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OH 810

Full transcript of an interview with

MARJORIE HANN

on 30 January & 12 February 2007

by Robert Hannaford

Recording available on CD

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 810

Interview with Marjorie Hann recorded by Robert Hannaford on the 30th January and 12th February 2007 for the State Library of South Australia Oral History Collection.

DISK 1 OF 3

ROBERT HANNAFORD [RH]: You should test it, shouldn't you?

BRENTON HANN [BH]: I have. And we're away. This is an interview with Marjorie Hann by Robert Hannaford on the 30th January 2007 at Marjorie's home at Rosslyn Park. Also present is Marjorie's son, Brenton Hann.

Well, you can chip in if you want to. You might want to ask a few questions yourself about – – –.

BH: Yes.

RH: That's a good idea. Okay. Well, shall we start?

I'd rather forget about it. Just talk to you.

RH: Okay. Well, I've got to apologise for my voice.

Your voice sounds perfectly natural to me.

RH: It's a bit croaky. Anyway, Marjorie, I'd like to concentrate this interview on your art experiences and art work, of course, rather than just your life, which I imagine somebody else has had plenty of – you've been 'done' before. So my experience of you is in the last ten or twenty years, and you've written me letters and proven to me that you're an artist – and I've seen your work, of course – of great importance; and the way you speak of art. So I'd like to ask you a few questions about your own artistic career, your background. So could we start there? Were you always an artist as a child?

No. Well, I suppose I was in a way, but I was really influenced by a woman who had become quite well-known – in fact, I think she's represented in the Art Gallery in Canberra – her name was May Voke, and I knew her when I was six and she was twelve. And she lived near my grandmother, and when I used to visit my grandmother sometimes May was there with her mother. And May

used to draw fairies. (laughs) They were beautifully drawn, and I used to goggle at them because they were so beautifully done and I thought, 'If there is one thing I want to draw in my life it's fairies.' (laughs) So that was my first interest in that kind of thing.

And when I went to school, in those days the children used to have autograph books and they used to be asked to write something in the autograph book, and they used to say to me, 'Draw me a fairy.' So I used to draw fairies for them. And there was one girl there who became a great friend of mine, her name was Jean Wilkie, and I didn't know but her father was a very well-known artist and he was the teacher of Life at the School of Art when it used to be on North Terrace in the old Exhibition Building. And Jean and I used to live fairly near to one another – this is when I was about, I suppose, thirteen, twelve or thirteen. And one day we were walking home from school together and she said, 'Dad's just had a new studio built. Would you like to have a look at it?' I didn't even know what a studio was. So we went into this house and there was this great big room, and when I went inside there was a raised dais at one end and an easel on it with a marvellous painting of Jean. It was absolutely beautiful. He painted in the style of Sir Henry Raeburn. In fact, he came from Melbourne and he was known there as 'the Raeburn of Melbourne'.

RH: A Tonalist, in other words.

Yes, he was. And he was a soft-edge artist, though. He didn't get a sharp edge to anything, it was all soft and muted. But it was beautifully done, and I looked at it and at that moment fairies flew out of the window. (laughter) I thought, 'What I want to do is to paint portraits like this man.' So when I left school I said to my father, 'I want to go to the School of Art and learn from Leslie Wilkie.' And my father was very much against it. He said artists were a wild lot and I would come to a sticky end! (laughter) Anyway, my mother took pity on me and after staying home for a couple of years and learning how to cook and sew and all those boring things she finally talked my father round, into letting me go to the Art School.

And of course I had no idea what I had to do when I got there because I'd learned art seriously. We had an art teacher at the school where I went to,

which was then known as PGC[1], but we didn't really learn the fundamentals of art, we just copied things. Anyway, when I went to the Art School I said I wanted to learn to Leslie Wilkie and they said, 'You've got to be joking. You can't learn from him until you've learned Still Life and Antique.' And I didn't know what Still Life and Antique was. Anyway, I went into the Antique class and I think I had a teacher called Mrs Walicek.

RH: Oh, yes.

She was pretty well-known. She was a very good teacher, but she had –

RH: I think she taught Ivor.

– yes, she did. She was on the staff there, because the School of Art in those days had a sort of rudimentary staff of teachers, but they also employed artists who were by contract, used to come and teach, and you got a very wide example of different types of art because of that; and except for Leslie Wilkie, who was also the Curator of the Art Gallery and he was the leading Life Art teacher there. But I had to go to (laughs) Mrs Walicek first and learn how to draw from all these plaster casts and everything. She had a (laughs) habit of repeating herself, which became a sort of watch-word amongst the students: she'd come along and look at your work and she'd say, 'It's coming nicely, dear. I said, it's coming nicely.' And she always repeated herself like that until it became a joke that we used to say, 'It's coming nicely,' twice, to one another.

But there were a number of teachers there who were very good. Tom Bone was one – have you heard of him?

RH: No, I haven't.

Well, he was a watercolourist and he was an Impressionist watercolourist and very good, I had the good fortune to learn from him. And there was a man who was (laughs) a very good etcher. He was Malcolm Helsby and he came from Yorkshire, and I learnt etching from him and I can remember him saying, 'You poot it in a bath of ah-sid, and when it starts to boobble you tickle it with a

[1] PGC – Presbyterian Girls' College.

feather.' (laughter) But he was very good, and I think there's a few examples in our art gallery of his work.

RH: So you learnt printmaking as well.

Yes, in those days. I didn't go very far with it but I wish I had. Because the trouble was I wanted so much to learn from Leslie Wilkie that I didn't want to be a full-time student, which was a great pity. I wish I had been, because there are a lot of things that I should have learned that I didn't learn at that time. I only learned about seven subjects out of fifteen.

But, at any rate, after I'd been allowed to learn from Leslie Wilkie, I'd only been with him six months and he had an illness and had to be operated on, and they sent him home too soon. The wound had not healed properly and septicaemia set in and he died. So then I thought, 'Now, I've only been learning six months from this wonderful man. Who am I going to have as a teacher?' Well, the only person that they thought would be suitable for teaching was Marie Tuck. Now, I'm going to say something here I hope I won't get sued for. Marie Tuck, when she was in France, did some beautiful work, lovely work. And I can remember thinking, 'She'll be wonderful.' But whether it was because she had her tutors looking over her shoulder all the time I don't know, but she was not a good Life teacher. I wasn't learning anything from her at all that was getting me anywhere. And I was getting in despair about this and I said to somebody, 'I'll never learn anything from this woman. I know she is a good artist, but she's not a Life teacher.' They said, 'Well, cheer up. Ivor Hele's coming back.' And I said, 'Who's Ivor Hele?' And they said, 'He's our star pupil.' And I said, 'If he's our star pupil, why isn't he here?' And they said, 'Oh, he's gone abroad to study in France and Italy and all the rest of it.' And I said, 'How old is he?' And they said, 'Twenty-three.' Well, at that time I was nineteen and I thought, 'Twenty-three isn't going to teach me much! He's only a boy.' And of course when he came back we were absolutely stunned. He was marvellous. We were not expecting anything like that and I was absolutely dumbstruck, he was such a wonderful man. But he never gave you any praise. He used to come up and stand behind you and say nothing, you'd feel your courage trickling away from you, and then he'd say,

'Turn the page over and start again.' Awful. And the highest praise I ever had from him was when he said, 'I can see you're beginning to learn what I taught you.' (laughter)

RH: **That's funny, though. I've heard comments about Ivor's teaching style, they seem so different to what he was like when I knew him many years later. But just before we get onto [him] – I'd like to talk a little bit more about Ivor's style and so on – looking back, how do you see the School, as it was then: its teaching methods, its approach to painting or to teaching, more importantly, I suppose? Do you think it was a good school to go to, with what you know now?**

Yes, it was a very good school. I think mainly because of what I said earlier: that they used to have artists under contract to teach and therefore we got a very wide selection of different styles. And I'm not in a position to judge what art schools are teaching today because I have no idea, but I have a feeling that they teach according to a kind of preconceived plan of what a student should do, and it's mainly, to my mind – and I might be wrong – but it's mainly psychological. And while I think psychological attitude in painting is important, I think the basic skills are more important still, that you should learn the basic skills first, before you worry about the psychological side. Now, some people have said to me, 'If you learn too much from one artist you develop a style like that artist.' Well, that need not be the case because I'll tell you two people who learned from Ivor Hele who are nothing like Ivor Hele and who are both very gifted in their own way: one was Jeff Smart and the other was Jacqueline Hick, and they were contemporaries. They couldn't be more different from each other.

RH: **No, that's true.**

But they both learned from Ivor. So my opinion is that the idea of teaching the basics is very, very important indeed and I think it's starting to come back a bit.

RH: **And the School, in your day, did teach the basics.**

Oh, yes.

RH: **Now, how would you describe those, if we could just get into a little bit?**

Well, of course, to start off with, we had to learn from the Antique, which were plaster casts of Greek and Roman statues, and they didn't have to have a rest and you could walk round them.

RH: So would you draw from them?

We drew from them.

RH: Would you be concentrating on form or tone or seeing or which?

We'd be concentrating on form, tone and proportion. And that helped us to work things out. They had a half-life-sized plaster cast figure of a flayed man, didn't have any skin, but he had all his muscles and his bones showing, and we learnt from that what to look for.

RH: Is that the one with the man with his arm up and the other arm back?

I don't know what happened to it.

RH: Yes, I've seen one, a plaster cast of a – – –.

Because they got rid of it all, after the War, when the idea of Modern art – and when I say 'Modern art', all art's modern when it comes to the pinch, it all depends what you're doing; but I meant the Modern outlook. They decided that plaster casts were a ridiculous waste of time because you were not expressing yourself. Well, of *course* you weren't expressing yourself; you were learning the basics. My opinion is if a person learns the basics they can do anything.

RH: Well, now, those basics: what are they, in your mind?

