

**Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.**

**Interview with Jim Foose**

**August 20, 2008**

**Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz**

WILLIHNGANZ: This is Greg Willihnganz and I'm going to be interviewing Jim Foose today at Susan Goldstein's house in Lexington, Kentucky. It is August the 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and this interview is being conducted for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. Morning, Jim.

FOOSE: Morning.

WILLIHNGANZ: Can you tell me in a sort of one sentence summary what type of work you do?

FOOSE: Well, I, I, I'm involved in most media, that I essentially thought I was a painter, I've done sculpture, I've done print making, I've done, well, artists books which is a little bit hard to define but it's a quintessential art form I think of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most artists that I know and have read about have done books, one way or another, so, little bit of everything, but I, my first love is painting. And that, that hasn't changed.

WILLIHNGANZ: You work in oils or watercolors...

FOOSE: I do now. I have, people, most people who have met me or know something about my work think of me as a watercolorist because I've gotten somewhat international fame with it but I gave up watercolor 14 years ago to paint in oil. I was never trained as a watercolorist; I was trained as an oil painter and so it seems like natural to return to it.

WILLIHNGANZ: When, did you grow up in Kentucky? Were you born here?

FOOSE: No. No, I came from Pennsylvania. I came here in 1958 to attend the University of Kentucky and haven't left. (laughter—Willihnganz)

WILLIHNGANZ: We had a similar experience, something like, we came in '85. We and we planned to be here for a year or two, and just found that Louisville was just so comfortable we couldn't leave.

FOOSE: It's a lovely city.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, yeah, it is a lovely city. So tell me about your, your growing up. Were there things in your experience as a child, and in your family that sort of moved you toward your art work?

FOOSE: Well, I, yes, I've always involved in art one way or another. I want people to know I was not a child prodigy. I, but when I think back, high school years and things like that, I did get awards for my art and got in the newspaper for things that I've done but I, I, I had very nurturing parents. I had an uncle that I adored and I give him most of the credit for turning, turning me into an artist because he was the kind of person that could build a house, build the furniture, do the landscaping and did incredible houses in the Philadelphia area and also as a painter and so visiting him was

headly stuff for me so had a lot to do with, early growth I guess. I had a sister that could have been a very good artist if she hadn't spent so much time teaching kids in high school, you know, because art, sometimes I feel selfish for doing it because it takes, it takes concentration. It takes time alone. And painting in particular is a very monkish sort of business. You don't do it with anyone else, you don't do it holding hands, you don't, you, you go to your studio and you make images and it doesn't rely on anybody else. It's only you and what comes out on the canvas or paper or what ever medium you're working with. But my uncle had an incredible influence. My father made cartoons. Never published but, there, there are some genetic connections I, I suspect, but I've always, I've tried so many things else and failed at it, I, I tried to do art and I did okay with it so, I guess that's what I do.

WILLIHNGANZ: In your, in your education, were there opportunities for you to experiment, to learn about art?

FOOSE: Oh sure. I, I had, I had plenty of times to, you know, I, I had good teachers. I have actually became a teacher and I find that when you, when you take on the role of teaching, you emulate those who have taught you and so when they allow things to happened then you interpret it into your time and you allow things to happen.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, were there formal programs that you took as you were growing up?

FOOSE: Well, I went through high school and through college. That's it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Were you doing art in college?

FOOSE: Oh yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: That was your major?

FOOSE: Yes. My major.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And that was at UK?

FOOSE: Yeah. UK.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay, and did they have a fairly eclectic program or was it pretty much focused in one area? Did you...

FOOSE: No. When I was there in the late '50s, early '60s there was a different kind of teaching going on. What, and I explain it by what we have now. There tend to be specialists. People, if you're a sculptor, you're a sculptor. If you're a printmaker, you're a printmaker. But my teachers were teachers who could teach an art history, they did painting. They, they did almost anything they wanted to do and often interchanged, so I, I was tutored under that sort of background and it helps, I, I, I think,

although it seems impossible to do that now, I think it's a better way of teaching. It's a better way because anything's possible, but UK art program, particularly when I was there was pretty well expanded. It wasn't large. Not nearly as large as it is now. But I keep coming back to the teachers I had. Men that, and women that were helpful to me and I think as, as a person who just retired recently from teaching, I realize that you never shake your teacher and I, somehow that just connects.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, did you ever have a primary mentor at school?

