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**Oral history interview with John Clem Clarke,
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Transcript

Interview

PC: Paul Cummings

JC: John Clarke

PC: Today is the 13th of July, 1972, Paul Cummings talking to John Clem Clarke, do you still use your middle name or not? Sometimes I see it and sometimes I don't.

JC: I mean I use it because John Clarke is a little bit too common, just for identification.

PC: It helps, you were born in Oregon, right. 1937 which is what day or month?

JC: The sixth of June.

PC: The sixth of June, okay. Where is Bend, Oregon?

JC: East Benton and

PC: Yeah, so you're equal to the mountains and the ocean or ...

JC: Well, the way that state is, is that two ranges of mountains which are in the west, and this is just down the second set, so that that's where the desert starts, mountains and trees in one direction and the other direction is desert pretty much.

PC: So you're kind of over-powered in landscape.

JC: Yeah, that was kind of, well, I didn't live there all my life, we moved when I was in the third, fourth grade, somewhere.

PC: Where did you go to from there, with your family?

JC: To the Liamate Valley, over the first range of mountains.

PC: So you stayed in Oregon though. Well, did you have brothers and sisters?

JC: No.

PC: No, what kind of schools and things did you go to?

JC: Well, I went to, when I got there I went to a one room school house and we lived on a ranch and then, after

PC: Right, you were talking about the ranch.

JC: Well, then from there I went to a consolidated high school.

PC: What kind of ranch was it?

JC: It was a grass ranch, we raised rye grass mostly, kind of a lawn seed, or cover crop for cotton in the south, specialized kind of.

PC: Big?

JC: A section.

PC: That's not bad.

JC: Big enough.

PC: Was there, you know interest in painting? Did you start drawing young or

JC: Yeah, I started like everyone else, copying pictures and you know either drawings or photographs when I was a kind, but nothing heavy and nothing very serious at all.

PC: Just kind of fun kid stuff. Was there encouragement or not, or didn't it make any difference.

JC: Didn't make any difference.

PC: How about school, was there anything there or was it just

JC: No.

PC: Quiet.

JC: I didn't, then when I went to high school, I started, I got somehow trapped into playing football and that's you know about all I did to, I didn't do any art or anything in high school.

PC: Well, you went to the university, Oregon State?

JC: Yeah, first.

PC: Or was that the first one? How'd you pick that school?

JC: That's where I got my scholarship, my grant and aid to play football.

PC: Oh, how'd you like football? Where you interested in other sports or did just that?

JC: Well, I liked almost any sport better than football.

PC: Really?

JC: I just wasn't very good at them.

PC: It's funny if you were good at football but you didn't like it.

JC: It was a horrible thing in play but a fun thing to watch, now it got such a bad taste on me that I couldn't even watch it for a long time.

PC: Really, are you interested in other sports that you still watch?

JC: Yeah, well, I watch a little baseball one and a while. Not as much as I really do enjoy football and watch now my old college coach is the coach of the Rams now and that's always so

PC: Makes it more direct.

JC: Interesting for me.

PC: Well, that's fun. How did you like school, the University otherwise?

JC: Well, I thought I liked it quite a bit. I as a matter of fact, after I transferred schools, I quite football after two years and transferred schools and I started at that time to take a drawing course and I took a painting course. I really wasn't majoring in anything yet, and it was the middle of my Junior year.

PC: Where did you go from there you went to

JC: The University of Oregon.

PC: Oh, the University of Oregon. I've got to have a sequence on, on some of these things. Well, what caused you to start the painting classes or drawing classes?

JC: Well, I took these courses and I really liked that part of school you know. The other classes were so formal and sort of uptight that I just found it very refreshing to go down to the art department you know, really it was more of an academic atmosphere actually than there in the English Department.

PC: Oh, really, how so? That's interesting.

JC: Well, thinking, were people more and it was more original thought, and they seemed to be a lot more alive people down there. I really liked it. I thought that I'd really like to do, that's what I'd like to do in my life, become a college professor in an art school, that's all I really ever wanted to do. I never intended to be an artist.

PC: Who were some of your instructors there? Do you remember any in particular?

JC: Yeah, Andrew Vincent and a guy called Jack Wilkenson are probably the two biggest influences.

