Oral history interview with Robert Straight, June 4, 2013

Straight, Robert
Painter and former University of Delaware professor

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MARGARET: This is Margaret Winslow, Associate Curator for Contemporary Art, interviewing Robert Straight at his home on Tuesday, June 4th, 2013. We can just ignore this because it’s really just for archival purposes. So, it is just this incredibly exciting time. Incredibly exciting. And it’s interesting because I feel like it’s book-ended by the riots in 1968 and the fear of downtown Wilmington.

And of course, vacant property; artists coming in and taking advantage of that situation and then on the other end, something that happens in the early 1990s. Less corporate—it seems like—less corporate funding, Susan Isaac’s gallery closed. There’s this shift in the early 1990s, I guess as a result of—and I have to do more of my social history research—but as a result of what was happening in the 1980s. So it’s book-ended on either end, so I’m going to shorten it up a little bit and just focus on those two decades.

ROBERT: Interesting.

MARGARET: Yeah, very exciting. So, just to give you my hopes for our conversation today; I’d like to talk about your arrival here in Delaware, your recollections of the University of Delaware faculty and students at that time—and these are general recollections. I do want to talk about your work.

We’ll see how long this conversation is—if we have to reschedule we can do that—because I’d like to talk about the transition of your work during this time as well, and then your recollections
of the Wilmington arts’ scene in the 1980s when you were really here and participating more in annual exhibitions, things like that. Yes, so that’s the general scope of our conversation today. So let’s start out by talking about when you arrived in Delaware.

ROBERT: That was 1980. I came here of course to teach at the university. At that point, I had a vague idea of some sort of art community, but it was really not very—I didn’t know a lot about it. I knew Carspecken-Scott Gallery.

I think Steve Tanis was showing work there at the time. So that’s basically what I knew about that. I lived on Scott Street in Trolley Square at that point, which was right down the block from Blue Streak Gallery. I’m not certain at the time that Blue Streak opened, but it was a neat thing to be happening because the woman who opened it was Ellen’s sister-in-law, I believe.

MARGARET: I wonder, was she her sister-in-law? That’s interesting. She didn’t say. Avery Draper opened the gallery. I don’t know if they were related, I’ll have to check on that.

ROBERT: Okay. I think they were related. But I’m not positive.

MARGARET: Okay, I’ll double check on that.

ROBERT: I kind of kept a close eye on Blue Streak Gallery. They tended to show more craft things, but really high-end kind of. It was a real gallery. They put on shows, it was professionally handled. It was neat, because it’s right down the street, and I would see Avery every morning walking down to the gallery. We’d talk a little bit; I didn’t know her real well. Then one of the things that happened with Blue Streak, there was another brownstone next to it, which now is an office building.

One Saturday morning I woke up and I’m looking down the street, and they were building this new building next to Blue Streak. The brownstone next to it, it was like this. And I say, “Hey Chris, something weird is going on, it almost looks like that building that’s next to the Blue Streak is starting to fall down.” She was like, “Oh, no.” Later on in the morning I go out and the thing is like this. And in fact the building did fall down because the building they were building on the opposite side of that, they had dug a basement, but they didn’t prop the building up or anything, so the thing fell over.

MARGARET: Oh that’s incredible. I’ve never heard that. That’s amazing.

ROBERT: And then Avery was in a car accident and then that’s when Ellen took over. But I believe that was after we moved here.

MARGARET: Yes, because that was in ‘88 that they took over the gallery. She passed in ‘87. But let me go back for one second, because—and this is partly just to get this down in recording—so you graduated in 1969 from California State University at Long Beach with a BA, and then finished your MFA from Cranbrook Academy in 1971. According to your resume, you were the assistant and assistant professor at Connecticut College from 1973 to 1980.
ROBERT: Prior to that I actually taught at Spelman College.

MARGARET: At Spelman in Atlanta?

ROBERT: Yes. And that was ‘72 to ‘73. It was just for a year and then I went up to Connecticut.

MARGARET: Here’s my question: I imagine—though you could confirm—that you knew Julio prior to you coming to the University of Delaware or no you did not?