FOOSE: No, no. They were all, little bit of every one. I, one of my teachers that I talk an awful lot about and have talked a lot about was Ray Barnhart who retired in I think 1969. I was still there, and actually not in classes, but I knew him and moved to California and was making art out there until he was 93 and I, he'd still be making art had he not been involved in an auto accident which was very tragic. But I remember Barnhart gave us a talk at the museum one time during one of his retrospectives, as one of his students, and I reminded everyone that he would always say, "You're my worst student. How did you get what you're doing?" He never let go and even, when I, I saw him just a few days before his accident in California and he was still my teacher. He was still teaching me. He wouldn't let go and, another quick story. I had built a studio in Lexington, which anyone would think it was a good studio; very large, with skylights and proper lighting and he came to visit me and I asked, "Would you like a drink." And he said, "Yes." Well, he said first of all, "Do you have a glass?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Do you have ice?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you have good quality bourbon?" I said, "I think I can give you something." He said, "I'll have a drink." And he looked around the studio, which is architectural beauty, and he looked up and he looked at me, just as I'm looking at you and he said, "I'm proud of you. But I don't know why." So, his wife assured me that he was proud of me but he just, he never let go of the fact, and I was a terrible student. I was not focused. I dropped out a year to become an artist, I was a miserable failure at that because I just, I wasn't disciplined, but he, he, he always reminded me that, I had a way to go. But I, when I came back I was a more serious student and recently married. And that's like auto insurance, you get better rates. (laughter—both)

WILLIHNGANZ: So, you, you mean when you came back to school?

FOOSE: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: You got a bachelor's degree and then you went out and taught for a while or...

FOOSE: No, no. I got a bachelor's degree and then I went into, I, at the time, I could have taught, but the pay, the annual pay was equal to exactly equal to doing what was then called commercial art. Graphic design. So I had a whole 25-year career in that. Mainly began at the university 'cause I never, I've been at the university since 1958. And I was the art director for UK press for 7 years and did a lot of their books and in '84 I was offered a tenured track position to teach and I decided well, maybe its time

for me to teach, so that, looking at, thinking about it now it seems to have gone very fast.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, you taught then in the art department. You taught painting.

FOOSE: Painting.

WILLIHNGANZ: And graphic design and all.

FOOSE: Yes. Yes, I sort of started doing that because they, they had a so-so program but it wasn't focused and I made it into a successful program but it got to the point where the technology, computers, things like that were needed and there were financial issues at the university about whether they could do it or not to do it and I had no interest in computers. My students know I have probably thousands of emails that I've never gotten. They're out there in cyberspace, that I've never answered because I don't do that and so, painting became more attractive to me so I focused on that.

WILLIHNGANZ: I see. In your artwork, it sounds like a lot of your work has been because, the force of your employment has been oriented to very functional needs, but sounds like you've also done a lot of personal work for your own aesthetic expression.

FOOSE: Well, that can be addressed probably, probably pretty simply. Graphic design, in its purest form, you're doing art for something for someone else and, and the derogatory statement is well, its not really art because you're doing what someone asked. But at a top level, which I always tried to do, you're respected for what you're doing. You're asked to do it and you get very little influence, you know, you're convincing in your presentations. But I never saw the skills, the discipline, the focus to do that any different than painting. So, I've always painted. I never gave up painting. I was painting while I was doing that. I mean, seven, seven day a week perhaps. One was paying a salary and the other was paying me a salary too because my paintings sold very well. So, I never, I never made a dichotomy between the two, what was art and what was not art. And that's a continuing argument but I'm so far away from that now I wouldn't know where to begin, particularly with technology involved in today's, today's practitioners.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, when you've done painting, has that been painting on commissions? Have you done portraits or specific things?

FOOSE: No, no. I, I've done 10 or 12 commissions I suppose, a half a dozen portraits, but no I've always painted what I wanted to paint and exhibited and such.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, how do you paint?

FOOSE: How do I paint?

WILLIHNGANZ: What comes to you first? Do you have this idea or do you see a color and want to build around it or is it a shape or form thing or are you making a political statement?

