Oral history interview with Julio daCunha, August 27, 2010

daCunha, Julio, born 1929
Painter

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JULIO: Up until about ’82 or ’83 the chronologic thing, and I didn’t know what to do with that, so I was talking to Steve [Ruszkowski] one day and I realized you were interested in pursuing different artists’ works and activities, you know, and I thought, well, if you’re interested in keeping all the material, I’m more than happy to give it to you.

MARGARET: Oh, that would be—

JULIO: It’s quite a lot. I mean, like, in folders. There’s some private correspondence, particularly when I was at the University of Delaware from different things that I did there. Just maybe also interesting, you know.

MARGARET: That would be wonderful to have. We really have been filling out our artist vertical file in the library as well as, of course, the object files in the collection as well, but let me just take a quick moment and say that—

JULIO: I don’t know how many pieces of my work the Delaware Museum has. I know that they had, yeah, a [inaudible] that I had gotten [inaudible] with. This is what they have?

MARGARET: Yeah, I actually went down and took admittedly very poor photographs because we’re just trying to go through the collection and taking pictures.

JULIO: [Inaudible] that was just a frame. This one, I don’t know how this one got in their hands.
MARGARET: That was—let’s see, what does it say?

JULIO: Twenty-five.

MARGARET: Let’s see. You know, I didn’t pull—

JULIO: I don’t think they have [inaudible] one.

MARGARET: I don’t think so. I don’t know if it’s in here. No, I didn’t see the credit line.

JULIO: It was at the bequest of Ms. Jane Gardner.

MARGARET: Yes, a lot came in with that gift.

JULIO: I don’t know how this one got in their hands either. These two were from Ms. Gardner.

MARGARET: That first one was as well?

JULIO: This one had—they used to have an annual oil and acrylic in the fall and a watercolor and graphic art in the spring, and on that spring on ’79 I got the first prize for that one. No, it was this one I think. One of those. One of those got the first prize, but I think that the [inaudible] had more than just one didn’t they?

MARGARET: And you know, actually, the first one came in from Mr. Sewell C. Biggs.

JULIO: Oh, this was from Mr. Biggs.

MARGARET: Yes, that’s what it was. That’s right, I just looked at that yesterday.

JULIO: Which Biggs? Sewell?

MARGARET: Sewell, um-hum.

JULIO: I don’t remember that at all.

MARGARET: But actually—

JULIO: The one of Richard Sutton, I thought that he had given two or three drawings along with that one, but I may be wrong.

MARGARET: I don’t think so. But—

JULIO: I thought he had a number from—well, anyway, they do have a number.

MARGARET: Oh yeah. Actually, why you’re looking at this first one I have a quick question for you because I was looking—as I’ve been going through I’ve of course been making updates in the object files and this one is listed as untitled, but I’m curious because his picture’s down in front and this one has a title with the caption.
JULIO: *Entanglement*, that’s what it should have been.

MARGARET: That’s the title, correct?

JULIO: That’s the title of it, *Entanglement*, yeah.

MARGARET: Good, good, good, so I’ll change that.

JULIO: Now, what I wanted to do—and maybe since you work there now and they have a new curator, a new Director or whatever, the last time I had talked to Rowland Elzea who was the curator for many years of painting, painting and sculpture now, [inaudible] curator would be, and one of the Directors that follows St. John, his name escapes me now. His name was—oh, he moved to Virginia from here.

MARGARET: I’m not sure.

JULIO: Well, at that time, this was ’76, I had a twenty-year retrospective at the Museum and there were no catalogues of that, but it was a little bit after this. This one was ’75, and that one was—

MARGARET: That was ’77.

JULIO: Oh, this is the retrospective?

MARGARET: That was this—

JULIO: Yeah, in that whole collection. You’re right, you’re right. There was a catalogue. Well, not a catalogue but a write-up, yeah.

MARGARET: And a full checklist as well in the back.

JULIO: What?

MARGARET: A full checklist as well.

JULIO: Of all the paintings, okay good. Yeah, I think I only have one copy of that. I think the Museum may have had a few leftovers because they were selling it, but they may still have it somewhere.

MARGARET: I bet probably in the archives.

JULIO: Anyway, the name escapes—the last—not the current one but the one before her—

MARGARET: Steve Bruni?

