Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Interview with Richard Diebenkorn

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Transcript

Preface

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 97-2003. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

Interview

[The recording quality of this entire interview was unfortunately very poor due to the tape recording process itself and also to road noise, particularly where Susan Larsen's voice is concerned. Some attempt has been made to distinguish for the reader the length of unintelligible passages. Where there were shorter utterances between intelligible words, transcriber used two blank lines (_____ _____); longer unintelligible portions are indicated with " [inaudible]." Trans.]

Tape 1, side A (marked May 24, 1977, side 1)

SUSAN LARSEN: [tapping, banging sound] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

[interruption in taping]

SUSAN LARSEN: My students borrow this all the time so I think it works. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So what you mean is you hope it works.

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I tested it out, looked into several [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think it's going now.

SUSAN LARSEN: [Yeah, it seems to be going.] I didn't, probably to use in New York for my thesis _____ work _____ tape recorders that have [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, _____, are we going [through, to] the [George] L. K. Morris which we talked about _____ _____. I was _____ _____ and I wrote my notes on _____ _____ notes on [inaudible]. Was he, was from. . . . Pardon me for all the long sentences. [inaudible] [laughs]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: You won't get that _____ out of me. [laughs]

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh that's, that's [okay]. Some of the things that I was interested in the catalog, I was rereading _____ _____ essay _____ _____ structural problems. [inaudible]. He was talking about the angles and planes [inaudible], and how. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The angles and planes what?

SUSAN LARSEN: He had a number of _____ _____, he had a number of _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I have it here.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . a number of paintings in which the space was very drastically tilted _____ _____, and yet it moved backward, and that whole relationship with the total space movement from front to the back, back to the plane of the canvas was very sort of radical, very interesting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: [You, He] mentioned that you thought that was particularly interesting _____. [I wondered if it was true.] It seemed to be. . . . I wondered. . . . It didn't seem to be particularly Cubist space in that it wasn't broken for example, in the sense of being broken. But it certainly was moved and elevated _____ _____ pushed.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Now this is something that could only occur in representational painting, right?

SUSAN LARSEN: Um hmm, that's right, I guess.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Where, where the various representational cues bring, bring things forward as opposed to. . . . Or rather, rather [push] things back.

SUSAN LARSEN: In the sense of the space relationships moving back into the. . . . By _____ this is _____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, the representative space relationships. Whereas I would think that if I'm following you that [nothing, none] like this could even occur with abstract painting because there wouldn't be the, the representational cues to. . . . There would be other kinds of cues which, which aren't as strong as overlapping of objects and the representation of [deep space] perspective of various kinds.

SUSAN LARSEN: The whole. . . . The way that works in, in nature, in _____ illusion, when you have things that are overlapping, versus the way space is often abstracted in abstract paintings seem to be related a little different.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: In that this happened so easily and yet it was so radical. It didn't seem contrived and yet it seemed very severely different than that, the normal way that things sort of fall back.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seemed to be very interesting place to be at.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I remember, particularly, the mention of Jerry [Mixon's, Nixon's] article, and I guess I thought to myself when I read it. . . . [pauses] Well, I guess I think I wasn't [even, in, into] doing representational stuff, like still life. That I wasn't doing that much more than, than, say [certain] post-Impressionists who tipped the table top up a little bit or let you look down into a cup, I mean, increase the mouth of a, a, of a cup or bottle or whatever. Bring the background space up. I sounds like I'm putting down something that I might have done in those pictures by saying that, well, maybe Braque or Picasso or [sounds like: Greece] or . . . were doing that kind of thing, but I. . . . So maybe I'm not altogether _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: I guess, that was my impression, too. That it had come out of [your, the] [afternoon, natural] experience, and that it was somehow informed also by the things that had happened between, but that you managed to go back to that impulse, and pick up something that's very [true, sure] and very fresh and not as if it became [out] of the painting as it did _____ _____ [can, began] but to be related to painting in a very colorful way and also to be very expansive [inaudible]. A lot of people who go from Cubism into other Cubist paintings perhaps _____ _____ impression [of] complication. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's true.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that feels artificial, and that really felt and looked so [powerful]. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, of course I had come right out of Abstract Expressionist kind of where the, where the perimeters are, where the, where the picture expands. In the sense that representational painting usually does especially nineteenth century, late nineteenth century representational painting. I think Degas. . . . He's a spectacular example of, of a. . . . I mean, there's one picture where there's half a man standing, I believe, in a carriage and. . . . Half a man in the sense of [inaudible] [called] by the [owner] boundary.

SUSAN LARSEN: They do seem, _____ boundaries to [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I may not have all together gotten hold of your question there or your observation.

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, it, I guess I was trying to relate it to the. . . . Last time you were talking about deciding to do an abstract painting, or the sense of where that comes from. We were talking about, I asked about the shift from the representational phase into the abstract phase, and, I guess, from all [the, we] had supposed that [was simply] one thing grew out of another, and you pointed out that when you decide to do an abstract painting, you decided to [deal with] that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: And that I think can be very interesting and informative. But going back to the, back to the figurative phase, I tried to put that into consideration again, and you said that the whole history of abstraction wasn't something that you necessarily are bound by when you do a representational painting and [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I wouldn't think so. Again, if I understand it, there. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe I'm not explaining. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, I think we'll get, we'll get there.

SUSAN LARSEN: It just seemed [free] among all the _____ [I mean the] history, _____ _____ _____ of, the sense of what one has to do [would be, to be] very conscious of that whole complication, because by the 1950s so much had happened. I'm thinking about [in, the] space and traditions of the canvas and abstraction, _____ _____ that. Once you do that, that _____ thing that clearly without getting all [locked, worked] up in. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: You're talking about the representational stuff now, right?

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah, right. Without getting _____ _____ _____ it did. It seemed to be a very clear and unusual thing to be able to do.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: What you might expect would be that, that one would make a clear, a clear break. And I think you did mention baggage, so that you might assume that somebody then going back to representational would carry this. . . . And I did carry a bit of it maybe all the way through. But at the very beginning, the pictures looked. . . . Well, they were very painty and very gestural in energy. I have a couple of them downstairs, the first two still lives I did _____ _____, which I might show you.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Would you like to see them?

SUSAN LARSEN: Sure.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Should I bring them up?

SUSAN LARSEN: Fine. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Do you want to turn off the machine?

SUSAN LARSEN: Okay, sure.

[Interruption in taping]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [speaking about the painting _____ _____ _____ Ed.:] This would be the rather, rather early stages in the game. One kind of declines, but the [painting is, paintings] _____ and I think within that, that definition there are frame _____ there can, there's plenty of room for _____ible in the expansion. But I, there are rather few painters I know that I'm talking about good painters who really, really make a break, and suddenly they're doing, they're doing _____ _____ something like that.

SUSAN LARSEN: Do _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So I've been, of course, quite involved with doing abstract painting, and also involved [in, with] Abstract Expressionism. And to go into the figurative thing, I took these, these, in a sense, ideals that I'd _____ _____ _____ [maybe openness] and the, bring things up to the surface. And what else did you say? I've. . . . Because it seemed that all those things were, were true. And then to do a representational image, I did. . . . They allowed, for me, faithful to, to a situation represented. There was nothing really violated, I didn't think, by, say, bringing things up.

SUSAN LARSEN: It. . . . As _____ the strong point [inaudible], it seemed as if you were I got a timeline. Here would be the, like the year 1900, and here's 1950 with Expressionism and after going through this kind of development, that you somehow got back here, this wonderful fresh place where the space was seen in terms of nature and it was working in a kind way that did feel true and felt akin. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I see, um hmm, um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . in some ways to things I've seen with Cezanne and other painters who deal with nature and manage to likewise think about the abstract qualities of the picture. Whereas in here there was all this, you know, very complex development from Cubism and [Neoplasticism, Neoclassicism] and later Cubism and all of that, and then you put this into a, get caught in [here] and go, to go. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: There. . . . It's interesting, that maybe there's something in Abstract Expressionism _____ _____ freeing up _____ _____, which is I suppose what is thought of as being abstract. I don't mean this in terms of, I don't think of this as progress, I just think of it as places to be.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, I understand. Yeah. I also think in terms of my particular doing it, [remember] I spoke last time of the real dichotomy. Is that the word? Abstract and _____ An abstraction for what I think I'm doing. I mean, I think I'm doing abstraction or I think I'm doing representation, and they're very, very different things. So then to abandon abstraction and go to representation would be really a [then, bend], an immersion in a natural situation for _____, really observing this is, this where I'm pinning my, this is the source of the expression. I'm really feeling inadequate in terms of the words. I just. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: No, no, it's very interesting. I've. . . . If you don't mind, I'd rather we talked about just different kinds of painting rather than history in these series of talks, if that's all right?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Sure.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ _____ maybe something that someone else didn't cover and that I find fascinating. That's why I brought it up [inaudible]. Expressing my own whatever, seeing _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: In thinking of a question and answer sort of _____, finding myself all over the place, and. . . . [chuckles] That's all right though.

SUSAN LARSEN: I think conversations have their own structure that is natural, and most of the time [it's just, this is] fine, and then anytime I've had a lot of specific questions often something will happen to the conversation and I'll [point] to a place where [it] wasn't, and then invite, enlighten you and vice versa [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: All right.

SUSAN LARSEN: Anyway, so then it seems that so often things work in a linear way _____ _____, and looking at all of these various stages in your work even though I know there's a total thread that it seems that it, it goes from one thing and can become another so easily and flow into a lot of these without any apparent contradiction. [inaudible] Very interesting. So could we perhaps go over just quickly that period where you decided to commence, to go into an abstract painting, and what that was like?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: To go into an abstract. So that would be, so that would be the initial one when I was a very, very young man or the 1967, '66, or '67?

SUSAN LARSEN: I guess. . . . Either. Maybe you could compare them, the two places that were [in, at] various times.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The first time was when my awareness of paintings was coming about. . . . And [well, though] I was really quite in the dark as to [really] _____, really every new person, painter that came to my attention, my _____ _____ one way or another and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Were there any in particular? [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, most immediately I think of Cezanne. That was. . . . I guess, that was the big, that was the thing that shook me up mostly, I think, in the beginning, because I had. . . . I think when I. . . . When I think of working as an adolescent teenager drawing and painting which I did a lot of privately. . . . What I was essentially was an illustrator. I was illustrating my enthusiasms of various kinds of phases I went through, and the, the work that I thought was good was really, was illustrative. I think I. . . . In one of those articles, I think maybe Maurice's [_____ Ed.], I spoke of Edward Hopper. . . . One of his paintings I'm not too sure whether it was early thirties [early morning, Sunday morning] air, or lighthouses or whatever. . . . But that's the first time I remember being really taken by a picture in a way other than admiring it for its verisimility [sic Ed.] or its neat way of being painted, or. . . . It was with one of those Hoppers that I really got the whole kind of oomph, gestalt or whatever, the _____ speaking of the, essentially the painting impact of a total _____ painting. Well, then of course Hopper is still in that vein of, of. . . . There's just a lot of good pragmatic sense about where things are in the space and how they look like what they're supposed to look like and how the. . . . There's a very real kind of mood that's evoked, comparable to the mood one might have in the, in the real situation or very close to that. So then, for a year or so, mostly during the time I was at Stanford, that year, I guess of late '42, early '43, I was painting like [him] _____ _____ _____ part of a, in Palo Alto. Okay, it's. . . . What I did, in that painting, I would go out and drive around and look for something that really looked like a, like a, that would fit my image of painting, of. . . . And occasionally I'd drive around, and finally come home; I'd never really find it.

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But then usually I did. Sometimes I'd force myself. But at any rate. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Was it, it was a kind of visual structural thing, or was it some object that was particularly interesting?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It was just a kind of whole situation out there. [It was a Ed.] scene, and. . . . I wasn't, I don't think I was that conscious of what the elements were that went into making up that scene. I don't think that, I think that it would have taken really a kind of analysis that I wouldn't have been capable of, because I didn't know about the dynamics of, the potential dynamics of a painting. I couldn't, I didn't analyze it in those terms. But of course they were there operating, and they were, I'm sure that those dynamics or those potential dynamics were in large part what caused me to stop the car, and say "Ah hah! This is where I'll work today."

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So. . . . But the, the big break occurred with Cezanne, and I remember when I. . . . I remember when I first. . . . I went to the library and this must have been before Stanford because I took [a, the] survey course at Stanford, and I think the last day of the survey modern pictures were shown. We finally got to the twentieth century, and I know there were Cezannes. So I was familiar with. . . . This was maybe the year before the survey course and taken, this was my freshman year, so it was, had occurred then, which would have been in 1940, '41. But I read The Moon and Sixpense, and I was quite taken with, with it, and at one point can't remember the name of the _____; it doesn't matter but at any rate the narrator speaks of the protagonist painting as Strickland that was his name. Speaks of his painting as reminiscent of Cezanne, works by Cezanne, in certain, certain respect was Cezanne [sort of] I wanted to know really what. . . . Because here was fiction, fictionalized Charles Strickland had painted and really _____ _____, and I was interested in the story, so if, to find out a little bit what his painting looked like would mean I would look at Cezanne.

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So I did, and I do remember my vividly my. . . . It was a, what _____ _____, might have been a _____ _____ _____ productions, and it was really a shock to me, those pictures, and I'd like to be able to look at a Cezanne now with the shock that I had then imbued with, as I was with, or dedicated as I was to a kind of painting that this was just not. And I think _____ _____ don't realize what a break that was. It's just so easy now, and Cezanne is a quite straight representational painter. There are certain funny things that happened and are almost taken from the lay point of view now.

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The layman isn't, not _____, isn't upset by a Cezanne. And, in line with this I'll get off the track for a minute [but, because] I think I probably told Maurice this too, but my grandmother took me to a van Gogh show. It was the first, I think it was the first traveling van Gogh show in the United States, and it came to the, to the, I believe, the Palace of the [Asia, Ancient] Modern in San Francisco, and I went and my grandmother. . . . I must have been eleven years old, somewhere in there. She took me because I was so interested in drawing and painting. And I must say, this was no great revelation for me. It was just a lot of paintings and I really didn't understand what it was about at all, but I do remember the people going around the, the lecturer. We didn't go with the group, but we were just first behind the group and had to. . . . And they were laughing just about all the way. It was "Ha ha ha ha." Here's this next _____, van Gogh.