Well, in life drawing it's correct proportions; an appreciation of colour, the understanding of colour; good composition, how it's placed – if it's portraiture; if it's landscaped – – –. Here, there goes another tale, because I was a commercial artist for about twenty years and I would invite anyone that wants to take up art not to become a commercial artist if they can possibly help it. You've got to earn some money somehow, and in the days of the Depression that was one way of doing it. But I used to be so *accurate* when I drew something, so conscious of perspective, so conscious of the effect of light and shade and colour perspective, that I became very tight and everything I did had a horrible, stiff, almost architectural look about it. There was no freedom in it. So I went to a friend of mine who was both an artist and an illustrator, and I told her my problem and I said, 'How can I loosen up?' And she said, 'Well, go out and do it in half an hour.' And I said, 'It takes me two afternoons to do a

landscape.' She said, 'Do it in half an hour.' And I said, 'I couldn't possibly do it in that.' And she said, 'Yes, you could. When you do a job for somebody, you do what's called a "rough", which is just an idea, and the boss looks at your work and says, "I think you could make my product a bit larger or my name a bit larger or something like that," and you haven't wasted a lot of time doing a careful drawing. So,' she said, 'you've got to go out there and do something as fast as you can in half an hour.' And I said, 'But that's unfinished work.' And she said, 'No, it's not; it's the essence of it.' And she was quite right. And although I didn't do work in half an hour, I found I could do a reasonable landscape in a couple of hours.

RH: So this is after you left art school –

Yes.

RH: – and started working as a commercial artist.

Yes. Well, I became a commercial artist because it was that or nothing, and I was a commercial artist for about twenty-five years.

RH: So did they teach you perspective and colour theories and how to see tone and all that at school, or is that just something you picked up individually from some of the teachers?

Well, I think I picked up a lot of – what's the name of that man that taught tonal values?

RH: Meldrum.

Yes, Max Meldrum. I think Leslie Wilkie followed the Max Meldrum idea by saying that when you see something very bright, if that's the brightest thing that you see, then nothing must be as bright as that; and when you see something that's dark nothing must be darker than that. And work your colours between those two opposite poles, almost like the scales on a piano. And I learnt that I think from Leslie Wilkie. What was the other thing you asked me?

RH: Well, just what other things they taught there. Perspective, did they do special classes on perspective, for instance?

No, but the School of Mines, as it was then, used to send students along to the School of Art to learn architectural perspective, but I never learnt that; I learnt

visual perspective. And I found that a lot of people found it very hard to grasp. And so, when I was teaching myself, I made a video on visual perspective, and I made it quite clear at the beginning of the video that this was not intended for architects, it was only intended for people to see shapes and why they were that shape.

RH: Yes. And you say when you were teaching yourself, so you more or less taught yourself that, after art school?

Yes, because I found I couldn't get perspective across to people. When I was talking about the horizon and the eye level, they would come to me and say, 'I've forgotten where that is.' (laughter) And I said, 'It's wherever your eye is!' You see, but they couldn't understand that, they simply couldn't understand why the roofs of houses going down a hill, why didn't they go down too, but they've got to go up to the horizon. So I made this Visual Perspective video to help people who found it hard to understand perspective in the sort of visual way instead of an architectural way. And I know it helped people because I think there was even a school that got one of my videos to help the students to understand it.

RH: Yes, I know those videos are in existence. So, now getting back to art school, before we move on to your later life, tell us a little bit more – it sounds as if Ivor's teaching was very important to you: how did he go about teaching that was so good for you?

Well, I just admired him so much, I thought his work was so superior to anyone's work I'd ever seen in my life, but you see, I only learned from him for two years and then the War broke out and he went away as a private – you probably know all about that. And then, when he came back again, I went to him for one year, but I was married then and I had my first child and I found I couldn't combine the art –

RH: This was back at the Art School.

– yes – and I found I couldn't combine looking after a baby and going to art school, too. But then I was still doing a bit of commercial art at home when they children were asleep in bed. (laughs) But what made me come back to fine art – I hate that term, but anyway that's what it is – was that I'd gone along

to the Art Gallery one day and there was a self-portrait of Ivor that had won the Archibald Prize.[2] And he was rather an arrogant man, and there was this arrogant picture looking at me, saying, ‘You have thrown your life away.’ And I thought, ‘No more commercial art. That’s it.’ And that’s when I decided to go back and try to learn portraiture.

Well, the difficulty was – – –.

RH: And how old were you then?

Oh, I must have been in my early forties. It was a late time to go. But there was nobody there that taught like Ivor, there was no-one. And I was in despair because in any case I’d learnt Drawing from Ivor for two and a half years but I had never learnt to paint, and he was an oil painter. And because I was a commercial artist we never used oils, it was all watercolour. So I thought, ‘I’ve got to remember what Ivor taught us with colour and composition and all that sort of thing and work it out myself with watercolour.’ Which is what I had to do.

RH: Did you think of Heysen as a possible – – –?

I don’t think Heysen was teaching then.

RH: But did his watercolours influence you?

Well, I felt that he was somebody that you would have to learn from the beginning to go to him, because his paintings were beautiful, they were Impressionist but they were also very Romantic. And at that time I was more concentrating on portraiture than landscape, you see. But there was another person I admired very much, landscape artist, and that was John Pritchard. And I thought if I could paint like John Pritchard I’d be happy, but I don’t know how he goes about it. But in the meantime my fellow colleague and artist, Gary Gaston, knew that I admired John Pritchard’s work and he rang me up one day and he said, ‘If you want to learn from John Pritchard he’s got a Saturday class and I’m going to it. Would you like to come with me?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I’d love to.’

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[2] Ivor Hele won the Archibald Prize for the fifth and last time time in 1957 for his *Self-portrait.* .

RH: And when was this?

This must have been, I suppose, about twenty years ago. And he was living at Highbury. So I went out there with Gary and there were about seven other artists, and it was marvellous because he would do a lot of demonstration and I would see how he'd whack the colour on and do it quickly. And he and Ivor Hele I suppose were the two greatest mentors.

RH: And did they know each other?

I don't think they knew each other as friends. They admired each other's work. But John Goodchild was also of the same opinion as myself – that is, I was of *his* opinion – that the basics are what counted.

RH: I was just thinking the South Australians have almost got a name, a tradition, for draftsmanship, and Goodchild and Ivor and Hele and Heysen fit into that.

Absolutely.

RH: And I was just wondering if they did know each other, if they did have similar sources. Did Goodchild study overseas?

Goodchild was an Englishman and he used to go back to England about every second year. And he had quite a few important positions. I think he belonged to a society that only admitted very good etchers. He was an amazing man, because he cut out the middleman in everything he did. He had his own printing machine, he made his own picture frames – – –.

RH: Could you just turn it off for a minute? (break in recording)

BH: This is the continuation of interview with Marjorie Hann by Robert Hannaford, 30th January 2007.

RH: Okay, Marjorie, you were talking about John Goodchild.

Yes, he was a man of many parts. He was a wonderful pen-and-ink artist, he was an etcher, he was a watercolourist – a wonderful watercolourist; he also did oil painting, and although his oil painting was good it was not as good as his watercolour. And he always cut out the middleman: he had his own printing machine, not only for etching but for invitations to his exhibitions, he printed all

his own exhibition invitations; and he made his own frames, he cut his own glass, he made his own mount board.

RH: Did he?

He didn't have anybody except himself in everything he did, and he was very proud about that. And this may not be generally know, but he was also married to a very gifted artist. Doreen Goodchild was an oil painter and she was just as good an oil painter as he was, every bit. But they had three children and she loved her garden and she gave it all up to look after the children and the garden. But it was a great pity, because she was a very gifted woman. And she also did lovely modelling, she did quite a number – I think she's represented also in the Adelaide Art Gallery, you might find something about Doreen Goodchild there.

But I never met Sir Hans Heysen. I thought he was wonderful, and I think he captured the light and the romance of Australian landscape more than anyone I've ever known. But I think that it was a little *too* Romantic. I mean, Australian landscape can be lovely, but it's a little bit harsh, and he never got anything harsh, as far as I know.

RH: What about those northern landscapes, the Flinders.

Yes. But they have dignity. They were very grand and dignified.

RH: Yes, that's true.

I never felt that there was any kind of suffering that would be found.

RH: No. I always found it strange that he never painted kangaroos and wild life; he always painted the cows and the sheep; but they must have been around up in the Flinders, you can't go there without seeing emus and kangaroos. He painted the goats, but again it's a European animal.

Well, he did a painting, the old Adelaide Railway Station – not the one that exists now which is a casino; the one before that – and it was very much in the way Monet painted a railway station. And he also painted haystacks when he was in England, very much like Monet's haystacks. So he was very much influenced by the Romantic attitude of the Impressionists, and I think that when he came to Australia he couldn't paint Australia the way the Impressionists did because the atmosphere was different, but he still saw it in a very Romantic light.

RH: Yes, I think you're right. And you were aware of that while he was alive, and did that affect you? I guess what I'm trying to ask – he's such a major, great painter in this State that he probably influenced all painters to a certain extent – did he influence you directly, did you think Heysen when you tackled watercolours?

No. I thought Heysen was Heysen. And there've been a lot of people who've tried to imitate him and unfortunately it hasn't done his reputation any good, because people say, 'Oh, that's a Hans Heysen student,' and it's not good enough, it's never been good enough; whereas I used to feel that John Goodchild was nothing like Heysen. He was able to paint – for an Englishman I think this is astonishing – he was able to paint the harsh light of Australia, even though he could paint the beautiful softness of English light, too. But the Australian light was sharp and harsh and he was able to do it, whereas I never felt that Heysen could do that. Even the lovely ones he did of the North still had a lovely gentle quality about them.

RH: Yes.

You know, it wasn't 'I love a sunburnt country', sort of thing.

RH: No. That's interesting. What other artists influenced you in those days, when you set out as a painter? Overseas artists as well?