ROBERT: No. I didn’t know Julio.

MARGARET: Were you hired by Julio to come to the university?

ROBERT: I was hired by Dan Teis.

MARGARET: You were hired by Dan Teis. And Dan Teis—who hired Dan Teis?

ROBERT: Say that again?

MARGARET: Who hired Dan Teis? Do you know?

ROBERT: Maybe Julio. Was Julio chair of the department at one point?

MARGARET: He was.

ROBERT: What about Charles Rowe? I wonder if Julio—Julio and Charles Rowe were there at the same time I believe.

MARGARET: Right.

ROBERT: If Julio had been chair and then Charles was the chair and then Dan came. But I’m not certain. Julio would know.

MARGARET: Okay. I’ll ask him. That’s interesting given the—as you know, all the Cranbrook connections.

ROBERT: Which has continued, you know.

MARGARET: That’s right, because Troy [Richards]—

ROBERT: Troy and Abby [Donavan] and Lance [Winn] all went to Cranbrook.

MARGARET: It’s a good school.

ROBERT: Sure is.
MARGARET: It’s a great school. So that’s interesting. So you were hired by Dan Teis. Here’s my question: how did it come to be that you exhibited in a group show in 1978 at Millersville with Larry Holmes and Vera Kaminski who were both—were they both at University of Delaware at that time?

ROBERT: They were.

MARGARET: How did that happen?

ROBERT: And Larry actually had been—he graduated from Cranbrook. Larry Holmes did.

MARGARET: At the same time as you?

ROBERT: He graduate after I did and I didn’t know him. But—it gets kind of incestuous—when I was at Connecticut I was working with a woman named Maureen McCabe who also went to Cranbrook and—I think she’s the one who put this together—but Larry was in an exhibit at Connecticut College.

I had known Steve Tanis at Cranbrook. He came my second year, so I knew him, we were acquainted anyway. So anyway, I think he actually came up with Larry to deliver work for this exhibit in Connecticut, so there was that connection. And then Larry—I think he set up the show at Millersville. But there was also a gallery around the same time in Philadelphia called Arch Street Gallery. It was run by a woman named Emily Woolf. She was a student at Connecticut College, and I had had a show there.

MARGARET: That was the same year? In 1978? Your solo show at Arch Street Gallery?

ROBERT: Yes.

MARGARET: Oh wait, here’s the other question though: 1978 show at the Perkins Student Center Gallery at the University of Delaware.

ROBERT: Right, at that was set up by Larry Holmes.

MARGARET: Okay. I’ll be interviewing Larry Holmes as well.

ROBERT: Oh you will?

MARGARET: Yes, I have to. He’s connecting everyone at this point.

ROBERT: I know. Oh man, this will be ongoing.

MARGARET: Yes.

ROBERT: You know what’s interesting is, when I think back on how things have happened, often times it’s not something you really work for, or try and get rolling, but it’s just
circumstances and surprises, really. Someone that you’ve known a long time ago or someone has seen your work at a group show at some point and all this time has thought about it and then they wanted to do a show.

So it’s weird how when you’re starting out you’re really trying to have exhibits and have your work shown and then the way it happens oftentimes is beyond your control.

MARGARET: So much more organic. And then we go back and I’ll over analyze it. How did this happen? So can you tell me about that 1978 show at the Perkins Student Center, the type of that work you were showing?

ROBERT: It was—I’m trying to think. It was three-dimensional work that hung on the wall. At this point I was also really into making pastries and desserts, so the paintings—I thought of them as paintings—but they were almost like cakes that hung on wall.

MARGARET: Do you have images of any of these?

ROBERT: I do. Do you have a second? I have a book of slides.

MARGARET: Okay, let me—I’m going to pause this. So we’re still recording.

ROBERT: Like this. They were kind of based on Navajo blankets and quilts.

MARGARET: Still fairly large though.

ROBERT: Yeah. And they were stretched.

MARGARET: And these were acrylic on canvas?

ROBERT: Yeah, really thin paint. Like stains.

MARGARET: Oh wow. So I’m sure you’ve gotten this before, but I have to ask: pattern and decoration?