SUSAN LARSEN: They were laughing at it?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Laughing at these pictures. And this man was trying to talk about the passion of Vincent van Gogh and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: They were. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . these people were, it was, it was just a big joke. And I tell that story because I'm really, I'm really impressed in my recollection to think as late as the thirties mid-thirties, I guess it was this work had just not come into the _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: That well have been, well may have been that one that was at the Museum of Modern Art. I think '35 they had, their first

show was a van Gogh show. I wonder if that, it might have been that one.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Quite possibly, because that was, that was just about the time. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: And I was very much hit by the fact that the Museum of Modern Art _____ would become the van Gogh show and would have done that in 1935, because it seemed very historical to me, too. I would have thought might have done a [Morero] show or Picasso show or something like that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: They didn't think to [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And I think this _____ as much as _____ _____. But, almost. . . . It seems like no time at all before about ten paintings of van Gogh in reproduction became almost cliches. I just got so tired of seeing them, I mean. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Everybody did.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . in furniture stores or on somebody's wall. And so it happened very, very quickly, but, but _____ happened recently. So then this Cezanne thing was very much like that. I wasn't, I was fascinated by it, but it was, it was really upsetting to me. [truck goes by]. [A house just didn't, didn't, it's perspective, it wasn't right. Now we understand his language, so that the perspective is, is [super] right. [both chuckle] [And this is very peculiar. And it isn't very peculiar.]

SUSAN LARSEN: And you perceived the really radical peculiarity at the time?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. Well, then I think that's what I'm talking about. [Is that, or arguing, or did you. . . .]

SUSAN LARSEN: No, I really. . . . It's one thing also for it to be there and it's another thing to be able to see it and know how radically different that it is.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: Which I think sometimes people look at the the layman again and knows that it's not what he usually sees but doesn't know why, doesn't. . . .

Tape 1, side B (marked May 24, 1977, side 2)

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well then. . . . [pauses] Then, then I went to U.C. Berkeley, and met [Herb, Bert] [Lauren] and he was the Cezanne addict, and then. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Does it give you [much] _____ [book] _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, yes. Uh huh. Absolutely. Right out of the book. The book was no surprise to me at all. And I read, having had this semester, and had this _____ lecturing, [but] then I had a painting class from him, too, and I was really intimidated by some of the, some of his pet students, who just painted the right [mood], [moment] in the painting, tilt the table way up, and. . . . And I remember having an argument in his office, and I said "Well, the apples would roll off the table. I just can't. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [laughs]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . I don't, can't accept this." And I also. . . . And I, I'm surprised that he allowed me to do this, but maybe it was because it was wartime and I was in uniform and. . . . I was in uniform, that's _____ _____ _____ [requisite]. [laughing] But I got special permission to go out and do what I'd done at Stanford, roam around and find things that I wanted to paint, and paint outside, that I would bring into him. That's when I would occasionally have discussions and get into _____ _____ _____ person when I said that _____ _____ and the apple rolling off the table _____ _____ _____. But at any rate, the, that really, getting into Cezanne just broke down a lot of . . . _____ _____, just were some things that I _____ _____ I [felt] I could do a lot of things with [these, this] picture that I [had] dreamed of [_____].

SUSAN LARSEN: The comment about the apples rolling off the table, that [was], and it's interesting to me because it seems that you can take it, could take Cezanne do it maybe without knowing what each step means, in getting away from the things that you see.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: And by being concerned with the fact that they do roll off the table, and that that is important, that you are [doing,

getting] something that is unusual, and that you better have good reasons for doing it. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . is, I think, a kind of nice telling thing. _____ _____ somebody else might [have] just painted _____ _____ saw, and with Cezanne there's no transfer of movement, basic construct of _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, in later years, I had some students I [thought, felt[were very callow who made remarks like that concerning things I was trying to tell them.

Well, in my kind of personal history there, the Cezanne thing rapidly broke down my faith in the representational structure, just as had been happening in the, historically, and, but it wasn't until I got back east, then, when I was sent back in the military and was stationed just outside of Washington, that I began seeing these paintings first hand and seeing a lot of [Brooks, Phillips] Gallery and _____ [____sion] Gallery and all that. And fortunately able to work while I was in the Marines after I managed to [pluck] myself out _____ _____ [American] of course I couldn't do any painting at all until I got out of there _____ when I got into a place where I did a lot of work. So that's when I really started to mess things around, the distortion being sometimes expressive and usually. . . . Sometimes with direct expressive intent but usually with formal, formal intent where I was really kind of discovering what kind of happened in _____ in following the, this, these what is essentially abstract plastic [and, in] [whatever] the [word, work] wants to be, that I was involved with, and this was the basis for all sorts of distortion. I remember. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: How was. . . . Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: The Phillips had a collection, as far as I could tell, from ever_____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . to twentieth-century, early twentieth-century _____. I just wondered if you _____ _____ very interesting?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. The name that he wasn't necessarily my favorite but the name was just comes to [me] is _____ [Nass].

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . [but, and] then there was [_____ Ed.] [Down, Downe]. _____ _____ _____ whose name _____ _____ very interested in. Oh, there was Joan [Baring, Bering], who interested me quite a bit. I guess one of the reasons why. . . . There was this little show of, a small show that I think the Phillips put on, of Carl [Ganass] of [just, his] recent, most recent work. I think works that maybe they bought _____ _____ his exhibition was. And as I remember he was for the most, he was, he was much more abstract, and I, when I recollect _____ _____ there was completely abstract in some cases.

SUSAN LARSEN: It must have been [_____ Ed.] [Hughes] _____ charter member of the American History of [Gardens, Artists].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh. Because it wasn't the later, the later work, that, of course, everybody became familiar with, which was, was [synthetic, his aesthetic] _____ _____ figures and. . . . This was really abstract. I think it hit me at just the right time. I think that most of the abstract painting [was] done. But this really helped to push me over into really moving around into an altogether abstract stuff.

SUSAN LARSEN: They've had, they've always had _____ _____'s paintings there.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Excuse me.

SUSAN LARSEN: The Phillips must have had a particular fondness for [romance, the dance (or a person's name: Romanza?)]. I think he might have even been a friendship _____. . . . They've always had a lot of his paintings there. He's interesting. He pops up in the thirties and various places that are good places to be. [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: Yet he never seems to be [really] totally _____, goes in _____ in the right directions _____ certain things.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Didn't. . . . My recollection of it, it isn't, it isn't that, that clear. I don't recall them, it being _____ _____ _____. But mainly what, what Phillips had was. . . . Well, you know the collection. _____ _____ _____ Matisse. _____ read Jerry's [_____ Ed.] [inaudible] studio _____ _____. It's one of the most important pictures of [our, their] life. It's a shame that _____ _____ doesn't give any title _____ _____ [dress, interest] in the studio. Well, I have sort of. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: That was. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . gone on about how I've been getting into. . . . So it's really a. . . . At that time I was doing, doing both things. I never, never went back to the original _____ Hopperesque view of things, but I, I vacillated between representation and abstract semi-abstract, _____ _____ _____, and [in, then] in a few cases I _____ _____ the abstraction, which at the time, at that time, was not really abstract in the sense that the whole space was abstract. I really didn't come out with _____ abstract form as against a [ground, around] with a sky or background wall, or _____ _____. . . . And essentially, in terms of subject, it was, there was a _____ _____ one would label objects.

SUSAN LARSEN: That's interesting. The space _____, the space construct, though, is something that . . . .

AMV: [Uh huh.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The, that had, that took some working out. I mean, I don't. . . . It's not that one ever works these things out, but it wasn't until somewhat in, well, the late, later forties that I feel that I really, feeling knew what I was doing in terms of [_____] completely abstract space. It was. . . . Well, just that. [takes a big breath]

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ interesting. I reminds of what you said about abstract [quality], that the differences and. . . . It's almost something very difficult to attain the space that is an abstract space.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I was, I was thinking, I was saying that I, I referred to arbitrary color as something that I, that I couldn't [do it] _____. Arbitrary in the sense that it was. . . . Arbitrary in terms of a depiction of a representational. . . . And I thought of something I wanted to say after I. . . . [inaudible]. [last sentence

RICHARD DIEBENKORN is trying to think of a point he was trying to make, not about content of the paintings Ed.] [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, that was _____ interesting _____. It seems that in an, in an off. . . . Okay?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [gasps]

SUSAN LARSEN: That's all right. [

RICHARD DIEBENKORN appears to have remembered the point he wanted to make Ed.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I do. . . . The thing that I wanted to add that I thought I should have added in order to make more clear what I meant: I said that Matisse was able to use this, in a sense, arbitrary color; he could represent light and shade without [needing, meeting] backgrounds, and then keep the color working in the terms that he wanted to without having to bring the values down and make actual shade, purplish dark, sort of. . . . But I thought after you left that I was, I would put Matisse on just about any pedestal that I can think of, except that not in this sense. I don't mean that that. . . . I'm speaking of people's limitations not as something that's keeping them down. . . . I'm saying this wrong. This particular thing that Matisse is able to do he has in common with an awful lot of people. I've had students who are maybe pretty primitive who just have this capacity to use marvelously expressive arbitrary color. So, what I'm not. . . . I'm not saying that this was a great achievement of Matisse, but I _____, I marvel at some student who maybe is not impressive in too many ways, but impressive to me in this way that he could look at. . . . [pauses] Well, he could let really crazy or exotic, whatever, colors stand for something convincingly in his, in his picture. So that I'd look at the color he used for that brown, and it'd be a flaming red and somehow he'd make it come off. Whereas it could be that [flame, main] red would be [wrong, brown]. [chuckles] The table is brown. It's not red, but. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles] Well, is there perhaps. . . . You know, within that ability, there must be also levels of using it and clarity of what you're, why you're doing it, to. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [Right. Like. . . .]

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that, if you can just decide that you're going to _____ a tube of green paint and paint it green, but it doesn't make it work right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's right.

SUSAN LARSEN: You have to pick up that green, tube of green paint with some conviction, some intent, some knowledge that that green is going to mean, or is going to stand for, and, really more effectively stand for that color than if you approximated the actual. . . . There was a psychologist who wrote a book that interested me. I saw it in 1941 or something. I've always remembered this book, and I [can't] remember the psychologist's name. But I _____ it [as, was]. . . . He wrote it. . . . His theory was that among artists there were [either], there are. . . . Well, he had two categories of artists: the visual type and the haptic type. And does this ring a bell to you?

SUSAN LARSEN: I've heard of the haptic and the _____tic.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, this person. . . . It was quite a respectable book that he wrote. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . and the visual was the, strictly working from visual image and with, logically in terms of that image in a sense, naturalistically, realistically. One automatically draws a hand in terms of what a hand appears to be. Then the haptic would be the approach that is. . . . I'm sure you're way ahead of me, on what it's gonna be. It's a kind of natural expressionist kind of. . . . Where. . . . What's the word that they used in the, in the article or book?

SUSAN LARSEN: Was the abstraction of empathy, or. . . ?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Empathy was the word, yeah. Okay, so there'd be a real, with the haptic, there'd be a real [dose of, close] empathy. The person is, is involved with the hand. And, if it were holding something, well, one would feel the holding of it. And this would be where the emphasis was. So, roughly, it would be a kind of, be an expressionist, natural, or gravitating to that kind of image. And then he was kind of. . . . This was his theory, but at the, in the last part of the book, was his kind of proof, which was involved with the blind, working in a blind school. And I think sculpture was done, and he had photographs and, clearly, among the blind, there were visual types and there were haptic types.

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, really. [both chuckle]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, it's about _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe the word visual isn't, isn't the, it's a kind of knowing what _____, or one kind of knowing _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. [pause] It's in the. . . . [pause] Well, I guess. . . . [pause] But I just have a mental image of a painting, of painting I would, I would see in neighborhood, an adult painting class in the neighborhood comparable to where I grew up as opposed to what it would look like in some painting adult education room in the Bronx. [laughter] Where I would expect the haptic to predominate there, and _____ _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: There's a. . . . Well, it intrigued me just _____ at this total _____ conversation but intrigued me about Hopper, too, that Hopper would be a choice _____ _____. It's very rich painting. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . [inaudible] already _____ _____ begin to, to be, begin something around that point, is to have a lot of _____ _____ _____. It struck me very much how close he is in many ways to Degas, in his way of treating _____ women's faces. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . and the tensions that are in those faces. The more I look, the more I admire his _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. _____ backwoods, almost naive Degas.

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah, yet it's done so cleanly. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, boy, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .that it's really, it's really very convincing, not to take not one bit away from him.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. I guess I didn't mean backwoods. [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, the whole American [review, _____ view] thing, too, is something that I've been working a lot lately on _____. The, there's been a lot of writing on American art, looking for American qualities in American painting, European qualities in European painting, and twentieth-century _____ _____ _____ fascinating, too. It's almost [a kid, akin] to varieties of perceptions.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: The usual line is that American painting is very fact-oriented the visual type you're talking about and that European art has a longer, more sophisticated tradition, that it could be more easily the other

type. But it's, the levels of diversions in the sense of what this comes out of is interesting. Because I think sometimes people just have it naturally, they have ingredients of both _____ together, influences don't explain it totally [at all]. It's been used a lot in [American] _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Are you writing something about this?

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I'm just thinking a lot about it because I'm teaching American art next year again, and, and I'm, we're showing these American paintings in our show with European paintings. And there's a lot of rhetoric in the thirties about American's national traits and qualities. There's the whole, the regionalist, the whole regionalist aesthetic and _____ _____, all of the writing _____ _____. Whitney's shows in the thirties were very regionally oriented. And then a lot of people looked at the American abstract work and said, "No, this is strictly European painting," that it's copying European sources.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's funny, the. . . . I felt that the semi-abstract or is that, that's the word that was used, wasn't it, so much was very much derived from European, and it was only in the initial gropings that I did semi-abstract, because I felt that when I did twist things too much or when I was being not true to the situation, that I was being phoney in some way or other, whereas when I plunged into abstract painting, none of those feelings at all. Here, I was really in a, in a well, newer _____ _____ _____, new. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Was this, say, in the sixties, the difference between how that felt then and how it felt earlier? Or are you talking. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ _____ _____?