Well, because I'd been a commercial artist I very much admired the work of Ainslie Roberts. Now, Ainslie Roberts was an amazing person because he was a young man when the Depression was on – I was only a teenager, in fact I hadn't reached my teens, I think I was about ten or eleven when the Depression really hit, but Ainslie Roberts then would have been a young man in his twenties – and he was a born artist. But he had to earn his living somehow, and the only way he could do it was by commercial art. And he started a business up and you were considered to be pretty good if you got admitted into Ainslie Roberts's studio, became a commercial artist. But he really was a wonderful draftsman and a wonderful illustrator. And I suppose you know all those books that he did with C.P. Mountford: they're beautiful and they're imaginative and they're clever, they're wonderfully clever. But he did other things, too. He did stained-glass windows and they're beautiful ones. He was a very gifted man. I went to his last exhibition, and he died shortly afterwards, and I had a great

admiration for him as a draftsman. But, you see, when I was a commercial artist there were several firms that you worked for and everybody knew everybody. Everybody would say, 'Oh, he's left So-and-so and gone to work for Delmont's or gone to work for somebody else.' And I worked for Delmont's and I worked for – oh, what's his name? He looked like the American eagle. (laughs) Oh, Alan Martin. He was pretty well-known. And I quite enjoyed commercial art, but it never satisfied me, it was a means to an end: that was getting myself dressed and clothed.

RH: And through that time, when you were a commercial artist, did you do much in the [way of] portraits or landscapes or .....?

Well, the only thing I did that was not like that was there was a man who worked for Alan Martin who wanted to start up on his own business. And at that time there was a man at I think it was 5DN – that was a radio station – whose name was Bob Fricker, and he invented a little boy called 'Charlie Cheesecake', and Charlie Cheesecake always did things wrong, he was always getting into trouble. But of course he wasn't there. But this man – he wasn't an artist himself; he was a 'visual artist', as they called them – he thought he could do something in connection with the Child Safety Council. And he approached me and asked me whether I thought I could illustrate Charlie Cheesecake as a little person and have him doing all sorts of dangerous things and what happened to him – because I rather like doing comic stuff – and I said, 'Well, it's not my [place] to say that, it's Bob Fricker. Bob Fricker invented him: you'll have to get his permission.' So he went to Bob Fricker and said would he consider it and he said, 'Oh, yes,' he didn't mind. So we got this book, and it was only a little book, showing all the different things that children get into. Well, at that time I was not married, it was before I was married, and I didn't know what trouble children got into. But the Child Safety Council gave me about fifteen different examples of ghastly things that children did, and I had this little book with Charlie doing something that he shouldn't have done and the page folded over like a flap, and when you pushed the flap back you saw the frightful thing that happened to Charlie. One thing in particular was running along with a pencil in your mouth, running into a door and the pencil goes right

out through his cheek, you know – *terrible* things. But anyway, the Education Department apparently liked it and they took it up and issued it to their schools. And to this day I meet people who say, 'Did you write *Charlie Cheesecake*?' And I thought, 'Heavens to Betsy – I don't want to be known for *Charlie Cheesecake*!' (laughter)

RH: Well, it's not bad. What other commercial work are you proud of, looking back over it?

Well, when I got married things were not easy. We were rather hard-up, three children took a lot of looking after and clothes had to be bought and all that kind of thing. And I thought, 'I've got to do something and make ends meet.' There was a competition in *The News*, which was the evening paper: 'What is the thing you hate most around your home?' Well, there were so many things that I hated that I hardly knew where to start. But I thought, 'My husband's wardrobe. It's got everything in it almost except clothes.' He'd jammed everything, because we didn't have a shed or anything like that. And one day I got fed up and I said to him, 'Look, I have to go into the city to do some shopping, and I've taken everything out of your wardrobe, and I want you only to put back the things that are necessary and I'll get rid of the rest.' So when I came home everything was spick and span, nothing there. Opened the wardrobe and the whole lot had been put back. (laughter)

So there was this competition and I sent it in to *The News*, and I won it! (laughs) But what made me laugh was that the staff on *The News* thought their wives had sent it in. (laughter) Then I had a letter from *The News* saying, 'That made us laugh. Has anything like that happened in your home that is ridiculous?' Well, I didn't know where to *stop* because there were so many *awful* things – he contributed quite a lot. (laughter) And I wrote a thing called, 'Every woman's family', because I thought, 'What happens to me is probably what happens to every mother.' And I did it for nearly six years, did it every week.

RH: I'd love to see some of those.

And I illustrated it. And that was great fun.

BH: Where was it published, Mum?

The News.

RH: What years would that be? In the ’50s or something?

Yes, it would have been in the late ’50s because Brenton was just born, he was one, Margie was three and Avey[?] was five.

RH: And were you interested in the great commercial artists, did you take an interest in the commercial work in other countries?

Yes, Norman Rockwell. I thought he was absolutely fantastic. I was always very interested in illustrations, tremendously so. When I was very young my mother used to buy me – I think they called them ‘annuals’, at the end of the year, they were Christmas books for children – and they had very good artists in those days, not the kind of stuff that they do today which is, I suppose, aimed at children because the illustrations are very similar to what children do. But in those days they had very, very good artists, people like Harry Rowntree and Ernest Aris and the great Art Deco artist of France, ...: beautiful work, I used to love it, and I used to like the way they signed their names. Ernest Aris made his name go right across the page as it if were somebody running. And May Gibbs, of the *Gumnut babies*, used to put a little circle around ‘May Gibbs’. And there was another one called Mabel Lucie Attwell, ane wrote her name ‘Mabel/Lucie/Attwell’, one number under the other. And there was an American artist, woman, called Rose O’Neill, and she used to do a page in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, which my mother used to get, and it was called ‘Kewpieville’, because in those days there was a toy doll that was called a ‘kewpie’ and it was a celluloid doll – it was very much like a May Gibbs Gumnut Baby but it was before May Gibbs’s time – and she signed her name ‘Rose O’Neill’, and the ‘O’Neill’ had two Ls at the end of it and she made them into very long legs with little boots on the end. (laughs) And I used to think that was fascinating.

RH: Did you employ any of those sort of gimmicks yourself?

No. No. I wrote a book when I was about eighteen, when I was still at the Art School, and I nearly got it published but it was the Depression time, and it was a lot of invented creatures, because I made them up. But they were sort of

cartoony creatures. And I took it to Rigby's and Rigby's sent it to a publishing firm in Melbourne called Georgian House, and they said they would publish it. But they held it for two years and then they wrote me a letter and said because of the Depression the risk in publishing a book in Australia was too great for them to take it on. But they advised me to try overseas. But I'd lost faith and I didn't. But I've still got it. It's down in the studio, it's called *The Corripane and other wogs.*

And then at the same time – not the same time; later, when I was doing these articles for *The News* called 'Everywoman's family' – there was a paper that was brought out by *The Advertiser* and it was called the *Sunday Advertiser*, it had a very short life, only lived for a year. But they asked me if I'd like to do something for it and I did a strip. It wasn't a comic strip, it was quite serious drawing, but it was based on Thackeray's story, *The rose and the ring*, it's a fairytale. And it ran for the whole year in *The Advertiser*. I hope it didn't cause *The Advertiser* to fold up. (laughter) It died.

RH: I remember it well, actually. I used to go in –

The *Sunday Advertiser*.

RH: – yes, I used to enter it myself in the – it wasn't the 'Possum's pages', it was called something else.

No. It was a children's page.

RH: Children's pages, and they had prizes for drawing and painting. And as a seven to ten year-old I entered it.

BH: How did you go?

RH: Very well.

Yes, I'm sure you did.

RH: I got about five book prizes, quite a wad of money, and I got a couple of – – –.

You would have been very young.

RH: Yes, I was seven to eleven I stopped it.

Little did I know, when I was doing that – – –.

RH: We were probably published in the same paper, in those days.

Yes, it would have been. It only lived for a year.

RH: No, it lived for longer than that.

Did it?

RH: Yes, because I went in it from the age of seven until eleven.

I thought – probably I'm getting mixed up with my own strip. Oh, I know why: at the end of that strip they asked me if I'd consider doing another one, and the only one I thought I might like to do was *The bluebird*, by Maurice Maeterlinck. Have you ever heard of it?

RH: No.

Well, it was a very popular children's play in those days. So talk about me, I had enough nerve: I wrote to Madame Maeterlinck – who wouldn't understand a word of English, by the way – and I said would she give me permission to do her husband's play as a strip. She was furious! She wrote back and said how *dared* I think of doing such a thing, how *dared* I. And, of course, that absolutely choked me off. I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to do it, so I'll give it away.' And I gave it away. But I must have got mixed up because I didn't do anything again for *The Advertiser* and I know it had a very short life – the *Sunday Advertiser*, that is.

RH: That's right, yes.

But you got onto *The Advertiser* as a cartoonist.

RH: Yes, that was some years later. I meant to ask you about Ainslie Roberts: did he go to the Adelaide Art School?

Yes, he did. And he learned from Gladys Good, who was a very good teacher indeed. She was the greatest teacher I ever had there. She taught me a great deal – I don't mean that she taught me like Ivor did, because Ivor was an artist; she wasn't so much an artist but she was a good teacher – and she told me that Ainslie Roberts said one of the nicest things to her: he said she was the first person who had taught him that art could be fun. And she also told me that his Christian name was actually Bertram. He was 'Bertram' Robert, but he didn't

like the name Bertram, and Ainslie was a family name so he used that. Little bits like that are interesting.

RH: Yes. So, Marjorie, you were a commercial artists then for a number of years, and when did you drop out of that and take up – well, 'fine art', as you call it?

