

**Oral History Interview of  
Charles Adams**

**Interviewed by: Leslie Dutton and Bill Tydeman  
December 13, 2000  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*Leslie Dutton Fine Arts Interviews***

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Charles Adams as he discusses running his own art gallery.

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<b>Subject</b>	<b>Transcript Page</b>	<b>Time Stamp</b>
Introduction and background	05	00:00:00
Growing up; art	08	00:04:51
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Moving back to Lubbock	12	00:15:57



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**Leslie Dutton (LD):**

This interview is with Charles Adams to Leslie Dutton and Bill Tydeman on December 13, 2000. Charles owns Adams Galleries, and is an art historian, and I would just like to know background about yourself.

**Charles Adams (CA):**

I was born in Lubbock, and I'm Charles Adams the Third. You guys have interviewed both my grandfather and my father about land title stuff.

LD:

Oh, okay.

CA:

But I went to Tech for a while, and then I ended up going to New York, and I finished school up there, I went to NYU and then did a little graduate work at Columbia but never finished that. And I had a small gallery dealing in printmakers in New York in the Village on Bleecker Street. It was a clean, well-lighted Place, it's still there, I sold it to my best customer, and he's still running it.

LD:

Wow.

CA:

I had it for seven years, and he's had it now for—well since 1979, so he's had it longer than I did.

LD:

What really led you into art, art history and those kind of things? Any influences from your family?

CA:

Not really. Probably one of my biggest influences was Lawanda Murphy.

LD:

Really?

CA:

I went to Camp Davis with her son Joe, and we were good friends. And I was always able to draw from grade school up, and thought I wanted to be an artist, and Lawanda worked with me

some, and Lawanda's kind of the one who said, "Get out of town, go to New York," while my mother was saying, "Stay home, stay home." She was kind of pushing me.

LD:

So how old were you when you were working with Lawanda?

CA:

Well, when I first met Lawanda I was between grade school and junior high.

LD:

Oh wow.

CA:

When we went to camp with her kids. And I knew her kids, was good friends with her kids all the way through junior high and high school. And then Lawanda and I kept up. When she and Louis would come to New York, they'd come see me and we'd go to dinner or something.

**William Tydeman (WT):**

You mentioned your talent for drawing. How did that play out in your family? Did they encourage you, or was it like so many families—

CA:

No, they really didn't. Yeah, wisely they didn't. Somebody comes in here now and says they have a kid who has talent, I say, "Well you know, break his hands," you know. But I came from a long line of lawyers, and everybody kept saying, "Well, learn how to make a living and then you can do art on the side." But their view of art was like everybody else's, that there's one way to make a living with art, and that's by being a painter, and if you're a painter it's like being a movie star—the chances are pretty slim you're going to be a star. And what I didn't realize and they didn't realize either was that art's pervasive in the culture, and there are all kinds of venues in support of the arts as well as the arts. And I took—I'm dyslexic, had a hard time in school, a hard time reading, and a high IQ and was considered lazy and a—what did they call me? Underachiever. And I took art history review at Tech, was my first art history class—

LD:

With whom?

CA:

—and it was like suddenly here were photographs and prints and paintings that tied everything together. I mean it was like a door opened up. It was like looking at the string of pearls—one thing led to another thing led to another thing, and it was all politically, economically, socially

...tied with art. And art reflected all the different movements, reflected the wars and the economies and the—you know, the church and all the different developments. So it tied world history together for me.

WT:

Now was your dyslexia diagnosed when you were a kid?

CA:

Not when I was a kid, no. Because I was—

WT:

It was too early, yeah.

CA:

Yeah. I was born in '42, so it was just laziness. And it's gotten less as I've gotten older. I'm a reader now.

WT:

No kidding.

CA:

Which is kind of strange. And dyslexia kind of runs in the family, so.

LD:

Isn't that interesting with a bunch of lawyers.

CA:

Well, the lawyers aren't the dyslexic ones. [Laughter]

LD:

Okay, yeah.

WT:

I was thinking—I mean, there were people like Lawanda around and—

CA:

Yeah.

WT:

But Lubbock, I'd have to generalize, in the fifties as a kid growing up, I mean this is not an art-centered community—

CA:

No.

WT:

You're not getting much—

CA:

The house I grew up in, there was a painting over the sofa that came from the furniture store, and there was a ballet dancer in my sister's room, and that was it. And my dad was—he kind of wanted to be an archeologist, and so he was interested in indigenous cultures. And so, there was some Indian art around, he collected some—I think FDR was giving out paper sacks and pastels and the Indians were doing some drawings on bags, and he collected some of that. So he was a real influence as far as keeping an open mind and looking at what was around you. The family was well-educated and open, but not art oriented. And I think art was one of the ways that I could express myself, since I couldn't read and I couldn't write.

LD:

How was Lawanda as a teacher?