JULIO: Bruni. When Bruni was the Director I had talked to him about maybe having a 40 or 50 year retrospective and he was—he seemed to be very interested, but then he wrote me a letter that the—I think Elzea said we already had a 20 year retrospective, we cannot continue that kind
of thing, and he vetoed it. So I said, okay, fine, but now it’s going to be—it’s way over 50 years
that I’ve been here and painting and I gave up on that idea, but I thought that I still have about
maybe 200 paintings in storage of all the different periods, including the very first ones I did
when I was here in 1950, when I first arrived in Delaware in 1956.

So, I still have some of those paintings and I thought that the museum may be interested in
selecting maybe one from each of those periods and I’ll donate them to the collection of the
museum.

MARGARET: Oh goodness, well I would love to speak with my colleagues about that.

JULIO: So, that would be another reason why I wanted to talk to you and I thought that maybe
there’s interest in having maybe 15, 20 paintings because—

MARGARET: Because there are definitely—I mean, we have so—

JULIO: What you have is not quite representative of what I’m doing lately. [Inaudible] early
stage, you know.

MARGARET: Right, and one—

JULIO: I’ll give you some photographs of my work. They’re not very good but at least they’re
big enough and you can show them some of them. I still think I have them in my collection from
in storage and all of that is at—what’s the name of the storage company? It’s in New Castle.

MARGARET: At Bayshore?

JULIO: Huh?

MARGARET: Is it at Bayshore?

JULIO: No.

MARGARET: Hopkins and Sons.

JULIO: I don’t know that one.

Oh, it’s a huge place and they have them in a couple of large crates there, way up there so that
they don’t get humidity and all that. So, I’ve been tempted to go because since I brought them
from Columbia I haven’t really looked at them, so I don’t know if anything got damaged or in
what condition they are. I thought maybe, you know, when I go do it, it may be a good
opportunity for somebody to come and look at them and select a few.

MARGARET: Right, right, well I would certainly love to go with you and I imagine that Heather
Campbell Coyle, who is the curator of American Art would like to go as well. Well, I—
JULIO: I gave up on the idea of having a retrospective show because the Museum, like all museums, they’re probably scheduled for two or three years and I don’t even know if I’ll be around in two more years or three more years because my health is really not all that great. I’m not suffering from anything that is crucial at the moment, but you know, I’m 81 years old and you just never know if you’re going to wake up the next day and you’re in another world, you know?

MARGARET: Right, right.

JULIO: So, that’s why I gave up on that idea to do a retrospective but I thought it may be interesting for them to have a better representation of my work.

MARGARET: Exactly, exactly.

JULIO: I mean, include some of the newer things.

MARGARET: Oh, well that would be wonderful. Today, I was hoping that we could talk about a couple specific moments because as you can see I’ve done lots of research on your work already—

JULIO: You certainly have.

MARGARET: But in particular, I wanted to talk about, kind of, your arrival in Delaware, what the art community was like at that time, and then look at what the art community was like in kind of the late ‘70s. So, if you can maybe first talk about when you arrived in Delaware.

JULIO: Well, when I first arrived here it was in 1956 and the Delaware Museum was already in existence of course, but they used to have, as I said, two shows a year that were open to the local and other artists, you know. People could submit from Virginia or Maryland or wherever. I think they were judged exhibitions and they usually had a purchase price and two or three honorable mentions. The art scene at that time was really meager. It was practically non-existent. There was no—I can’t remember a single gallery in Wilmington other than the Museum and the university gallery.

We had a gallery then in the second floor of Memorial Hall and it was pretty large, and a faculty member was in charge of putting up monthly exhibitions of travelling shows from the Museum of Modern Art, The Smithsonian from New York, from the Whitney, and I run that for about three and a half years. Not only did I have to get the shows, but I had to hang them and that was a major, major job. As a matter of fact, for two or three years I didn’t know what it was to have a free weekend. I just worked at the gallery setting up—because it was big. That gallery was as big as two or three of a large one here, the whole second floor of Memorial Hall.

Yeah, it was very big, and believe it or not we had very good attendance from the community and even from Wilmington; people came around. But, when I had my 20 year retrospective at the Delaware Museum it was—people had never seen anything like it and Carspecken-Scott [Gallery]—because he remembers very well how impressed he was with the fact that, oh my
God, there is a contemporary artist in Delaware. So, I was one of the very first ones to really bring in the—well, first of all the Cranbrook tradition because I had just graduated from Cranbrook [Academy of Art] and I came here. For about the first six years I was here, Rowland Elzea, his wife—what’s her name?

MARGARET: Betty?

JULIO: No, long before Betty.

MARGARET: Oh, right before Betty.

JULIO: And she was a very good painter.

MARGARET: Oh, that’s right.

