James L. Acord Archive Project

In the mid to late 1980s the nuclear sculptor Jim Acord, moved to Richland to advance his work incorporating nuclear technologies and radioactive materials in contemporary sculpture. In the late 1990s a complex sequence events culminated in Jim losing his Richland Studio. Before the owners of the property hauled everything to the dump in advance of selling the property I packed up as much as I could of anything that seemed worth archiving. In the summer of 2014 I began the process of documentation. So far I've taken thousands of photographs and scans of Jim's sketchbooks, slides and photograph collections, and have made a preliminary inventory of five file cabinets and the contents of some two dozen boxes of Jim's personal and professional effects. While I may eventually donate everything to a university or non profit art organization I would first like to make a digital archive of as much as possible and to make this material available to anyone interested in Jim's work. There are also a few objects of art, some finished, many more unfinished, that I would like to see be part of an exhibition of Jim's work. Like many artists I am under some financial stress so I am not free to devote as much time to this project as I would like. That said, I will continue the process of working through the archive as I am able. As of this writing (August 2014) I currently have over 40 GBs of photographs and scans available. If, for whatever personal or professional reasons you would like a current copy of this material send a flash drive (or several) with enough free space to hold the data together with a self addressed stamped envelope for the drive's return. I will copy what I have onto your drive and return it to you with my best wishes.

I might add that I don't have any pictures of the work Jim made after he left Richland. I would particularly like to get copies of the reliquaries he made when he was an artist in residence in London. Anything you could share and add to the archive would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Philip E. Harding

A lengthy Acord Archive update.

As some of you know, after Jim pulled out of Richland I removed a great deal of material from his studio. I have tried to be upfront about this so it might seem a little less like pillaging for personal enrichment, though it has been enriching. In 2012 I made an effort to document what was here, taking thousands of photographs and scanning thousands of slides and negatives, but I just scratched

the surface.

I had planned to do much more but life and my own art got in the way. My house is full of stuff that I think is important and worth saving, stuff I have every intention of getting to, but lately I've been feeling more like a hoarder.

In 2020 I was contacted by someone named Robert Franklin, asking about Jim. Briefly, Robert is an archivist and historian with the Hanford History Project, a Professor of History at WSU-TC, Co-editor and author of two books on Hanford, and was President of the B Reactor Museum Association from 2019 to 2021. In his work he started coming across references to Jim and an internet search led him to me. When he learned what I had saved he immediately wanted the collection for the Hanford History Project. I wasn't ready to let it go but his interest inspired me to start digging into the collection once again, sorting, consolidating, and photographing even more. We got together several times for work sessions and conversations about Jim and his work, before life again seemed to get in the way.

In 2024 I decided I need to stop hoarding or acting as a gatekeeper to the collection. Besides, my own art has completely taken over my house, making work sessions here increasingly difficult. Over the last few years I've gotten to know Robert and The Hanford History Project better and decided it is the best and most natural place to serve as the long term home for Jim's archive, or at least what I've been hanging on to. I've visited their warehouse several times and I know Jim would have loved exploring the place. I also think he would have liked Robert, and those he works with. They have answered all my questions, responded positively to all of my concerns, and seem to value my input. What's more, they have clearly caught the Acord bug. They really appreciate what an extraordinary thing Jim accomplished when he was here, despite how it ended, and are excited about digging in and learning more about Jim and his work.

Before letting it go I made one last push to photograph and scan more of what was here. (I now have a real copy stand, as opposed to the makeshift stand I used in 2012.) In addition to materials directly related to Jim's life and work in Richland, I also saved photo albums and scrapbooks, not only from Jim's childhood and youth, but those of his parents and grandparents lives as well. Although not relevant to Jim's nuclear work they just seemed too interesting and meaningful to leave on the studio floor. I've now digitized them, copied hundreds of additional loose photographs and scanned another 785 frames of negative film from Jim's life in the 60s and 70s. I've also copied decades of letters Jim wrote to his parents after he left home and a journal he kept for several years in the early 70s. I've only read a fraction but they reveal an artist deeply committed to making art, pushing

himself hard, always broke and struggling, but finding ways to make sculpture, such as by cutting up old cars and welding the scraps together. They also show how he struggled with episodes of depression. I don't know how frequent such episodes were but they could be debilitating.

Back to the Hanford History Project. When I told Robert I was going to write this post, he asked me to mention that he would like to speak to any of Jim's friends that are willing to talk. He has talked about writing something on Jim and it would go a long way towards getting the story right if he could hear from those who knew and cared about him. There is also discussion about putting together an art show. This idea has been floated before but perhaps the time is now right for a fresh look at Jim's work and life. I think it would be great if some of Jim's friends could collaborate, not just to share works of art that may be in your personal collections but by sharing memories. Perhaps we could organize some sort of round table discussion with as many of Jim's friends and colleagues as we can bring together for the exhibition.

Giving up control of this collection has not been easy. I value the time I got to know Jim and the time I've had access to this archive but it has never been mine, only something I've been privileged to steward. Having the archive in my home has given me time to process what Jim accomplished, and to process my feelings over his loss. I feel personally invested in the fate of the archive, and hope to be involved with it on some level in the future, but it is time for me to step back and trust others, giving them a chance to discover Jim's life and work for themselves.

That is not to say I'm going to stop working with the thousands of digital images of Jim's life and work I've now created. I'm currently going back through them, sorting, deleting duplicates, and cleaning in Photoshop as needed, but I'm unsure of the best way to share them. One idea is to start posting image sets in the form of slideshow videos, like the one I'm posting today. Is there an interest in seeing more like this in this? It is long and needs sound but it was easier than posting hundreds of individual images. I would create an Acord website where people could scroll through the images but I can't afford the hosting fees and don't want to create something that will vanish as soon as I do. Any ideas?

Finally, my apologies for not sharing anything for years. The truth is, I've always had mixed feelings regarding my actions. I never got Jim's permission to do this. When he left Richland he wanted to burn it all down and when he learned that I had saved things from the studio he wrote saying it could all be hauled to the dump. It seemed too important to do anything of the sort. His story is worth remembering. He entered the heart of a world committed to secrecy, nuclear arms,

nuclear power and cutting edge research saying “art has a place here,” giving both artists and nuclear engineers a new way to think about the nuclear industry.

Finally, although I am posting this on Jim’s Facebook page, the best way to reach me is via my gmail.com address; philipeharding@ that location. I am reluctant to post Robert’s address in such a public forum but you should be able to reach him c/o the HHP contact page at, www.hanfordhistory.com, (or ask me via email and I’ll send you his complete contact information directly).

Thank you for reading to the end. All the best,

Philip Harding
In Richland WA.
8/13/2024