FOOSE: No, my, my earlier work could be misinterpreted as being nostalgic but it wasn't and people with, with training knew that. The act of painting in itself is for me, just making something that wasn't there before. I have no political agenda. Well, relatively recent landscapes and water, there's a creek in Jessamine County that I painted often and I painted winter and summer. I've done probably close to 200 paintings both watercolor and oil before I transitioned totally to oil. And you'd see a bright yellow spot in it and people would say, "Well, what's that for?" And I'd say "It's a Pennzoil can." And it was. When someone trashed, some of the paintings I did along that creek, I remember one time I was out making drawings in preparation for a painting and this terrible smell came out and I had to find out what it was and it was a bag of, a big black trash bag full of rotten meat that someone had just tossed there. So, there's other evidence of man being there but what really attracted me to the creek to begin with, and it's, I worked there for several years, is the raw energy of the place, because it floods. And you, the road goes a long the side, which you can see after a heavy rain there is a, you can see things go out in the tree, which is above the roof of the car and you project that laterally and you think, "My gosh, I'd hate to be here when that happens." But what it's provided is a continuing source of interest. Because the creek's there, the bank's there, the road's there, but little things get washed down and pushed out, back in and the stage is constantly changing so, I can spend, if I chose to, probably the rest of my life doing that. But I, I moved on from there. So, I don't know if that answers your question about what draws me to it but early paintings of barns, white houses and things of that nature were often thought of as nostalgic, but not, not again to the trained eye. 'Cause there's no cuteness in it, there's no open buckets, there's no things that happen to people that do that. I'd have saw them as objects to paint. Had I lived somewhere else, say in, in the Bahamas, I'd probably paint bright, brightly colored houses with palm trees or, if I lived in another area of the country I'd probably paint something else. But I paint what is around me. I don't have to go far for my motif. In fact many, a whole series of paintings evolved around a small pond I have. Well, not a pond, but a, containing water tank with, with Iris leaves growing. Water Iris. I did a whole series of it but that was just right off my porch, so.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about your process. Do you ever work from photographs?

FOOSE: I work, yeah, I take photographs. I don't do sketches. I take photographs. I, the, the photographs are, they, their not composed. I know good photographers, they spend hours composing. I, mine are not composed. I, I just take them as notes. I get 'em. I don't get. Em. But they're a quick way of gathering a lot of information but mainly its, its getting back to what drew you to it in the first place.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, when you're out and about, waling around a creek bed or whatever, do you like, stop and say, "This. That's a picture?"

FOOSE: Oh, sure. I think, you know, since the advent of photography, I could spend two hours talking about the relationship between photography and art, I mean, its been well documented, is, we see differently now. Even riding in a car with the windshield framed in makes a frame around a painting and there's thousands of images like that. But, I, I, recent years, its hard to say how long ago that was, the phenomena of nature, interestingly, for example, just walking looking down at the grasses, in the grasses when there's been a flood or high water, how it sort of weaves in and out of the, the rocks, fascinate me for an abstract painting. But I've been quoted as saying, the, can't remember my own quotes but the agitated frenzy of nature interests me, but yet they're beautiful things when they're done 'cause they involve color, and they involve surface. They involved everything a good painting involves. But underlying it, there's a, there's a danger in what I see. But just like the Pennzoil can, I'm not beating some drum for ecology or the EPA or something like that. I try not to pollute, but it seems like we can't escape it 'cause people just don't care. If I've ever attempted to throw something out the window when I'm driving I think of my farther because had I done it, I not only, well, he not only would have stopped and had me pick it up, he'd have had me pick it up a mile in each direction just to teach me. So, I'm hoping to pass that on to my grandchildren, because you know, we have to do that sort of stuff. But I'm not, I'm not an overly active, I don't belong to any organizations or anything. I just quietly do what I have to do.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, my father taught me just; always leave the place a little cleaner than you found it.

FOOSE: Yeah, yeah. It was the same way when I was going thought the terrible teens, I guess. He didn't care what I did, as long as I cleaned myself up after it, you know. Cleaned it up. Like one time, I was building a model railroad set in my basement working with plaster of paris and chicken wire for a tunnel, you know. You can imagine what was going on there. And I hit my hand with a hammer and I took my hammer and I threw it. It went right through the wall. Well, I got the chicken wire and I put it in there, got some stuffing in there, put the plaster of paris, smoothed it out. You can hardly see what happened. And like George Washington was supposed to have said, "Well, I just threw a hammer." (unintelligible) Well, you've done the right thing and walked off.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

FOOSE: Never, never, never gave me a lecture on getting mad. He said, "Well, you've done the right thing. (unintelligible) okay, but you've cleaned up so that's fine." So.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow. That's impressive. Are you acquainted with Neil Di Teresa?

FOOSE: Yes, sure am.

WILLIHNGANZ: I was at his studio doing an interview with him and he talked to me about using photography so that he had a scene that he liked and then he wanted to put some figures in it and he put this up on his computer and then he took his figures and of course, he'd throw them in to Photoshop or what not and you can shrink them down and then put them where you want them and he, he arranged the elements of this picture and then when he got it the way he wanted it, print out sort of a blueprint, if you will, and then paint from that.

FOOSE: Mmm, hmm.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you use any kind of similar mock-up process?