JULIO: And Bernie—

MARGARET: Bernie Felch?

JULIO: Bernie Felch and myself, we were the big contemporary artists of the day, so it was—what was her name? Rowland and—her name escapes me, but anyway it was Rowland’s wife at the time and she married—they divorced around the mid-70s and she married the chair of the art department at Yale University and she became very well known in [inaudible]. So anyway, that was it. It was Rowland, his wife, Bernie, myself—who else did I—well, I think Mr. Ed Lopper was already here teaching.

MARGARET: Okay, and how was his work viewed? Was he viewed as contemporary?

JULIO: He was viewed by the public as strange. That’s how they viewed it. They viewed it as strange. Yeah, I think he was viewed as contemporary, yeah, because we were all pretty much doing abstract art at the time or semi abstract with contemporary tendency, but because—even at that time the Wyeths were already pretty much on the scene and everybody thought nothing of Andrew Wyeth and his father. That was the only thing that really counted, the Brandywine tradition.

MARGARET: So, in those annual exhibitions, I mean, what were they like?

JULIO: Work came from other states, so it was good, yeah. And Bruce St. John was very much behind and wrong. I didn’t [inaudible] and making it known that we were having those shows to be shown. Yeah, we used to have quite a number of people participating, but not all of them were Delawareans. Then, of course, little by little we started to grow and grow and grow and by the late—you asked me about the late ‘70s?

MARGARET: The late ‘70s—

JULIO: By the late ‘70s there was a lot more interest and that’s when I had the show, I believe it was ’76, ’75, somewhere around there, and that show had over 100 works in it. I think today it
would have made quite an impact but back then the art department had grown, okay, and we were [inaudible]. I was chair of the department from ’66 to ’69, for three years. I didn’t want the chairmanship but it fell in my lap and I did it for three years. I was able to get an increment and double the faculty in three years, so we had Larry Scholder, Victor Spinski, Gus Sermas.

I brought all of them here to Delaware. Then, by 1970 the department already had 12 or 13 people and we had Susan Tesson and William Reader and Victoria, so all of them—you know, all of us were educating a new generation of Delaware artists in a contemporary language.

MARGARET: Right. Now, tell me—

JULIO: By the late ’70s our students were already participating.

MARGARET: In that. Now tell me, when you’re talking about the growth of the faculty, it says—I was looking in the 1986 catalogue and it said that Alan Gowans, is that—

JULIO: Alice?

MARGARET: Alan Gowans?

JULIO: Alan Gowans.

MARGARET: Gowans, that he wanted to engage a Cranbrook graduate to replace one that was leaving the UD faculty. So, had he gone to—

JULIO: That’s how I came.

MARGARET: So was there already a connection?

JULIO: That was in ’56.

MARGARET: That was in ’56.

JULIO: That was in ’56. What happened was that there was a faculty that was handled. The art department was Ms. Bailey, Mrs. Alan, Ms. Garner, that was it. Oh, and John whatever his last name was. Four, four people, that was it, and it was art and art history because Ms. Bailey and Ms. Garner taught art history courses, you know, so I came in ’56 and I replaced No. 4. Now, instantly, at the same time Gowans was appointed instead of [inaudible] and Alan Gowans was appointed Chair of our [inaudible]. We were combined [inaudible], you see. From 1976 until 1966 we were art and art history. Now, in those ten years we added one art education [inaudible] and one art historian, which was Wayne [inaudible].

So, in ten years we only had Gowans, Margaret Alan, Ms. Garner, myself, and the [inaudible] art education, which was [inaudible] and the two artists. From 1956 to 1966 the department had to grown to seven people and we used to teach art education program, home economics program—the women in home economics had to have two or three art courses and the education majors had to take two, three, or four art major courses, so when I took over the chairmanship—
okay, we’re going to split the departments up. Gowans and [inaudible] went to art history and Hopper came at that time too, and here I was with Mrs. Alan and Ms. Garner and Jimmy [inaudible], and myself.

Couldn’t do it any longer, so I was able to turn the administrations arm and say we need more people. We cannot satisfy our programs with what we have, so in those three years that I was chair I was able to add four new positions to the department. Then, in 1970 George Nocito came as chair and he also realized that he [inaudible] so he hired three more, so within a period of five years we had doubled, tripled—not quite triple, but doubled the faculty.

MARGARET: Right. So now, why or how this strong connection to Cranbrook?