ROBERT: Oh yes. I’ll show you some more.

MARGARET: So these are early 1970s.

CHRIS: We weren’t here until—when did we move here, Bob?


CHRIS: 1980, that’s right.

ROBERT: So these are the paintings that came after those really flat ones. You know how I told you had been making pastries and desserts and all of that. So these are really thick paintings.
MARGARET: So how deep?

ROBERT: Maybe like this. And the paint: I’d mix up the acrylic with modeling paints and gel mediums, and then use a pastry tube to squirt it out.

MARGARET: So a bit smaller in size, so large is maybe 49” by 49” but about 1 ½” to 2” thick, and that’s really the buildup of the modeling paste with pigment.

ROBERT: Yeah, paint over paint. But that orange section in here would be—I was also mixing sawdust in with the paint. So there’d be some parts that would be lower but textured. Kind of like frosting. These are actually the paintings that were shown at Arch Street Gallery. They were just on paper.

I had done a residency at Yaddo, and it was when our first daughter was about to be born, and I took off to Yaddo for residency. I only got to stay for two weeks, and then she came. Anyway, so I was stapling a paper to a floor and scraping pigment over them. That actually is something that I still do with my work.

MARGARET: So you’re capturing that. Are you capturing wood grain then when you’re doing that scraping process?

ROBERT: Yeah. You’ll see the floorboards through it. The spirals in here were done with oil stick, but everything else was acrylic, so the oil stick acted like a resist. The acrylic wouldn’t stick to that, but it would stick to everything else.

MARGARET: So you’re starting with the oil stick and then pulling acrylic pigment across.

ROBERT: Actually instead of using acrylic I used only dried pigments based on earth. You know, like Sienna or Ambers, or rotten stone. All of those kinds of things.

MARGARET: And so for the ‘78 show at the Perkins Student Center were you—you were showing the three-dimensional work from ‘76?

ROBERT: I have some different ones. These were the ones that I was showing there. Where I built these forms out of hardware cloth, which is that metal—it’s like a metal grid that’s soldered to each intersection.

MARGARET: Like a mesh?

ROBERT: Yeah. So I would make the shape out of that. And then cover it with papier-mâché and then cover it with acrylic that had been mixed with sawdust or whatever to make it really beefy.

MARGARET: Oh and these were 6” deep. So much smaller, 12 by 12—

ROBERT: They’re smaller but thicker. Then they got bigger. And they got more elaborate.
MARGARET: Oh my goodness. Wow, look at these.

ROBERT: They actually started getting like sculpture. And these are actually the ones that I would show here at Perkins.

MARGARET: So that would have been P-56 through 59-ish?

ROBERT: Yeah.

MARGARET: Still thinking about pastry?

ROBERT: Yeah. If you had a layer cake and cut one layer up and still saw the other layer. The other thing that I was kind of thinking about was just—at this point a lot of people were doing thick paintings, I think, really pastel. I was thinking about what if you took a Van Gogh painting and ran it through a table saw so that you could see the actual topography of it. That was kind of the idea that I was thinking about here.

MARGARET: These two forms: P59 and P60 looks much more organic.

ROBERT: Yeah and almost going back to those flat drawings I did at Yaddo. Using the spiral and trying to simplify things. These things got really elaborate and they took a long time to make. I started thinking, “You know maybe the next step would be to make sculpture.” But I always wanted to be a painter, so there was this intersection where it felt like I had to make a decision. It was either just let go and start doing sculptural things or back up a bit and see how you could push painting forward within its limitations.

MARGARET: Was this the most three-dimensional you ever got in your work?

ROBERT: In grad school I did ceramics. I had some sculpture in undergraduate school. But after being out of school I’d say this is the most three-dimensional work that I did until recently.

MARGARET: Yeah I was going to say until nothing since. Nothing until recently. Wow, these are incredible. Are these in private collections?

ROBERT: Some are, but I have some of them here.

MARGARET: Okay, good. I thought you were going to say they’re no longer—

ROBERT: You know what, the thing you’re doing is coming at an interesting time because in the spring of next year the university is going to do a show of my work. They’re going to call it a retrospect. So I was thinking, a lot of this stuff no one has ever seen—or at least people around here haven’t seen it, so I’m thinking I might show one piece from each group of things. It’ll be fun.