PC: When did you have them initially or did they come along later?

JC: No, they were the ones that got me started in the first place.

PC: Well, you were what, two years there right? You'd been two years at the other

JC: It took me three years because I didn't have any art

PC: Like starting all over.

JC: I had all my requirements finished but I, my last year in college I just painted pretty much.

PC: Well, the University of Oregon I hear from people who've been there it's a rather exciting place to go.

JC: Yeah, it's very nice country there and it's there's a lot of California students, and usually you find students that really leave home and go out on their own and more interesting and they are more adventurous.

PC: More independent, more explorative.

JC: I think it's a much healthier

PC: It's not a large school is it?

JC: Well at that time I guess maybe eight thousand or something like that, pretty small. Pretty big for Oregon.

PC: Were you interested in other things there. Did you pursue any sports or other activities.

JC: Yeah, well then they asked me to come out and kick extra points in conversion of field goals, place kicking and after a year, I did that for one more year. But that wasn't the same. I was still I was majoring in painting and ...

PC: Well, what caught you to make the decision so quickly like that? Do you think ...

JC: I don't know, it just seems the way that I do things, I can't half way commit myself to anything, I have to sort of go all the way.

PC: Well, what kinds of things were being taught there in the painting school? That was what, in the late fifties right?

JC: Oh, they weren't at all avant-garde. There was not abstract expressionism or anything like that taught at all. Maybe the most modern would be impressionism, very

PC: Really, there as no west coast kind of oriental influence? Was there much of that teaching that or

JC: Oh, maybe a little, but not

PC: Not very apparent.

JC: Not very much. There was, the northwest had a kind of a look of it sown as far as painting one images and maybe related to Diebenkorn more than anyone else. I suppose he's the west coast of school sort of, but the Northwest was a little bit different again.

PC: Well, they had a lot of calligraphy and all sorts of

JC: Crazy stuff.

PC: Well, you know I'm curious some more about how things what you based your ideas or decisions on because you didn't grow up with painting around you, or you didn't, you parents didn't develop it the way it happens sometimes with children, so it started later. Was it influence, just being decisive about things and the fact that you liked it, the professors, the academic situation, appeal to you?

JC: Well, I was getting to a point where I could see that the people ahead of me were doing job interviews and you had to start thinking about what you were going to do, you know, and it just depressed me to the point that I couldn't, I just didn't know what I was going to do. So I made the decision to try to be an art professor and you know, I committed myself all the way to that. I found out later that the best way to get a good teaching job was to have a show in New York so I thought well, I'll have to get one of them.

PC: One of those, right. Well, do they have a collection there at the University? Is there an art

collection here or a museum of any kind?

JC: Oh, yes, oriental.

PC: Yeah, did it interest you and

JC: Not really.

PC: So had you seen much painting by that time, by the time you were in college or

JC: No, I had seen very, very little and most of that was reproduction.

PC: Had you bought art books or anything or not ?

JC: I started to buy some, when I was, you know a little 99 cent pocket.

PC: Little pocket book, yeah. So you really went through college and got a degree so you could get the job and do all those things.

JC: Settle down to a soft life.

PC: But you went to Mexico City College at one point. Now where did that come in?

JC: Yeah, I went down and that was a thing that was incredibly good I think for me, the art school maybe wasn't so good there, but I think the more teachers that an art student has the better. Everyone has something to offer, and the more exposure you have, but living in a foreign country was pretty different then than it is now. Was very good about seeing this country. In fact, it didn't make too much difference what I learned about Mexico. It's what I learned living in Mexico and America.

PC: Perspective, yeah.

JC: Being too close to be able to see, you have to stand back to

PC: What year were you there?

JC: I was there, first I was there in '56-57, I'm not sure, it was a summer. Went for the summer and then the second time I went down must have been '69 or '59, '58-59. I'm not sure, the winter for the winter.

PC: How did you like the college, was it useful or was it just that it was a fresh point of view?

JC: Well, it was a place to meet people who had been living there for a while, which I think important. I tried to learn Spanish but I didn't do that very well.

PC: How'd you like the life there with the students?