JULIO: Oh, because that fellow who I replaced was from Cranbrook and people had liked—the students had liked him a lot, so when Gowans was appointed chair of the art and art history department [inaudible] at the end of the spring term [inaudible] want to work for anybody else. She [inaudible], so Gowans was given a whole bunch of applications from people who wanted a job in the art department and he looked first of all to see if there was anyone from Cranbrook and mine was there, which I had applied early in the spring of ’56 and they had told me no, they weren’t anticipating any vacancies.

So, he was teaching a summer course at the University of Michigan and I was at Cranbrook which is 50 miles from [inaudible]. So, he called me the first week in June. He called me one day and he says are you so and so? I said, yes. He said, I have a vacancy in my department at the University of Delaware and I said where is that? He says, well, he explained to me. I said, oh, yeah, yeah, I remember, I applied there because it was close to New York. So he said could you come for lunch tomorrow at Ann Arbor? I said, yes, I don’t have a car though but I think I can find a way to get there, so I’ll meet you there tomorrow. He said I would like to meet you, and I said okay, I said all right.

So, the next day one of my classmates took me to Ann Arbor and I met Gowans. We had lunch and we talked about the weather, this and that and the other, life, and the University of Delaware was hardly ever mentioned [inaudible]. Nothing. He didn’t ask me about my art. At the end of the lunch he says I really like you and I think we can work together, would you like to have the job? I said, look, you got me at a good time because I have a contract from the University of Oregon to go there and teach drawing and watercolor painting to the architects in the architectural school because my first degree was in architecture. I was going to sign it and send it back last night when you called me yesterday, so I haven’t signed it. He said, don’t sign it. You come to Delaware.

I said, okay, just because it’s close to New York I’m going to Delaware, so that’s how I landed here. Then, once I was here, one day we were looking for a painter and this fellow came to the door of the residential hall and he says my name is Steve Tanis and I just graduated from Cranbrook and I understand that you have somebody here from Cranbrook. I said, yeah, that’s me. “I’m looking for a job.” I said, “do you have your slides?””, and he said “yeah,” so we looked at them and he was so much better than any of our candidates that we were looking at and we gave him the job.
Then, with Steve came [Larry] Holmes and with Holmes came Bob Straight and now they have a whole bunch of them from Cranbrook. So we have—I was the first one—no, excuse me, John whatever his name was was the first one, and then from then on this kind of tradition started in the art department. Now, the funny thing with that, in 1976 I left the art department and I went to the honors program and I didn’t teach any [inaudible] art anymore. I was teaching all [inaudible] courses in art history and cinema and literature, which were two of my favorite topics at the time and now. And that’s how that happened. I [inaudible] the department, but Steve was already there.

MARGARET: Okay, so in ’76—

JULIO: In ’76 I went to the honors program.

MARGARET: In ’76 you went to honors, okay, and then when did you formally retire from the University of Delaware?

JULIO: In 1994.

MARGARET: 1994, okay.

JULIO: [Inaudible] 40 years.

MARGARET: Wow, that’s incredible. So, you said that into the ‘70s and into the mid and then into the late ‘70s that the scene, the contemporary art scene in Wilmington—

JULIO: Was much better.

MARGARET: Was much better. Now, I also—

JULIO: But by that time Robbie Jones had started this Fifth Street Gallery.

MARGARET: So, that’s what I want to talk to you—I definitely want to talk to you a lot about—I’ll tell you, Stephen [Ruszkowski] and I had the chance to go into the Queen Theater before they started demo, and so Stephen had taken his camera, we’re looking, and we’re walking up the stairs and it says Gallery, Gallery, Gallery, and of course that sparked my interest, what was happening here, so I would love it if you could talk about Fifth Street, Rob Jones, all of that.

JULIO: Well, you know, Robbie Jones was not a good artist, although he could have been a very good artist, but he was very undisciplined.

MARGARET: And he was a student of yours?

JULIO: He was a student at Delaware, and he started drawing and painting and he was pretty good at drawing and could have done really something, but then he fell into the hands of Joe Moss and decided to go for conceptual sculpture and conceptual art and [inaudible]. It became—in his case it became total Mickey Mouse, you know. But, he never graduated from
Delaware because—you know why? Because he couldn’t pass his language requirement and in those days a Bachelor of Arts degree you had to have a language requirement of a minimum of two years and he couldn’t pass it, so he never graduated from the University of Delaware, although he told everyone that he had. He never did.