MARGARET: It would be wonderful to see work from this period. Who are you working on the show with?
ROBERT: Pardon me?

MARGARET: Who are you working with, for the retrospective?

ROBERT: It’s going to be with Janis [Tomlinson]. Do you know her?

MARGARET: I do. That’s exciting to hear. I’m looking through these things and I’m like retrospective, retrospective. So this is good. So that’s the work that you showed at the Perkins Student Center Gallery in 1978. And then now might be a good time since we’re looking at things to talk about the transition of your work then into this moment. So, from the late ‘70s through the 1980s.

ROBERT: Here we go. This is the end of the ‘70s, in pattern and decoration.

MARGARET: But this isn’t really the first time we’re seeing the fan form, because it’s existing in part in those earlier constructions, right?

ROBERT: This happened at a point when pattern and decoration was starting to happen. I showed these works in New York, so people said, “Oh, they’re fans.” But I hadn’t really thought of them as fans, I had simply thought of them as these geometric divisions. Each image has three parts showing—later on I cut this part out—but the bottom part was the bottom layer, the plywood backing, then a section—a concentric circle that followed that, and then a third one, that was corrugated.

MARGARET: Were they stepped?

ROBERT: They were made—they had plywood backings and then canvas stretched over that. But it had stretch under the canvas, like in a fan.

MARGARET: Like ribs?

ROBERT: Yeah, like ribs. And in between each rib there was stapled down so that the top concentric circle went in and out.

MARGARET: So at a harder angle. So it wasn’t—how can I describe that?

ROBERT: It wasn’t like a flat surface, but it was like—the bottom 2/3rds of it were flat, but the top –

MARGARET: But it’s not just concave like a smooth concave, it’s really angled.

ROBERT: Right. And they started out being just a simple division, and then—these also were encaustic and I started covering everything but the intersections were those points met. And drawing just a single line as a window. Then along the edges, the top edges, I would leave some of the colors so that you would know that actually a lot went on underneath that was similar to what you see here.
MARGARET: So almost like a window. No? Are you seeing those layers below?

ROBERT: Mhm.

MARGARET: Do you have any of these still?

ROBERT: I do.

MARGARET: Okay good. I do not quite understand. It’s interesting because some of these start to become almost—well, they look almost figurative in the slides. The imagery is starting to look a little figurative in a way.

ROBERT: Really organic. Almost like the opposite of the geometry that actually started the whole thing. Here’s’ some more of those.

MARGARET: So these are 78, 79. And you were really focusing on this format, on this shape.

ROBERT: Yeah.

MARGARET: When did you first show these works? Because the first thing I think I have in the files would be the Arts Magazine review from 1980. Is that the first time these were shown?

ROBERT: I think it was, yeah.

MARGARET: Okay. So moving into the 1980s: I have this first show, this was at Barbara Toll in October—well, the show wasn’t in October though. We’ll say fall. Was it in September?

ROBERT: It could have been.

MARGARET: Okay. The review is from October of 1980.

ROBERT: Yeah I’m not quite certain of the actual dates on that. I could find it though.

MARGARET: That’s interesting. You would have just started at the University of Delaware.

ROBERT: Right. About this time.

MARGARET: How did you become involved with Barbara Toll Fine Arts Gallery and did you show there?

ROBERT: Well, I had talked to Patterson Sims, do you know him?

MARGARET: I do. I met him once during the ICI Curatorial Intensive.

ROBERT: He was an assistant at Ivan Karp’s Gallery: O.K. Harris.

MARGARET: I didn’t know that.
ROBERT: I think—was it Patterson’s? I’m pretty sure it’s Patterson Sims who said, “Yeah, I like this work a lot, but we can’t show it.” And this is when a gallery would actually talk to you. But he said, “There’s a woman who’s opening a gallery and she’s interested in young artists.” And it was Barbara Toll. The first show I had with her was actually in her apartment on Prince Street. She was—I think at that point—working as a private dealer. And then the second show I did with her—she had opened a gallery on Greene Street.