SUSAN LARSEN: Are you still talking about the forties?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I'm talking about in the forties, yeah, when maybe there were very few abstract really abstract painters. Well, there were, there was the AAA [A_____ A_____ A_____ Ed.] you know. I was thinking of the, what became an abstract, the Abstract Expressionists or New York's, the New York School. And it wasn't until I committed myself there that, to that kind of, that kind of abstraction or that complete an abstract, committed myself to painting in that sense, that I no longer had these kind of concerns about was I doing these little gimmicky things to. . . . Or [distorting, the story]. . . . It would seem really impossible for an American to do things with a head the way Picasso did, to really dislocate and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: And to do it naturally.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. To make it stick. To have the. . . . It's the same things we were talking about with color. I think [I'll] put the ear up here, and somehow it was right in terms of. . . . And in the best ones they got, they become very arbitrary, of course. When he was really first getting into that sort of thing, he was doing something that was just out of reach of really, I would want to say categorically out of reach of American, as any, of those American virtues. [inaudible, blast!] [chuckling]

SUSAN LARSEN: I _____ _____ anybody tried it, except maybe Pollack could have really _____ _____. Maybe David Smith in his drawings. No one [ever really] attempted that particular thing. Maybe they [thought, felt] that. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And I guess Pollack could only do it in a, you know, really kinetic [tortured. . . ., torture.] And I suppose. . . . You know, not like Picasso _____ _____. And there's, you know, there's some of those heads [that Ward Ganning, before _____] did, which are pretty tortured, but there, there's a real reserve, and there's, it isn't direct expressionist spitting it out the way. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: They're really constructed.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: Thought so carefully. Every, every, all the sketches [_____ _____].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: The slightest difference is important to him. He wanted to have that just so, just right. [That's interesting.] [You, He] didn't go through the, the sort of sign and symbol phase either?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Did I?

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . with the writing and language.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Later, a bit. Yeah. No, that was quite a bit later in the [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: Because that seems to be what they were doing in the very early forties, _____ _____. Pollack and _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, I'm sorry. Regarding _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible; pause?] I guess I fooled around with those things a little bit when I was in art school, art school in San, in [inaudible] in '36. . . . I don't know where we are now [in the conversation Ed.].

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I think that at least we cleared up why you didn't have that state of muddle in regard to Cubism, that, that your reticence to get involved with that, your uncomfortableness with semi-abstract paintings, seems to indicate that, a sense that that wasn't a place that was _____ _____ to be.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right. In the forties. So I think I _____, well, nature, or whatever it is out there, I took it very directly in where I did make the distortion which there is, which you pointed out, [pointing] things out, was just simply a function of _____ and painting.

SUSAN LARSEN: It reminds me of the. . . . I guess it was [_____ Ed.] [Reinhardt, Rhinehart] who talked about re-presentation and. . . . Representation as re-presentation and presentation. And trying, I guess, to [move] beyond presentation _____ _____. [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh. [inaudible sentences] When I first read about art, and read about concrete meaning _____, that was just a shock to me. I was so surprised. It was the [inaudible].

SUSAN LARSEN: You mentioned those torn paper pieces of [Har-toon] Gallery collection as being interesting, [in a way]. Is there something in particular about them that. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I guess this was, this was one of the really kind of exciting kind of revelations, that not only did one make pictures pasting with papers, but that one could tear up a piece and make something out of it. I mean, this is really quite a step beyond the. . . .

Tape 2, Side 1

[Near the end of this tape side, Richard Diebenkorn mentions having talked about a subject on a previous day, a subject that he talked about on Tape 1. Both Tape 1 and Tape 2 are marked as having been recorded on June 24, but is it possibly mismarked? Trans.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But I guess I can finally say that if I take it too far there's usually pretty good reason. Sometimes it may just be anxiety or, or having gotten out of the wrong side of the bed, or problems that are distracting, that might cause me to go ahead and destroy some[thing] _____ really, take something really too far. But I think usually it's maybe. . . . I can wring my hands and say, "Why the hell didn't I leave it?" [laughing] When it was, you know, when it was good and right, and or seemed so. But there was, there was something a little bit wrong, something that had to be, something that had to be altered, moved or _____ _____. It's curious about that. Sometimes maybe it isn't right at all, but it's all, it's certainly all part of the game at any rate. Because I don't know how many pictures that I have just destroyed with one, kind of one little alteration, where somehow I can tell myself, as some kind of consolation, that I have some, some incredible unconscious eye in terms of my own work, because I [can] pick the heart of the picture and screw that up. [both chuckle] I'll say that's one thing that can't be there or has to be, something has to be done there, and that's the, and that is the life of the thing, that's what sparks the whole.[. . .] So I do this, up, make this alteration, and then I can think, "Aah, yes." and look back, and then the thing sort of collapses before my eyes. [laughs]

SUSAN LARSEN: It requires a kind of courage, though, too, to go for the. . . . Rather than fiddle around with some little part, go right into the middle of it.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ _____ _____. Courage has to be conscious, though. [Like it. . . . I can. . . .]

SUSAN LARSEN: Does it ever turn into another painting? Like a whole new. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, sure, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe you were at a certain place and you, in essence, lost ground, but you wouldn't have been satisfied where you were in the first place. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [Exactly, Right], right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . with umm. So you just see it through to something that ends up being _____ _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Sure. Yeah. And so often this is terribly important to somehow have a, have this canvas take on a totally new stance, a whole new balance, a whole new content, attitude. It's somehow the only way to, the only way to proceed. And I've often wondered about painting historically old master painting. I'd wonder if. . . . I suppose temperaments are a product of time. That I would certainly think that, to be involved with a picture for a year and with that same subject, and glazing and gradually changing the skin, the skin flesh tone, and. . . . It's kind of static, very static work _____ _____ _____. . . . It just, I don't think I could, think I could do that. Or it seems like an alien way of working. I would just get. . . . Things would be so stale and. . . . But I did see [an] x-ray picture, oh, some years ago, maybe fifteen or twenty years ago, of a Rembrandt portrait. I think it was in an art magazine or. . . . And the. . . . It was simply one of his portraits of his wife and. . . . But at any rate, in the x-ray, one could see that the head had been moved about seven or eight times from one side of the picture to the other, and apparently pretty much, pretty much finished up in each phase and painted out or just moved, moved, moved.

SUSAN LARSEN: That's extremely [inaudible phrase].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And that was kind of surprising, revealing thing to me, that. . . . So there was quite a little bit in the process, and. . . . In terms of. . . . As opposed to this extremely static view: You have your idea. Draw it out. Color it. Color it in carefully. Modify it. And essentially this single static image. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Then it's not that different. There are radical changes along with _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: There are often surprisers. _____ wanted to ask, too. About the. . . . That, we talked about that, _____ _____ would, might relate to the idea of the format with the Ocean Park paintings. Do they, do you see them as a continuing sort of investigation? Or do you see them as [odd in your] work? Or are they interrelated in any way?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, they're certainly interrelated by. . . . Siblings. [chuckles] Umm. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ wanted to ask you. Is there a sense of working within a context that you [saw]?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I'm not sure I understand you, but. . . . Con. . . . I think of my context as my, as my studio, the environment, what comes in the windows while I. . . . The parameters of

my life, really. Context. Does that understand you, or not?

SUSAN LARSEN: No, I think that's a realistic honest answer. I was. . . . They seem structurally related, and there's a kind of structure that one is intrinsic to a number of _____ all working in a line. They seem similar in some ways and importantly different in others. And I was thinking of them as a group. I don't know if you're thinking of them as a group, or a series, or as a phase of your own work, part of your life?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I guess I think of them as group, in groups. Having a large exhibition of predominately them those pictures does kind of alter my feelings about them in a way that I'm not altogether happy about. Because I do think of these as one they group now and I wouldn't have, had it not been for this exhibition. How I do feel about them, certainly while working on them, is. . . . There's a group that I'm working on at the moment. I'm not on a group now, but I'm about, I hope, after I get back from New York, to be, to start up again. And the group usually completes itself if I don't have too much distraction very, any number of sources. In the past I have done about twelve paintings a year, or in a year and a half. And I, at one point I start feeling that this is, this is. . . . That the group. . . . They're not. . . . These feelings aren't that clear, so the best way I can describe it is that somehow I've _____ come around a circle, or. . . . Feeling of completeness about a group of things that maybe that. . . . [It seems] secondary collaboration [chuckles] to say that maybe. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, it seemed. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . maybe I've tapped the extremes of, up to or. . . . Because I never actually do that, maybe. It's hard to cope.

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, it seemed that often they're referred to or written about as _____ _____ _____ accomplish _____ _____ things. Where they seem, they've gone on for a long period of time. They seem to be part of your working life, rather than. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . some kind of theme that ties it together. I was thinking of, say, Mondrian's paintings _____

1925 to maybe '35. Nobody calls that a series or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No. No, they don't.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . _____ or a group. And yet it's a kind of format that is investigative.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: And it investigates through a body of work and a long period of time. But it's somehow not looked at that way, whereas sometimes things are. So it seemed kind of a [philosophical, _____ obstacle] thing.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: True, yeah. It may be partly my fault, in that I, in that I've never, I didn't in, I didn't say Ocean Park series but I have them labeled with Ocean Park number. . . . That's my doing. And then so somebody comes along and, looking at Ocean Park paintings, "All right, this is Ocean Park series as opposed to Berkeley Series," or. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: So that was never the intent, to call it a series _____ _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No. I didn't, and I, well, I didn't exactly object to it either. What I do find a little funny now is that the drawings, I've never, I thought, "My God, the drawings stamped with the numbers on those," and so I just leave them untitled. Well, they're called Ocean Park series drawings. [both laugh]

SUSAN LARSEN: Is there. . . . Well, they're related to the paintings, it seems, and so that what goes for one goes for the other? Is that what happens?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. But, but here's a name for them that I haven't, certainly haven't. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: So, it just seemed odd to me, because in conversation people'd say, "Oh, the Ocean Park paintings." It's as if they. . . . It's all understood what you mean. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . when there's so many, and it's such, goes through such a long period that it isn't understood.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, it would seem to be a much more sensible label if there were maybe fifteen that had been done in a time span of eight months or a year, something like that, or maybe even a summer, or. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe through time that'll just dissipate. It won't be an issue anymore. The label.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: When I moved here, then my wife, Phyllis, said, "Ah hah. You changed the name of your _____ _____."

SUSAN LARSEN: Main Street.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: You started from one again. [both chuckle] Well, but that was the problem. I thought right away of Main Street, but then the other studio was on Main Street also. Main Street. . . . The other studio, of course, was in Mission Park and still is. Really, _____ _____, unique, and a new name.

SUSAN LARSEN: I think we won't need _____ _____

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ Ocean Park, no artist would think that's [inaudible phrase]

SUSAN LARSEN: I don't know if it's too easy to discuss it, but I was wondering about the relationship of light as light not necessarily the light in this place, although it's really beautiful and special and it's relationship to the light in a painting, and if the two are separate phenomena or if they're related. If they're related, how does that come about?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I don't know how it comes about but they end up being related. And I can only see the changes later, looking

back, compared to pictures I painted here or there, and _____ _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: It's _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's just an adaptation, adaptation that I make to circumstance. It was. . . . And this isn't [quite, white] light, but it's close to it, and blends itself to, to a light variation. Something that I do know that happened several years ago now: I started working on raw canvas well, just a transparent glue coating and as opposed to primed and canvas is very warm, and it's really a color that's closer to ochre and _____ thing. So I started working on a bunch of canvases, four or five, that were just this color that I liked very much. It's a color that. . . . Well, masking tape is that color, and. . . . It's a gray, luminous, tawny. . . . And, well, this sort of got into. . . . There are quite a few paintings that then have that as a key or. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Is it the, is the canvas underneath? Or is it the way the paint [seeps, sinks] into that fiber into the surface _____, or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I think for one thing that my. . . . Because I, because I like the surface, because I like this color or did; I want to get away from it because. . . . But at the time I was working on it, because I liked it particularly, I was a bit more protective of this raw canvas area than painted areas. So they would stay in the picture longer, for. . . . They wouldn't get swallowed up [in, with] paint as fast as other, as say a primed white, dumb white surface. And I just seem to get that out of the way fast. Get it qualified. And, but I was really taken by this raw canvas, which was darkened by the glue _____ _____. And so, being in the, being in the picture, it was there to condition whatever I did to the painting. So it established a kind of key, or a tonality, in the way that plain white ground doesn't because it's neutral. Is that clear?

SUSAN LARSEN: Yes. _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And then a certain kind of light came with that, and at the same time, the wall behind you, which is not. . . . I tried first to paint against the blocks, and at that, about six months, and decided that it was just too jumpy a background. It was bothering me and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Did the lines tend to extend the _____ to the boxes?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, a little bit, yeah. And, if it wasn't, I couldn't tell really at the time what it was doing to the work, but maybe I'll look back later and see, as an example of _____ _____. But, so I put up this, this board. I'm going to extend it, make that whole, that whole wall _____. But then when I went to paint it, I knew I wanted it white, and so I went to a paint store for cheap paint. Can said "Off White." Well, that's what I wanted, and I didn't get. . . . A helper painted it for me. I came back the next day, and I looked and, "Off White? That's just full of ochre. It's sort of. . . ." [laughing]

SUSAN LARSEN: [Oh, no.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's much closer to my canvas, raw canvas thing, than really I want the background to be. I really want it just to be neutral. And instead it's seems really quite. . . . As opposed to the white on the door over there. You can see how really yellow. . . . And that wasn't. . . . I think I'm really off, off on a tangent here. I'll finish this up.

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, that's okay.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But it worked for me and in another sense against me. And I'm, I just can't bring myself to paint it over at the moment. [both chuckle]

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe in your very. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It was another thing that was influential in the. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe a very white white would be almost too, too dazzling, sparkling.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's right. That isn't neutral by any means to me. [But, That] very bright titanium, or that's an aggressive white, and this isn't white. It's a sort of a. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, there are qualities about the densities of colors that reminded me of qualities of light. And I don't know if they're intended or _____ _____ them differently. But, for example, that large blue block [_____ Ed.] there seems to be very intense and kind of sharp.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: There's an, I don't know, edge to that. And the yellow seems softer, glowier, more diffuse. And often I tend to read those as relationships akin to the kind of values I see in natural [things]. And they seem very sharp, angle-y, sort of pieces and patches of light. At other times, stuff like this. And I wondered if that had any reference to that experience or whether it was a separate thing?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No. To that experience? I'd like you to. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: To those differences in light and color that one experiences how _____ things. Or even with a _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [moving away from mike and back again:] I think with a picture like, with this kind of thing, [that I, then I wouldn't seem] like that periodically. It's more often not successful. I don't think that. . . . No, that probably got painted over. Oh, I have to. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: I don't mean as illustration. Maybe there's a sort of parallel.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: We'll see if this somehow fits in with what you're saying. It's a kind of a break with what I ordinarily do. It's like taking the bull by the horns and saying, "I'm going to use very sharp, breaking color," for apparently no context[ual]. . . . And no reasons of how the environment is. Maybe it has to do with something that's happened to the, in my life. But no. No, am I off the track of what you wanted?