He never graduated from Delaware, but he and another two people from the art department—I can’t remember their names, opened the Fifth Street Gallery. Within a year the other two disappear, they didn’t want any part of it. The problem with Robbie was that he was totally undisciplined, he had no knowledge of business whatsoever, and he thought that having a gallery would be just having parties and openings. The problem was that we lent him a lot of support because several of us on the faculty of the university had shows there, although the gallery was not known yet and he hadn’t really made a name for it, you know, and yet we helped him with shows. As a matter of fact, this show was shown at the Fifth Street Gallery. And then he closed because he wasn’t making any money. He owed all of us—he owed money because we had sold things and he never paid us back. Like, in my case, I think he had sold maybe seven or eight of my paintings and I never saw a cent of that money. Then, he moved to New York and within, let’s see, he moved to New York in the very early ‘80s, ’80 or ’81. By ’82 or ’83 he was one of the first AIDS victims. He died. He died very young. He was only about—I think Robbie was 32 or 33 when he died, yeah.

MARGARET: Okay, so very young.

JULIO: He was a very [inaudible] man kind of individual and there was a charm to him, but he was just so undisciplined in everything, in his relationships with people, in his way of handling the business, in his art, you know. It was a shame. He could have been—he could have had as good of an establishment as Carspecken-Scott and Hardcastle or whatever. He had all the opportunities because he had been our student and we had lent him a lot of support, but when he started to disappoint everybody we said, ah, okay, not Robbie, no. It was very sad.

MARGARET: That’s a shame. So, who else—

JULIO: The gallery was—if you enter through Fifth Street on a metal stairs you ended up in the gallery on the second or third floor and it was pretty big. It really was quite big, you know.

MARGARET: So who else showed work at the gallery?

JULIO: From the faculty, I did. Who else showed? He had a few group showings and I think some of the people helped by submitting stuff to his shows, but I don’t remember any other faculty member that had a one man show like I did. I took the chance of doing it and I regretted it afterwards, but anyway. It was okay. I still had him a little bit under my thumb at that time when I showed the work, but within a couple of years he just—you know, it was just a bad joke, that’s what it was, yeah.

MARGARET: That’s a shame.
JULIO: It’s a shame because he was very talented in some ways. He had a lot of talent and he was a very creative person, but he was never able to channel that creativity, you know. It was just—he let his private life interfere too much with his professional life and those two just don’t mix.

MARGARET: Right, right. So, Fifth Street and then Hardcastle and Carspecken-Scott were both open at that time—

JULIO: At that time, yeah.

MARGARET: As well, so talk about the type of work that they were showing in the late ‘70s.

JULIO: Well, Hardcastle was probably the most conservative of the galleries. [Fred] Carspecken, right from the start tried to incorporate more contemporary art in the things that he showed. In truth, [inaudible], but there were those two.

MARGARET: I read—

JULIO: But see, there were some galleries—there was—my first show in Delaware was in 1961 and that was at the—


JULIO: At the Studio Gallery, but that Studio Gallery was run by a painter, I don’t remember his name, but the Studio Gallery was on Washington Street, I think. Isn’t that the one that runs right by Wilmington Hospital?

MARGARET: Um-hum, over the bridge.

JULIO: Yeah, so on Washington Street, very nicely centrally located, but again, it showed only contemporary art and he only lasted in business two years, yeah.

MARGARET: And then, what about—

JULIO: At the Studio Gallery, yeah.

MARGARET: And then—oh wait—

JULIO: See, 1962. Annual Regional Exhibition first prize in painting and that was the purchase at the Delaware Museum. So, in ’62—and that show had been running for a number of years. It was original show. It wasn’t just Delaware, and that was thanks to Rowland and to St. John.

MARGARET: Bruce St. John.

JULIO: Yeah, Bruce St. John.

MARGARET: As well. Now tell me—I’m trying to—
JULIO: Now, in ’63 I started to show at the Zegri Gallery in New York and I had about six shows with them in New York City.

MARGARET: And then they closed in ’71?

JULIO: Yeah, because he died. Armando Zegri which was the owner, he died of liver cancer in a matter of months, and here I was left 42, 41 years old with no gallery in New York. I tried a number of galleries and I couldn’t get anywhere for about two years until finally I got the Pleiades Gallery and I had I think three or four shows with them, yeah. Then, they had a beautiful gallery in SoHo and we run it ourselves, the artists. There were, like, 20 of us and we run the gallery. It was a very, very nice gallery and it showed nothing but contemporary art work.

Then, in about—after I joined, about three years later, finances got really bad and we couldn’t afford to continue to pay the costs of the rent and they reduced it to something maybe maximum twice the size of this studio and that was no good for 20 people. So, I withdrew from it.