JC: Well, I must say, I liked that pretty well. That's one of the main reasons I was down there so much.

PC: Have you been back, do you go back?

JC: Yeah, I have not for a while, it's very different now. I don't especially like Mexico anymore.

PC: What's the change, how do you see it?

JC: Well, it's mostly the people there I guess. They don't like Americans very much there, they never did as far as that goes. I don't know, it's hard to, hard to put my finger on it. It's going back, it's like anything else in life. It's hard to go back.

PC: Well, when did you go to Europe. Cause you were there at some point?

JC: Well, I graduated in 1960 and I went six months into the Coast Guard and then I worked, actually I built a house, to make enough money to go to Europe. I thought, maybe I'd say a year and then come back and get my master's degree, but I ended up spending two and a half years and meeting a lot of New Yorkers and you know, finding out about what was really going on in the world then.

PC: Where were you in Europe?

JC: I started out in Paris. And then I went to Greece and then I went to England, Liverpool, actually.

PC: Liverpool. That's a strange place to go.

JC: And I spent the last year in Spain, down near Gibraltar, between Gibraltar and Malaga and a little town called Point de Rola and then I, that was probably five months there and seven months actually in Ibiza.

PC: How'd you go to Liverpool.

JC: I couldn't find a studio in London, I left Greece, and I just wanted to get to the biggest, dirtiest, industrial city I could find, I thought Milan first and that was impossible and then I thought, well, I'll try London and it was impossible to find anything there. So I thought Dublin and I couldn't afford the ferry to get across from Holyhead to Dublin. But I just needed to go to work. So I looked on the map and the nearest town was Liverpool.

PC: Why did you want to find an industrial city, what was the attraction?

JC: Well, Greece was such a fairytale kind of world that it wasn't real enough. It seemed like I needed to be back in a real world where people were doing things and

PC: What about Spain though, cause that's sort of

JC: Well, I sort of satisfied my need for the big dirty industrial thing. I spent the summer there, I felt like, I dismissed a summer that year. It was cold and wet all summer long, so I wanted to get back into the sun.

PC: Well, what was Liverpool like? Did you spend much time there and did you get to work there or not?

JC: Oh, yeah. I worked very well. I pulled into town and I asked a policeman if there were any artists that lived around there and he said yes and he looked in the back of an old Volkswagen bus and he saw a guitar that was laying back there and, oh, you're an artist and but he meant a musician. And he said well you've got to go down to this cave thing you know. Later like I found out it was the Beatles. Then I said no, where's an art supply store? I figured I find something there, well, he said you've got to go up to this little pub and talk to somebody there and spent about three hours after I

hit town I had my own studio and practically ready to go to work.

PC: What English artists did you meet there, any that

JC: A guy called Don, you know, I can't remember.

PC: Yeah, people that wander in and out of pubs.

JC: And I lived in a whole building full of artists actually. And I can't remember their names. It was a real artists' community there at that time and they were into this thing called pop. Which I had practically never even heard of at that time. They were more like aware of what was going on. Then probably a lot of people in New York, they really followed all those things there.

PC: Well, after all pop art was a term originated in England.

JC: Yeah, I guess that's right.

PC: But that was what? That was 60 what, 2, 3, somewhere in there.

JC: 62 I guess.

PC: 62.

JC: May 63, I'm not sure. No 62.

PC: So you were there for a while. What brought you back to this country then?

JC: Well, I don't know, a series of circumstances from home. And I was getting bored. I knew it was time to come back to, get back to New York, not home.

PC: You hadn't spent time in New York on your way to Europe?

JC: Yeah, I spent about three or four days waiting for my ship. I didn't know anyone here and I just walked around the streets and

PC: Looked at it, well what have you been in New York since you've come back or have you been elsewhere?

JC: Yeah, I've been there pretty much all the time.

PC: Well, you know your first show here was what in '68 with the Kronberg were there exhibitions or things prior tot hat, or is that kind of the beginning of

JC: Well, not really, I had a guy that was started to sell a few paintings and he gave me a private show one time. Twice I guess. I just maybe a year prior to Kornblee, I was starting to like, be able to afford to eat, some very lean years from 64 to 67, something like that.

PC: Where were you living at, downtown?