FOOSE: Go back a hundred years. I use a hundred year old process. (laughter—Foose). I'm aware what a computer does. I mean, I'm not totally, I'm not totally unaware of their, what Photoshop, things like that you had mentioned. But, I manipulate photographs as well, and, but, I have a show opening in 19<sup>th</sup> of September and its called Flora and Fauna and what I've done is gone through magazines and other kinds of sources of objects. It could be a plate it could be a slug, like a slug slug. There's one with a rooster in it and I've cut all these out and arranged them in to collages based on where I want them to go and made paintings from it. So, that's what he's doing but he's using technology.

WILLIHNGANZ: Right.

FOOSE: And I don't know whether he's doing it better. I admire Neil. I've known him so many years, quite a few years. Its, even when I was taking photographs of houses and barns, I would manipulate, sometimes standing in one location, move two feet to the right, two feet more to the right, and just click, click, click and then glue 'em back together to get different distortions, so, but even then, when they were, the other, I don't care what you use, whether its Photoshop or, personally, I don't care what any other artists use, whether its Photoshop or a collage, just don't let 'em know what you're doing. I mean, I have a lot of tricks that I do, even my studio assistant who is supposed to be with me today, slept in apparently, he's probably the only person in the world that truly knows what I do, other than my daughters I suppose, to some extent.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. Let's see here. Now, has, has your work changed over time?

FOOSE: Oh yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: How has it changed?

FOOSE: Well, its certainly a lot more colorful, I mean, more variety of color, but I would say, I was actually part of a, a one man show at a museum in Evansville, Indiana, Owensboro and they own a large painting of mine done, oh, I want to say 30 years ago, so when this show happened about four years ago I had the new work. 11 new

paintings and someone asked that same question, "Why is there so much different?" You know, I couldn't explain it except it's been 25 years and if you're not changing your not making art. So, Picasso said, "I'm about three years ahead of my public." Takes 'em about three years to catch up. And a lot of my public hasn't caught up. They don't know what's gonna happen next. But, I've had a couple stages in life as an artist because I do exactly what I want to do and again, you get someone with a trained eye that's followed my career, you can see how these things have grown and how things that happened years ago are now coming to fruition in, in recently.

WILLIHNGANZ: Do you do any sort of social commentary with your work?

FOOSE: Nu, uh. Other than the Pennzoil can. (laughter—Foose)

WILLIHNGANZ: So it's strictly basically an aesthetic appreciation of your subject?

FOOSE: Yeah, shapes, forms. The process is fascinating too because it takes time, and it, I would hate to do anything that I've already figured it out in advance. I like the idea of causing problems and shaking the work up, but some people, I suppose, are happy with the fact that they learn a certain style, a certain body of work and they never change. Art history books are full of artists that have gotten very rich and have, they have not changed, they've just gotten bigger work. They have bigger studios and more help and stuff like that but they haven't, their work hasn't changed at all. I, I always sought a change and, and hopefully, that can, well, that's just the road I've taken.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I read an interesting quote by a filmmaker who said his process was he was always looking for new problems or difficulties that he could get himself into that he could creatively solve to get out of.

FOOSE: Well, that's a good, a good, I would agree to that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. I expect so. So, so, do you use any unusual techniques in your work?

FOOSE: Not really, there's, I, sometimes I use strange tools. Like watercolor is a very delicate medium, or can be done on paper, which is subject to being torn or ripped or something like that and I, for a while I was doing bushes and tree, tree lines and I was using, instead of a sable brush, which most watercolorists use, I was using a brush, steel brush that you work concrete with because I could incise into it and get the feeling of it in an abstract sense much faster than if I tried to paint hair by hair, so to speak and that, I don't think I invented that. But you know, sometimes I use my hands. I don't, I don't do anything that hasn't been done before. It's how you do it. You bring your own calligraphy to it to, to some extent.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about your, your studio. What's it organized like? How does it work?

FOOSE: Well, right now it's in disarray because I'm moving to Atlanta and I've had five studios since I've been in Kentucky. One that I built which was very beautifully appointed and right now I live in a house built in 1870 and essentially the whole house is a studio. But there's a certain order to it. I speak of it in the past because most of my belongings have already been moved to Atlanta and I'll be joining them in probably another six weeks but it takes a certain amount of order but every artist has his or her own order and what seems like mess to some is not to another. And I'm not obsessively neat. But when I taught painting, particularly oil painting, the students would like to splatter it all over the floor and on themselves and on their pants. Sort of took a pride because they had it on their pants. And I just sat there and looked at them and said, "The object is to get it on the canvas and not you." So to that, that extent, I'm a little bit neat.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about exhibiting your work and that whole process of getting out into the world.

FOOSE: Well, in the earlier years you do a lot of searching. Now, it's, they search you out. I recently was informed, that one, one of my paintings for the embassy in Botswana, or something or other, (unintelligible) but earlier years I did a lot of out door art exhibits, enter any possibly show that I could enter to show in, particularly if there was prize money involved and once you do you just, you keep doing this and if you do it enough, you get recognized and people start to notice you and good people, museum directors and like Steven Daugherty who, art editor of American Artist. He, he juried some shows I was in and then started to give back in a sense and when, when, I had a retrospective with the UK art museums, they asked him to write the essay for. He said, "Oh, yes. I've been following for years, his work for years." But in his case, there's humor involved at times. I remember I was invited to a conference up in Spring Green, Wisconsin, which is one of Frank Lloyd Wright's studios, for a watercolor symposium and Steven was also on the panel and he, he's, he's a dandy sort of little guy. Not a little guy but he dresses in a bow tie and stuff like that. Quite the opposite of me. He, well, someone in the audience asked the question, "What do you think about a how-to books?" And I've never been one to sugarcoat it. I just, well, they suck because they show you one way to do it and it's just like repetition. Well, he's sitting there watching me like this and he says, "As editor and publisher of many of those books, maybe we should talk." (laughter—Foose). So, he's, he's never forgotten that. And he also, another interesting anecdote, which he's never, never forgot was, I get, my process, and this might answer some other questions, my process, I get focused on an idea and I'll just run it to the wall, see what I can do. There is a plant, which I'm told is South Africa's natural, national flower. It's at least about a (unintelligible). I don't know if you know it.

WILLIHNGANZ: I do not.

FOOSE: But it's a beautiful plant. Its bloom is interesting. And I was at a friend's house one, and when they dry, they become a certain shape, a certain form. If you let

'em dry, let 'em dry in water they do one thing. They're named after Proteus, the Greek philosopher I guess who had the ability to change and become different things and I, I did a series of these. I was going to do prints of them and wood cuts and ended up doing a bunch of paintings and I was so focused when I went to that same conference, we were putting on nametags. Again Steve looked at me and he said, "You see what you wrote on there?" I said, "What?" And I'll go to my grave telling you this is true. I put "Jim Proteus." (laughter—both) That's sick. (laughter--both) But it, it happened.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about your involvement with art associations or organizations.

FOOSE: Well, again, if you hang around them enough they'll ask you to do things. I've been involved in many, belonging to, to organizations, watercolor societies they call them, like Watercolor USA, which I was one of the founding members of it. But local, regionally and locally I was involved in the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen and Lexington Art League. And if you have enough passion, and you're physically able to, they ask you to do things and so, you do them. But you don't do them all for the rest of your life. You contribute what you think you can contribute and don't do much more.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, have you been involved with the Southern Hounds, at all?

FOOSE: No. No.

WILLIHNGANZ: Okay. And have you been an officer in these organizations?

FOOSE: Yeah, I've been, I've been sitting on the board of directors. I was president of one, corresponding president, corresponding something or other, the other.

WILLIHNGANZ: Tell me about the Guild. When did you join that? The Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen.

FOOSE: Probably, and don' task me the date of this 'cause I don't know. Probably, well it was the first year they had their first fair because I did the poster for it. And I, it was always, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen but it realized heavily on craft, not that I make a distinction between what is art and not art. But they're outdoor shows were not necessarily conducive to putting paintings up where as if you had ceramics or glassware or leatherwork it could stand it a lot easier, but for quite a few yeas I was very much involved with it.

WILLIHNGANZ: What have you, did you serve as on officer on the Guild?

FOOSE: I was on the Board of Directors.

WILLIHNGANZ: For how many years?

FOOSE: Oh, 4, 5, 6. I don't know. Its ancient history.

WILLIHNGANZ: This would have been during like the '70s.

FOOSE: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, okay. And then you got less active but you maintained your membership. Did you still show there?

FOOSE: No, no, I just, it wasn't where my interests were. I felt I contributed where I could contribute. I met a lot of good friends in those, in any organization like that but it doesn't, there's a time and place for everything that you do and even though I've been asked and served on many other types of boards and stuff like this, like Living Arts and Science Center, locally, I do it with the caveat that if I feel that I'm contributing, not telling them what to do but I feel like I have a contribution to make, if I don't, its wasted effort for both them and myself. 'Cause I don't, I pulled away form these organizations.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I assume, to some extent you've become busier as your work as become more popular.

FOOSE: Well, sure. But many times it involved travel but, a lot of early years going to out door craft shows or exhibiting in Virginia, Marblehead, Massachusetts, or Ohio, wherever, you would get in the car and travel with your work and then you, I'm tired of that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, I can understand that. Have you traveled overseas?

FOOSE: Oh, yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Has that affected your work, your perspectives?

FOOSE: Yeah, it, it definitely does. I've, I've had three exhibitions in Germany. My work has been in France, China, South America, god knows where else. And I, in 1980, I guess it was '81 I was invited to teach at an art academy in Trier, Germany and at the time, there were only two other Americans involved, being asked to do that and I was invited there because of my reputation in watercolor internationally and my shows were in watercolor. But any time I travel, even within the states and spend time, like I spent 13 summers in Colorado with an art school, it always takes me at least a year to get used to the surroundings, but I, I bring back different perspectives, particularly in Europe there's a different aesthetic than American art. You're either pure American or pure European or sometimes there is a blend involved. And, I like, I've been fortunate to travel many places in the world. And like, even in England, when my children were small, another family friend and their, two of their, two boys, I have two daughters. My daughters were about 10 and 12 at the time. We flew to England for a month. We had rental cars. We sort of followed each other. We flew to Scotland and came down through the Cotswolds and places like that and ended up in London for the last, last

week of our trip but trying to find certain places from maps and the hitch was, we had, we two little green cars and they were, one would go this way, had gone this way and we never really connected. But there was a little red car that was doing the same thing we noticed. Sure enough that red car, like again that Pennzoil can got into my paintings. I put spots of red into my paintings, which, essentially you can paint most of England with four or five colors as long as there's a green or a blue involved. And white, perhaps. But I started putting red into it, because it got humorous after awhile. We stopped, my family, we were looking for what they call Elephant Rock or Elephant beach, which is supposedly, had semiprecious rocks on the shore. Which is perfect for kids 10 and 12. Two daughters. We never did find the thing but we stopped, there was man walking, this was in Scotland. There was a man walking, we had two cars and we stopped, asked him where, Elephant Rock, I think it was Elephant Rock, He had a big armful of rhubarb. He started making gestures, he was talking. I didn't understand one word of what he was saying. He was speaking English. It just cracked us up. I have never forgotten that, you know, and to this day, I could do a mental drawing of it because he was just such a character. But, yeah, travel expands, expands your ideas, expands your viewpoints, different museums, different world.

WILLIHNGANZ: I have a very similar experience. The first time I drove out to see my wife's family in Rhode Island and I got out of the car, walked into a store to ask for directions. I got back in the car and was laughing so hard. I didn't understand a word he said. (laughter—both) It was such a weird form of English.

FOOSE: Well, the dialogue was so, I did not understand one word he said. We thanked him and drove on.

WILLIHNGANZ: Now, you were in the first Guild show I believe and that was the one where they had the rain and the hail and everything else. Were you doing watercolors at that point?

FOOSE: Yeah, I was really, I think, Susan sent an email that, someone reminded me of that. Yeah. I didn't lose what people thought I lost 'cause there was a tent. We had plastic put over it but watercolors are not necessarily survivable in a heavy rainstorm if you don't have a tent. But that's part of what you did. Most things don't survive except perhaps ceramics might be okay. But I, I don't remember losing a lot of stuff that time. I do remember cussing a lot at the rain gods. I've always, my observation has been, the years that I was doing that, that god didn't like outdoor shows, since it always rained and the Guild, early in the spring was the spring exhibition and so it, in Kentucky particularly, its, its very iffy. If you do it in the fall it's very hot and you don't know what the weathers doing so, but that, that's a part of my life that's so remote now that I barely remember detail.

WILLIHNGANZ: I understand. You subscribe to periodicals for your craft?

FOOSE: Sure, I read some. I, not as much as I used to but I, this move to Atlanta has reminded me that I had too many books. We moved, somewhere between four and

five thousand books. Where I'm moving to they've got a library for me so that'll be cool but, art is continually changing so, Art News is one of my favorites. I get to see others as well, but I, I don't, I don't do it generally.

WILLIHNGANZ: When you got into the, The Guild and got involved in the League, I believe you were with...

FOOSE: Art League.

WILLIHNGANZ: The Art League. Was that important to your growth or your development as an artist?

FOOSE: Only as much as I got to make good friends with other artists and talk about similar issues. It's hard not to look at someone that does something really well and not try to imitate it at some point or another, but mainly its comradity and collegiality of these friends.

WILLIHNGANZ: Did you get into any kind of cooperative artwork with anyone else or involve, or you've pretty much always been just independent.

FOOSE: No. I've been kind of a loner in that issue.

WILLIHNGANZ: I interviewed Linda Fifield last week.

FOOSE: I don't know her.

WILLIHNGANZ: She's a, she's an interesting lady. She strings beads, which is something I thought you gave up in about second grade, but this lady strings beads, which the Smithsonian displays because she's fabulous.

FOOSE: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: And she and her husband, her husband is a very good wood turner, and he makes what she calls vessels, these basically hollowed out pieces of wood. And then she'll do decorative bead work around the top and then he'll do little carvings on the top and they sort of work together that way and I thought it was a really interesting sort of synergy that they build up in doing that.

FOOSE: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: But that doesn't sound like it's been something in your experience.

FOOSE: No, not really, but I agree. There's several books written about, particularly, man and wife, or sometimes, brothers or sisters. John Commity, for example, his brother was a craftsman and Alberto was the artist and he often had his

brother do certain elements of his artwork. So that there is that kind of relationship. I'm best left alone. And, the only thing that gets me stirred is if something, point a stick at me and started jabbing me, then I get excited but I'm best left alone to do my art.

WILLIHNGANZ: What, if you can, tell me what, what is causing the move to Atlanta. Is there a new opportunity you're pursuing here?

FOOSE: No, it's, it's a physical condition. My daughter owns a very large house and she's converted one whole level of it to me. And it's amazing. It's a big tall house, similar to this one and so we're putting an elevator in it and I just, but really the truth of it is I want to be closer to my grandchildren.

WILLIHNGANZ: Good reason.

FOOSE: And, they're growing like weeds. One's, one's 13, the others are triplets. They're 11 and so I just, I need to be near them. And I need to downsize, that's been the painful part.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, it's always difficult. A lot of decisions. Hard to part with stuff.

FOOSE: Yeah, and making art for 50 plus years, stuff piles up.

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we're sort of at the, the upper crest of where I think we're going to go in our lives. I'm 62 and we've got a four-bedroom house and the girls have now moved out and we haven't got grandchildren yet.

FOOSE: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, we've got a basement full of memorabilia and files from the '70s and all that stuff that I never parted with because I never had to. Each house was bigger. And we got 3,000 square feet right now, so, you know for two of us, that's plenty of room.

FOOSE: Yeah, yes.

WILLIHNGANZ: But the downsizing, we know its coming.

FOOSE: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: It's just a question of when. That's what we're looking for. As you look at the, the development of art and craft in this state, in this little region that we are inhabiting, how would you say it has gone? Have there been like major periods of growth and development and is the interest in craft and artwork higher now, or lower than when you really got active?

FOOSE: There'll always be an interest in it. The thing that I've observed is, whether you're in Europe or in Santa Fe, every region or country has its own way of expressing craft and I think that comes back to man's basic need to do something with his hands. There's nothing more satisfying, with all the technology, technology has made an interesting inroad into some of these crafts, but Kentucky as far as I know, sort of rolls with the punches, so to speak, as any other area of the country. Some areas are very hot and Kentucky, Berea is a very big area for crafts, and another area, Santa Fe, so the artists, of that nature, crafts people tend to congregate in certain areas. Survival of the many, so to speak. I don't know what else to say about that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I was doing, a couple of weeks ago, an interview with a lady in Seattle, who collects the pottery of Mata Ortiz, which is a small, Mexican village outside (unintelligible), I believe it is. And, and they have, originally, seven families that started and built this very unique pottery, which the Indians take the hairs from their children's' heads and they make these very fine brushes and paint very exquisite (unintelligible) on them. And now they've got a community of roughly 2,000 artists who create this pottery that's become pretty much world famous. It's in most museums and stuff. And it's just kind of interesting to look at how that culture developed. It would be interesting to do a documentary just on that city and its development.

FOOSE: Yeah.

WILLIHNGANZ: Because it hasn't been going that long but it's just become an industry for that whole area.

FOOSE: Well, that's the purest form. Unfortunately there's another side to that. There's some crafts people, we don't have to mention, there's one artist that became so famous he doesn't do his own work anymore. And he would just sort of come in in the morning and just sort of pick the ones he liked and sign his own name to them and leave. And I find that very disingenuous. But what you've related, with the Indian area, I think that's art in its purest form because, with some support, they can become something bigger than a local phenomenon. And it sounds like they've had that.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, I think they have. I think though that there's always a certain conflict between being creative and being commercially successful. And I've been surprised in the interviews I've done, and I've done now 16 or 17 different interviews for The Guild. Probably more than that. Closer to 20. And what I'm surprised by is how many of the artists that I've met, who've done stunning work and very impressive work, don't do that as a living. That's, you know, they have a day job and this is what they do to exhibit it to sell.