When I saw the portrait of Ivor in the Art Gallery saying, 'You're throwing your life away.' I went home and I said to my husband, 'I'm never going to touch commercial art again.' And it was a hard road, because I'd become so slick with commercial art, everything I did had a different feel about it. And that's when I learnt to landscape in (laughs) half an hour. But doing the portraiture was difficult, because there was nobody who taught like Ivor, and they said to me, 'You ought to go to Ingrid Erns.' Well, I went to Ingrid Erns and she was a very good pastel painter .... painting, but she glamorised everything and I didn't want that; I wanted to be like Oliver Cromwell, 'Paint me as I am, warts and all.' I wanted to paint people as they really were. She was tremendously popular, because she made everybody look like a film star, but they were all good likenesses, I'm not knocking that at all. She was a good artist, in that sort of way. But I didn't want that; I wanted to get to the nitty gritty of a person's character.

RH: And did you do much commercial work – I mean work for money, portraits?

No, I didn't like being commissioned for portraits, I'm afraid – this is where I'm going to bring my granddaughter in, Sophie, because Sophie's wonderful. But I'm a bit like Sophie in one direction, that is that if she's given a commission, she never does as good work as she does when it's spontaneous, and I think it's because she's worried. *I* was worried. I used to think, 'I won't get a good likeness. I won't do it, I know I won't.' And of course I didn't. But I could always get a *reasonable* likeness, if I was not doing it as a commission. So I just did it for love. But Sophie, in my opinion, she's all that I ever wanted to be. She's got an uncanny way of getting a likeness.

RH: She has.

But she doesn't seem to realise it.

BH: **..... will have to impart to Sophie his killer commercial instinct, I think, (laughter) so that Sophie can earn a living from it. All due respect.**

Because, you know, I can't understand it. She's done some uncanny likenesses. Do you know, once she did a portrait of some people down at the beach at Maslin's, and there was a little figure about an inch high and I said, 'That looks like Angus.' She said, 'It *is* Angus.' (laughter)

RH: **Yes, well, that's what makes her – she definitely has got an amazing talent. Well, talking about commercial stuff, how did you get on, then, once you gave up the commercial art? Was there not quite such a need to make money for you then?**

By that time, my husband was going ahead. (laughs) I know that people have often said, 'He's a public servant.' And I used to say, 'Yes, but I'd rather not tell you what it is' He was in the Taxation Department. (laughter) But he put his head down and studied very hard at law, and he was eventually made the chief of the Appeals Department, and they told me that were even thinking of putting a sign up over his door: 'Abandon hope, ye who enter here.' (laughter) But he had got quite a senior position; in fact, he got to be Acting Assistant Deputy, if you can work that out – there's a lot of this 'Acting' business in the Government – so we're not so hard-pressed as we were to start off with.

RH: **And did you sell your landscapes?**

Yes. At long last, I persuaded my husband to go overseas. I think he didn't want to go, because he'd been in the War and he'd been in Britain, and I think that there are a lot of very dreadful memories for him. And I didn't realise at the time. It's only when I've been watching television recently that I realised what a frightful time they had. He really didn't want – but he did go for me, he was wonderful. We went twice, and we had a six-month stay each time. And I painted and painted and painted all round England. But when I came back I had all these paintings. (laughs) I thought, 'What am I going to do with them?' And somebody said, 'Why don't you have an exhibition?' And I thought, 'Well, why not?' So at that time I was in the Royal Society of Arts, I was a Fellow, and I had two exhibitions there: one six months after – no, two years after that, because we went two years later.

RH: Do you remember what year that was?

It would have been in the early 1970s. I'm not sure the exact date. But I did very well out of both exhibitions. Mainly, I think, because people still love England, or they loved England.

RH: And of course England has a great tradition of watercolourists, too. Were you very influenced by that tradition?

I couldn't do it. I was Australian, and therefore my colours were sharp, and I could never get that beautiful softness that the English people – I tried, but I think I'd have to live there for several years.

RH: Yes, it's a matter of learning to paint wet-on-wet, isn't it?

Yes. Well, that's where I think John Goodchild was so clever, because he could paint the harsh light of Australia, but he could also paint the soft light of England. But I had two wonderful periods of six months each time. It was really marvellous. As a matter of fact, when I first went to England, we went to the bank to make sure we could get money when we needed it, and the bank manager said to me, 'What have you come to England for?' And I said, 'Well, when I was twelve and was madly keen on fairies, I said to my mother, "Where is Fairyland?" And she said, "It's in England." So,' I said, 'I've come over to see the fairies.' He said, 'Oh, there's no trouble there, they're all around Piccadilly Circus.' (laughter) I didn't mean that kind of fairy.

RH: Back in Adelaide again, you started teaching, didn't you, at the Royal Society.

Yes. Well, that's how I first met *you*, because the Royal Society of Arts in those days was finding going pretty hard, they were almost in the red. And they said, 'We're going to call a special general meeting. Has anybody got any ideas for making a bit of money?' So when we went along there, people were putting up all sorts of ideas, but they were short-lived ones, you know, they wouldn't last. And I said, 'Look, we've got amongst our Fellows professional artists. Why don't we have a tutorial scheme and ask these artists if they would be prepared to teach?' And the person who was the President then was Elizabeth Manley, and she said, 'They'd never agree to it.' And I said, 'Well, will you let

me try?' And she said, 'Well, you can try.' So I wrote twelve letters to twelve artists and only one knocked me back, and that was Barbara Powell because she was going to England. But we were stuck because we didn't have a portrait artist, and they said to me, 'Well, will *you* teach it?' And I thought, 'I'm not good enough. But I know someone who *is* good enough, he's just come back from Melbourne, he won the Alice Bale Scholarship. I don't know him, but would you let me write to him and ask him if he'd teach?' And they said, 'Well, you can *try*.' So I wrote to Robert Hannaford and I told him how much I admired his work and I said would he consider teaching at the Royal Society of Arts. And I didn't realise it, but he'd just come back and he was in a bit of a flurry settling down, and I didn't hear from him for about six weeks and I thought, 'Well, he's not interested.' And in the end I got a bit of torn paper off a notebook saying, 'Yes, I'd love to come. Thank you very much.' (laughter) And so we had you as our portrait teacher, and I think that was marvellous.

RH: I had no idea that it came about like that, that's a new story for me. All I can recall is getting a letter from you. I thought the Royal Society had a long tradition of teaching and so on like that. Ah, well, that was interesting. And you were teaching Watercolours at that time.

Yes, I was. But the Royal Society of Arts in those days was run differently from the way it's run today, and I'm very sorry about it because they had a very high standard. You couldn't become a Fellow unless you were pretty good in several directions, not just one. But nowadays I think almost anybody can become a Fellow, and it's lost its prestigiousness. And it's a great shame, because it actually is the oldest art society in Australia. It's beaten Sydney by two months. (laughter) But it's a great pity, because it was a privilege to belong to the Royal Society of Arts; in fact, it was quite difficult to get in; but now they're almost going on their knees and begging people to join and it hasn't done them any good.

RH: So how long did you teach there?

Oh, I suppose I taught for about four years. When I had my second exhibition at the Royal Society of Arts, the Principal of the WEA[3] happened to be walking past and he saw this notice outside that there was an exhibition on, so he went in and saw my work and wrote me a letter and asked me whether I'd consider teaching at the WEA. And I said, 'Yes, I'd love to.' And that was Landscape, of course; and then after a while he said to me, 'Do you teach anything else?' And I said, 'Yes, I teach Portraiture.' So I had three or four classes in Landscape, Portraiture and Perspective, and I taught there for sixteen years; in fact, I taught till I was eighty-one.

RH: That's fantastic. And how did you enjoy that teaching? Did you learn stuff yourself?

Yes, I learnt a great deal while I was teaching.

RH: Yes, I found that.

And it was very relaxed. Because people were not going to be there to try and become great artists, they were there to relax. And in fact, as a matter of fact, I will not mention this man's name because he's an artist, but he was also a member of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, and my husband was in the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra as an augmented player, not full-time, and he said, 'This man is going on a holiday to Europe, he'll be away for about six weeks, would you take his class on at the WEA?' This was before the WEA asked me to teach there. And I said, 'Oh, I don't think I could do it.' And he said, 'Well, I'll get him to have a word with you.' So he came out and spoke to me and he said, 'It's Landscape.' And I said, 'Yes, but I've never taught Landscape before,' and he said, 'Well, they're only housewives.' And that made me *furious*, and I thought, 'I don't care *what* they are. If they're going to learn, they're going to learn properly.' So I took it on then and I took his class while he was away.

RH: And did it stimulate you in your own work?

[3] WEA – Workers' Educational Association.

Yes, it did. I wanted to help people, I wanted to see them develop. And two or three of them have, I'm very happy about it. But I must tell you one thing about one of the students I had, because it really is a classic example: she said to me, 'I'd like to learn seriously, not just come along to a term' – which is all I did at the time – 'I'd like to go to an art school, can you recommend one?' And I said, 'Well, it's long, long since I went to an art school. I don't know which art school to recommend to you. But, for what it's worth, I would say that the Underdale school' – which has since closed – 'the Underdale school will stretch your imagination.' She said, 'Well, I'll give it a go.' And I said, 'Well, I wish you'd write to me at the end of the year and tell me how you got on.' She said, 'All right, I will.' So at the end of the year I got a letter from her. She said, 'I know you'll be pleased to hear I got a distinction in Portraiture, but you're going to be astonished when you hear how I got it.' She said, 'They gave us an assignment to do. It had to be a self-portrait, but it mustn't be drawn and it mustn't be painted and it mustn't be sculpted and it mustn't be photographed. So,' she said, 'I thought, "They want something symbolic." So,' she said, 'my name is Avis, and that means a bird in Latin, and I think I'm a good listener and I'm rather soft. So,' she said, 'I got a pillow and I stuffed it full of birds' feathers, because they're soft and my name "Avis" means "a bird". I'm a good listener, so I had a cast made of one of my ears and I had fifty latex ears made from that and I sewed them all round the edge of the pillow because I'm a good listener. Then I had to say something about my life. So,' she said, 'I made a pillowslip of muslin, and I wanted it to be transparent because these were memories. And I printed photographs on: first of myself as a child, then my first job I was a pharmacist, which I hated, so I had a photograph of a shelf with a lot of emetics on it to make you sick. And then I met my husband and he was in the Air Force, so I printed the Air Force insignia on it. And the thing we enjoyed doing most was ballroom dancing, so I put pairs of feet all over it. And that was the pillowslip. And,' she said, 'I got a distinction. What do you think of that?' So I wrote back to her and I said, 'I think that was extremely clever. I couldn't have done a thing like that if I'd even tried. The only thing I can say against it is that perhaps in a hundred years one of your descendants will say, "What did Great-great-grandmother look like?"'