JC: On Rivington.

PC: On Rivington. So you spent a long time in that street. Well, what kind of painting were you doing after you got out of college?

JC: Just about everything.

PC: Trying all sorts of ideas and

JC: You know, I went through just every possible thing, not really intending for any of it to make much sense but like just sort of gathering a vocabulary.

PC: Where along the line did you give up the idea of being a professor?

JC: Well, I came to New York, I came here basically to get that show so I could go back. And I was starting to cool off on it anyway and I just looked around here. It didn't seem to me like there was really that much competition and I don't know, I don't know. I couldn't teach now if it was the last thing in the world. You know, I never would have, I would have been a terrible teacher anyway, you know, I could never lecture.

PC: Just for all the preparation and the College Art Association and all that.

JC: And all that, well, administration madness.

PC: Well, when did you, you know, move into the kind of work you're doing now?

JC: It's probably like the start of that was actually in Spain. At that time I was doing like action painting and I started to make some stencils of letters and numbers and then I saw this sign on the beach that said no dog with a cut out dog and I thought well, I mean, I wonder if I could do that. And so I drew that and it came out and you know, looking, you know, just like a regular dog and so then I thought well, if I can do a dog why can't I do a face, and if I can do a face, why can't I do a body. And you know, why can't I fill in the background, you know, one thing after the other. And the stencils just simply got more interesting to me than anything else and I was finally able to like drop everything else.

PC: And just use the stencils as the way. Well, how did you get to Jill Kornblee?

JC: Through Ivan.

PC: Through Ivan, yes.

JC: I had the big fight, after I sort of had decided to do all stencils, was what kind of subject would not hinder or not, you know, what kind of subject wouldn't distract from like what I was really doing. And I finally decided that since I was projecting and I was really into the visual code, like how, like the second realism comes about, that the most honest thing I could do was simply like explain that by showing things like that you already knew, like reproductions of paintings, then basically what I was doing at that time was making reproductions.

PC: Well, did you start using slides and things, or how did you do those?

JC: Well, at first I had an opaque projector, and I just could set it down on a book and you know, it was like very rough, but I could sort of get things in the right way.

PC: And then cut stencils for everything. You had said before we started this, that you know, talking about one of the paintings, that a painting for a slide, that you used the camera. How do you do that, you know, is it a reflex camera or

JC: Yeah, well, what I right now, what I'm doing, I'm actually going out in the country and photographing things, taking a photograph and doing like thick gooey, wet paint of that and photographing that and

PC: Do you paint over the photographs or do

JC: No.

PC: It's done, the photograph as a model.

JC: It's just done in the old, yeah, yeah. And then projecting that on the paper.

PC: But you make slides from that? You've got an awful lot to do before you can even get started and do some more

JC: Yes, yes, it's getting to be an incredible process in painting.

PC: Well, you know, it intrigued me because I remember the Kornblee show. You showed those sort of large famous paintings that you did. How did you select the particular paintings? Where they just the ones that you were familiar with and you thought you could use or was there a particular

JC: Well, you see like every painting was, I was really, well, I was really inventing was a visual code and everything like every painting required a different visual code.

PC: How do you mean, visual code?

JC: Well, a visual code is a system of things that stand for other thing, you know, it's what our world is made up of. You know like most of it, like our, for instance, when I went to Europe and saw the Night Watcher, what ever, you know the painting that I had known for so long. They weren't really as real as my little pocketbook things that I had been studying for years. And it and alter it started to be settled in my mind that there were two realities. The one that's very founded in this country which is the one that comes from a visual code, or like a second, you know, it's not the real thing. It's this thing of that, but that becomes a real thing too.

PC: Right, right.

JC: And it's not necessarily any poorer, we make the, our society would tend to say that it's poorer but it really isn't, it's just something else.

PC: Because as I remember the early paintings even of the images were familiar, the surface quality was different and there were enormous numbers of changes and you didn't attempt to reproduce it on a different size or just scale, I mean the scales would change the whole feeling of the picture was different.

JC: Well, I didn't do that on purpose. I think, actually I quit doing reproductions when I reached a point that I did want to personalize them. I wanted to change them a little bit, and I didn't feel like doing that to someone else's painting. So I started doing my own photographs of real models.

