

The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums
U.S. Representative of California (1971–1998)

Objects: Chairman Portrait

Selecting an Artist

Representative Dellums recalls the process of choosing an artist for his portrait.

Interview recorded April 19, 2012

White was either number one, or number—or number two on everybody's list because, for example, in the federal building, they displayed all of the competitors' original work and their concept, which may be an eight by 10, and people actually came in and voted. So it was, you know, Oakland-Berkeley, where else, activism is in our genes. So then people fully participated in that process, and they chose him to do this thing, and to my amazement, he actually came back here, interviewed me. He came to the House Armed Services Committee. He went into the gallery, watched me work on the floor of the Congress. And so, he really wanted to know who I was, and see me in my environment. He then also contracted a photographer, and the photographer had to take pictures, and I remember one day the photographer said, you know, "There are two artists here. We're competing. Right?" And they said, "No I want—" So he had the photographer take different angle shots of my hand, so if you look on there every vein is my vein. It's not a generic hand or it's not—it's, it's all right there. For example, they had a photographer looking at the painting as it evolved, and it was one shot of the artist looking through a microscope, looking through a magnifying glass, into a picture of my hand, and he was painting from that. So it was that level of intricacy that was amazing.