BH: **So it wasn't a good likeness?**

RH: **No. Oh, well, that's a very good question, isn't it?**

BH: **We should have a break now, because we're about to run out of time on this. Perhaps a cup of tea, and then a bit more if you like.**

RH: **Yes, okay.**

Oh, I think you've had enough, haven't you?

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

BH: **Now, this is a continuation of the interview with Marjorie Hann by Robert Hannaford, 30th January 2007. Brenton Hann is also present.**

RH: **All right, Marjorie, you were talking about this house that you were asked to paint.**

Oh, yes. The Royal Society of Arts had heard that an artist's house was to be demolished and apparently he was a very well-liked and known artist. His name was Gus Barnes – I'd never heard of him. But it was on the corner of East Terrace and Kensington Road. So, because I lived in the vicinity, I was the nearest artist to do it. So I went out there to paint it and I had a key to get in and have a look around and it was a beautiful place, very much like – the same period, I think, as – 'The Cedars' of Hans Heysen. And I examined it all and looked at it and I thought, 'How lovely.' And then I heard it was going to be pulled down and a commercial place called the 'Booze Brothers' was going to be (laughs) erected there instead, and I thought, 'This is dreadful. And I've never even heard of Gus Barnes, but he must have been pretty good because it was such a lovely studio.' So I went to the Art Gallery and I said, 'Have you got any information about an artist who lived about the same time as Hans Heysen, his name was Gus Barnes?' And they said, 'Oh, we've got a catalogue, you can have a look at that.' So I found his name there and I found that they had quite a few examples of his work, and he was very, very good indeed. And I thought, 'This is terrible that anyone as good as that should pass from people's remembrance and nobody would know who he was unless they'd lived about the same time.' And I thought, 'There's a good many artists today who are just as good as Gus Barnes and they're going to be forgotten too, unless something's done about it.' So I was on the Council of the Royal

Society of Arts at the time, and the next time I went to a Council meeting I said to them, 'Why don't we make videos of living artists today that we know are good, so there's a record of them for the future?' And they said, 'Oh, it would be too expensive, we can't think of it.' And I said, 'Well, I don't know that it would be – it doesn't have to be a professional thing. It could be an amateur thing, but it would still be valuable.' And they said, 'Oh, well, we'll think about it.' And they thought about it for ten years and didn't do a thing.

So by that time I thought, 'Well, it's my idea and I can do what I like with it,' so I went to the Adelaide Art Society and I told *them* the situation, and they said, 'Well, give it a go,' and they did. And they made sixteen videos of artists of note of that particular era, and I think they're still obtainable and I'm not sure whether it's the Art Gallery that's got a copy of them, but I know that they're there if people want to get them. They're interviews with the people if they're still alive; if not, with their friends or descendants, talking about these artists and the kind of work they did.

RH: That's a marvellous idea, and I know that they're about, those tapes. Speaking of artists, you knew Gwen Barringer, people like that, Margaret Preston: could you give us a bit of a – – –?

No, I didn't know them. They were just icons that we used to admire and look up to. I didn't know them, but they were still very much before the public at that time, so that I used to – – –. The people that I knew reasonably well who were contemporaries of mine were Dorrit Black, Dora Chapman, Geoff Mainwaring, and someone that you knew, Shirley Keene. Shirley Keene was a frustrated artist. She was a very good one if she'd had the chance. But she was a spastic, and she went overseas with several other artist friends in London and, while she was there, she did some sketches of London scenes. But because she was a spastic she found it very hard to hold the brush; she had to work on huge pieces of paper, they were butcher's paper. And she could also write very humorous articles about these scenes, and she rolled them up and sent them back to *The Advertiser*, and *The Advertiser* reduced them down and, because she was a really good draughtsman, they were beautifully done and in proportion. And they printed them for about two years, in *The Advertiser*. And Shirley, she was really quite an unfortunate spastic because she couldn't do

anything else, and when that came to an end she thought, 'Well, I'll have to come back to Australia. I haven't got any future here.' But the BBC[4] had heard about her and they gave her an interview about how to be an artist even if you're spastic, and they paid her for that and she was able to stay, as she thought, another week in London on the money; and then she got a letter from an editor of a magazine for spastics, and he was retiring and he asked her if she'd like to be the editor of the magazine. And she said yes, and she was in England for about twenty years. She's back in Australia now, I think she's still alive. But whatever she did was good, even though it was extremely crude because of the size she had to do it. But when it was reduced down it was lovely work. So I think that's an example of how people should never give up hope, no matter what.

RH: No, that's a good example. Now, you said you knew Geoff Mainwaring.

Yes.

RH: How well did you know Geoff?

I knew him fairly well. He was a real glamour boy. Very, very popular with all the students. And in fact he was only –

RH: Especially the girls.

– one step behind Ivor Hele. He was so close to Ivor Hele that it was a sort of tussle between the two. But Ivor was the one that went ahead. And I think Geoff went to the War too, but when he came back he became the Principal of the Ballarat School of Art and he was there right up until he died.

RH: Yes.

He was very good.

RH: Well, that's where I met him, in Ballarat. What do you think of his painting?

Well, he wasn't quite as good as Ivor, but he was very good. There was another boy there – – –.

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[4] BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation.

RH: You know he's had a bit of a resurgence? There've been articles on him in Victoria.

No, I didn't know that; I'm very glad to hear it.

RH: Yes, it's interesting that some of those artists – – –.

Well, at that time there were three or four students, all about the same age, who were exceptionally good. He was one, John Dowie was another, and Geoff Shedley was another one. Now, Geoff couldn't go to the War because he'd had a collapsed lung and he wasn't fit, but he was a draftsman and an architect, and he designed the City of Elizabeth, and the Shedley Theatre there is named after him. He was very good.

Now, there's one thing that I've never been able to track down, and I'd love to. It was something that happened in the first year of the War. St Peter's College had a Craft master who taught the boys woodwork and craft things, his name was Robert Matthews. And he was a bit of an actor, too, belonged to the Rep Theatre. And they were trying to raise funds for the boys going abroad, for comfort funds. He thought of an idea of having tableaux put on at St Peter's College on their stage in their assembly hall, illustrating great historical events of English history. At that time I was in my very early twenties. The War didn't really start in 1939. In 1939, when war was declared, there was a period where Britain was hastily getting together and getting her armies ready and training the soldiers, and so that period was known as 'the Phoney War', because nothing took place. But during that period we knew it was going to happen. I must have been about twenty-two at the time. Anyway, Robert Matthews got all the artists he could think of to design sets, and because he was a bit of an actor and belonged to the Rep Theatre he got all the members of amateur dramatic societies to be in the tableaux.

The first one they had – and I helped with this one, because the first setting was designed by George Whinnen, and it was 'The signing of Magna Carta'. (interference with microphone) And when the curtain went up, you could hear a gasp go up from the audience because this huge – – –.

BH: Keep going, Mum. I'll just reset that, you've just pulled that bit of it off. That should be all right.

George Whinnen had designed a backdrop, about so big, about two feet, and it was drawn up by anybody they could get from art schools to work to squaring it up. And it was a scene of – was it Runnymede where they signed Magna Carta? Anyway, there were tents in the background and all these artists were gathered around King John, who was sitting at a desk, very unwillingly signing Magna Carta, and all these people around, the knights and the barons, pointing to him, saying, 'Do it,' and it was absolutely thrilling. And I helped with that one. And I can't remember all the artists but there were a lot of them. Geoff Mainwaring did one. It went through history from Magna Carta right up until World War I. And there was 'Queen Elizabeth I at Tilbury', and they had a real white horse. She came on and it was marvellous, because they had this big painting of a ship in the background and all these people. Then they had the – I can't remember all of them, but they also had 'The Duchess of Devonshire's ball', which was at the eve of Waterloo, and she had this big ballroom and it was all Regency, beautifully done, with all the people on the stage doing a gavotte or something; but there was a soldier at the back and he was whispering in somebody's ear they had to leave immediately, and they had to do it without anybody knowing. And the soldiers left, or they were leaving, leaving only the civilians behind, because they all went off to Waterloo. I forget who designed that but it was wonderful. But Geoff Mainwaring's was 'Gallipoli', and he had the slope of the mountain going up with real people dressed as Diggers climbing up this mountain. Now, I don't know what's happened to that, but there must be a record somewhere at St Peter's College. They must have photographs of it. Because it was an *enormous* thing: it was called 'This England'.

RH: Well, maybe you mentioning it will bring it out. Now, other artists of your era: what about Nora Heysen, did you have anything to do with her?

No. See, we didn't go up to Hahndorf at all, we really didn't know the people. My sister-in-law I believe played with her. She was Phyllis Williams, and they were at Hahndorf, and I think she and Nora used to play together; that was my sister-in-law. But I didn't ever know her. I thought she was good, but I felt that sometimes, when there's a very good artist, that the children want to be as good

as their father or mother was. That happened with the Boyds, because I think Penleigh Boyd was a wonderful artist but I don't think the Boyds came anywhere near him.

RH: (laughs) No. That's interesting. I think the same – about Nora, and the Boyds. Yes.