MARGARET: Were there any other Delaware connections to that gallery?

JULIO: Only Charles Rowe because I had him invited to it, yeah. I pushed him in, and then both of us retired pretty much at the same time, yeah. It wasn’t worth—see, if you don’t live in New York you’re never going to make it real famous there. You have to have a studio there, you have to give cocktail parties, you have to invite the critics, you have to invite other artists, you have to invite some money people, and then you begin to have a name. One of the reasons why Steve Tanis had been so lucky with New York is because his sister-in-law has been running a gallery for years there so the connection is a family connection.

Not that his painting is no good, but it’s just a matter of connections and contacts. I don’t know if he—he hasn’t had a show there for a while now. I think the last one was three or four years ago maybe. He’s not well. He’s [inaudible] practically since birth from—what is this thing where they have to use insulin?

MARGARET: Oh, diabetes?

JULIO: Oh yeah, diabetes, and when they get to be his age, you know, diabetic people, they begin to really settle down. I don’t know, I haven’t seen Stephen for about four years. The last time I saw him was here and he didn’t look all that great and [inaudible]. So anyway, the question—I forgot.

MARGARET: I have—

JULIO: Oh, what other artist had shown.

MARGARET: Had shown, right, and then, but wait, before—the Warehouse Gallery. The Warehouse Gallery in Arden.

JULIO: Oh yeah.
MARGARET: What was that like?

JULIO: You know something, as long as I have lived in Wilmington I have never had contact with Arden. I don’t even know my way into Arden. I don’t know where Arden is. Isn’t that funny? I don’t know anything about Arden.

MARGARET: I don’t either, really.


MARGARET: So, but you had a show there in 1960 at the Warehouse Gallery—now, where did I find this? Let’s see.

JULIO: Oh yeah, it was a very small show. Yeah, very, very small show.

MARGARET: Very small show.

JULIO: Because it wasn’t in a gallery. The gallery used to be at the [inaudible] Theater.

MARGARET: Within the theater?

JULIO: In the theater, yeah.

MARGARET: Oh, okay.

JULIO: It wasn’t in the theater proper, but it was, like, somewhere connected with it. It was part of—I had forgotten about that. I had a show at the Rehoboth Art League, which was pretty big. I must have had 65 or 70 paintings there.

MARGARET: When was that?

JULIO: In ’86, for the whole summer, and didn’t even list that in my [inaudible].

MARGARET: Okay. So, had you seen any other shows at the Warehouse Gallery? Do you—

JULIO: No, I don’t think that exists anymore.

MARGARET: Okay. I don’t think so either.

JULIO: No, I think that was given up way back there, probably mid ‘70s or something like that. See, the problem with galleries in Delaware is that other than established ones, there’s no room for new galleries because the economy has been so shaky for years and people cannot sustain the gallery unless they have sales.

MARGARET: Right. So, I don’t have that you exhibited any work at these next two galleries, but did you know—I mean, Blue Streak is still around, though it seems like it’s very different—
JULIO: Yeah, I showed there once.

MARGARET: Oh, you did? When was—do you remember when you—

JULIO: I showed there in—I showed [inaudible] in 1996 and then in—no, it was later than that, in 2001 or 2002 I show at this—

MARGARET: At Blue Streak [Gallery], okay. And from what I understand, early on it had kind of good contemporary craft. Is that—

JULIO: At Blue Streak?

MARGARET: At Blue Streak?

JULIO: Yeah, it started mostly as a craft gallery and then little by little she started to incorporate paintings.

MARGARET: Right, okay.

JULIO: And then they left the one side just for exhibitions.

MARGARET: Right. Now what about—

JULIO: She [Ellen Bartholomaus] does a pretty good job there.

MARGARET: She does.

JULIO: She doesn’t sell much either, but I guess she had the business next door, you know, so she can keep on going. Also, I think her husband is a well-known lawyer and that probably helps to support the whole thing.

MARGARET: Yes, I worked for her for about a year recently and I think she said at one point that she almost considered the exhibition side of the store a non-profit, but she really meant it to have the opportunity to show—

JULIO: I had a show there for a month. It was the Salome series. There were about 15 or 18 paintings and it was—I had put a lot of work into that, but people didn’t react at all to it and it was open for a month. I didn’t sell one piece, not even a drawing. Nothing. I felt terrible because usually—like, in this show that I just had here, I didn’t want to sell anything but I could have sold, easily, four or five pieces because people were literally asking me, please, could you give me a price on that one? I said, no, I can’t.