MARGARET: And did you just have those two shows with her?

ROBERT: I did. And then I was in several group shows with her.

MARGARET: So that’s ‘80, ‘82.

ROBERT: Here’s the other convoluted thing: when I had that show at the Arch Street Gallery, a woman reviewed the work and that was—who was this?—Anne Fabbri Butera. She’s still writing. I think she’s in her 80s now.

MARGARET: Really? Is she still in Philadelphia?

ROBERT: Yes. And she reviewed my last show—she does an online review. She reviewed my show in ‘79 or whenever it was, at the Arch Street Gallery. But then about this time, her daughter who is also—she was an art historian, and she’s now head of the art department at a Catholic school in New Jersey, a university art college.

MARGARET: Not Ursinus—where is Ursinus? Is that in Philadelphia?

ROBERT: No.

MARGARET: Not Ursinus then

ROBERT: I’ll think of this. But anyway, so she did a book on pattern and decoration, on fans. The whole thing was about fans. She included these fan paintings in the book; that’s Virginia Fabbri Butera.

MARGARET: So this is her article in *Arts Magazine* May 1981, but she also published a catalog on pattern and decoration.

ROBERT: And the show traveled around the country I think. But you know, it was mother and daughter.

MARGARET: Oh interesting. So this is Virginia.

ROBERT: Hey Chris, where does Virginia Fabbri teach? You know, the Catholic school in New Jersey:

CHRIS: Oh, what’s the name of it? It’s not Seton Hall. I’m trying to think.
MARGARET: So no Joyce Kozloff in this exhibition?

ROBERT: The College is St Elizabeth.

MARGARET: Okay, so she’s there now?

ROBERT: Yes. But at the time she did this catalog she was working at a gallery in New York, I believe.

MARGARET: Okay. I don’t know if it would be in here or not. Unless it’s one of the galleries that’s credited. Ann Miller, Mercer, that one we’re missing, this is Lerner Heller. Were you showed as well?

ROBERT: Yes.

MARGARET: Okay. So Virginia Fabbri Butara was at Lerner Heller?

ROBERT: Yeah. You’ve done a lot of homework.

MARGARET: I have.

ROBERT: Here we are after the fan painting, and then they started getting more three-dimensional.

MARGARET: And much more organic.

ROBERT: Organic, yeah.

MARGARET: Wow, this is really—I’ve never seen this work.

ROBERT: No. And the shape itself would be—it would have struts like the fans, but they were shaped in curves at the top and the bottom, and then there was canvas stretched over them. The painting would actually bulge out at the top and then flatten at the middle and then bulge out again.

MARGARET: Okay, so concave and then flat and then concave out.

ROBERT: Yeah, and then on the edges it would also go from flatter to more raised.

MARGARET: And how deep? So these look to be a little small.

ROBERT: Some of them are really small. In fact these are out in the studio. See, you can see the shape.

MARGARET: So some of these are—so $P16$ is 7” deep?
ROBERT: Yeah, 72” by 48”, so 6’ by 4’, and 7” in the deepest part. And it was taking that same thing from the fan, so isolating a part of the under painting, where the single line—but here it was a continuous line or edge that would highlight the underpainting within the structure.

MARGARET: I’m realizing I have just misspoken, but I meant: these are convex, not concave, correct?

ROBERT: They go from convex to concave and then back to convex.

MARGARET: Okay, I just want to make sure that I said it correctly for that, okay.

ROBERT: And those are the paintings that I showed at the second show at Barbara Toll.

MARGARET: Okay. Because I saw this image and was pretty confused. This makes sense, this makes sense, I don’t know what’s happening there. This is completely different imagery than I’ve seen.

ROBERT: There it is.

MARGARET: Yes. Okay, so that’s P-125. Interesting. So no longer thinking—or still thinking—about pastry, segmenting—no? These look very different in intention.

ROBERT: Yeah. I think I was thinking about cross sections of paintings. Being able to see—these which start out with a structure that was—it would be like a circle, but these two parts would be folded in, and this would be the part that bulged out and bulged out.