The same thing with the Lindsay family. All those chaps were very gifted. That's extraordinary, because they were all gifted. The only one that I felt wasn't much good was Percy, I think.

RH: I disagree. I think Percy was a good –

Percy tried.

RH: – I think he had a good sense of colour and tone; he didn't have the versatility of Norman and Lionel –

He wasn't the draftsman the others were.

RH: – no, wasn't a draftsman; but he was a colourist and a tonalist, which the others weren't.

So was Daryl. Daryl was, but you don't hear much about Daryl, but I used to love his watercolours.

RH: Yeah – I didn't like Daryl's stuff so much.

Didn't you? They were very limited, but they were good. I'll tell you who is a little bit like him and that's – she's a woman: her name escapes me, but she's –

RH: South Australian, or – – –?

– yes; she won a portrait prize for the Doug Moran thing.

RH: Oh, not Penny Dowie?

No, not Penny Dowie. Her name's something like Caroline but isn't. Anyway, it might come back to me. My memory's not as good as it used to be. But she painted a little bit like Daryl: very limited colour.

RH: And did you ever come across Ivor Francis?

Yes. Ivor Francis was a great person for Surealism, and he was a critic on *The Advertiser*, and I must admit that I didn't always agree with Ivor Francis, not by

a long shot. But he was very much in favour of the Contemporary Art Society. Because the Contemporary Art Society started up after our first Modern exhibition from Europe, that came over about 1941 or 1942, and I went along to it and in those days, because I was brought up with the School of Art tradition, I thought it was awful. (laughs) But now I think, 'No, they had a lot of ideas that were good ones.' But they were so different from the way I thought that I had to wait a long time before I began to see any real value in what they were doing. But Ivor Francis was all for it.

RH: Right from the start.

Yes, right from the start. He used to write very acid remarks in *The Advertiser* about the old school.

RH: Of the world artists, who do you like and – well, we're talking about Modern artists now: what of the Post-Impressionists, people like Van Gogh, Cézanne? Do you appreciate their work?

Yes, I do. But I didn't to start off with. But I thought they had a wonderful sense of colour, and I've always liked Monet's work and Renoir. I didn't like Pointillism. That struck me as being too mechanical. But it's clever, because it's almost the same process that three-colour-and-black, tricolour-and-black, reproduction is. If you get anything magnified up, you see all these little coloured dots. I don't know whether they still print like that, don't suppose they do, but they did when I was a commercial artist. It was very much like Pointillism.

RH: It was.

And I thought that that was clever; but I didn't like it because it didn't have any naturalness about it, it was always stiff.

RH: I know what you mean.

But I like the Impressionists, yes, very much. The only one I liked of the Post-Impressionists was Van Gogh, and that's only because reproductions never do him justice and I went to an exhibition and saw his work and it was beautiful, the colour was lovely.

RH: Yes, I agree.

There was also an artist that I don't think anyone ever has heard of now, but when I was studying History of Art his name came up: it was Karel Appel. And when he painted he used to use the paint like fruit salad, and it was delicious. (laughs) It's a strange thing, because art has to reflect the times in which we live. If you look at any kind of art history you'll find this happens all the time, especially in the Rococo period, when everything was so artificial, just before the French Revolution. I mean, the idea of shepherds and shepherdesses (laughs) with cupids fluttering around in the sky is too ridiculous, but that's the way things were.

RH: Well, looking back now, would you say you were lucky to live in Adelaide and have the influences that you had, people like Ivor and – – –?

Yes, I was. Yes, I was. We were all lucky, all the students who lived at that time were very lucky, because the artists that I knew were so sincere. They were out to follow their own star in their own way, and they were not at all concerned with trying to impress people. They were doing their own thing.

RH: Yes, that's interesting, because a lot of art of the twentieth century has not been done under that way, really, has it? It's been to impress, to push the personality forward, so to speak. But the artists you were talking of were different to that, weren't they?

Yes, they were. Now, I'm going to say something here which is not really about the past at all; it's probably about the future. But my granddaughter, Sophie Hann, has got this divine spark that I would have given anything to have had myself. But she fell in with some artists in Sydney who were very much out to impress people, and one of them said to her, 'Why don't you paint more like Renoir?' And I said to her, 'Look, Sophie, when I look at your work I don't want to think of Renoir. I want to think of Sophie.' And I think that's very, very important, but a lot of people are *trying* to paint now – for instance, there's one person whose work I don't like but I think it's clever, but I don't like it because to me it's sterile, and that's the work of Jeff Smart. There's nothing of life in his work, it's all like Madame Tussaud's Waxworks: they're not real. But even though I don't like his work I know that that's what he's trying to do, he's trying to show you what he is, and I think he's a sterile person. And I think that if you're going to –

RH: At least he's expressing himself.

– he's expressing himself, and for that I take my hat off. I think he's really doing it. To me it's very, very important that any kind of art, whether it's painting or music or poetry, should come from the heart, because that's what you want to do, not because you think, 'That's going to work, I'm going to sell it, it's going to be popular.' It's got to be because that's what you want, that's what you've got to do.

RH: What do you think of your own work now when you look back upon it?

I might have done better if I'd never been a commercial artist. If I had been able to devote my whole life to painting I might have been a better painter, in every way. But I used to enjoy, when I was young, doing comic stuff, almost cartoony stuff. I enjoyed that, that was fun. But because I've been asked in the past to give an opinion of my own work, and I think I'm a 'good mediocre'. I really think I'm not a bad mediocre, and I'm not even mediocre, I'm a good mediocre; but that's as far as I'll get. I haven't had the gift that Sophie's got. Sophie's got something that she doesn't even seem to realise it. I'm sure that if she keeps it up she'll become well-known, if she only keeps it up.

RH: I agree with you. Well, if you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently, regarding your artistic career?

I would have loved to have been an illustrator, I think that's wonderful. The person I admire most – and here we go back to my first love, fairies – the illustrator I admire most is Arthur Rackham. I think his work is absolutely beautiful. The drawings are good, they're very muted, but there's an ethereal quality about it. And one of his followers, Brian Froud, gets a rather horrifying atmosphere into his work, and it also hasn't got that mysterious quality of other-worldliness, I don't know what it is. Arthur Rackham can get life into trees –

RH: That's right.

– life into water. And when I look at his work I think, 'Oh, to be able to paint like that would be wonderful.' But I don't suppose I could, because I'm not Arthur Rackham. (laughs)

RH: What do you think of Norman Lindsay's work?

Now, Norman Lindsay is obsessed with sex and the female form – and he's got every right to be that, he's a man – but the things I like best about him are *The magic pudding* [illustrations]. I love *The magic pudding*. I've seen some illustrations he's done long ago, when the Borovansky and the de Basil Ballet came out here: he did a lovely cover for one of the programmes, and it was Sheherazade, and it was the only one of Norman Lindsay's female figures that I thought was absolutely delicious. It was beautiful.

RH: What made me think of Norman Lindsay was when you were talking about Arthur Rackham, and some of those ethereal landscapes – you know, the moonlight things – he had a wonderful touch with watercolour, didn't he?

Yes, he did. Yes, he did. But his was a sort of Grecian love of beauty, Norman Lindsay.

RH: Yes, it wasn't Australian, was it?

No, it wasn't Australian; and also it wasn't ethereal in the sense that Arthur Rackham's was. When I've looked at Arthur Rackham's work, I've thought to myself, 'He really seems to have caught that mystery that belongs to childhood.' But it's something that you can't put into words very well.

RH: What do you think of Albert Namatjira?

Well, I rather wish he hadn't been influenced by –

RH: Batterby?

– yes. I think that he did a wonderful job, considering he'd never done it before. But I like Aboriginal art to be Aboriginal art. I like the designs and the colours and everything else that Aboriginal designs are. To me that's so Australian. It's like the Aztecs: the Aztec design belongs to the Aztecs. The Aboriginal bark paintings, to me, are truly Aboriginal Australian work, and although I think Rex Batterby did a wonderful job in teaching Albert Namatjira, they are not Albert Namatjira; they're sort of an echo of Rex Batterby.

BH: What do *you* think about them?

RH: Well, I don't think that's so; I think he painted better than Rex Batterby, and for the pupil to surpass the master is – – –. And I think they became Albert, definitely. I can see the early ones looked a bit Rex Batterby-ish,

which one would expect; but it seems to me that there's a contradiction here. Rex taught him the basics, which you advocate, and he took it on and he didn't need Rex after a very short time, he did his own thing and he did it consistently and he did it very well, I think. And I think they're very much Aboriginal, in that sense.

Well, I think it was certainly very astonishing that a man who'd never had anything to do with European art was able to understand it the way he did. Because I don't think that anyone since him could equal his ability. But he's never appealed to me, I don't know why, it's just one of those things that missed its mark with me. Perhaps I wouldn't have liked Rex Batterby.

RH: Yes, fair enough.

I don't know.

RH: And what do you think of Aboriginal art generally? At the moment it's very popular and it's worth a lot of money, it's bringing huge money all over the world. Does that surprise you?

Well, I like it as long as it *is* Aboriginal art, but it seems to have become very much commercialised and they're putting colours into their hands that they never had. I like the black and the white and the ochre and the red, and that to me seems right; but when they start using blues and greens and everything else – there's no reason why they shouldn't, but it's 'Aboriginal art influenced by Western art'.

RH: Now, looking at the whole history of art – (laughs) this is a silly question, I suppose – but who do you love most in the great masters?

Velasquez. Velasquez.

RH: Yeah? Why?

Well – and next to him but in a different way, Rembrandt. Because Rembrandt, to me, seemed to paint a person's soul. Velasquez painted a very lively life painting of somebody, the character of the person. If they were a crowd of people having a good time, they looked drunk. (laughter) But there was something about Rembrandt that is astonishing. There's one in particular which I must mention, which moves me more than anything else, it's an etching of Rembrandt's, and it's 'The woman taken in adultery', and she's kneeling down and Christ is laying his hand on her head. And the whole of the background is

black. It's making my flesh creep. But I feel there are thousands of people there, in the background, a whole world looking at him. Now, that a person can make you think that when there's nothing there at all, it's just a black background, but to me it's alive.