PC: Right, right, when did you start doing that? Those people in the country and all of that?

JC: Oh, that was what, my first show was just the reproductions, the second show was all the same picture and that was, I started in '68, '69 and '70 is probably when I started going out into the

fields and photographing.

PC: As I remember some of those had kind of a classic overtone and

JC: Yeah, I really didn't want to, again, make new subjects. I tried to stay with the same subject. If I was doing it on the judgement of Paris, like all, I just took the ingredients of it. Like there had to be a mercury, there had to be a Paris, there had to be the three graces. And it, you know it has like incredible possibilities. You know and instead of, you can work on the paint. Ah, where was I? If I put those ingredients in a landscape they had a built in like meaning. Which was nothing that I was really concerned with, but somehow like I wouldn't be asked, or people wouldn't get into what is that nude doing in that field there, you know.

PC: You just said it was the three graces.

JC: Yeah, what's the significance, what's he trying to say, what's you know what's it all about/

PC: Well are you interested in classical mythology or

JC: Not really, no.

PC: These are just, you know, traditional ideas.

JC: Yeah, they're what paintings have been made about for

PC: Forever.

JC: Not doing new things, that's the only thing that I, if a painting was going to look like 1970 or whenever it was, it wouldn't be because it had a 1970 car in it, or you know, the subject matter wasn't a give away. It would simply be because of that was the way the painting looked, you know, the paint looked like another time.

PC: Well, what about there were some brushstroke paintings weren't there?

JC: Yeah, from there of course that's another, it's not as old as those classic things, but I just reached a point that I, well I actually thought that you know, I said one time in another interview that I couldn't, I thought it was impossible to make an abstract painting anymore, that was like anything but simply a beautiful decorator item, and the public had been so used to them now that it was hard to make a

PC: Make a statement.

JC: Yeah, right. So I had to think about that a lot. It's always the things that you believe most that you can question first and they're always the things that change first. So I just thought about how much would a close lens, how much variation there was in the paint and the possibly is and like doing abstract realism.

PC: Well, you know it's interesting there's always a referral to the camera. What is, you know, you use the camera really like an eye, that you can then transform, do you take lots of slides of things or do you just kind of build up to one and

JC: Well, that's something that varies all the time, sometimes I take and, hundreds and sometimes I go months without even using it. It depends on where I am at the time.

PC: But you use it as just another tool basically, the camera's end results not your end results.

JC: No, no. I found out I had to take my own photographs from the start because they weren't especially good photographs that I wanted, they were like photographs to make a painting from, which is a whole different thing. I could never find a photographer that could see the way I

PC: Well, what kind of camera and how do you do all of that?

JC: Well, it's a Nikon. A couple of them, and what I use mostly is a micro lens and focus it down very closely, or it's a regular lens, but you know, like there are a lot of different things I use. Sometimes bellows, and you know, when I'm photographing a part of a slide, blowing up certain things sometimes simplified what I'm working on it often.

PC: Well, you know a particular slides or

JC: Well, yeah, that's what we started before, if, if this and this works and this and that works, then what if that and this are put together?

PC: So it builds.

JC: And so like I would look for a photograph that I, if I could like exercise on that, you know, I need something that would, that this would be a good test, this to see if it would work.

PC: Then what do you do, you project it on and start making the drawings from stencils?

JC: Yeah, there's one thing I should qualify about that, all the things that a painter, I suppose, or an artist of any kind, a cook, whatever, whatever you can talk about is not really what the basic decisions are made from, to it's when it's case right. Whenever it looks right, when it's right. And I can tell a certain amount from what I project, you know the slide projector to a certain size and in my mind what it can look like, what it probably will look like, but there's nothing I can

PC: Make a list of.

JC: Well, I can't really, it's hard, it's very hard to talk about it, it's a matter of rightness.

PC: Well, do you still use models in the countryside, cause those were the paintings I tend to remember offhand.

JC: No, I quit that when I started doing abstract realism.

PC: Well, how do you, or do you relate to other realist painters now?