CA:

She really wasn't a teacher, she was just a friend, a mother of a friend of mine. And I would take stuff to her and I'd do drawings that I thought were really swell, and she'd critique them. And I had a real hard time going to black in a drawing. I'd say "There's no black," and she said, "There's black there, you've got to just look, you'll see there's black there, there's a dark shadow in everything." And she kind of—and she denies it, but she kind of maybe realized that I wasn't the artist that I thought I could be. But she also made me realize how interested I was in the arts. And so it was just kind of falling into it from there. [To person entering] Hi.

**Unknown person (UP):**

Hello.

[Pause in recording]

WT:

So when you mention Lawanda's influence, when you came to Tech and made that—so she's saying somewhere along the line—and didn't you need to look at the work that you were doing



and not come to understand your talent, find your talent, and I'm reading too much into it?

CA:

Yeah. No, I mean I would draw and I could draw pretty well, I could draw. But I never could learn to get beyond the opinion of what I saw as opposed to what I was really looking at. And so there was that. And I just didn't see a future for myself as a painter. And it was going in then into the sixties and crafts were important and so I kind of looked at crafts and thought crafts was an answer. Saw a real division between fine arts and crafts that happened at that point.

LD:

Can you address that just a bit? Of your view of that? Crafts versus fine arts?

CA:

Well it's just in the sixties a lot of people were really involved in the crafts. Just the handmade object. And it kind of harked back to provincial American art, or Mexican art. And it looked like there was a real awareness of crafts as a fine art in America at that point. And sure enough after that then they developed the American Crafts Museum, which is close to the Museum of Modern Art. It really did take on its own life.

LD:

Do you think it's still viewed like that?

CA:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean especially when you look at people like Louise Arnold and her collection, which is a really strong collection of craftspeople. People who have taken crafts beyond just craft into the fine art.

WT:

When you said those lightbulbs went off for you in a sense when you were at Tech, and I assume that was freshman year, an art survey, so at that point you—

CA:

Tech went on for a long time. [Laughter]

LD:

So how long was that?

CA:

Yeah, it went on for a long time.

WT:

But I guess what I was getting at that you were typical, were you an entering freshman at that point, eighteen years old, [inaudible] when you first—

CA:

Yeah, eighteen, nineteen, yeah.

WT:

And when, in the course of that series of academic experiences did you decide, “All right, I know art’s for me but I’ve got to find my niche and I’ve got to look for other areas.” I guess what I’m getting at is how did the whole gallery thing begin to evolve? [Person enters space]

CA:

[To person entering] Hi Jaylin [?] [00:10:07]. I came by your house about two thirty. No about two, a little after two.

**Unknown Speaker (US):**

You just left.

[Pause in recording]

CA:

Fred Leighton’s, which was a store in the village that sold Mexican crafts and jewelry and clothing and went on—now they sell high end antique jewelry. And I discovered I could sell, and I never knew I could sell. I could sell just talking to people, and would just stand at the counter and—

WT:

That’s interesting.

CA:

And I sold better than the Leightons did, actually it was Murray Mondschein and his wife. And so a friend of mine had an opportunity to buy a small poster shop, and wanted to invest money and asked me if I’d run it. And I said, “Sure.” And so I started working there and it didn’t work out, the place didn’t succeed. And so he was closing up, and I talked to my folks and at that point I had met a number of New York printmakers. I was exclusively interested in being a print dealer as opposed to a painting dealer or watercolor. And I met a number of printmakers and found a—I kind of improved on everything that he had done wrong. Found the right location, the right size, the right rent.

WT:

Still in the village?

CA:

Still in the village, on Bleecker. And he was on Bleecker, he was just on the wrong side of Sixth Avenue. And I moved over, Bleecker and Charles with antique dealers, I was right next door to Pierre Deux. And I made a living from the get-go, from the day I opened the door. Which was unlike doing it here. But—

WT:

But that was also pretty well timed, right? I mean in the sense that—

CA:

It was in the early seventies, and if—you know in Manhattan, you're in a store like this and above you is twenty floors of customers. And I mean it's hard not to make a living in that town. Especially with services.

WT:

Yeah. [Inaudible].

CA:

And so I sold local printmakers and I did some framing, not the kind of framing that I do here. But real minimal framing, and then sold prints. And eventually sold the gallery. I got to—I was about thirty-six, thirty-seven. My mother's health was failing back here. I'd been up there for ten years and I missed the flat, the dry, and the brown, I missed all the things I thought I hated.

WT:

Is that right? That's real interesting.

CA:

I'm telling you, I was watching John Wayne movies just to see flat.

WT:

No kidding.

CA:

And it was not due [?] [00:13:19] to come back, and I thought I'd never do another gallery again. And I came back here and started running family real estate, residential rental. And I eventually started kind of selling that off, and I opened up down on Broadway and had twelve years on Broadway that were really lean, but developed a pretty strong following. And again, selling

printmakers, and selling printmakers out here is like doing missionary work, because people don't understand what prints are. And when I moved into this location about six years ago I started making money, and I started carrying local painters. And there seems to be more of an interest here now in local painters than there was. Used to, buying art was a big city production that you bought art from your betters, and they told you what was good. And people just—they seem real interested in buying art from people that they know, and they know something about, and they can relate to the work and to what the artist is seeing, because it's all in the same area. And my theory is if you're—you're not really investing in art unless you're spending twenty to two hundred thousand for a piece, and then your chances are iffy. Because—I carry people in New York who were very hot. And boy, you can't—nobody wants to hear about them now.