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I was trying to . . . . I was trying to pose it as a metaphor rather than as one on one correspondence that color and light in nature seem to have different tones and textures and feelings, [too, to them]. And there's quite, there's a wide range of that painting, which I wondered had any relationship to that, those kind of light experiences, color experiences.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: You're talking about my painting? Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: It [must be] off the wall.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But you're not just saying painting in general. Well, if I do understand you, I have to say I [would, wouldn't] think so. In some way or other, and this could be misinterpreted, I. . . . This isn't a. . . . Because [it isn't a] statement that I want to put out as some sort of quotation, because it really would qualify incredibly. . . . But I would think ultimately the, the rela. . . . I would say this, anyhow, to you, that the relationships in nature of light out there [pointing Ed.] or out there [pointing another direction Ed.] are ultimately the. . . . Their character somehow, the way they work, is criterion for, for the rightness in the picture. And did I get away from your question?

SUSAN LARSEN: No, it's exactly where. . . . I was just making an observation rather than _____, rather than say _____.

[About here the traffic noise increases drastically Trans.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think I can make that statement if it, if I can make, if I can really leave it so that it's not some one-to-one thing. It's not a look in the paintings.

SUSAN LARSEN: Right, and I didn't mean to suggest it that way.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: A look in that, you know.

SUSAN LARSEN: Just that that's an experience that's very primary to see, and very often, and one's awareness of the tones and textures of light.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: You know. They would be, are often in terms of [the kinds] of the weights and densities. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, exactly. Oh, I should say, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that sort of _____ture, all of that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: And. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Painting has to relate. What else, really?

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, those could be just. . . . I don't think they could be sensitive or _____ if they are, to painting, but one could do that just by deciding to make a large change of color, or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Sure, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: And there's a sense of, I think the feeling of. . . . It's kind of, it's hard to put into words, but

there's a kind of expansiveness in, and sense of almost joy about, those things posed so clearly, and in large masses, that this part

of the [hidden] enjoyment of [the] painting, because it is such a pleasure.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's interesting.

SUSAN LARSEN: And so it's a basic visual experience. It's not illustrative, but it's. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . you know. I think that's why people will take photographs [of, at] certain [times of day], places or. . . . Why we like sort of _____. Because it's _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Somehow that subject that we talked about at first, the first day, the, comes up again and it's the relative tolerance of an artist for removing himself specifically from, from these qualities. [I think it was, You can use, Maybe it was] that thing that I was talking about with Matisse who did. . . . The color could get so arbitrary and yet, I feel, still attached to, finally, to his actual view of, of natural phenomena, whereas I thought that I [couldn't] get. . . . Maybe I'm just more literal.

SUSAN LARSEN: Or it's all part of the same [gradation] of things?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Some of it, yeah. And then I remember we, I did qualify that, too, by saying that certain, that I had students who were maybe doing primitive, or naive, quite convincing, quite convincingly get away from, or, or. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, that, I guess, really goes into a central issue of what is a painting? Where does it exist in the continuum of ideas and things?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Where is one's painting. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: A. . . . Just painting. Painting is [that particular] as a thing. It's not a natural object. It's a made object. It exists in _____ of experience and dialogue.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: It can be all of those areas from totally, a totally arbitrary to a totally. . . . Or one that is trying to grab meaning out of [their] views. And then sometimes the place in between, _____ _____ sort of. . . . [inaudible] always to be that earth-shaking thing.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, right, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems that in talking about meaning in painting, meaning is often construed as being content message but meaning can also be about seeing.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, yes.

Tape 2, Side 2

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, they're pretty much a separate activity. I would use them. . . . I would use ones that I consider successful in things that I could. I've attempted several times to. . . . Where there is a drawing that I liked a lot, and seemed, that seemed to have potential scale, I've used it as a start on a large painting, and more or less [kind of] copied relationships. And it doesn't work. I just, in the first, first fifteen minutes, it's all gone. It didn't. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [It didn't take? Different _____.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Just because of the size, I guess, they're kind of even _____ on the paintings. And it's that kind of. . . . It's not a difference I can explain. Otherwise I wouldn't suck into doing this occasionally. But then, because I, it would seem on the surface of things that I could do, but there are subtle differences, like [in the] gallery and size that are entirely different _____ _____ change _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: [Right.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But I think the drawings are very important to my paintings, and they, they establish the kind of time limit of the painting, and they're, they lend themselves to a much, much more easily, to

alteration. Some things kind of turn over more, [perhaps], rapidly, or possibilities can be followed up easily. It's one thing to alter a four-inch by five-inch area, and it's another thing to make a, make alteration of a four-foot by five-foot area.

SUSAN LARSEN: They are [on papers].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Most of them are on paper, yeah. A friend, artist, gave me some, some sort of plastic, which when it was, provided me with more drawings, and _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible question]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That one is, and then that one. And the black and white one [behind you]. [pointing to drawings]

SUSAN LARSEN: It's seems a little translucent.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, it's translucent, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Kind of _____ browns. . . . When you said a little translucent, does, do, does that bother you?

SUSAN LARSEN: No, in fact it's. . . . There's something firm about the surface, and it's real interesting over], the way that. . . . Are you working in tempera, gouache?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Gouache.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems to sit on the surface rather than soak in.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. And it really lends itself to easy alteration. It's rather like monotype, working on a plate or. . . . It just takes _____ _____ totally that _____ _____ _____ very simply. Whereas with paper, over here, there's erasing involved and washing out, and then still the, a big part of what was there remains. And in another sense it's. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Just another thing that is fascinating is [we often know it], about how often. . . . The surface has a liveliness that is really worked into a. . . . It seems to be related to a direction taken, and then altering, then redirected. It seems to be a part of that finished product. [You] don't seem to have the urge to obliterate this first steps.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, _____ to obliterate. . . . Total obliteration requires a very special effort, wherein one's. . . . It sort of takes the fun out of things. [You, I] can't. . . . One wants to move on. One obliterates, usually, for the reason of putting down something else. And if then this great chore of, of somehow bringing back this virgin surface again comes in the way of getting on to the other thing, _____ _____. So _____ _____ _____. And then of course at later stages, one doesn't or I don't know whether to then obliterate the thing or not. I have this, often, this bind about not a serious bind but there, perhaps, are all sorts of evidence of change and general sloppiness, hangovers from other phases and whatnot.

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckling]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And, at the time, again, if there were the time to clean things up completely, well, I wouldn't have any problems about doing that. But in a later stage, other stages become attached to these, to this, become related to lots of incidentals, or what one might refer to as accidentals. . . . I'm always afraid of this word: Impedimentae. Or is it ["pent-a-men-tay", "intimate"]. And that's why I'm afraid of it.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ ["pent-a-men-tay"]. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that the previous thought's _____ laid over.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right, yeah. So it would certainly question later stages whether to keep those things or not, and they're usually attractive and they usually seem to be contributing in a, in some sort of way. But then there's also the question, Do I want the picture to be depending on this? Or does the main idea depend on this kind of thing in large part? And if it does, well, and if this is some sort of production, something I'm leaning on, well I _____ _____. The question is then, Should I just clean this all up like possibly Mondrian might have? The later Mondrian at any rate. Or whether he just cleaned up as he went along, I don't know. But they're of course

pretty impeccable. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Except maybe for the thickness.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Except for the thickness, yes. [And, When] occasionally you can. . . . There is a kind of light that the paint has. Occasionally you can discern the changes and sometimes know that some of those things are cracking quite a bit from [averages, ravages, damages], they're coming, often in terms of things that he did earlier, and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: They almost crack like _____ Chinese ceramic.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, yes, uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: They have _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So there is that question about. . . . And then and that's kind of. . . . Generally, generally, I [think, make] that that kind of decision which says, "I'm going to make this thing entirely mine." In other words, [listen]. . . . [pause] I'm less interested in that. . . . I don't know that I was [never, ever] that interested in, in my stamp. Do you follow what I'm saying?

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah, very, it's fascinating [though].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And, but if the, that is the temptation, I would. . . . This, this idea be just by itself, that, without. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: There's a sense of arbitrary control [operating] to do that. A sense that _____ might even [trying] to erase the process or erase the time lapse.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . [rather] than _____ _____. Maybe it's a priori idea that goes along with the _____. It's, it would seem, too, that what is on the canvas is something that you respond to in working with it. Is that part of _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, I should say. Yeah. I would think that, that at any given if I follow you, at any given moment, what I would decide to do on the canvas would be in terms of what is there. So, again, I'm, I might be involved in all sorts of [attempted, _____tive] stuff. [Then, And] the question. . . . The question arises then. . . . The tentative stuff brings this, brings certain developments out, and in so in a sense it's done its. . . . [laughing] I won't get into that chain of. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles] But it is part, it's part of painting, anyway.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Sure. Yeah. Yeah. So. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: There was a line in a recent Art Forum article that talked about the strength and fragility of drawing, that it had both things, and it was sure _____ _____, it wasn't a mechanical kind of sense of. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . place and structural tradition, but it also wasn't purely that. You had other problems _____ at the same time, as well as _____ strike me. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: There was a. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . as being true.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Excuse me?

SUSAN LARSEN: That seemed to strike me as being true I mean, what you're talking about.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I. . . . It's hard to see one's own work, but really I. . . . But I would hope that would be based on. . . . I guess often the process of work becomes, seems to become over structured or _____ mechanical. And that's something sometime. . . . I don't know if I'm prepared really to talk about that now, because I don't really think I've got answers. But the subject of how seriously I'm involved with structure, as a requirement in painting. I. . . . That's a question to myself. [With, But] certain people I've encountered the critics or. . . . the assumption is that it's terribly important. Okay, this is the basis of what I'm up to, and I really don't think it is.

SUSAN LARSEN: Would, say, something like a, oh, like a [_____ Ed.] Malevich or [_____ Ed.] _____sky seem overstructured?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, not overstructured. . . . I [tend to, don't, never] think that's really what those pictures are made of. But I. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Just in terms of where you're. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: In terms of where you are, what you are up to. Would that be going too far in that direction for yourself?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, it would be a very different thing because in a sense it isn't as though structure hasn't been present all along. It may seem an obvious thing to say, but in one sense or other, in one sense, at that time, I would think that these artists were really discovering the possibilities of structure, and structure simply in itself as a means, as a kind of an end in itself. A means and an end and. . . . Well, this isn't something for me to do. It's like something, something we arrived at last time, where I can just choose to do it, whereas this is something there. . . . I'm thinking.

SUSAN LARSEN: I guess I pulled you off the track. But all I meant was that that seemed to be a kind of art that is involved with that almost as _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ possibilities, and it seemed that was, [forget] [why, while] we're trying to establish the boundaries, so that was out of boundary to do that particular attitude.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: Not that it isn't marvelous.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. Right. And. . . . And I'm. . . . [chuckle] I'm still pursuing this concern about how seriously I take the structure in itself. And sometimes I think I really have. . . . That the look of extremely simple angular austerity is a very important thing. And I'm not sure about this. It doesn't sound right and this can certainly be misinterpreted, but sometimes I think that I almost really like the look of a structured situation rather than the falling all the way for what the structure itself, and it's importance in order to prop up what I'm saying or. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: In the sense of its three dimensionality and [tactility]. It's [thereness, bareness]. It's the pleasure of looking at that construct visually rather than exploring it?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right. Yeah. Um hmm. Well, I wouldn't want to leave out exploring it.

SUSAN LARSEN: Have you ever been drawn to doing sculpture or just. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: What?

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . been drawn to doing sculpture or interested in it?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, years ago I did quite a few pieces of sculpture. It was when I was in the military, you know, and I had a friend who had a forge, all sorts of metal welding things, and I did quite a little sculpture, which was extremely angular but it relates to. . . . It's in the drawings that we talked about _____ _____. But that was the last of that. And then several years later, about three years later, I did some. . . . I think I recall pseudo primitive sculptures, pseudo. . . . I think the beginnings of it were seeing the collection occasionally belonged to the University of California, that at the time, they had of Northwest Indian artifacts. Not art, not that stylized totem-decorated ob[jects].

SUSAN LARSEN: Useful things?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: These were canoes, arrows, spears, simple knives, simple objects that had been fashioned and held together by, I suppose, whale, seal tendon, and bound and they had a marvelous whiteness, and. . . . Well, then I mixed that up with a little in my idea of it, a little bit of oceanity, oceania, and probably a bit of African. And I did a couple of things that I have hanging in my house that I, I've liked over the years. Sort of almost fetish objects. Things I did in 1954.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible sentence] In what medium? Wood or clay?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, wood. I carved them and I painted, painted them simple. . . . One I painted blue. One I painted white, and but it has leather and [part of it, one] is burnt. [You've got to] see it. Then I didn't do anything in the way of sculpture. . . . Do you mean for me to get off the track?

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, yes; it's interesting. I guess I'm trying to think of the. . . . I don't know whether it is a contradiction between two and three dimensional impulses, or _____ _____ _____ but uh. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh. These pieces were. . . . Didn't have structural intent. And there was no imposition of any structural device, or really hardly any thought of it. They, these I liked the best that I spoke of had a handle and a stick and a kind of head on the end of the stick, and it even has a remotely skull implications and then kind of phallic implications and also fetish, fetishistic implications. Why did I say all that? [meaning where was he going with the thought Ed.]

