the artists that you’re thinking of for this era, that he represented many of those. Or at least many of their works were available through him. I’m not sure it was quite as—it was probably a little more casual than representing.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: And it’s interesting because the style of work, there was a fair range from reasonably conservative—nothing as conservative as the Brandywine River School, but fairly conservative to more avant-garde things. The big show while I was there was the summer show, which was the—there were five artists and the person I remember the best is Bob Mauro, because he did these three-dimensional print works.

I actually own one. That was the first work of art I ever bought. I bought it from that show. They’re beautiful. It’s almost like they’re prints, colored prints, but then they’re folded in such a way in very geometric forms. Very chromatic color range. I wonder, have you talked—is he still alive?

MARGARET: I don’t know. I should find out.

MARGARETTA: You should, yeah. And I’m not remembering. So much the other painters, although I’m not seeing on this list—I’m sure I have this right. At some point he was also showing the works of a guy who did Raku pottery who is/was affiliated with the University of Delaware. He lived in Newark.

MARGARET: Was that Jim Rothrock?

MARGARETTA: Mm-mm, no, although this was the era when Jim Rothrock did the Wilmington installations where they were like plants growing green, growing out of—am I?

MARGARET: No, you’re right, that’s Rick Rothrock.

MARGARETTA: Oh, Rick Rothrock, sorry.
MARGARET: No, what’s interesting is he was also showing the work of Jim Rothrock.

MARGARETTA: Oh.

MARGARET: No relation.

MARGARETTA: Okay, sorry.

MARGARET: Which is interesting and kind of curious and I think he was doing Raku work.

MARGARETTA: No, that’s not who it was.

MARGARET: But not the name of—okay.

MARGARETTA: I would remember his name so well.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: Gosh, that makes me mad. Anyway, what else? One thing I do remember distinctly, and I’ve remembered it the rest of my professional career, we were talking about—because there must have been artists coming in to show their work to him. And we were talking about what it was that made him decide to do the work of an artist or to show the work of an artist or to represent an artist, and he said that he looked for a consistency. Because he said even within very early work through to the beginnings of mature style, you could see a consistency if you really looked if it was there. To him that was what really kind of was the mark of a strong artistic message or thing.

MARGARET: Right. Did you have a sense that Rob had any other gallery experience because I haven’t been able to find anything after—?

MARGARETTA: Oh no. Although he—I mean I was young and very naïve but he had it down. He knew what he was doing. He did know what he was doing. He wasn’t making tons of money, but what he was doing was very clear and I would’ve said he would have been very true to his mission despite the fact that it wasn’t making a whole lot of money.

But it was definitely a very strong time in Wilmington for the arts, although most of what we think of Wilmington might not have known it. But it was when the disco was up at the Grand Opera House and there was a real, almost under-life, sub-life or whatever, of contemporary art and culture going on in the city, and I just got a tiny taste of it in my very youthful, naïve undergraduate days. I mean I was a freshman, that’s really young.

MARGARET: Yeah, and were you just there for the summer?

MARGARETTA: Mm-hmm, although I went back a bunch and I saw him, you know I would visit and I can remember after he shut the gallery down, going to visit with him at his apartment because he was trying to track down a couple works of art and he was trying to pick my brain to see if I remembered.
MARGARET: So he had closed the gallery and was still living in Wilmington, not in that space though? In another apartment?

MARGARETTA: No, in another place, yeah.

MARGARET: Okay. Do you remember seeing him before he went to New York?

MARGARETTA: Well that would have been it.

MARGARET: That would have been—and when—?

MARGARETTA: Well it probably had been almost—do you know when the gallery closed?

MARGARET: The last exhibition that I have found details for was in 1979.

MARGARETTA: That would makes sense because I bet it was right before I—I went two years in Allentown and then I came to Delaware. I bet it was right before I came back to Delaware to finish my last two years.

MARGARET: Okay. Which would have been in?

MARGARETTA: About ’79.


MARGARETTA: Yeah, and that would make sense because he was definitely trying to close out details. I mean that’s what that conversation was about.

MARGARET: Okay. Now you must have attended or worked some of the exhibition openings.

MARGARETTA: You know, it’s weird because I was just there for the summer, I’m looking at your dates here, it’s kind of interesting. I don’t remember—oh, sure; H. Richardson Harris. Figurative, but I think—do you know who that is?

MARGARET: No, we haven’t tracked down all the artists.

MARGARETTA: Maybe figurative but in a loose way, not slightly abstract figurative. Do you have that?

MARGARET: Yes.