And all of them had this kind of division, so it even included in a way those very early paintings from graduate school. But then after that was painted, then I go back with a single line and paint out everything else. So you could see that underlying structure. Does that make sense?

MARGARET: It does. So this is not just—the format, the shape—is not just visual. You were physically folding in those two outside halves of the circle.

ROBERT: They weren’t actually folded. But I was thinking of it as though it were folded.

MARGARET: Okay. So it’s not a physical construction, it is visual. The visual understanding of the shapes. Am I saying that correct?

ROBERT: Yes. Although there was a physical structure to the painting too.

MARGARET: As well. Okay. That makes sense. This will be good prep for thinking through your upcoming exhibition.

ROBERT: So after building these things, they were really elaborate and took a lot of time and again I’m going: “wait a minute, here we are right back where the pastry ones were, making sculptural things. There’s got to be some possibilities for a simple rectangle, right?”
I did these paintings that were rectangular. And this was also the time when Neo-Expressionism was big, and people like Julian Schnabel or big names, and I really don’t like this work. It was like, I did it and I spent a lot of time with it, but somehow it seemed like this really wasn’t what I wanted to be doing.

MARGARET: Okay. And these are flat. Flat, rectangular, very—

ROBERT: Encaustic.


ROBERT: Yeah.

MARGARET: Okay. Wow, these are interesting. So this is P-138 through about 156 that I’m looking at. Very different. But you worked in this way for a few years?

ROBERT: Yeah. Let’s see here—this is ‘84, ‘85, ‘86. And the other thing that happened is, they actually did start becoming more figurative.

MARGARET: Oh wow look at that.

ROBERT: Almost like vignettes of either figures or still lifes.

MARGARET: This is so interesting with this kind of draping. These kinds of forms.

ROBERT: Right. Like stage sets.

MARGARET: Yes. Wow.

ROBERT: And I did make some three-dimensional pieces at that point that were based on the kind of forms I was using in the paintings. And also I started making some furniture pieces that I had some of the same shapes in them.

MARGARET: That’s interesting. What kind of—do you have images of those?

CHRIS: Don’t you have that small table still?

ROBERT: Yeah.

MARGARET: Were these three-dimensional forms—not the furniture pieces, but the other forms—were they free-standing or wall-mounted?

ROBERT: Free-standing. And I did some that were wall-mounted.

MARGARET: So some of these are maybe more traditional furniture table pieces, but then what’s happening in this image?
ROBERT: This is—it’s almost like a table-top but on the wall. So it was more like a piece of sculpture.

MARGARET: Okay, but this leg resting—this foot resting on the floor?

ROBERT: Yeah. And then this was *papier-mâché* and the top of it was plaster. And this table actually went with this drawing.

MARGARET: That’s very figurative. I can’t help but think of still-life in some of these. Were you thinking that literally or was it—?

ROBERT: Well these paintings were kind of like still lifes to me. Like an artist’s palette and a head and this drapery, it was like swags. Yeah they were sort of still-life things.

MARGARET: And a lamp?

ROBERT: We actually still have the lamp too.

MARGARET: Oh really? Now where were you showing these? So this was ‘85.

ROBERT: The DCCA had a show called “*Art Furniture*”—“*Furniture is Art,*” something like that. I showed some of those pieces in that exhibit.

MARGARET: I had no idea.

ROBERT: This one—Steve Tanis had that. It’s like a coffee table.

MARGARET: How large is that?

ROBERT: It is about—pretty big.

MARGARET: Coffee table size. Okay.

ROBERT: If you talk to Steve, it’s in their living room.

MARGARET: Oh wow. But still painting at the same time?

ROBERT: Yeah. Always painting. I’m addicted to that.

MARGARET: So from this period—did you—so you’re again at that maybe not an in pass—but again you’re at that point of painting, sculpture, where do you go again?

ROBERT: Yeah. I’m still here in ‘86 with things that are—you know, I was looking at people, American painters like Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, I’m still fans of their work. So in some ways I think that these things were influenced by American abstraction, early abstraction.

MARGARET: Yes, I can see that.
ROBERT: I was doing a lot of smaller paintings at that point.