MARGARET: Oh, it’s beautiful work.

JULIO: I know. I just couldn’t for many reasons, because they want a painting for $500.00 or $1,000.00 at the most, and if you say $5,000.00 they immediately say, oh, I’m sorry, I cannot afford it. I can understand that now with the economy the way that it is, but I thought, I’m not
going to let them go for $500.00. The framing alone cost me $300.00. You know, this frame for that show, which is there, cost me $6,000.00. $6,000.00 for the frame, so how can I sell paintings for $500.00. No way.

MARGARET: Right. Do you think that is—has that been typical of the Wilmington community, this kind of—

JULIO: Yeah, pretty much because the only ones that are selling now—well, for thousands and thousands is the Wyeth’s. Of course, Andrew is dead now and the prices have really gone up sky high, but Jamie, if he sells you couldn’t touch his work for hundreds of thousands. But the only other artist that still makes good money on her paintings in Mary Page Evans. She does get pretty good prices for her work, yeah, but she’s been around for quite a while too, you know. She’s been painting since the mid ‘70s.

MARGARET: As well. Okay.

JULIO: Yeah, and she’s very dedicated to her work, very dedicated.

MARGARET: Right. Now tell me—let’s see, two other galleries I wanted to ask you about, Somerville-Manning [Gallery]—

JULIO: Yeah, that was a good show there. They have very good shows, but I’m not familiar with any of them and I don’t go there hardly ever. It’s not a place that I go too regularly like I do Carspecken and Blue Streak, yeah.

MARGARET: Blue Streak, right. And the other is when Susan Isaacs had a gallery.

JULIO: Oh yeah, that’s right. You know, I never saw her gallery.

MARGARET: Oh, really?

JULIO: No, I never did. She did have a gallery, right. Well, she was a—she graduated from Delaware, I think so.

MARGARET: That would have been in the mid to late ‘80s to early ‘90s, I think, so maybe—I think she said it was open for about six years, right about six years.

JULIO: No, I never saw it.

MARGARET: ‘Cause, from some of the research I’ve been doing it seemed like that was another gallery that attempted to establish itself as a contemporary art gallery in downtown Wilmington, and then met with similar problems.

JULIO: If I did, it escapes—if I did see it, it escapes my memory, but I’m almost sure I didn’t. Where was it, do you know?

MARGARET: Orange—no—
JULIO: Orange Street?

MARGARET: Maybe Orange Street, Shipley?

JULIO: I don’t remember. I don’t remember at all. You know, I was so busy teaching at the University of Delaware and trying to do my work, because after I retired from the department in ’77/’76 I stayed with the honors program, but we still had to—we still had to publish and I had to have shows, and I continued to have shows and work as much as I could. But, teaching lecture courses you have to put in a lot of time to doing research, you know, and getting—it was very exciting for me to do it, I enjoyed it a lot, but it took a lot of my time. So, I didn’t go out that much. I was in my studio or the university, that’s it.

MARGARET: Right. That being said though, did you—were you at all involved with what was happening with the formation of the DCCA?

JULIO: No, no, not at all. I knew the place and I used to go up to the shows. What happened was that Gus and I, Gus Sermas had this studio on Franklin Street—what’s the name of it?

MARGARET: The—

JULIO: The Pyle House Studio. We had a studio there the two of us shared.

MARGARET: Oh, you did?

JULIO: Huge, was about four times this place here.

MARGARET: When was that?

JULIO: That was in 1996 to about 2000. For about four or five years we shared that studio because he used to come at night and I used to come mostly during the day. After I retired—so it must have been ’95/’96, yeah—and then I had it all by myself for a couple years. Then, I heard about this one and—because of Ken. Ken and Bernie Felch and I used to—and a number of other people, artists, we used to meet every week, twice a week at the Absalom Jones School for figurative drawing and sculpture. Bernie taught that group and we did a couple of years of sculpture and about four or five years of figurative drawing. Yeah, the Absalom Jones School Program.

MARGARET: And Bernie taught—

JULIO: And then one day I bumped into Ken at the farmer’s market for lunch. I don’t know why I went there. Someone named it and I said, oh, I’m going to come take a look and I bumped into him and he said we have a new building. I said, do you have a studio [inaudible]? He said, well, I think there are a couple right now, so I came and talked to Helen and she showed me a studio upstairs. I cancelled the one on Franklin Street and came over here.