RH: I know the one you mean. Well, he certainly had that spark.

Yes, he did. And one of the paintings that I saw of his when I was in England was very moving, and it was at the Wallace Collection, and it was a painting of his son just shortly before he died. And I kept on going back to the Wallace Collection just to look at it.

RH: Yes, that's 'Son of Titus'.

Yes.

RH: As a matter of fact, I've had a print of that that I've carried with me all through my life, since I was about twenty anyway, and I've still got it in my studio. It's a lovely painting.

It's absolutely beautiful. So that the difference with Velasquez is, I suppose, jolly, rambunctious life, and I love it, I think it's gorgeous. Every one he's ever done is beautiful, and they're so *good.* But Rembrandt painted something that is hard to put into words.

RH: What do you think of Michelangelo and Leonardo?

Well, Leonardo was certainly a genius. Painting, I believe, was more of a hobby with him than anything, because he invented things that today people are trying out. I must admit they look a bit like Heath Robinson's inventions, (laughter) but they're wonderful and they can work, to a certain extent. I believe he was the one who first thought out the principles of the armoured tank. Wonderful man. I remember reading a story about him once that made me laugh, where I think it was the Borgias who asked him if he could make a tree to bear poisoned apples so if they (laughs) didn't like anybody they could offer them an apple. And he did try it, but the tree died.

RH: And what about Michelangelo?

Yes. Well, Michelangelo is almost beyond criticism. I think you can do nothing but just gape at him. I know that there's only one thing that's a little bit

wrong, and that's the statue of David: the hand hanging down is a little bit too large. And do you know that I've got a dictionary with illustrations in it, and one was an illustration of the skeleton. And I looked at the skeleton and I thought, 'I've seen that before somewhere,' and (laughs) I looked at it and I found that it was the pose of the David, and the hand was too large on the skeleton.

RH: Yes. Well, he was only a young man when he did it, wasn't he? (laughter) What about the landscape painters, who do you admire there?

Well, landscapes is something which has changed a great deal over the centuries, because very few were done out in the open. They'd do a quick sketch and bring it home and work on it in the studio. That's what Constable did. And when I was in England I went to an exhibition at the Tate Gallery where they had a little alcove with a whole lot of little watercolour sketchbooks that Constable had done, and they were beautiful.

RH: Yes. They had some of those in Australia last year, in Canberra.

I thought, 'Oh! You needn't have worried about doing the oils. These are absolutely lovely!'

RH: They were.

And I think it was only Turner who got the public to realise that watercolours were not just a quick sketch to be worked from but they're art in their own right. Because right up till then watercolours – I suppose mainly because of their short life, you know, you've got to hang them on a wall where there's not much light, otherwise they fade; whereas oils won't. But I think if they're properly looked after they've got an atmosphere about them.

RH: They have. And if you were going to – you've done a fair bit of teaching: how would you go about it now, if you had a young student with that spark? How would you – what pitfalls would you try to avoid in teaching somebody? Would you teach the old methods, or would you encourage them to work spontaneously, or would you let them follow their own bent, or would you encourage them to draw from casts and things?

I don't know that I'd encourage them to draw from casts, because I think that that is sheer copying. But I would certainly teach them the basics of anything before they started to spread their wings. I think you've got to have a working

knowledge of the English language before you can write a book, and I think the same thing applies to art: you've got to have a – – –.

RH: It is about communication, after all, isn't it –

Yes.

RH: – the same as language.

But colour can be a very emotional thing, and sometimes I think that a little more emphasis could be taught on how colour can bring on a mood. Not that I've ever done much like that myself except once; I went up on the hills on the shortest day of the year and I painted a scene there from life, and when I came home I thought, 'I haven't caught the atmosphere of the shortest day of the year,' so I did something I've never done before or since: I repainted it on another piece of paper, and this time I used a limited amount of colour, and I got the mood I wanted. And I thought, 'Well, that's odd, because that's how I *felt* about it, but that' s not what I *saw.*'

RH: That's very interesting.

So it's a tricky thing to teach people to use their imagination if they haven't got it naturally. Some people have got it naturally and they can do it.

RH: Would you encourage a student to do that, to paint from memory or imagination?

Subsequently, yes. But I'd teach them the basics first. Until they had it at the back of their mind so that they knew what they were doing.

RH: And by 'the basics' you mean a knowledge of tone and form and perspective.

Yes, all that. All that. But then I would say to somebody, 'Try to paint – – –.' (points) Now, that picture up there, which is done with only four blocks because it's a woodcut: the backdrop has been done with a roller, they've rolled the colour down from top to bottom. Then they've cut one block for the distant trees, then another block for the middle one, and the last block has used a lot of strong colour. And it's a very emotional thing. The artist who did that would not have seen that scene like that; he would have probably gone out in the early morning and done a quick sketch and then thought, 'I'm in charge of

this, and I'll paint something that will make people feel the way I feel about this early-morning, misty scene.'

RH: Yes, it's like the technique of a Japanese wood block, isn't it?

Yes, that's right.

RH: And it's an Australian scene.

That's why I like Whistler, because he was able – – –. There's a lovely one he's done of a lot of fireworks coming from the sky – have you seen that one?

RH: Yes.

It's a water scene. And it makes me think of a man who objected to the price Whistler wanted for one of his paintings and he said, 'How long did you take to do it?' And Whistler said, 'A couple of hours.' And of course those days, two hundred pounds was a lot of money. And they said, 'You're charging two hundred pounds for something that took you a couple of hours?' He said, 'I'm charging two hundred pounds for a lifetime of experience.'

RH: Yes. Now, Marjorie, you've sent me a couple of your cards with your little watercolours on them over the years, and there's one that I recall, it looks like you've done it from your car, looking down the road somewhere – I've forgotten where it was now, but a street scene –

Ah, yes.

RH: – so did you do that kind of thing? How long would a watercolour like that take you?

Yes, I was in the car and I pulled over as far as I could out of the traffic, and it was a nice scene because the traffic was going down a hill and there were the hills behind it.

RH: Yes, that's right.

Ascot Avenue.

RH: Yes, that's the one.

That's right.

RH: Now, you painted that against the steering wheel, did you?

Yes, I used to push my seat back as far as I could go and put my board on the steering wheel, and draw.

RH: And how long would something like that take?

Oh, probably an hour or two hours. Wouldn't be more.

RH: An hour or two. You'd draw it with pencil first?

Very little. I would just sketch in the position of everything.

RH: What, with an HB or something?

No, a 2B.

RH: 2B, yes.

2B or not 2B.

RH: And just roughly describe your technique, how would you think while you were painting a painting like that?

Well, to start off with, I would never encourage anyone to paint from a photograph. And that's not because I feel that it's morally wrong, but I feel that if you paint from a photograph you've already got the thing stated for you. All you've got to do is to put down what is already there, whereas if you're out in the open it's a challenge. You're in front of it, you haven't got anything to go by except what you see, and you've got it – even if it's wrong, you still get a bit of yourself into it, you won't be able to help it. And that's why I always encourage people – – –. That's one of the reasons why I was so disappointed with the results of that Rolf Harris thing on portraiture: he would get three different artists, and the work they did while the Queen or whoever it was – it wasn't the Queen; whoever was sitting – – –.

RH: He painted the Queen as well.

That was awful. That was *shocking*. (laughter) But they'd get this famous person sitting there and they'd do a lovely thing, and then he'd give them a photograph and say, 'Go home,' and they lost all that sparkle.

RH: But they did it willingly, too. That's the method, that's how most people paint portraits these days, from photographs. They muck around for an hour or two with the subject to satisfy the subject, I think, more than anybody, then they take a photograph, go home and copy it. But we're

both against that, Marjorie. But tell us how you built up your painting: would you put in the sky, the light colours first, with watercolour?

Yes. The sky would dominate the whole thing because that set the atmosphere of the whole painting. So I never did anything in detail. I'd rough out the position of a building and trees and what have you, then I'd get the sky in first because the sky set the whole thing. And I used to paint with a fair bit of water, the only time I used a little water would be if I was doing any detailed work. Then I would work from back to front, furthest things first, then the middle distance, then last of all the main subject, a little bit like –

RH: Right, so you could paint over the top if necessary.

– yes – a little bit like a theatre production, where there's a backdrop and then the corps de ballet comes in and finally the chief dancer comes with the spotlight on them.

RH: And did you let your washes run down to a puddle at the bottom, or did you do it on the flat?

No, I used to do it at a slight angle. The same angle that my own face was. If I was like this, then I'd have the thing like that. If you have it flat it distorts the perspective.

RH: That's right.

But because of the advice I'd had I would try to do it as quickly as possible, because – well, I mean, if you're going to do a morning painting, you've got to finish it in the morning because the light changes.

RH: And did you ever go back and work on the same painting day after day?

No. The only time anything ever happened like that was when I was with my daughter and she took me out to a place in Uraidla and when we were packing up to go home and I'd finished the thing, as we were driving along, I said to her, 'Where did you put my painting?' And she said, 'I put it on the roof.' (laughter) So we rushed back and it wasn't there, and I thought, 'Oh, I'll have to come back and do the whole thing again.' So a week later I went back with her – this is almost hard to believe – as I was sitting there painting a car went past and pulled up. He said, 'Excuse me, were you here a week ago?' And I

said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I saw you drive off and I saw something fly off the top of your roof. So,' he said, 'I picked it up and I took it to the Stirling Police Station and it's there if you want it.'

RH: (laughs) Had you signed it?

No. He didn't know who I was. Margie went to the police station and she got it back, so I had two paintings of the same subject, that I hadn't meant it.

RH: And so I take it you've stopped painting now because your eyes are – – –?