SUSAN LARSEN: What?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh. Well, then the next sculpture that I did [_____] was when I had an operation in my back in 1968 [_____], and I was laid up and sat around in my yard and whittled and made more of these objects. So I was thinking of picking up where I left off in 1954, but these, I don't think they're as good as the ones I did before. They're much less economical and they're kind of. . . . They have a certain extravagance in their kind of hairiness, and sort of starry-eyed. Oh, a little bit of [depth, death] and a little bit of fun all in the same. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: It was a different mood?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Quite different, yeah. But again, no, nothing structural. So I have a few of those hanging around the house, too. [both chuckle]. And I remember another. . . . The impulse to do the ones that I first told you about in '54, in part, I told myself and I told my wife why I was doing these things, told friends why I was doing these things at the moment, was that. . . . Actually I didn't know how much money I would have to pay for a good piece of primitive sculpture that I wanted, and if I had known how easily come by they were at the time, well, I think I still would have made my own pieces, but I imagined these things as museum pieces and therefore way beyond my means, and probably were anyhow. So I'm sort of making these things because I can't buy them, so. . . . [this passage was said with a smile]

SUSAN LARSEN: That's the way many painters begin, too.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . that's why I went for this pseudo. . . . Huh?

SUSAN LARSEN: That's the way many painters begin. They want something to look at.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, right.

SUSAN LARSEN: As well as the. . . . There's a better way of interpreting that, too, that the sense of wanting _____ around, wanting [to look beyond the wall OR: to look. . . . Be on the wall]. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: And that's how a lot of, particularly amateurs, say, "_____ _____ _____." They can't [inaudible sentence]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So that's the. . . . That's the only. . . . That last in 1968 went on for a summer while I was really incapacitated, and then sort dwindled off. As soon as I was really able to get back to my studio regularly, I was painting again. Well, so much for the sculpture.

SUSAN LARSEN: There is a sense in things like constructing a sculpture of fixedness of knowing where a plane is, or thing, what its relationship is _____ing. Some [really, early] constructivists _____ explores that [very] small world. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . the idea of where, how his _____ _____ and with [optimism] thing.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: And I was wondered if that kind of structure in a sense _____ you'd ever either explored in sculpture or _____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I certainly do it in painting and drawing, and so I really think that most artists, the process of [making] carries over. So even though I'm telling myself that I'm on a vacation with this three-

dimensional material that I'm dealing with, I'm not, I'm not throwing out those concerns by any means.

And that reminds me, I said "vacation from." I'm. . . . There was one thing I wanted to say about drawing, and that is that, [well], you haven't been around here when I've been painting, but I have just one painting out, whereas the drawings, all drawings I'm working are out_____, working on are up and displayed. And I guess I've, I don't know if anybody who has interviewed me has quoted this. I've said it before, but I don't think anybody's picked me up on it. But I do use the drawing often as a, as a procrastination from the. . . . I think of the painting of a the painting as a much more serious, weighty activity. [laughs] And it takes much more energy to get into, and it's much more taxing, and all of that. So the drawing activity is still art that I'm doing, but is, isn't [hurting, earning] me quite as much. And one of those things can fall to pieces and I can tear it up and throw it in the wastepaper basket, and that's that, and that's easy. But when a painting collapses, well, there's desperation that sets in. And, so, I can procrastinate with [the, do the drawings Or the little drawings], and but I, since they're hanging up all the time, if I get into really terrible trouble with my painting, then I can. . . . Often, something pops off the wall and says, "Well, you've got to fix this." [laughter] "You've got to do something about me over here."

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, it's, hollers for attention or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: It hollers for attention?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, yeah. And it takes me off the hook [and, in] the [fan].

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles] Does it ever sort of semi suggest a solution to the painting?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, but with the, why it is effective sometimes in getting me off the painting is that a solution does pop up there. There's been a problem, and I've looked at it for several weeks, glanced at it occasionally or it's just shown itself to me, _____ [by, my] glance. But then somehow, being desperately in trouble with the painting I'm working on, I can sort of glance at it almost by accident, and there is the solution. And if the solution is there is nothing to do but just drop everything and get over there and [fix it]. [laughter]

SUSAN LARSEN: Do you work on several paintings at once? Or do you just concentrate on one?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I just concentrate on one, and I carry them as far as I can, which is where they, where they seem right and complete. But that's a will-o'-the-wisp sort of thing, so I'll put it away and then get on to something else, and. . . . But then I'll perhaps glance at that one that I've put away a week after I've gotten into the other one, and realize that I've [deluded, diluted] myself. So now I'm working on two, _____ two _____, in the same time three, four. So in that sense I can be working on a lot of pictures at once. But actually one picture up, and then I, except in extreme cases of some terrible block, where I just know I can't break this thing until I can relax somehow, or get away from it. And that happens occasionally. But I'll just put something aside but usually not and _____, finish it up.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But I've never _____ several out in the room to work on.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems, it seems [alien], but _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, boy, I'll say. Yes. It might be.

SUSAN LARSEN: The sense of concentration, _____ [me, be] distracted.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. I've just gotta _____ _____

SUSAN LARSEN: As you mentioned, [though], the word "finished," it seemed, too, that the surfaces don't have an obvious _____ finish, where you decide that, after you've finished off that last edge, the. . . .

Tape 3, side A (marked May 31, 1977, side 1)

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .half of a side. I was trying to be economical and use half of a side on the. . . . I think it was sort of the end of the last [section, session]. Oh, well. There's. . . . I [feel] bad. I'm sorry. I'm not a technological wizard by any means.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I'm. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Phooey.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And that crack that I heard. I thought it was the wind.

SUSAN LARSEN: That was the _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That was this, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Is it going now?

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah. It's fine. Those two sides recorded; it just didn't _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I see. Hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe. . . . [inaudible] I guess this relates to that [a subject they talked about previously? Ed.] in a way, but I wondered if ideas of density and expansion, or sort of compression and expansion, are things that you are consciously aware of? It seems that some areas of paintings are very dense. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .[and locked] and others are very open.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think that I would be most conscious of this kind of thing. I think that, in large part, this is, this is the kind of balancing, these are the elements that I'm attempting to make peace with. Yeah. However, the density relative, [in relative terms], is the opposite of density as _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: And expansion?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The Expansion, yes. In the way, the way things expand, in their expansion countered [in, by] another _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, one of the things that was also written about recently was the notion of declaring the dimensions and edges of the paintings. I think [Bud] [Hoffman's, Hopkin's] book, wrote about this, too, that they, that line runs down and across maybe not always edge to edge but there, there's usually something that's declaring the [breadth almost, breathiness] of the boundaries of the painting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The breadth?

SUSAN LARSEN: Perhaps it. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .it helps to give it that quality.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I seem to be. . . . I am puzzling at the moment _____ _____. _____ _____ _____. They seem to be such _____ _____. But that doesn't mean that I want to give up trying. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I don't suppose they're, they're decided _____ make a line with expansive, but it seems that they do that, expressively, and maybe the expressive intent is more. . . . It's easier to talk about [rather than] mechanical.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, maybe. I often think of this may be of some help to you I often think of lines as reach, reaching. And I think of areas as [distant] and _____, expanding.

SUSAN LARSEN: As space?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: As space?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Space is a, is a ambiguous word, always has been for me because I've never been sure, with a writer or a fellow artist, whether they were talking about lateral two- dimensional space, or whether they were talking about kind of illusion, illusionary, illusionistic, or a sense of, of space in depth. What were you talking about?

SUSAN LARSEN: I think the second. [Possibly] _____. . . . Well, the relationship is [the thing, I think] that. . . . You

could

mark off that space and say, "This is a space," but it feels like a much. . . . It's a, again, a metaphor. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . a larger space. And it feels grand, it feels large.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think it's something in the same kind of thing that, was it [_____ Ed.] [Frye, Fry] or [_____ Ed.] Bell, who said, "significant form"? There, I want to say I think what we're talking about is "significant space." I think. There's a quality that the form of an apple can have that [very] somehow transcends simply that apple and becomes a plastic form. I think it's [nice]. It's saying, ["think [nearby] there"]. And you don't really think much of that area, that two-dimensional space, until it is related in such a way that it has qualities that, where it becomes, their work, significant. Not mine. [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: Nice to have them around, though. [laughs]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. [laughs]

SUSAN LARSEN: The. . . . Let's see, there was a quote that I. . . . I'm going back to my source book here. There's a quote that Matisse made, and he was saying that, I guess you've heard probably many times, "What I'm after above all is expression." And there was something I found in Mondrian also, where he said that "time is a process of intensification." I wondered if, through the history of your work I mean, all the [business] of painting you felt

that the issues or the quality of what you're after has gotten either more intense or clearer. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . or has it just gone through another phase?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. Recently I have felt that it's gotten a [little] bit clearer, not that I can clarify it for you in so many words. I mean it's. . . . But I'm very sympathetic to that, to the Mondrian statement, "Time is a process of clarification."

SUSAN LARSEN: Intensification.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Intensification. Yeah. Whereas the Matisse statement, somehow that's out of some context. I want to hear the rest of it there. I want to. . . . I mean, it just seems so. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: I think he was. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: "Yeah, sure. Sure, Henri." [laughing]

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckling] I think he was talking a lot about form. Someone, either somebody was, had asked him a question, or he was responding to a question in the air about the formal makeup of things. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .and he got tired of talking about the mechanics of form. And he said, "Ahh, I have problems," he said. "What I'm after is to express. . . ."

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: And the other thing that he was, he mentioned in that quote was that he was not interested, that for him expression was not a gesture or a grimace or an expression on a person's face. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh yes, I remember.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . it was the total expressive quality of the painting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right. I [mean] really. . . . Yes. And so marvelously faithful to that in his work.

SUSAN LARSEN: There does. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I suppose that that statement, very important statement that he made at that time, that his work has been so effective. Just his work and the circulation of his work, the presence of his work in art today makes a statement not that surprising [to me]. Whereas the Mondrian statement maybe is something that

hasn't been worked over and over.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems that, that there is a quality, an expressive quality, about these paintings that is [clear, clearer] to the viewer to _____ interest in a lot of. . . . Where, there's a lot of an admiration for them around. People really enjoy them, responded to them. In the recent show, too, a sense of read good feeling about the whole body of work, that's. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [That's right.]

SUSAN LARSEN: That that expressive intent is what people respond to immediately. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . as well as the structural qualities. Whereas a lot of the painting dialogue for a long time in the sixties and seventies particularly has been very much about structure and about plastic issues. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . and relationships between phases and _____ line of development of things. To put things back into those other terms is a rather special thing to do for the dialogue of current painting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, yeah. Well, I certainly don't think I'm unique in doing that, but it certainly has been something that I, that I've held to, and. . . . Well, I should throw this in at this point, I guess, that music has been terribly important to me. And the people whose music is most important are the, well, I suppose the heart of the so-called classical music and. . . . Beethoven being one, or [Hindemith], or maybe even getting [into] Brahms and Bach, perhaps a little earlier. Right, right in there. It's hard. . . . Where the combinant of the, the amalgam of expression and structural is just so marvelous, so complete, so total. . . . [pauses]

SUSAN LARSEN: It's interesting, too, because expression is a, is a, usually means other things. It's a different kind of structure; it's a different kind of feeling.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, right. And having also gone through an Abstract Expressionist period, body of work, it seems that those definitions are [now, not]. . . . Expression and Expressionism are _____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: They are, indeed.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . .in some. . . . In tone, at least.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ have both components as. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. Expressionism is a description of a certain character of, a certain attitude toward expressing . . . myself, I guess.

SUSAN LARSEN: I had another thought about that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: I had some other thought in my [cap], and I can't grab it.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh. Have, have you ever been interested or at all thought about the sort of classic/romantic dichotomy? Is that. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, sure.

SUSAN LARSEN: Is that persuasive or. . . ?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Umm, well, yes. I think it's one of the. . . . I guess I think it's. . . . Because I'm not an art historian, I can be really very naive in a statement like this and say, "Well, I think" wouldn't you agree with me "that it's the big dichotomy in art?

SUSAN LARSEN: I think it's useful. I don't think it explains much, sometimes.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: You don't.

SUSAN LARSEN: The people you think of as Classicists oh, the Greeks, [Nicholas Ed.] Poussin, [sounds like Felisande (Cezanne?)] have always, to me, a good ingredient of passion about what they do.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: And the out-and-out romanticists to be, the great ones [Eugène Ed.] Delacroix, _____, have a lot of discipline, too.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right. Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: And it just seems to work at the most uninteresting ends of the scale. Although, in the main, I think it's real useful. I look at Mondrian and he seems like [a, the] quintessential Classicist, but. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . as a person, the whole sense of honing to that so incredibly is very emotional.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: Although in the dialogue of literature and art and music it's. . . . Without it, people would be lost.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But you wouldn't want your marvelous example of Classicism to go off and become this robot, nor would you want your marvelous Romantic to go off and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Jump off the. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . and be a, you know, a hare brain. [chuckling]

SUSAN LARSEN: Right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Emotional, emotion, total emotional object.

SUSAN LARSEN: Right. It. . . . I think maybe there would, it's about something else.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I feel if you take it away from the artists themselves, and just think about we're, about potentiata [sic], or about certain goals in, possibilities in work, well, then I think the Romantic-Classic thing can get to be kind of real.

SUSAN LARSEN: One's _____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And on the other [end, hand], of course, those things have been around so long that they've really gotten sort of mixed up.

SUSAN LARSEN: One is maybe a drive toward order, structure. And the other is maybe. . . . Well, it's a bit like [warring] in the [attitude] in the abstraction _____ [mythically].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: But it. . . . I don't think anyone has ever used the term Classical in regard to your painting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I don't think so. [I don't know.] I think probably in my [view] it's _____ _____ the attitude at a given time, and I've also used the Romantic in a kind of _____ too [damn]. [laughing] Too heavy in that department.