MARGARET: And moved here. Now, had you known Ken before?
JULIO: Yeah, Kenny and I and Bernie used to have the Absalom Jones, and before that, we had a little group of four of us that got in this lady’s house on Route 7 and we used to go do our drawing at least once a week. We hired a model, we paid the model, and the four of us did figurative drawing for years, for years and years.

MARGARET: So wait, that would have been you, Ken, Bernie, and who else?

JULIO: Mary Page [Evans] was part of our group for a while, a couple of the ladies that run that Pyle Studio. I don’t remember their names, but they were part of that when we went to [inaudible] Street, and Mary Reilly, very nice woman who died a couple years ago. She was a good watercolorist. I loved to do the drawing class. She was faithful to it. Well, that was the main core of the group. The others came and went.

MARGARET: Okay. Now, tell me, did you—I’m assuming—I think that you know Margo Allman?

JULIO: Oh yeah, Margo, yeah.

MARGARET: I remember—

JULIO: I think I was her first teacher in 1956. I taught an extension class at night—I think it was ‘56/’57 and she was one of my students there. She was just a young girl, newly married, and she took a sculpture class with me.

MARGARET: Oh, wow.

JULIO: So, I’ve known Margo minimum, as I knew Bernie, since 1959 for sure [inaudible].

MARGARET: As well.

JULIO: We used to go into [inaudible]. They were Germans that had come to this country right after the war, and he was a professor of chemical engineering and she was a very good pianist. He was, too, and they used to have two grand pianos in their living room and every Saturday night the Elzea’s, Bernie, and myself would go there for concerts. For years and years we did that, yeah.

MARGARET: Interesting.

JULIO: I mean, everything was in a very minimal scale because that was a culture of [inaudible] at that time, you know. Other than the Wyeth name, you know, and the Brandywine School. I think [inaudible] Wilmington maybe and in art because maybe there were other groups, but in Newark it was all non-existent. Nothing.

MARGARET: So tell me, how do you compare that history to today?

JULIO: The what?
MARGARET: That history to what’s happening today?

JULIO: Art history?

MARGARET: Oh no, the kind of history, that tradition of being a bit of a cultural desert to today? Have you seen any changes or—

JULIO: Well, it’s hard to tell, you know. I think there is a group of high society people that have been—I formed a committee in the middle ‘80s to help the arts and the humanities at the University of Delaware, and I was lucky that I knew Frolic well and some of the DuPont’s and some of the blue bloods of Delaware, and I was able to invite five or six of them to be part of this committee. Then the dean of our college, being [inaudible], got wind of what was going on and she expanded it so that we had art history, music, art—let’s see, art history, music, art, and there were a few connections with the English and the philosophy department and created this committee under art, the humanities.

It became quite the thing with the higher, you know, echelon society here in Delaware. We had wonderful concerts with audiences of 100 to 150 people, black ties, and big dinners. Even some like Frolic Weymouth and people like that participated, very much into that, and it kind of made them aware. But as soon as that committee was closed, when those had retired from the university and the university grew in such a way, they took over and they didn’t really continue it. We have continued to have the music department, but just the music, yeah.

MARGARET: So, does it seem like that kind of cultivation is really—

JULIO: That kind of cultivation helped a lot for a while. And I think that, you know, people make an effort now to—they make more of an effort to go to shows and to go to the theater, but the theater has always been fairly good because—what they call the DuPont Theater now, which has been running ever since I came here. They always put on Off Broadway plays, you know. But, in the art, Carspecken is very well connected with all of this blue blood scene and I think a lot of them are his customers that keep it running. The same with Hardcastle, if it wasn’t for Mrs. Draper, no excuse me, that is Mrs. [Wilhelmina Wemyss Laird] Craven, who was married to DuPonts, that gallery would have closed long ago.

She used to come and buy 50-60 paintings all at once and distributed them in all of the hospitals in Delaware. She would just buy a quantity. Of course, her taste was very conservative, but still, it kept the gallery running. I mean, it was the best customer you could ever have because every six, seven months she would come buy 25, 30, 40 paintings and then put them in rooms in the hospital, yeah.

MARGARET: Like, decorate—

JULIO: [Inaudible].

MARGARET: That’s good support. That’s very good support. Wow. So, we’re over an hour already so I feel like I should probably stop this for today.
JULIO: Yeah, we can continue. What I’m going to do is I’m going to bring a couple of those books and I’m going to bring you a whole pack of photographs that you can show them if you want to and if you think they’re interested then we can come to the storage place and put them out and let them choose—

*End of audio*

*Duration: 62 minutes*