MARGARETTA: I think I do remember that one.

MARGARET: Your father—

MARGARETTA: Yes, Dad [William H. Frederick, Jr.] has a piece.

MARGARET: Yes, of H. Richardson Harris.
MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: So he must have—they must have come to the gallery when you were—

MARGARETTA: So Dad came, because Dad always—now wherever I have a job or work my father would come, you know, he was being a dad. Yeah, it’s funny that he bought that piece, because it’s a little unlike—oh, no it’s not. No, it’s not. I know why my dad bought that piece, yeah. Anyway, did I tell you that or did you see it?

MARGARET: Your father told me that. I haven’t seen it yet though. He’s invited me out to see it.

MARGARETTA: Wow, you need to talk to my dad soon.

MARGARET: I need to talk to him.

MARGARETTA: Really soon.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: Yeah, interesting. I new it, that’s good that my brain’s not as bad as I thought. I wish I could tell you the guy—David, that was his first name, the Raku potter.

MARGARET: Someone else has mentioned—I’ll have to look in—


MARGARET: David Meyer’s a current UD [University of Delaware] faculty.

MARGARETTA: Yeah, he doesn’t work on Raku though.

MARGARET: No, and it wouldn’t have been Victor [Spinski].

MARGARETTA: Maybe he wasn’t UD faculty. Maybe he was just—he was living in Newark, I remember I went to a very crazy party at his house.

MARGARET: David—no that’s photography. Someone else has mentioned Raku but I can’t remember right now.

MARGARETTA: And even in my naïve way, I knew that whatever the life he [Jones] was living, he was very protective of me. Like, he did not want me to be exposed to too much of the wild and crazy. Which is why I might not have such a good recollection of any openings.

MARGARET: Of openings or after-parties?

MARGARETTA: Oh, no, no.
MARGARET: Because I know, I think it’s in 1978, it’s the first time that Rob is kind of managing the disco that was on the second floor [of the Grand Opera House].

MARGARETTA: Oh, yeah. I got more information from Rob’s partner about the discos than I did from Rob.

MARGARET: And you would not have gone up there?

MARGARETTA: Oh God, no.

MARGARET: No?

MARGARETTA: Well one, I mean was I, like 17?

MARGARET: Oh, you would’ve been—yeah, right.

MARGARETTA: No, no, no. In fact I do seem to remember Rob telling me I couldn’t go there.

MARGARET: You couldn’t go?

MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: Okay, and some of the other activities like the Sleaze Convention, you would’ve—

MARGARETTA: Mm-mm, I have no memory of it.

MARGARET: Yeah, because that would’ve—that was in September of ’76.

MARGARETTA: Right.

MARGARET: So, that would’ve been too early. So, not a lot of other artists—not a lot of people coming into the gallery during regular business hours.

MARGARETTA: Oh my God. Days and days, yeah.

MARGARET: So even though you’re right there on Market Street and at that point—so in ’78 you had the Market Street Mall.

MARGARETTA: Yeah, I was thinking about the Mall as opposed to—and that’s my earliest—I would have lunch sometimes; I’d go to Woolworth’s and have a hot dog. You could get like a dollar lunch at Woolworth’s. I mean they had the lunch counter. Yeah, I would say Market Street was probably a more safe place although very urban. But I guess it’s that thing about department stores kind of anchoring neighborhoods and making them less—well, they’re more vibrant. Vibrant being relative.

MARGARET: Well certainly at that point you have the Opera House that had been renovated.
MARGARETTA: Yeah, but that was pretty new in the Opera House’s days.

MARGARET: Yeah, but there’s still that energy in regards to the renovation project earlier in the 1970’s and then the mall going in.

MARGARETTA: And like Rick Rothrock’s green things [Wilmington Green] were a big part of that kind of cultural-ing of Wilmington.

MARGARET: Yeah, and you have that downtown revitalization which is interesting because then Rob was doing those—a lot of the activities with Fifth Street were earlier. He closes in ’79. But it seems like he’s really laying some of the groundwork for the foundation of organizations like the DCCA.

MARGARETTA: How long after that is DCCA?

MARGARET: ’79.

MARGARETTA: Oh really? Really? But it’s in the Water Works, it’s not in Wilmington.

MARGARET: No, it’s on French Street.

MARGARETTA: Really?

MARGARET: So it’s French Street first before they moved down to the Water Works and they are diagonal from the Delaware Theatre Company also founded in ’79.

MARGARETTA: In the Firehouse.

MARGARET: In the Firehouse. So he’s kind of that pioneer down there on Market Street with his activities even earlier in the decade.