There's something that I've been thinking about for, over some time I guess right along. I've been thinking of Beethoven's music. I don't know if this really goes along with what we're [kind of] getting at here, but. . . . I don't, I didn't mean to place. . . . Well, Beethoven is one of the real, one of the marvels and of course Bach is, and of course Mozart is, and of course Haydn is, and blah, blah. There's something that Beethoven does that is really fascinating to me, and Bach rarely does it I don't think Mozart does at all. And I just don't know if I can get this. . . . I guess, you'll have to understand what I mean at some point, and then. . . . Because I'm not going to be able to really describe it. He does a really non-art kind of thing and deals with it so deftly that he can. . . . He's the only person who can be. . . . I mean there's all sorts of rambunctious music, say. He's the only one who can be rambunctious in a, like somebody talking in a bar, you know. Where, even today, when people say that anything is subject for art, somehow people haven't quite. . . . They've made art out of. . . . And I'm. . . . Well, I just, I guess I don't know anybody who has really done it as strikingly as Beethoven, this thing. And I don't really think I do it, and. . . . This would be something I'd like to do, but I don't know quite how. I mean, the relation between music and painting is pretty tenuous, often. But I would hope sometime to feel that my expression in

my work could do that thing. And it isn't that I want to do some non-art thing. But it's. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Could it be that sort of raw edge that [_____ Ed.] [Halpenser, Howpenser] remarked about you? That sense of. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think it can. . . . I think that would be [a] way into it. And. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: It's not that the edges are raw; it's just that there's a sense of not totally putting it into a. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . confirmed structure.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: But there's something a little wild and loose about it. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that's still being. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And even somebody like [Jackson Ed.] Pollack. I don't think Pollock does it. When I first saw his really, his best moment where that Painting Number One, that sort of. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [Autumn] Rhythm.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . and there were several that came, quite a few that came at that time, and I think this was '49 that I. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: '49, '50.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . there was one that was in San Francisco in a group show. I looked at that, and thought, "How really elegant, how. . . ." And I think I might have even said, "over elegant," a little bit too, too lyric, too great, too graceful, too. . . . Not really, but not. . . . So I said that because I wanted to pick the, apparently, the rawest artist in that particular. . . . I think [sometimes] _____ I might approach it more closely, but I. . . . Well, I can, but I don't.

SUSAN LARSEN: Right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: There's really an amazing thing that is really quite, just so wonderful, about, that Beethoven, that he. . . . And then it's curious also that he drops it in later, late music. And maybe, finally, that music is really, is, as the musicologists will all say, that the depth, the most profound, whatnot. But it becomes, it becomes, in some sense, rather artier. I don't know. I don't mean artier. That, that's _____ [pejorative, majority].

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I think I. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Possibly an example of it is in the Great Fugue which is very impulsive. But how I really like to think of it is in more in the middle period, where it's really like throwing a ball around and being very. . . . Bouncing it off here and there, and things are so unpredictable, and. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe athletics is a good. . . . Something like that is a very good metaphor, because there's a sense of reach going on. Reach and control, but. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. Right, yeah. Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . that, sometimes overextending, but if you extend to the maximum and pull it in at the same time that's really where the high, kind of high excitement. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: You know, but that's really interesting. Do you think painters go through those kinds of phases? Of, that letting loose and pulling in and. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think so. I think that I do. I don't often really know what happens when I start to pull up, and my work gets much more maybe this isn't quite what you meant but the work unaccountably gets much more closely figured, much more cautious, much. . . . And there are times when I can. . . . And they're good moments in that, too. But the worst is when I feel that I want, I want to be precise; I want to say what I mean.

And so then all the, the superficial earmarks of precision become so important, so. . . . [chuckling] I'm making a line that just moves straight and touches that, exactly that, and this and that _____. Then I can get all involved, say in an afternoon, with the feeling that I'm being so right, so right on the nose. And suddenly, maybe not a day later maybe the next day, maybe a week later just being disgusted with this, this kind of activity.

SUSAN LARSEN: [laughs] Isn't. . . . Maybe also there's a sense of getting very involved in that that's just as involving and as risky and as extended as the other thing.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Maybe. Yeah, maybe.

SUSAN LARSEN: The surface and. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [They're] looking around [inaudible] spoke.

SUSAN LARSEN: Gosh, Bob [_____ Ed.] was going be here shortly.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: Bob was going to show up in about fifteen minutes or so.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, okay.

SUSAN LARSEN: We have a terrible upheaval at school [_____ Ed.], and both of us have to go to a faculty meeting at three, so _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, sure. I hope it isn't any terrible, terrible thing.

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, just leaderless. We are leaderless.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh.

SUSAN LARSEN: We're rather an _____ tribe, so. . . . It's just, it's just _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Nothing like the sort of thing that could happen at UCLA. I hope. [laughs]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I'm sure it's our own particular variation [probably, problem] _____ _____. We're just without a dean and not liking the _____ _____. We have to elect one of us to be, and nobody wants to be. It's just, that's just. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ bad.

SUSAN LARSEN: Anybody who's really into open door doesn't want to _____, which is the unfortunate thing. It's like politics.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: The best people are out doing some _____ _____.

_____ _____. I wanted to ask you eventually, too, about Los Angeles as an environment for a working artist. Have you any thoughts about it? It seems, as someone who's come for. . . . I've only been here for two years, less than two years, and one of the things that seems so peculiar about this place is that it either. . . . It seems to almost pose as a place that doesn't have a long historical context, although I suspect there is one here, in [given] that pose is part of it. But a lot of people have expressed the feeling that because there isn't a closed-in feeling of buildup of time, space, issues, that it's a freer place for this. . . . The community structure's a little different.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm. Well, I guess I [can] subscribe to that.

SUSAN LARSEN: Is it a freedom. . . . The notion of being free from, or free to, or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Sometimes I'm a little, feel like a little, feel my inadequacy a little bit when I suddenly realize, "Well, I've never really thought seriously whether, you know, whether I, I'm free from something here or free to do something here or. . . ."

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe that's the ultimate. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And I hate to think of myself as this sort of unconscious _____. . . . [laughs]. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Maybe it's just natural. Maybe it's just fine.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [Umm. . . . Huh uh.] I. . . . Did I mention coming here and the reasons before, to you?

SUSAN LARSEN: I think just briefly. If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to know a little bit about _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: My parents were San Franciscans, and I had grown up with a San Franciscans' prejudice about Los Angeles, which has gone off in air now, but that's the way it was forty, thirty years ago, that people in San Francisco felt that one didn't even visit Los Angeles it was such a. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: What for, huh?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . ._____ place. And so I sort of that carry that prejudice with. . . .

Tape 3, side B (marked May 31, 1977, side 2)

[In addition to the noise problems described earlier, it sounds as if the tape has been damaged in some way. Trans.]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I did tell you this?

SUSAN LARSEN: No, you didn't.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No. And so I stayed for about three weeks, and it was then that I felt something about the place, an absolutely different pace, a different potential for a really fresh. . . . It seemed very fresh to me, crummy, and uh. . . . [both chuckle] And, well, I liked it, and then I could, I could feel these little twinges over the next. . . . I guess it took me five or six years before I finally decided to, to just go, "God, move down here."

SUSAN LARSEN: Was it a, was it the cultural context, or the spaces or the, at least as a physical place, or all of it, or none?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's just an inclination that [inaudible] it hadn't. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: I mean, did you meet particular people that you thought were fabulous and wanted to be near them, or was it. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, no, no, not that. The. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: It's Bob.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh. I'll go down.

Tape 4, side A (marked June 2, 1977, side 1)

[This is another series of extremely poor quality tape sides. Very little of Susan Larsen is audible and Diebenkorn, even though he possesses a marvelously rich bass voice, is often obscured by traffic and/or surf noise and tape recorder hiss. Trans.]

[Another person (male) is sitting in on the interview [_____ Ed.] Trans.]

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . if you walk across this cord, across this. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, yeah, right.

SUSAN LARSEN: The sound phenomena, it's really _____ _____. . . . When [you, I] came last time, [we, you] were talking about _____ coming to Los Angeles.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: What time you arrived in _____ _____. How _____ _____ _____. _____ _____ anymore?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Try.

SUSAN LARSEN: I think we did about _____ _____ or so after you came back. [chuckles

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [chuckles?] Yes. Like I believe I had said that I had come to Tamarind, and in Tamarind _____ _____ I _____ some of the grass, and this is the first time I realized that Los Angeles had, I mean, any character, and it was very attractive to me. And some five or six years later I came down here. It took that long to sort of turn things over and make the decision to pull up stakes in beloved I thought [Marin, Malin], California. Sometimes one thinks, considers a thing beloved long after it no longer is. [One would] think that was the, that was the case.

SUSAN LARSEN: Do you remember what it was about L.A. that attracted you?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I've used this word before. It may be just a handy thing to say to get the question out of the way. But it seems, seemed like it was [the, a] kind of pace or a different rhythm or metabolism than northern California. And it seemed considerably more open and. . . . [pauses] More open. [embarrassed chuckle?]

SUSAN LARSEN: Was it _____ _____ _____ [faster]?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, I think so. I think the pace is faster. But different in, in perhaps more intangible ways. To me intangible. I'm sure a literary person would _____ _____ here, [put, bump] the words right out there. You know, what I think I ought to do. . . . What we have done heretofore is close these windows, because the back door is wide open. [closing windows and doors]

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ _____ transcriber's point of view. [Amen! However, it didn't clear up the problem completely. I believe they used the tape recorder's built-in microphone or perhaps set the microphone on top of the tape recorder Trans.]

Another male voice (AMV): I'll sit here so _____ _____ _____. I'll sit here so that you can see me a little better, too.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: All right.

AMV: _____ _____ _____. See where I'm going.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Okay.

AMV: [unintelligible]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, so did you come to this area right at the beginning, as far as Santa Barbara _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, um hmm. The, we immediately were attracted to the Santa Monica canyon, and so we rented a house there, where we lived for a year, and then found one for sale, which [we bought then.]

SUSAN LARSEN: You were going to be working there?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Excuse me?

SUSAN LARSEN: You were working at home as well?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, I worked down here, on Main Street [on, in] Ocean Park.

SUSAN LARSEN: That place on the corner of Ashland and. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Ashland and Main.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And I worked there for 1967, 1966 [ten, seven] years, _____ _____ [grant], and moved here. I built this place. Clearly I'm, I'm fond of Ocean Park or I would have possibly built my studio somewhere else.

SUSAN LARSEN: Any place at all?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: [It] could have been almost any place at all.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, no. It [just] had to be here.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ the option to _____ other. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, I had that option. [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

AMV?: [inaudible] [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, I want to just follow it up a little bit more. One of the things that some people have said about Los Angeles in the context of artists is that there didn't seem to be a lot of background or history _____ _____ _____; it had to define [their] character. Did you think that was true, or was that a _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I don't think I was involved with those considerations, really, although, again, it's difficult to tell. But the considerations one was actually involved I didn't seize on them and. . . . _____ in capital letters [me, read, we] [myself]. Clearly that, I'm sure it interrelates with the

_____ _____ things like that. _____ these things related. I would agree with that, [certainly], _____ you say.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ understand, it's true. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, I think San Francisco has a much closer. . . . Or did when I was there. And, and what seemed to follow up after I left, in San Francisco. . . . Somehow, for the most part. I don't want to _____ this generalization onto _____ San Francisco. But it, generally speaking, it kind of followed in a [immediately] in the, the funk thing was developed, expanded. A thing that existed pretty much right along when I was there. Even in the, even in the late forties, it was, there were the seeds, early indicators, of that kind of attitude. I also don't mean to stick that phrase on San Francisco. I'm sure, as with individual artists, this is setting up a label, attached forever. [all laugh] It's one of the, it's one of the apprehensions that I have also about interviews, because there are things that I've said [in] twenty years of interviews, several phrases that just make me curl up [that Ed.] I still find in a review today. [You know, And] somebody digs back in the magazine articles and [whatever]. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Out comes this, this chestnut again. [It's] [attention] [do we] [calm] or some foolishness like that. So perhaps some memorable quote from, from out of this. . . . [chuckling]

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, did [inaudible phrases] having come _____ lived in this _____ _____, is that, are, is there, [do] artists and galleries and places _____ identifies with being [in] Los Angeles the way there is [inaudible phrase]. Here it's seems harder to [talk].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's harder to _____ [in town]. I [don't] think there's, _____ a matter of. . . . I don't think there's been something comparable to the Cedars Bar. I used to here, before I came down here, of Barney's Beanery, on the. . . . I think I only went there once, [on a, to] visit. And _____ the artist that I saw there was [Bob, Rob] [Horton], _____ and _____ he _____ the place and out again with _____. [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But I do remember in New York, in the early fifties, Cedars Bar was quite a nice place to get a [drink] [here]. Pretty much everybody would be there. [pause]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible phrase], a style _____ _____ that happens to you?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's a, there's a kind of character, but again it's a, it's [an] intangible [matter, thing]. The artists are, are different, and that's at the moment, that's all I can say. It's. . . . There just won't be a place to hear a Moses, or a Francis, or Bob Graham, or whomever. In San Francisco, they, it's just, it's something to do. . . . And I, the question immediately occurs to me: What happened, what has happened to me in, since 1966? Have I changed my spots and I am now one of these? [laughter] Or am I, or am I a displaced person? I was at a brunch or something for [Robert Ed.] Rauschenberg last, last week, and I met Paul [Kantor, Cantor], and he said, "You, you've you been away," and I said, "Yes, I've been in New York." He looked at me and said, "New Yohk." Mimicking the. . . . [chuckling] I'm supposed to say "New Yohk" or something like that if. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: But clearly he was saying, "You're, you've always been an outlander, and. . . ." So. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Okay. I just thought _____ ask all of that _____ trying to ask _____ through times _____ _____. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [Exactly.] [inaudible sentence?]

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ trying to get some idea [inaudible phrase].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] I need to ask you too _____. Do you really [know] about [where, whether] you _____ _____? Did you know any artists? Or did you have any idea what an artists' life _____ [was like]. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well. . . . I mean, it's fine that you ask this, but it, you may recall that it, that Maurice [_____ Ed.] in his article goes into this a little bit. Because I sensed at that time, before I decided to do as my father wanted me to do, to go to Stanford and be a lawyer, before then, as an, as we say, adolescent, I [longed, wanted] to be an artist and planned to be an artist, and this was [bagged]. It involved continuing what I was doing at that time: drawing and trying to paint a little bit but mostly drawing. And feeling that I was pretty good at it and [that] I, _____ _____ this was my calling, I wouldn't be, would be an artist. But it didn't, didn't, the. . . . That goal or that ambition, or that intent, didn't, didn't. . . . Well, I don't know how I actually said this. I may have said it, but it seems to me in the article it said, "That he was not about to be an artiste." [That, Yet, But, What] clearly I wasn't. I. . . . Probably if I'd been really pressed, I would have said I'd be a commercial artist or something, _____, [which meant] an illustrator or a. . . . But it was this, the. . . . I. . . . Also in the article it speaks of the [fine] art that was about. This was in my, in my high school there. I can remember at one point going into the, in the second floor attic or third floor. I knew exactly [what] it was in the high school. But there were a couple of [art, arts] studios, drew, and I got [the time] in San Francisco I guess that must have been in the thirties the _____, the impact of Diego Rivera, Mexican muralist, was still there, so there were big charcoal drawings of, of [rope], _____ _____ huge feet, or something [like that]. The closest I'd come to the museum, I think I would see something like that, some, something related to that kind of work which seemed absurd to me, or just. . . . [Just that, This is] it was not interesting [in that way].