Well, I've got macular degeneration quite badly now. Right up till last year it wasn't too bad, and I've got one good eye and one that, because it's blurred, it does interfere a little bit with the good side. I could see you very clearly if I keep that eye closed, but if I open this eye you become slightly blurred because that interferes with it. But unless I wore a patch like a pirate I couldn't do it, and of course as far as landscape's concerned my sight's not very good in the distance now. Somebody said to me, 'You ought to take up abstract art.' (laughs) I don't think so.

RH: Well, to finish off with, Marjorie, have you got any advice you'd give a young painter?

Be true to yourself. Whatever you like painting, learn as much about that as you possibly can. Take advice from everybody; you don't have to always follow it but you can listen to them. And if you have a good mentor or a good teacher try to find two others so that you don't just go to one teacher alone; you go to three of them that you admire and like their work but are quite different, and it will make you think around your own work [more] than if you just become a devoted slave to one artist.

BH: Well, that's the end of the interview.

END OF DISK 2: DISK 3

BH: This is the continuation of an interview of Marjorie Hann by Robert Hannaford on the 12th February 2007 at Marjorie's home at Rosslyn Park. Also present is her son, Brenton Hann.

RH: Okay. Now, Marjorie, we were talking about Heysen and how would you compare his work with Ragless, for instance, who you also knew very well?

Well, Max Ragless painted Australia, I think, in the kind of light that I think of Australia. Heysen's work was very poetic and Romantic, and of course it was beautiful too; but Ragless seemed to be able to paint the sunlight and the contrast in shadows that go with it. And in those days – this was before the Rundle Mall was created and it was called 'Rundle Street' – there was a little film theatrette there called the 'Sturt Theatre', named after the explorer Sturt, and Ragless was given the commission to paint a number of Outback paintings or scenes which would sort of tie in with the title of Sturt. And they were put up as a kind of a mural around the foyer, the entrance. But when the Rundle Mall was created the theatre, of course, was pulled down and the paintings were sold, and I don't know who bought them but whoever did has got a wonderful slice of history.

RH: Yes, he was certainly a worthy artist, Ragless, wasn't he? His ability to paint that bright sunlight.

Yes. I think he got very close to the real atmosphere of Australia as it really is – at least, that's my opinion.

RH: And, as you say, not romantic in any sense of the word.

Well, you can get romantic at dusk and at dawn, but I don't think he worried about that, he just thought about the effect of the sunlight on everything: beautiful, clean work.

RH: Another artist you knew was Ainslie Roberts.

Yes. Ainslie Roberts in my opinion was a sort of frustrated artist, because he was a product of the Depression when it was very, very hard to get a job at all and he became known as a first-rate commercial artist. And if a person becomes a commercial artist, sometimes it interferes with their originality; but it didn't with him, he became a wonderful illustrator. He was a marvellous draftsman and he illustrated the books of C.P. Mountford, the Dreamtime books, they're most beautifully done. And I remember seeing an original display of his work at the Ailsa Osborne Gallery and I can remember feeling very annoyed about it because they were beautiful paintings and there were a couple of women going around looking at them and one woman said to the

other, 'Oh, yes, they're good, but he's only an illustrator.' And (laughs) I was so annoyed that I wrote a letter to the paper, and I said, 'If Ainslie Roberts is "only an illustrator", well, then so is Michelangelo because he illustrated the Bible on the ceiling of St Peter's in Rome.' And I got a letter of thanks from Ainslie Roberts. (laughter)

RH: That's a very good point. How was Ainslie trained, do you know?

He went to the School of Art –

RH: Here in South Australia?

– yes; before my time, though, Ainslie was about ten years older than I. He learnt from Gladys Good, who was also my teacher, and she told me once that he said that if it had not been for her he would never have realised that being an artist could also be fun.

RH: That's interesting. Now, there's another stained-glass artist you knew.

Oh, I forgot to tell you that Ainslie Roberts had done a stained-glass window in one of the chapels at the Centennial Park: it's a sort of modern thing, though, it's not the usual nineteenth century one that we usually see in churches, but it's most effective.

BH: Sorry, where was that?

That's in the Centennial Park.

BH: Centennial Park.

One of the chapels, I'm not sure which chapel it is. It's a beautiful bit of work. And another stained-glass designer was my old friend from the School of Art student days, Vanessa Smith, who was originally Vanessa Lamb. And she was a very gifted draftswoman – you can't call her a 'draftsman' – and she did about fifty churches with stained-glass windows and she was employed by Clarkson's. And she was extremely imaginative, too, and her figure work was very good. She'll always be remembered because of her stained-glass windows.

RH: Now, are there any other people from that era that you'd like to talk about, in the ballet schools or something?

Oh, yes. At that time, during the War, there was a number of groups that made life more interesting because we were in a very rationed period where things were cut short all the time. We didn't even have a proper blackout like they did in England, but we had a thing called a 'brownout', which meant that the lights were concealed by a shade over the top so that any plane going overhead wouldn't see them. But there was a ballet club that was formed of students from various schools of ballet teaching, including those by Nora Stewart, Dorothy Slane and Joanne Priest, and they all came to this club and it was organised by a very imaginative young man called Joseph Siebert. He choreographed quite a number of beautiful, original ballets, and the costumes and the sets were designed by Dorrit Black, May Voke and Nan Hambidge, and because we were severely rationed in more than one way you could not buy any kind of clothing material unless you had coupons, and coupons were very precious. So they bought a lot of cheap calico and designed costumes, cutting out the calico – even Swan Lake had feathers painted on; in fact, all the costumes had their designs painted on. But it was very good, very well done, and I don't think anybody that ever went to those ballets ever forgot them because they were highly-original and beautifully-presented.

And at the same time there were several amateur dramatic societies that were going, and they had to do the same thing, design their own costumes and their own sets in the same way. And they achieved wonderful results, it was a marvellous bit of imagination on everybody's part. But there was one young man who was a member of one of these clubs, which was the Playbox Theatre, and that was Keith Michell, and he was a young art teacher and he was quite a clever artist, too; he could also write music and he wrote quite a lot of songs for musicals that they put on; and he was a very good actor. And at that time – it was just before the War, the year before the War – Laurence Oliver and Vivien Leigh came to Adelaide and they met him, and they were so impressed with his acting that they gave him a recommendation to the Old Vic, and he went back to England and got taken in by the Old Vic Theatre and he took part of Henry VIII in the film of that name – it would be remembered by some people. But he had quite a number of art exhibitions, in England too, so he kept up his artwork. He was a very gifted young man.

RH: Sounds like you were really involved in the art and the theatre of the times.

Yes, I was involved with it because I was tremendously interested in original approach, and nearly everybody I knew had something to contribute to the art world. And of course I think now, since Professor John Bishop thought up the idea of having a Festival of Arts, and that took off, and to start off with it was very exclusive; but then we had a follow-on by what is called today the 'Festival Fringe', and that opens the doors to artists in every field you can think of, and it's a wonderful way for Adelaide to keep on developing its artistic capacity.

RH: And do you think Adelaide is doing that? Do you think it's as vibrant a place artistically as it has been?

Well, I'm unable, because I can't travel like I used to, I'm unable to attend the festivals so I don't know what they're doing, but I know that they're awfully *keen* and I have no doubt that, although there might be quite a lot of stuff that I wouldn't think was much, there must be some very good stuff coming out as well. Because that's what happens. Art takes a different road with every century, and sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good, but the good is always very good.

RH: And I take it by that you sound quite optimistic about it.

Oh, yes, I do. I was going to tell you a little bit about Daisy Bates.

RH: Oh, yes.

Because she's a bit of a legend, and I might as well tell you that because it shows me up in rather a bad light. (laughs) I was only a student at the time at the School of Art, I was about seventeen, and Daisy Bates came down from Ooldea and went to see the Principal, who was Mr Lawrence Howie, and she said she had got a number of stories she'd collected about Aboriginal children and she wanted to get somebody to illustrate them that she wouldn't have to pay too much because she didn't have any money. And because at that time I was very interested in doing illustrations they sent for me and asked me whether I'd like to do it. And I said to her, 'Well, I don't know whether I can successfully do what you want me to do, but I'll have a shot at it.' So she gave me two of

her stories, I took them home and I worked on them, and then about a week later I went back and presented them to her. And she looked at them silently for a minute or two and then she said, 'The trouble is you've really only drawn European children and painted them black.' She said, 'You don't know what an Aboriginal child looks like.' So she said, 'My suggestion is you come back with me to Ooldea and learn what an Aboriginal child *really* looks like.' And at that time I was seventeen and I was very frightened of life, (laughs) and I said, 'Well, if I went back to Oodea where would I stay?' And she said, 'Oh, you can stay with me. I live in a tent.' And she said, 'There's no comfort of any kind, you'd have to eat Aboriginal food.' And I said, 'You mean witchetty grubs?' And she said, 'Oh, when you can find them. But probably lizards and snakes and kangaroos. And there's not much water.' So I thought, 'I don't think I like the sound of this.' Now, if I'd been Jacqueline Hick I would have jumped at it, she would have loved it.

RH: Well, do you regret not going now?

Well, I don't think I would have done a good job, I really don't. I think I would have been far too frightened. But it was a wonderful compliment and I was very thrilled that she even thought I was worth taking back to Ooldea. She was a tiny little woman and when I've seen paintings of her none of them do her justice. She was like something out of an 1890 album of photographs. But it was a great experience and it certainly made me realise that not all children are the same to look at when they're young.

RH: Well, that's about it, I think, Brenton.

BH: Okay.

There's nothing else.

BH: Oh, I'm sure there's plenty – – –.

RH: I'm sure there's plenty we could talk about.

BH: This is the third of the cards recorded.

The what?

BH: The cards that we record on. And we will now conclude.

RH: I was going to ask you again about Jacquie Hick, but you did speak about her in the first one.

Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW.