

00:00 Victoria : Hi

Harold : Hi Victoria. How are you today?

Victoria : I'm good, how are you?

Harold : I'm good, I'm good.

Victoria : It's a nice clear day today, I'm going to go for a two hour walk later.

Harold : That sounds nice.

Victoria : What's it like there?

Harold : Well, it's a bit cold, but it's not bad and we've got bird cages. Catherine [Carmichael] put bird cages out yesterday, so there's a whole bunch of birds already today.

Victoria : Oh, wonderful! Probably more birds out there [at Harold's studio in Flesherton, Ontario] than down here in the city.

Harold : Well, they seem to not be here until we put food out!

00:38 Victoria : Maybe that's something I should do! So, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview, Harold. Obviously, I want to talk to you about the McClure Gallery show that's on now, *An Artistic Dialogue: John Heward and Harold Klunder*. And, I know you had a chance to look at the video that was done between Natasha [Reid] and Paul [Machnik] and it was really great.

Harold : Yeah, I thought it was really good. I phoned Paul and told him I thought it was good and he's so embarrassed, he said : I kept groping my face and losing the camera... But all that... it's interesting in my opinion.

Victoria : I agree.

Harold : It's ad hoc, it's not a printshop with polished walls.

Victoria : I think that's the charm. It's very much about getting your hands dirty and inks all over the place.

Harold : Yeah, I think so too.

01:35 Victoria : So, one of the things that came up a lot in that interview and something that I thought we could talk a bit about is that very idea of collaboration and I know that this isn't the first time you've collaborated with an artist. You have a very disciplined studio art practice, but I

also know that collaboration has been a part of your practice over a number of years. So, why don't you talk to me a little about that?

Harold : Sure. Well, I think I was always interested in doing things that I didn't know how they would end up. You know, you just start something and then when you're doing it with someone else...I think a lot of early work was with Catherine and I, just even outside of Niagara. Catherine would do performance and I would do sound work for her and she would react to the sound or I would make sound recordings responding to how the performance was going. They always mixed, sound and performance. As a performer, it's a very quiet activity but just adding sound creates a different situation. And even when we were doing Niagara, in many ways it was like a noise band. We had no actual real interest in making it into a song kind of situation and more just let it vent really.

Victoria : There's a better word than vent - it's called improvisation, no? And just so people listening understand, Niagara was a band you had in the eighties in Toronto, right?

Harold : Yes, with other artists. It's always interesting because it's kind of like when an artist does a collage and you're starting with things and it's just sound. You're collaborating with the materials, in a sense. When you're working with someone else, there's a lot of push and pull. One person has one idea and the other has another idea and they somehow come together logically. Part of it, I think, is knowing that person well.

04:10 Victoria : Yes, I was going to say choosing who you improvise with. And in a sense maybe this is a segue to your relationship with John [Heward] and how you came to have this particular print collaboration with John.

Harold : I guess the impetus was essentially Paul having a studio. We did some sound work together, just around the same time. Again, it's never done with a music sheet. It's just going into it and then sometimes it works better than other times, but with visual art it's a very silent thing. Making art is actually very silent. The work speaks but when you're doing it, there's only the sound of the brush moving.

Victoria : There's something about the print process that also facilitates collaboration. Is there something about the print process - which is already social - is there something about that?

05:19 Harold : Yeah, I think essentially with printing, there's a third person who's actually the printer and that's maybe where it starts. But, I think with John, I just felt I got along with him really well. He's kind of quiet, doesn't say a lot and the words are very essential. He never goes on about weird things. He's more or less very straightforward. I can't sense what I am, but anyway! I think we hit it off; he likes my work and I like his work so maybe that's often a beginning point. You kind of know something about that person...Unfortunately he's gone, but he had a really rich mind that he kept very private.

Victoria : And a very musical mind; he was part of the Murray Street Band for years and really well-known as an experimental drummer. In the catalogue that goes with the show, James Campbell emphasizes that. He calls music the elephant in the room...So maybe we can go through each of the collaborations in the exhibition.

06:46 Harold : Sure.

Victoria : There are three of them. Something I mentioned to you before about the first one, which are dry points, called *Two Heads*, was how both of you are known as abstract painters and both of you have also done self-portraiture. I do recall at the McClure, we had a show with both Sylvia Safdie, John's partner and John. He showed these large prints which I think you could see in Paul's video yesterday. They were self-portraits but in a very expressive abstract way. You've also claimed that you always start your painting with the outline of a head. So, both of you have worked with this idea, in one form or another, of self-portraiture and in these very subtle dry points (which don't have colour unlike the other works in the show) you're working with one head at the top edge and one head at the bottom with all this white space in between.

08:19 Harold : The view I have of it is that it's kind of like a roll drum - what a roll drum used to be in television - where the thing rolls and the credits come along. The top and bottom kind of collide, but in a circular way like if you imagine a rope winding out at the top but coming back again at the bottom. It's a circular feeling within a very flat surface and I think that both John and I took to that because he put it on the edge and I put it on the edge. In the middle, whatever paint there is, is extremely subtle. Almost like dust falling on a sheet of paper in some places. In a way, it's placed the way we want it to be placed, but on another hand there are a certain amount of things you don't want to control. When something falls from the brush, you make that work.

09:31 Victoria : I felt like the space between, there was a conversation going on in the space between, like a dialogue. Or as you were talking about, a meeting behind the scenes. So, I guess the big central feature of the show is the *Catch and Hold* series that was done with John between 2017 and 2018 and these are very large colourful carborundum prints that you then both painted and then you went over again with watercolour. I think everybody is interested in hearing about that process. It was quite a process over a two-year period. Let's talk about that.

Harold : I think initially it was just kind of finding the paper, not finding it but sort of...Paul found the paper, but we knew we wanted it to be quite large. It made sense to have it be like a painting even though it would essentially be called a print. Printing is a third of it, the rest is kind of improvised around it. First John made his marks, which are very elemental, almost like minimal sculpture. His marks often look like sculpture and I've always liked that in his work. A quality, a solidity. It either hangs well from the ceiling or sits hard on the floor and there's a certain kind of feeling to the work that is difficult to describe. It's an experience when you look at it.

Victoria : Especially when you can walk around it. For instance, some of the works that were shown not that long ago at The Darling Foundry.

Harold : Other works where he just puts steel hoops on the sides, where you can sense the motion by looking at it but then they call you to a still place. They sit on the floor and they don't move but on the other hand, there's a curve. There's something that translates into it, giving it life. I think that I was always taken by the work even if I'm not always sure why or how things grab you and they take hold.

Victoria : Yes, and it's also sometimes the opposite of what one's own aesthetic is, and I guess that's something that is reflected in what you named the series, *Catch and Hold*. It's also reflected in the title of the catalogue published to document the work, which came from James Campbell's essay, about *contrepoint* or counterpoint, this idea of two different aesthetics playing off each other. You've got John's black base note, and then you moving, dialoguing around it.

13:01 Harold : At first I didn't know quite how to deal with it, but I thought the best way is to do what I would normally do, just react. Because there's sort of the "bones" there, what I would do is work around it, enhancing that and bringing it forward or letting it fall into the work. There's a certain amount of control both ways. In a sense John lays down the law and then I try to scurry around the fence.

Victoria : Although there's a lot of your colour and movement around the rectangle, that rectangle is in the center and really holds down the space and you have to negotiate.

Harold : They are black. Black really invites you to see the deep space; it isn't something that rises above the paper. Light colours beside it really give depth to the black. He used some deep gray as well. When I saw it, I just loved it. I thought, wow, this is something I can work with.

Victoria : And also a couple of places, it's not a full black, it's almost as though he used a dry brush.

14:29 Harold : Yeah, he actually used a roller, like a conventional roller for painting walls and then we put the ink on and then he could go as gentle as he wanted or push hard and some of it was taped with masking tape.

Victoria : And why did you think the carborundum was used? Did you enjoy using that? There are wonderful photos of you and John...particularly of you working with carborundum.

Harold : Essentially acrylic was the powder and I don't know the exact make-up of it but I had done prints before with that at a different print shop in Montreal and that sort of got me thinking that texture in print is usually not acceptable because it's a flat sheet that goes through a hard press. Also, the paper was a big influence because it's irregular, it's not machine cut it's made and pulled off a screen and so the fact that it's like that made it possible to think about

how to deal with the edge. There's a raised quality, which is not apparent when you see it in a photo but in reality when it's on the wall and you're walking by it, carborundum is something that is raised away from the surface where everything else is flat. The black goes very deep and the carborundum is something that sits up.

16:21 Victoria : It is and I agree with you that when you see photos of them you don't get that. I've seen them in Paul's studio - they are 4 by 3 feet - and so when you're standing in front of them, they really have a strong physical presence, like a painting. There is that sense of texture. They have a physicality that is really unusual and also I think because of the watercolour, it also gives it that sense.

Harold : In Paul's talk, he talks about me working with burlap bags and that influenced him to sort of create something that was raised.

Victoria : I do remember that and remember seeing those burlap bags in the studio and thinking how the heck are you going to paint on those? The texture and the physical presence are what stand out when you see those burlap pieces.

17:36 Harold : Part of it is the social experience with three people in the shop, and Milo [Paul's assistant] was there too, of course. That's a big thing too because we laugh and we ask : "does that work?" and we talk to each other about things. It's not simply just quietly doing work. We walk around a bit and come back to it. It's very kinetic.

Victoria : I guess the printing process also allows for time in between. You have to pull the prints, etc. The improvisational aspect seems so dominant especially the way you all work. I think Paul is experimental. I think he really enjoys that and John did and I know you do. That comes out in the work and in the images we see of you all working together. I also want to talk to you about the last series, which is a bit of a different collaboration. They are all the size of a sheet of printing paper, 8 and a half by 11 inches. I know they were done after John had passed and so maybe you can talk a little about that process.

19:26 Harold : Basically I painted them in my studio on the floor. I took a roll of canvas and unrolled it and laid down the sheets of paper in two rows and I read them all very carefully because I thought this is going to influence me, which is what it did I guess. There was a lightness in the amount of words in John's work. They say a lot but there isn't a lot of text, just small fragments here and there. It was easy to have it all quite quickly. I did them all, I think, in two sessions of maybe a half hour each and just reacting to what was already there.

Victoria : I can just read a couple, so people have an understanding of what you're saying. [Victoria reads some of John's poetry that is on the artworks] Just looking at them now, the colours you used to respond to them are celebratory colours almost. Bright blue, yellow...

21:18 Harold : And very thin, there is a lot of water in the watercolour. In part because I also really liked that it was a big empty sheet with words on it. I just thought "that's very like John

because he wants to isolate it down to what is the most basic or what can say the most" so I was trying to respond to that. A passage that might suggest something really elusive like the sky or something, which is always changing, it was interesting to apply colour with those thoughts in my head. You're not copying something as much as inventing what you think might work with that sentence.

Victoria : There's a saying that came to mind when I saw these and it's ekphrasis. That's when people write poetry in response to a visual image, for example a painting, so an ekphrastic poem are words that are trying to respond to the meaning the poet feels is coming from the painting. But what this is, what your practice is here, is a kind of inverting of that. You're responding in paint and watercolour to the words, trying to feel the meaning of those words. When I look at them, I can see a couple of places in here, very minimal, an eye...very suggestive marks, mostly abstract but also some figurative, or some words almost written. It's very delicate. They look great in the gallery because we have the large carborundum *Catch and Hold* prints next to the subtle, small framed works of *Fragments*. It's another version of two different aesthetics together in the gallery, counterpointing each other.

23:45 Harold : At that point, I knew that John was gone, so that's another thing. I was kind of feeling that and at the same time his words were there in front of me so that was kind of strange. When I'm in the studio, I always write things on the wall: potential titles, things I've heard or things I've read. Kind of creates a momentum.

Victoria : When you left your Montreal studio, you wanted to cover them all up I understand, but the artists taking over didn't want you to!!!

Harold : I did leave one part. It was requested and then I thought why not. Mostly, I didn't want to impose my views on two artists who were moving into the space and I wanted them to be able to own the space. I did take many photographs of all the words on the walls.

Victoria : Are you going to use them in your studio up there [in Flesherton, Ontario]?

Harold : No, not likely. I'll do other things, but it's fun to remember. They reminded me of John's words, his fragments. Basically putting them where he thought they made a comfortable composition, one up high, one to the side.

Victoria : Very much like poetry, the spaces in between are important. Looking back at the *Two Heads* collaboration, where the spaces in between are as important sometimes. They help emphasize the meaning of whatever mark is there, be it a word or a brush stroke.

25:30 Harold : Even the density of the colour...if you apply a colour without much water, it's going to have a fullness that you sometimes want but other times, you want it almost pure water with only a hint of colour. You're almost feeling sky, or feeling air that is not visible. It's subtle, but I really like those just because of John's work. It was easy to react to because it felt like he was there.

Victoria : Did you ever see John perform? I saw him at the Sala Rossa where he was playing. He was drumming and he would say out loud, very loud, three or four words, some of them like the word fragments that are here. John did write a lot and the words in the show come from an unpublished manuscript. There are really so many beautiful poems. People might call them word fragments, but they really are poetry to me.

Harold : The performance he was part of was made up of 17 musicians. I don't know the exact name, but it's an orchestra that gets together regularly and it's fairly random but John just bangs at the drums and then eases off and he's really almost ruthless as a drummer. He has a very potent kind of banging.

27:26 Victoria : It sounds like how you described that black rectangle at the middle of *Catch and Hold*. He lays it down with strength.

Harold : That's right. And commitment, he's very committed to : "OK, this is the mark and here it is". I respect that because you look at your own work and think, where am I going to go today?... and thinking is kind of pointless. After you just start and it gains its own momentum with layering.

Victoria : Coming from a place that isn't necessarily just the mind, correct?

Harold : Yes, right...a very visceral thing, I think. Painting is very visceral as music is, because you're hearing it. You can think about your ears, but it's not just your ears. Something is happening.

Victoria : The works have an embodied, material texture. I don't want to keep you too much longer. It has been great talking to you. We miss you having a studio here in Montreal. We hope you're going to be coming back to see us all.

Harold : Well, I will be back. We go back and forth; Catherine and I spent 20 years there.

Victoria : And the Visual Arts Centre was very lucky to have you teaching a few workshops with us.

Harold : I remember everybody's work, which is really astonishing. I forget their names often, but the works speak to me. Kind of a strange thing to have that kind of "no memory and memory".

Victoria : A visual memory though! Well, I'll let you go. Thanks again Harold. We'll talk soon and have a lovely day.