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ [Rothko] _____ _____ working artists, or what? [inaudible question]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. I have one, two brother, two brothers, friends, and they both, the really only friends of mine who drew, and so we would, on rainy days we would all draw.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm?

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ artists today?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No. Both stockbrokers.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible (or really nothing?)]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [laughter] Both of them. Really. One almost got away. He became, for about eight years, really followed his arts love, Cadillac cars. He was a Cadillac salesman. And I think became manager, and his, his father just couldn't stand the thought of him as a car salesman. So they brought him into the. . . . Finally he succumbed and he went into the firm. This a San Francisco stockbroking firm, which the old man ran. Any more asides that want? [laughing] Do you want digressions?

SUSAN LARSEN: [Oh] no, that's okay. I was just interested. [inaudible] So then it probably wasn't [meant to, into] college or maybe after that _____ _____ together with _____ body of. . . . _____ knowing, the idea of working in a studio, of setting up in a studio, or how an artist spends his life as [inaudible phrase] knowledge, or did you just [inaudible phrase]?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think that must have come, oh, perhaps the year before I went to college. And as a freshman, and summers reading, and following up stuff that I was exposed to and, as a freshman. Stanford had marvelous at that time; I don't know why it got all messed up in the sixties but at that time it had just a marvelous freshman [just a, distant] survey of world history that was, just had you kind of surrounded by specialists and of all periods, and visiting lecturers, and [sounds like: Lefthans or _____ Hans Maughm] and, oh, it was just, just grand. And then I later heard in the, that during the student protest period, [they were of them] scuttling all that. [inaudible sentence], whereas it was required, every freshman was involved in it. So it was a really quite enlightening time, thing [that was presented, represented] to freshman at that time. So that was, that was a help. And then when I sort of sneaked away from the regular curriculum and took some art classes, I, there was a [sic] art teacher there, who is now emeritus, and his name is [_____ Ed.] Mendelowitz, and I got to know him quite well. And he was, he had studied at the Art Students League, was obviously well-informed in art generally. He was a painter himself, watercolorist, traditional. I even, let me use his studio some of the times. I painted a portrait of my wife-to-be. This was when, it must have been when I was a sophomore at Stanford. So I was learning about art then. [embarrassed chuckle] I mean I was learning about the things around. And I was _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] just in general I haven't even gone through. I wonder if the kind of [inaudible phrase]. Sounds like [something I really] should do. What kind of an education do you suppose [inaudible phrase, then sentence]. . . . .resources, _____ men's versus [women] in society.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I would just, I would just. . . . If somebody, if you say formal education, what kind, I would say, "What would you impose on somebody who is going to be an artist?" and I would say old-fashioned liberal education. But. . . . One of the, one of the best, one of the really marvelously educated persons was David Park, and the, and he rebelled from his Boston family and was the first _____ in several generations not to come to college at all, came out to Los Angeles and went to art school, Otis Art School. But he read and was kind of naturally intellectual and not self-consciously so. But he gravitated to, to serious people, and in his reading he picked up and then became obviously educated. So I think that. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Probably _____ conscious of [inaudible].

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] he very fond of you?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And, yes, I think this had a, right along this had an immense influence on, on [favorite, papered] things. I used to _____ happen [inaudible]. Not in any sense, in any sense, an interpretive. . . . Except, curiously enough and this I'd forgotten all about I, when I was, after the war, I enrolled in California School of Fine Arts, now the San Francisco Art Institute, and I took a, one semester [at]. . . . [What the hell is his name?] Photography _____ _____ lithographs _____ [history], which I'm not _____ _____. One of them I gave to Daniel [Delowitz], and he has it in his house. And it's a, it relates a bit, quite a bit, to analytical cubism, the way things are built. It's kind, kind of structure of. . . . But a broken, broken structure. And the label on it that I had written and I had forgotten was Beethoven, Late Quartet. And I remember I was thinking of, of Joseph [Duggan, Luger], of that kind of fugal structure which, which related to a kind of Cubist thing, and. . . . Well, I remembered immediately when I looked at it that this was an interpretive work [sort of], whereas I, before having been reminded of that, before having seen it recently, I would have said _____ no. The music was, is there, and there was something about the spirit of the [contacting] rhythms, the whatever, the. . . . That, see the effect of _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: This was listening _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Excuse me.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, no. I mean, I shirked all that [recently] _____ at the musically formative stage. I just _____ get outside and practice _____ _____. And so I never really knew if I, if I was potentially, if I had any potential at all. I certainly think that I'm a good listener, but. . . . It turns out my son is, is a musician. A musician and _____titian combination _____ that _____. I think he _____ for me to be [inaudible].

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: What's that?

SUSAN LARSEN: So it reveals discipline, or a way to _____ other thing or _____ _____, something else that _____ inside you, at some point _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [Yes. I guess so.]

SUSAN LARSEN: So it's probably [inaudible]. [inaudible] be immediately _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible] And I suppose Braque must have been. . . . I hadn't heard that he played an instrument, but he's supposed to have all those violins and _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ now.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: He has Bach written in a good many of his pictures, in some of them. _____ _____s.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ has an office studio, [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible few sentences] from the stage. I suppose _____ _____ violins [Betty Garrett] _____s. [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: One of the things that interested me in the catalogue as well, and that is _____ _____ I was looking through some slides yesterday, was [inaudible section]. There's one that has _____ two shades of _____ gray in the shadows hanging down from _____ window on the side [_____ Ed.].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh, yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: It relates, it's almost [inaudible] high _____ energy [inaudible] real strong [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ _____ trip _____ _____?

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] resource _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, he was, it was really the high point of going through the Soviet Union seeing the [_____ Ed.] [Shuken, Shoo-ken] stuff. Which I was very familiar with [in, from] black-and-white photographs. I don't think any colored stuff had come out yet. It was after the, I [really] think it was after my visit that [sounds like: Skeer-uff-ers] got in there and [done] some colors. Very bright colored _____ pictures of [Shuken, Shoo-ken] with [Warsaw] paintings. Because I was guest of the artists' union there, I think I had to go around and greet. . . . [short glitch in tape; sounds from the context like there's maybe a sentence or two missing Trans.] I went around with an interpreter and then, then. . . . And when they couldn't shake him, my American friend, they would try and, well, leave [him Ed.] on the street corner somewhere. [laughs]

SUSAN LARSEN: Uh huh.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Who incidentally is a good friend of _____ [who is, he is] from Washington. But he would, he would. . . . Shall I go through this? Is this. . . . [meaning relevant to the taping Ed.]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: He made sure that I got to see things that I wanted, because [he was, he would do] all sorts of bargaining if he wanted: If I had to do this, well, then I couldn't get to do that, and _____ making _____ _____ _____, and all this sort of intrigue-y stuff that he was. . . . He was there all the time, and he was saying, "Now, come along, you agreed at the beginning that you were going to go in the back and you were going to meet so and so," _____ [_____aj, _____age] and _____ _____ _____, Western-type women who took me all through the. . . .

[Trans.]

Tape 4, side B (marked June 2, 1977, side 2)

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . most of which. . . . I remember one thing in particular. [He, It, Here] was a proto-Cubist Picasso, of a fairly large figure, very primitive mask-like, that just seemed sort of [dooms-day] Cubism. And that, at the time, had never been, never been hung in either Moscow or Leningrad, _____ Soviet Union. But it came out with the traveling, traveling show. There was a most incredible Matisse that I'm sure will never go anywhere, because it's in such precarious condition. It's an immense. . . . Recollection of size sometimes is deceiving. It's at least, it's at least as big as, as The Dance or Music, but it's on paper. Maybe it's on canvas, maybe it's on muslin or something like that. But it's painted in gouache. And they, [but] they never hung it. They had it up in their lab, and they just didn't know what to do with it, because it was starting to flake away and the binder of the glue in the gouache apparently had sort of disappeared, and they were saying, "Well, we, possibly we're going to spray this thing," and I thought, "Oh, my God, if you spray it, you're going to ruin eighty percent of the sensation that comes from this thing," because it had this marvelous dusty. . . . Gouache can be very beautiful in its dryness. It was a big Moroccan period thing, with. . . . There's a kind of a bad photograph of it in the Alfred Barr Matisse book, and. . . . _____ photographs that, I don't when they were taken. But at any rate, so I was very surprised to see that. This seems like quite a digression from what you, where you. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] At this _____ _____ trying to _____ impressions of _____ _____ and how. . . . It seemed an, an interesting _____ do [inaudible phrase] to quote [the] title things as, as a type of reaction to that, [I suppose].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. Oh, I just did that once. That was that one picture, [the Rep, The Rape (or the beginning of Recollections?], that I. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh, right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . called Recollections of a Byzantine [_____graph, _____gram].

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ other way, unless I haven't _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, there are others with that theme. There is a still life that I did at the same time with that sort of flowered pattern in the, in the background. But I just called that Still Life, Still Life _____ _____. Yeah. That's in the show, too. And these were about the last representational paintings, and clearly they were, they were getting pretty abstract. They were much more up, up to the surface and flatter, more pattern involved, and less, less involved with any kind of three-dimensional _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: You have a very surprising voice. There's a lot of _____ _____ _____ in say the same way, strong statement. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I hope you like them when you see them.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ [very, real] interesting.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: One thing that relates to that [inaudible] gain just a little bit from one space into another space. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . sometimes through shadow [inaudible] there's [inaudible] figure. [But] there's also a sense of things obscuring other things. It seems like several things are happening simultaneously. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes. [I think, As] you've said it. [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [chuckling] You've just quoted _____ _____. Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems to be in several periods, too. _____ _____ all through, I think, too.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, I think that's. . . . I think there's a kind of color. . . . There's a. . . . Well, I would like to get two kinds of things or three kinds of things, or more going in one, one picture, but [essentially] at least two kinds of things, and. . . . That's interesting. And there's this, along that line, Maurice [_____ Ed.], I talked. . . . And I actually found the cards that Bay-yoe, Bay-you [sounds like two attempts at Bayou Trans.] tapestry cards that my grandmother brought to me from a trip to Europe and. . . . And then there, the. . . . In that case, there's another kind of different sort of thing going; each strip has a different, different kind of. . . . One is involved with heraldry and the, kind of tells the story of the characters, I suppose, in terms of shields and [dead] identifies. And then, in the battle scenes at any rate, then there's the action depicted. And then down below, as you know, there are dead corpses and people being stripped of their armor and _____, in the different panels [always] the living and the dead and the symbolic [maybe] paralleling [the] horizontal strips within there, actually seeing the _____ tapestry _____ _____. [Right down] [Turkey].

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ talked of _____ _____. Is that _____ _____ _____. I understand that _____ _____ he was replaced once.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh. Well, they were. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . certainly marvelous. I guess she must have given them to me when I was fourteen or so, [fifteen, thirteen], fourteen.

SUSAN LARSEN: Is there any transfer of that to _____ _____, to this _____, the next abstract phase? Of the

[inner/outer] and multiple _____ things going on? To the Ocean Park paintings _____ _____ some sort of _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I think that I try to get different kinds of things in opposition and _____ _____ _____, and I can't get, say exactly how. Well, looking over your shoulder, I see a typical, maybe sort of formula kind of Ocean Park format, with the gatherings in one place, that kind of thing, and expanding with [oppose, close] to that [_____ Ed.].

SUSAN LARSEN: I'm sure it's _____. I was just thinking _____ _____ and I guess it's a statement of _____ _____ _____. And it's slightly, it's more, it's more difficult to describe than _____ for some reason. _____ _____ [feeling] seems to go through _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's. . . . In the kind of thing I'm involved with now, for any number of reasons, contrast is something that's sort of, it's not easy to maintain. The tendency is to. . . . And I think it's just been something in the air with people who have stayed with painting, that a kind of field thing that one is involved with, with a field thing of sorts. I mean, I wouldn't say really I'm a field painter, but, in a sense, even in the work before, there were elements of field painting in the early abstraction of mine. At any rate, remotely there is this sort of dedication to field, a field. Which ultimately is just a single field. [embarrassed chuckle] And this thing that I like of contrasting kinds of atmosphere or environment really kind of runs counter to that, to [bring] with the whole, [bring] the whole field. So, it may be less apparent now than earlier, earlier time.

[SUSAN LARSEN and

RICHARD DIEBENKORN move away from the microphone, after which the sound miraculously improves not perfect but a significant change for the better Trans.]

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ interesting _____, it's on the [fall]. It's a, it's a. . . . Is it a dish? It looks sort of like Picasso?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's a Picasso, yeah [_____ Ed.].

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh. _____ that _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh. . . . Which I am curiously very fond of now. When I bought it, we brought it home and neither my wife nor I thought much of it. It was [just kind] of something really dashed off for the tourists, tourist trade, and it got stuck away, it got chipped, and then [we] did our remodeling, it turned up, and it's face is dirty and it looks kind of archaic now, and it looks like what it ought to be. I mean, these are Picasso's sources, a sort of archaic thing. So suddenly it took on great, when it got dirty and chipped, it became something valuable to me, something I like to look at.

SUSAN LARSEN: This is probably a silly question, but I wondered why, how it happened that it's turned around. Did it _____ _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I've, I thought of that, too. I think that, that if he'd done the letters in reverse, when he was. . . . I think when he worked, he just wrote it out and then, but then counted on the reversal, and I think I, my guess is that he counts on, counted on the reversal because the backward letters give a remoteness to it. If he just had [sounds like: "Val-a-reece"] written there, it would be. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . you know, you [wouldn't, would] take that in very quickly, and the date, and. . . . But this sort of almost just gets into a foreign script a little bit, or. . . . I would think that was one of his, one of his reasons for doing that.