FOOSE: Well, that, that's another side of the coin. I think the true artists will make art whether they sell or not sell. But we live in a society, a time, I don't know if its ever been any different, that we still have to pay bills and you can do it in a pure form, really if you work at something, there's arguments on both sides of this as well, but if you work at something to make a living and then do the art and can keep up both of

them, it can be very good. But if you turn your art into a commercial commodity, it all goes down hill from there. Meaning if you're doing exactly what you think will sell, that's dangerous. For me it is, but you know, I've helped raise two children. They're both very successful young ladies. They're not young anymore. Tells how old I am but the, you know, they had to be supported, you know, they went to college and had expenses, and so you have to, you do what you do to survive. I don't know another way to get around the question.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, you know, I used to think, in my youth, that there were basically manufactured goods and handmade goods but the truth is there's all sorts of gradations between the two and I look at, for instance, the work of Louisville Pottery and they do fine work and I buy a lot of their work and I have a lot of their cups and plates and all sorts of things and my wife, through the university, buys some of their commemorative things to reward people but it's a very commercial focus, even though they use, what I would call hand-made techniques, they mass produce in a lot of ways and they've actually tried to sell through the mall and some other outlets which are not traditional folk, sort of handcraft. And then I went, recently, last week actually and did an interview with Bybee Pottery folks.

FOOSE: Right...

WILLIHNGANZ: Which are still in the same building they had in 1811. And I'm in there and I'm banging my head on their beams because it's just a little room. People were smaller then, but its still, its amazing to be in the same room and even though the, the fire, the kiln they're using is from '76, its on the same site where their original kiln was and, you just look at what people are willing to sacrifice in order to survive and what choices they have to make and of course its, so much of art has come out of our need to have a bowl, or a plate and then we learn we can make that look kind of nice and its nicer to use, and then it became an artwork that wasn't even intended to be eaten off of. But I just wonder about the conflicts there and how you resolve those.

FOOSE: Well, you heard of the Cabbage Patch Dolls?

WILLIHNGANZ: Sure. Owned a couple. Bought my daughters those when they were young.

FOOSE: When did you buy them?

WILLIHNGANZ: Oh, lord, back in the....

FOOSE: Well, I remember, I can't think of her name now, the original Cabbage Patch Dolls and that was a case where someone came in and said we will give you money to sell out the name and they were paid, I don't know \$10,000 at once, they lost everything. They lost the right to make them. But I still have one of the original Cabbage Patch Dolls, 'cause it was handcrafted. And I knew another, in fact, the young lady that used to live across the street, my kids were small and used to baby-sit. She was making

a certain kind of doll and she went to RISDE, Rhode Island School of Design and someone from one of the big department stores, Macys or somewhere like that, wanted to know if they could sell some of it. She thought it was great. Well, she said, we want a thousand of them. Well, it practically destroyed her. There was no way she could do that. You know, she was in this gap between making these totally personal things to, how am I gonna do a thousand of these. You can't do that. And that's, that's when other influences effect the craft.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah. That's a hard thing to, to get balanced, really. But some of us are lucky like Susan is, to surround yourself with all personally made artwork. It's gorgeous.

FOOSE: Sure.

WILLIHNGANZ: But there aren't many of us that can actually do that.

FOOSE: Right.

WILLIHNGANZ: You just do the best; I guess I'd say strike the best balance that you can.

FOOSE: Well, somehow I've always managed to do what I wanted to do.

WILLIHNGANZ: So, are people more aware of handcrafted art than they used to be?

FOOSE: No, I think it's about the same. I really do. I, there are some stars like Powell, Steven Powell in Kentucky. Prior to him doing that, there wasn't much glass being done in Kentucky and here he comes in with these beautiful, totally individualized things. And, there's some superstars obviously that have done very well in the art world.

WILLIHNGANZ: Yeah, look at (unintelligible) and his...

FOOSE: Well, especially (unintelligible). You know, he isn't, I don't, I don't even want to think about how much money that man, that guy makes anymore because it's so unrealistic, but its become an international sort of thing but they're also instantly recognizable if you see it in Europe or some place like this. But I, I think every artist has to make a decision on just what level they want to play at and not feel bad because they don't achieve more or not, they achieve less. Because that's what makes us truly human. That we can, we can do, up to a point, but when it's no longer fun anymore, why do it. I've been very luckily. And I've had all the shows I think I need. I'm not particularly, you know, impressed. That was pointed out when the, in a newspaper article that I had in The Retrospective in 2002 at the UK art museum 'cause I made a statement about, something to the effect that, we should have some lilies in here 'cause

all these things look dead. 'Cause they're paintings and artwork I hadn't seen in 20, 25 years brought in from collections all, all over. And, but I'm pretty content where I am.

WILLIHNGANZ: That's great. Okay. I think that's all we need to do for today.