MARGARETTA: That’s interesting.

MARGARET: Which I think is interesting to think about. So the other question would be about kind of the clientele coming in to the gallery.

MARGARETTA: Okay, so the only one I remember, and it must have been during the print show because there was a set of four monoprints that went together. I’d love to see them again, I have a vague memory of what they look like and I don’t know who did them, but it must have been—you’d assume it would have been one of those people in the show. But if you found out what those four people’s works look like, I’d tell you whose it was. Or five, however many it is.

Anyway, I remember one guy coming in and I was—I don’t know how many times I can tell you that I was very naïve. But I remember that he drove a Porsche and he was interested in those four monoprints and it would have been a big sale so I was pretty excited about that. But he never actually came through with the bucks.
MARGARET: And then talking to other artists who showed work at Fifth Street, there was definitely kind of a, not an underlying frustration, but certainly commentary about Rob’s inability to make a lot of sales.

MARGARETTA: Well, he didn’t have any foot traffic.

MARGARET: And even people coming in for openings and things. But there are some artists like Julio [daCunha] who continued to show.

MARGARETTA: Oh yeah, his work was there.

MARGARET: Quite a lot.

MARGARETTA: That’s right; his work was in the stockroom.

MARGARET: And it does seem—I do wonder if because Julio would’ve taught Rob, he was one of his students at the University of Delaware—it does seem like there was a kind of mentoring relationship between them.

MARGARETTA: Definitely. Okay so one of the things I did was go through all the artists’ files there, so I would remember—like I definitely remember Julio. Not him as a person coming in, but I remember—this is how I learned a lot of the local artwork because I would go through all the files.

MARGARET: So he maintained artists’ files?

MARGARETTA: He did. That was part of my education, to go through those files. That’s why he was letting me do that because I was learning all these artists’ work.

MARGARET: Gosh, I just wonder where all of those materials went.

MARGARETTA: Well where did you find this list for 1970—?

MARGARET: Most of the materials like this that we found are in individual artist vertical files in the library, which is great that we kept a lot of these materials. So it means going through the artists who showed, looking in and see what we have, looking for things online. Some things we’ve been able to find online as well, but that’s why I’m curious to reach to any sort of family because if any archives were maintained. But that’s interesting to hear because other artists and other individuals have talked about Rob’s disorganization, but it sounds like—

MARGARETTA: Well I mean there’s no question that—he wasn’t in the office of the gallery that often, but, I mean I think, he might’ve been on to other things as well. I mean he was not—I wouldn’t say it was because he wasn’t doing things, he just—it’s interesting in that article that I read just before talking to you that fills in a whole lot of things I had no idea about. I mean he was really making a stab at promoting very contemporary sort of notions of art in Wilmington. That included more than just running his gallery, like the whole deal at the Opera House and the disco and all that stuff.
MARGARET: You’re right. And the collaborations that he was doing with dancers and other artists whose work he wasn’t necessarily showing. Do you remember Tom Watkins at all and Xanadu Comics?

MARGARETTA: Mm-mm.

MARGARET: No?

MARGARETTA: I mean I knew who they were, and I don’t know why I know that.

MARGARET: Okay, well it does seem like there was some sort of close relationship between Tom and Rob.

MARGARETTA: Is that on the [Market Street] Mall? Was he on the Mall?

MARGARET: He was on Seventh—no, I think he was slightly diagonal. I think he was on Market Street but at Fifth—no so he wouldn’t have been on Market. He was like Fifth and Shipley. They were on Shipley, I’m fairly certain. But we haven’t talked to Tom yet.

MARGARETTA: Oh, he would probably be a good person, you know.

MARGARET: Okay, but you don’t remember seeing him in the gallery?

MARGARETTA: Well no, it doesn’t mean he wasn’t there.

MARGARET: Yeah, but nothing you remember?

MARGARETTA: Yeah.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: I’ll check around more about it. I’ll go home and see if I have a file. I used to keep a file for all of my many employments.

MARGARET: Yeah. Huh.

MARGARETTA: Anyway.

MARGARET: Okay.

MARGARETTA: Yeah, sorry about—I don’t know how I managed to miss the openings. That’s so interesting. Although I’m almost sure that the one that involved the Raku potter, I was there for the opening.

MARGARET: Okay. I’ll have to track down his name. I’m sure I have it somewhere.

MARGARETTA: I wanna say David Meyer.
MARGARET: Huh. Okay. I’ll look. Okay, this is perfect. I’m going to stop this.

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