SUSAN LARSEN: It's very funny. The date happens to be my birthday, not the day I was born but _____ _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh. Huh. Is that October third or March tenth, which. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: March. . . . Oh, it depends which way it goes whether its October third. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [to AMV:] How do the European, how did the Europeans do it? Do they put the day first and then the month?

AMV: No, month. November 15, '39.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

AMV: And it depends on the country that you're in, because the French switch it around _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

AMV: The German school the month first and then _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Of course it's logical to put the day first, which I don't do, but the day, the month, and then the year would be sensible.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____. Because you're going, you're going from year to. . . . This way it's logically [jumped, jumbled] up.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

AMV: In this _____ _____ _____ it, I'm just translating it back. I'm reading my mother's letters.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

AMV: She does say fifteen July nineteen whatever it is [15 July 19__ Ed.] is the _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: Oh.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, uh huh, uh huh. But as I think back at some Picasso prints where he has a big date, I think he does it, so I think it is October. . . . Not you. [said to SUSAN LARSEN?]

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: . . . October third.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____. That's the day Mondrian was _____ to the United States.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, it is! [chuckles]

SUSAN LARSEN: He landed in New York. [So, See] I could always remember it absolutely clearly _____ _____ that's why all his students know exactly the day he arrived. It's very easy to do.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] It looked very simple _____ _____ [Sylvia, Soviet] _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: After a while it didn't work _____ _____ _____ a child's face and his __oose. A quite _____ _____ had [inaudible sentence] One of the things, turning now to the _____ _____ [attracted] _____. I wonder how, through time, you reacted to _____ _____ who put you in _____ place in art history, that whole idea of development that's going on the late fifties and sixties, that painted with the flatness and edges and all of that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: Did you [inaudible phrase].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: How I. . . . I don't like being put in a group. I don't think this is too unusual a thing for, for some artists. But I've always kind of cringed at the title "Bay Area figurative." That just. . . . And one of the, tag that I didn't want to have.

SUSAN LARSEN: This must be overall very different from, one from another and that there really wasn't such a thing, or is it that you didn't want _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, I think there's considerable basis for the label. Considerable truth into. . . . But I'm not interested in that aspect of things. And it's not some kind of fierce independence or. . . . I just, I just kind of. . . . I think of my, of the best of those people, my friends, who were unique people. And there was certainly interaction, certainly we affected one another. Certain things in our work came off, rubbed off. And, I suppose, [them, they, their], so [am] impressionists and _____ keep us [board assists]. [laughs] [But] it's. . . . I'm much more interested in the aspect of the artist which would be unique, his. . . . Unique to, inside that person's head, not what's. . . . So I'm concerned with the, how you look at the. . . . [Just still, Distill] just doesn't interest me very much at all.

SUSAN LARSEN: The closer it is to a style. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [sounds like: Ahn-dray-mahnd]. [laughs] But, yeah, there's a whole passing, passing interest, because the style itself is not that uninteresting. But then there's this incredible unique _____ part of it. There's. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: How about the kind of thing that's going on the _____ _____ [say] in the [last, past] fifteen years that talk about the dimensions of the painting, the [dimension] edge to edge, with a _____ debate about flatness and point of view and the way that things _____ _____ [develop, developed] _____ [tones] justified by them. By being the next. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: What was the last?

SUSAN LARSEN: Like being the next logical step in [the line of] painting dialogue. There's often a new thing [popped] up. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . they're put at the end of this _____ _____ justify _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: It seems. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: So the extreme of that would be a [_____ Ed.] [Greenberg, Greenburg].

SUSAN LARSEN: That's right.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah, so. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Which is [the base] of _____ respond _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, that kind of historical progression, I. . . . It's really the hindsight thing, and I just don't. . . . I just don't go with. . . . I think they're very interesting intellectual that are, that are played by, right along, by those people. And. . . . But then they. . . . This is old stuff; I'm not saying anything new at all, but this critic or that sort of steps into the breach and selects somebody who, who seems to be logically the next step to this. . . . Well, then. . . . And really that's, that's nonsensical, because the next, the next step may be some sort of crazy throwback or left field and which then in hindsight becomes perfectly, the perfect step, you know.

SUSAN LARSEN: I wonder if [you've been, you'd be] conscious of the _____ _____, either watching it at arm's length, thinking about it. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Periodically I did, but I guess there was quite a, quite a period. And I've wondered about that, when I was doing representational painting, when at one point I just got so disgusted with art magazines and [that kind of] talk that I just cancelled all subscriptions and really didn't look at any until I guess until I came down here. And this, my department subscribed, and in my mailbox _____ they passed around, and I started reading a little bit again. And I realized that I had missed quite a bit of what was going on, and it was. . . . I didn't consciously set out to fill in, but I realized that, that in, in the reading that I started to do a little bit that I was sort of filling in about five years of, of just ignoring this stuff. [But, That] I'm not [necessarily, unnecessarily] always _____ _____.

SUSAN LARSEN: So that, it, [what, work] goes on _____ _____, maybe from an art writer's point of view, what's going on seems to _____ establish a climate _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: For a long time, _____ _____ less _____ _____. More and more of _____, the aggressive _____ _____ knowledge.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible sentence]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ necessarily the _____ _____ I was just interested.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Some reading that I've done recently, I [kept, can't]. . . . Somewhere in, when I was [most] recently in New York, somebody said that they. . . . I guess we were talking about things that we had

read and been presented to us in school and we'd just read and forgotten about it. And this person said he had just [picked, looked] up a book of Roger [Frye, Fry], and that it had been marvelous reading. He had, and then he had read it some time before. And so I bought it and. . . . [searching for it?] It's in there, and it's Vision and _____. [someone hands it to him?] Yeah. It's fun to read. I remember it a lot more. . . . I must have really read it hard, because [chuckles] it isn't quite the surprise for me that it was to this person [here]. I _____ read it more casually and. . . . But that kind of reading is. . . . I'm not _____ put down. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] approving of something, it's just wonderful how it is part of your consciousness or. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. I just hope, I just hope good writers write _____, listen to a _____ _____ good art.

SUSAN LARSEN: Definition of what that is _____ is interesting, _____ changes _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The definition of. . . ?

SUSAN LARSEN: Of what good writing is.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ define.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: So in order to, in order to limit the climate [inaudible phrase].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible phrase]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Where Greenberg was concerned, I might, even though I take exception or maybe put him as an example of that of that thing of being able to predict the next step through some sort of extrapolation. I think he's still marvelously interesting [for the] painter.

SUSAN LARSEN: In some of the, some of the structural issues of painting really got _____ _____ through _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: It may not even be, may not hold up as definitive history, but the idea of being aware of dimensions _____ _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . [follow, with all of] that stuff into _____ _____. And to have aware _____ other things to _____. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right.

SUSAN LARSEN: . . . everybody _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: It sharpens one _____ _____ something _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible sentence] Maybe those are _____ _____ _____. [chuckles]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible sentences] Your statement about the painting feeling finished or the painting feeling as if the process of the struggle that, this, going into making it finally didn't intrude upon _____ _____. The famous _____ about the art show, which is _____ _____ [understand].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes, yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: And do you, a lot of the recent paintings where there is a sense of, I think for most people. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Recent paintings of whose?

SUSAN LARSEN: Of yours.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: That there is a sense of reading in people's minds and eyes that they have a sense of experiencing this _____, almost _____ [release] resolution around _____ _____, art of _____ _____, present [cards] _____ _____. I wondered if, if you intended that state of mind, or if that was part of the _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: I think maybe, maybe that's intended. I think one of the best things that has happened to me a few times maybe quite a few times, in looking back in completing a picture, a feeling that I had. That necessarily there is a, plenty of action of sorts maybe not overt, but. . . . But then the feeling, along with things coming together, that it really is still, and. . . . And it's, it has been for me a very exciting kind of stillness. Kind of. . . . The word isn't quite right. If one action arrested or stopped, or something like that, that's not. . . . You know, that's like a photographer doing a broad jumper or something like that. It really wasn't what I mean at all.

AMV: _____ _____ _____?

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Good. Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. It certainly is. Yes. [did AMV go on talking in between RD's affirmations?] So I don't know where that comes from in, in putting the picture together, and I can't look around in this room and even find any example for you. But in the show, I hope maybe you might see some. That is. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: Well, it's a feeling that you capture in these paintings _____ _____, a sense of that it's, it's, [also, awesome] it's there _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Um hmm, yeah. Silence. There is another, another good word.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: And actually _____ session _____ there's another _____ _____ of _____ _____ obvious [glare] in the picture.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [inaudible] I think of something like [sounds like Doo-bee-yoe, but slurred fast together].

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah, me too. [both laugh]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ you can always phone, phone me. What time is it?

Tape 5, side A (marked June 2, 1977, side 3)

[Apparently AMV is a photographer ; this tape side appears not to be a formal interview but a conversation to fill in time while AMV takes pictures. Trans.]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] writing which is [inaudible]. [pauses? or inaudible?] . . . in this odd way things are going, the body of works seem so clear and resolved and _____, it's harder to ask questions.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Hmm.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] companion points _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's nice. [both chuckle]

SUSAN LARSEN: What about this.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. There's something curious, too, [but, that]. . . . Because I, I have had several sort of retrospective exhibitions I am ashamed to say, because I [admired, admire] de Kooning so much, but he said, "Give me a retrospective when I'm dead." He went back on that. He did do a retrospective after all. At one point he said that. But along with these shows, there's been [writing] Jerry Nordlund and [Chet] [_____ Ed.] and several people. And curiously they, the source of these writings establish a kind of personal history like I've never, you know, a diary [chuckling], and it's a little hard to break out of that. The structure gets a little stronger each time, each time it's gone over. And so [I, I'm] you know, at the moment almost a little tyrannized by that, but really if I could sort of shake that, I'd tell you some very different things.

SUSAN LARSEN: And I [can] think of other things to add since I'm _____ _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah. So I guess I, at the moment, I can't. . . .

AMV: _____ make a suggestion. _____ ask the question _____ to ask [the, a dumb] question, but in those _____ moment _____ _____ the eye-level strip of _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yes.

SUSAN LARSEN: In the eye-level _____ _____ strips _____ _____. It's a silly question really, and I'd be almost embarrassed in asking you, but I couldn't make, help but make a relationship between your field of vision as you walk around the studio and. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: And the pictures.

AMV: . . . and the pictures _____. And the conscious _____. [continues talking while

RICHARD DIEBENKORN answers, but inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh, not all together, not altogether conscious, but, but very much there, I know. And I don't know how many. . . . I'm simply impressionable. . . . My, in the other studio, there were these transom windows that. . . . I still have them, but they're more like that window, and this have this very strong diagonal, and friends have come and looked at my pictures and say, "Well, I see here you really got the windows in this one, haven't you?" [laughter] And of course I didn't _____ _____ about [including, putting] the windows in at all, but I can't that, so. . . . So that's the same sort of thing as your observation here, I'm sure.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Yeah.

SUSAN LARSEN: The _____ _____ _____ very _____ _____ to me that [inaudible]

AMV: There's a picture of _____'s. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Where?

AMV: There is a picture right here, right now [tapping a book, a camera?? _____ Ed.], that I saw in this [thing], and it had to do with when you started to describe this [creeping] [in the] [muslin, Muslim] [vibrant] material. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: The Matisse. . . .

AMV: The Matisse _____ _____. It was a moment when you I think probably saw yourself in front of that.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Huh, uh huh.

AMV: Is that a [fair case, Pear-gase]? [all laugh]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Huh. [Huh uh], [no].

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] time period.

AMV: It was just wonderful, because all of sudden you [settled, said] I'm all into the _____ _____, in the conversation it's what _____ back and forth, back and forth. All of a sudden there was a kind of open moment. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

AMV: . . . _____ _____ brought about _____ _____ magic.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's a, is a [great, very] gentle camera.

AMV: You use it to [take our] picture [to] object. [laughing]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: [All] right.

SUSAN LARSEN: It's very similar to [his].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: That's, that's. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: It's like a gun with silencer.

AMV: No, it's not a gun. It's not a gun. [chuckling]

SUSAN LARSEN: [chuckles] It's just the, those _____ _____. [pause]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: It's being very tricky there. [all laugh]

AMV: I just bought it, two or three months ago, and it's _____ _____.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh.

AMV: And this is designed for _____ _____ for you, and [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Uh huh, yeah, right.

SUSAN LARSEN: Once you notice, it's, how are you using, this camera in the air. . . .

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Here and I suppose over these _____ back shots. [laughter]

AMV: [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: You really have to watch him at all times.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Right, yeah.

AMV: _____ trust.

SUSAN LARSEN: That's right, that's true, you're absolutely [inaudible].

AMV: There's another thing, too. There's _____. . . . [Excuse me.] As you were sitting there, I was really curious what you were doing [inaudible]. [Don't get me wrong]. As, as. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: What I was curious _____ _____ what would _____ _____ eye to eye with _____ look like.

AMV: Like I know [you ought to, you're out of] focus behind Susan, but I don't how to focus behind you.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Oh, I see.

AMV: There's a, there's a way in which four _____ _____. . . .

SUSAN LARSEN: _____ _____ true.

AMV: No, no, there's [

RICHARD].

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Fine.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] One reason [inaudible].

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Come back in [like, eleven].

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] Thanks for your help.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Fine. I [could, get to] see some of these, I'll be. . . .

AMV: [Please, Do you] put this robe here [inaudible] watched them [shovel] Tuesday, was it? Because he said that [inaudible] this [afternoon] shot. [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Let me think what I. . . . I have to take my dog to the. . . . I should be here around eleven. Is that too late?

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

AMV: _____ _____ see before that.

SUSAN LARSEN: Yeah, [inaudible]

AMV: [inaudible]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: Well, this has been fun. I'm, I have marvelous feelings about what you did. Much, much better than the woman I told you about. But I have a different kind of good feeling there, and. . . . But I don't feel that I really receptive of _____ _____ _____. [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] Good. Well, I had, I asked [inaudible sentences] would be published immediately, so [inaudible sentences]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: See you both again.

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible]

AMV: Thank you.

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: _____ thank you for your marvelous way of being both _____ _____. And I'd like to have come by for my _____, which is going on _____ _____ both [inaudible]

SUSAN LARSEN: [inaudible] [all chuckle]

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: No, no.