WT:

Just the vagaries of [inaudible] are such that [inaudible].

CA:

Yeah. Oh it's very—you know. There are starts and there are bit actors, and most of us are bit players. So I try to avoid any talk of investing in art. I figure if you're paying two thousand dollars for a painting that's going to hang over a four thousand dollar sofa, and that four thousand dollar sofa's going to Goodwill, then what are you worried about? And so, it's been a slow take. People in Lubbock are real loyal once you start dealing with them. But they're slow on the uptake. But I talk gallery but really I'm a frame shop, and I support myself as a frame shop.

WT:

I noticed the framing.

CA:

Yeah, absolutely. Wouldn't be here if it weren't for framing.

WT:

Did you have—I mean at the point that you came back to Lubbock, was Baker Gallery still—

CA:

Baker was still cooking, yeah, absolutely. And Baker did a tremendous amount of groundwork for me. He carried people that at the time were important, at the time weren't important, who later became extremely important. And I think that that's helped people see—because we've been here enough generations now that you can look back and see people who were coming through here. Gene Klosses that you could buy at the Baker Company for twenty and thirty dollars are now two and three thousand. And that's reassuring. And he ran a really strong gallery, probably a stronger gallery than I do, because he reached further. He carried a lot of New

Mexico artists, and he stretched a lot further than I did, than I do, and was a lot more aggressive than I am.

WT:

Now I'm intrigued by what you said—in those first years you were doing exclusively prints.

CA:

Um-hm.

WT:

In Lubbock. So were these local folks that you were carrying?

CA:

Lynwood Kreneck, who teaches screen printing at Tech. The first time I met Lyn I walked up to him at a print show at Tech and said, "My name's Charles Adams and I'm a print dealer in Lubbock," and he said, "There are no print dealers in Lubbock," and turned his back on me and walked off. And I talked to somebody about him, he said, "Oh, you just have to suck up." So I sucked up mercilessly after that and then he listened to me, and we've become great friends. And he is technically one of the finest screen printers that I've dealt with anywhere, and has had some bad experiences trying to get his work out, he's had some work lost or destroyed, and just refuses to do it. Which is a shame, because he's got an international reputation among printmakers, but the public doesn't know about him.

WT:

And was it Kreneck who started the big print—

CA:

Started, yeah the Color Print, which is a biannual show. And last year he took it where it opened in every state in the union on the same day.

WT:

That's right, I remember that.

CA:

And I don't know what he's going to do to top that.

WT:

I don't to keep asking all the questions—Leslie? I was just—that was making me think about the relationship between a gallery and a dealer and the university.

CA:

The university's been real important to me, especially with printmaking. Because it takes a lot of equipment to be a printmaker, and a lot of private people in a town this size aren't printmakers. When I first opened up I called New York, I called all my printmakers up there, and they all sent me to work on consignment. And I opened up with a gallery full of what had been good sellers for me in New York, and they didn't sell well out here. I had a couple of names that were recognizable, but that's when I started selling local printmakers. And one of the nice things about selling printmakers is you don't have to say no to artists a lot because by the time somebody's a printmaker they're pretty well along. And where you have to say no a lot when you're carrying painters, because there are a lot of people who'd like to show their work, and they're just not ready to show.

WT:

Right. Since the technique is so demanding that they'd have to work their way through [inaudible] printing.

CA:

Yeah exactly. Yeah because they've had an education in printmaking or they're not doing it. And somebody like Lynwood puts them through the grinder. So, they'd be a pretty good screen printer after he got through with them.

WT:

Who are some of the people you carry locally?

CA:

Locally, now, I carry Tony Arnett, who's a painter. I'd probably say she's a realist, a still life painter. She's got a really strong following. She's a strange artist in that she's never had a dealer before. I'm the only dealer she's ever dealt with, she's never dealt with a gallery, she sells her own work, which is real unhealthy for a career, but she's got a really strong following and she demands high prices for her work. And I carry Lahib Jaddo, who teaches at Tech. I carry Ken Dickson, who teaches at Tech. I carry some of James Johnson's work, who's a local artist, he graduated from Tech. Kathy Whiteside, who's a Tech graduate. She's a painter, she does some collages that I carry. I carry—sitting here looking, I can't even think of their names.

WT:

Connie Martin.

CA:

Connie Martin, who's just come into the gallery. She's also a part of that midcentury show that I

put together. Connie and Lawanda were both—Lawanda Murphy, I carry her paintings and her watercolors. I'm sitting here looking at that guy's work and I can't even think of his name.

LD:

Jean Badgers.

CA:

Yeah, I carry Jean Schofield Badger—

WT:

Chinn, you—

CA:

John Chinn, a little bit of Angela Adams. Luis Jiménez, who is—I carry his prints. He a sculptor out of—originally from El Paso, but lives in Hondo. David?

David:

Yeah.

CA:

Is that a phone for me?

David:

Yes.

*End of Recording*

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