MARGARET: So these are only 12 by 16. Some are larger, but most are fairly small.

ROBERT: And then I think I keep flopping back and forth between things get really blown and then it’s “let’s simplify things.” So I started moving back to more simple just geometric shapes and bigger paintings.

MARGARET: So this is so interesting to see. So, back to those basic geometric forms. Ovals and things. Those basic geometric forms coming back in.

ROBERT: Yeah. And the paintings right before this, the head shape was kind of an oval shape, but this became more of like a geometric shape.

MARGARET: Right. Oh, wow. So this was ’88, ’87–’88.

ROBERT: And more of that up until the ‘90s.

MARGARET: Okay. So it’s really ‘89–’90, and that’s when—is this really the first time we start to see the incorporation of the star forms?

ROBERT: Right. Yeah. I’ll show you the first star painting.

MARGARET: I’m going to bring this with us. This is the first one? Oh and it’s shaped as well.

ROBERT: Yes. And it has nine sides.

MARGARET: Nine sides. What is a nine sided figure called?

ROBERT: A nonagon.

MARGARET: A nonagon?

ROBERT: Yeah, I think. And it’s what I was interested in, was something that was sort of circular. Something with more than four sides and could be divided up. So, that the structure really controlled the image in some ways. So you can see that it’s split in half, two sides. But the midpoints on each side were connected so that it became a star shape.

MARGARET: And this kind of—well I guess it’s both a parallelogram and a trapezoid, or a trapezoid in the interior.

ROBERT: Which is going from the inside points, skipping one, move to the next one, skipping, moving to the next one. So it’s sort of simple geometry. But I think for most I was really trying to keep them as simple as possible. As straightforward as I could make it and still have something that’s interesting to look at.
MARGARET: Do you know the year on this? What is the year on this piece?

ROBERT: It is 1991.

MARGARET: So this is P-233, 1991. Was this shown at Paul Cava? In Philadelphia?

ROBERT: Yes.

MARGARET: Okay. So this is the moment where now I am familiar with the imagery in your work. So that’s 1990, ‘91, 233, star, nine-sided. Have all of the stars been all nine pointed?

ROBERT: I think they were all nine pointed. And I was interested in uneven numbers. Lately I’ve become more interested in prime numbers.

MARGARET: Really? So the uneven numbers—is that because it can be divided equally? Or not even necessarily?

ROBERT: Uneven numbers because normally they couldn’t be divided equally.

MARGARET: Oh right.

ROBERT: You know, like on that painting. The division goes from one point, but to the middle of flat side. I didn’t want something that was like 8 or 6.

MARGARET: I was thinking more of like, so if you have 5, there’s this one point, and then it’s even on either side. But not necessarily?

ROBERT: Oh right, okay. No, I don’t think I was thinking of that. But I think this is the painting the Art Museum has.

MARGARET: Yes, it is. And that was –

ROBERT: ‘92.

MARGARET: Wait a minute. Let me just pull this up. Oh I lost it where is it? Yes. And this purchase was from the Paul Cava.

ROBERT: From Paul Cava, I believe.

MARGARET: It was. But you were in the ‘91 biennial?

ROBERT: Right.

MARGARET: Okay. But was this the type of work that was shown in the ‘91 Biennial? You know, I should have gone back; I could’ve pulled up what the work was.
ROBERT: I think it probably was. I wonder—this might have been the painting that was in the biennial.

MARGARET: P-232? Oh, so right before—

ROBERT: Although I’m not positive.

MARGARET: Okay, so I’ll check on that.

ROBERT: Phew.

MARGARET: I know. I think that that’s actually a good stopping point. Actually that’s a pretty perfect stopping point for thinking about the ‘70s and the ‘80s because that takes us up right to the beginning of the early 1990s and to this kind of shift in the work.

ROBERT: Right.

MARGARET: So, I’m wondering if now—well, we have two options. We could keep talking. I should leave here around quarter to five so I can go pick up Maura. So we can continue talking and try to get through your impression of some of your commercial and nonprofit spaces in Wilmington in the 1980s, or we could reschedule and talk about that.

[End of Audio]
[Duration: 66 minutes.]