JC: Gee, I don't really know, they seem to be more like, most of the realists and I know there are some tremendous ones, I really like them alot, are really, I really don't know what they are doing very much. I don't think they're involved with the visual codes which is basically what I'm

PC: Well, who interests you among other painters either you know, living, dead?

JC: Oh, God, oh, all kinds of them. Lichtenstein's always been a very, he's a powerful painter, and Johns. Talking about people that really sort of set things up for what's going on now, Malcolm Morley is a terrific painter and then go back into the old classics, you know there's a lot of people I can't remember everyone.

PC: There's so many, yeah. Well, do you, you know, cause I don't know I'm just curious, is there a group, I know there's a group of kind of realist painters that meets down in the Educational Alliance, are you interested in those people or

JC: I don't even know who they are, I didn't know about it.

PC: Yeah, they're all highly figurative, realistic painters.

JC: Well, when I changed my subject or subjects from, you know, like very readable and deep space kind of figures and things like that to an abstract subject, since I changed the subject I was no longer a realist in most

PC: Oh, I see. Well do you consider still realism or do you consider

JC: Well, it's probably more realistic now than I ever was, just a different subject and the realists know what subjects make realism.

PC: That's a marvelous shift.

JC: Ever into any Realistic, what they call realism today though, like I don't know, I really don't know.

PC: Well, you show with Ivan Karp now right? Do you still have things at Kornblee or not? Is that all

JC: No, when I changed, they, and the reason I changed was that Ivan had really been my dealer sort of more than she was and I mean he got me down there and he like brought clients there and he'd really been very, did most of the

PC: Did all the work.

JC: Yeah, most, well, she did a lot too, I can't say that. Anyway I felt that when he started his own place, that I really ought to go with him if he wanted me and so at that time I told Jill and sort of a concession she wanted one more show, she'd been planning one more show. I agreed to do one more thing and I did, but that was the reason that after I was with Ivan, I also had, was just a little still life show, wasn't anything that was

PC: Well, I'm curious about you know, the visual code term which you had mentioned, do you find that that is one piece depending on, or not depending but however the subject matter changes, in the sense that whether it's abstract or figurative or you know, after

JC: Well, you know that doesn't make any difference. It's all like the removal is like making a plan of like lights and darks and colors that are going to stand for whatever it is and it doesn't really make any difference what it is. It's things that camera and the same as the printing press and you know, whatever, you know. I don't know really about, much about visual codes except the ones I dream up for my

PC: So that in a sense you are applying you ideas to any giving subject?

JC: Yeah and the subject doesn't make any difference. It's just something to work out on. You know, like, go in a way to prove that the subject or the visual code works, almost to give some sort of a specific reference to start with and general reference later. I felt at a certain point, I didn't need to be specific which was, the specific was, would be like John G. is a flag. Know I'll use strips and

John say use them like a map maybe, it shows you what he was, what it was from and basically to make you aware of what he was doing with it and so like I, a Rubens or a Rembrandt or something. Not that much different really. If you're familiar enough with it as a map, a chart.

PC: So that, well, do you feel then since you're not ited to you know, realistic imagery, or images that your work is getting more abstract or doesn't that term make sense or not relevant?

JC: Well, the imagery, yeah, the imagery isn't really very important but if the imagery is more abstract, then the painting's more abstract, I'm not sure if that's you know

PC: It doesn't necessarily.

JC: Yeah, like it's not more abstract of course to me, it isn't. Like a reproduction was totally abstract to me also so, I worked, I work which ever way was the horizontal of the painting, whether it was right side up or not. It'd be easier to reach in fact I was never involved in the same problems as the painter that painted them.

PC: Well, because you were looking at his painting for a quite different purpose.

JC: Yeah, well I was transmitting, like my art wasn't creating a new subject, it was transmitting and creating a new visual code for it.

PC: But it's not, it's not really even a variation on his theme in a way, is it?

JC: No, no it's a straight transmission, it's like transposing.

PC: What do you find changes the most of you as things progress in the paintings?

JC: The ways of making things work, the visual code.

PC: Yeah, yeah. I'm curious about, do you think there's anything in you know, the years you were in art school, of things that you picked up from your instructors that are apparent to you now as an influence, or is there no such thing like that? Have you gotten so far away from

JC: Yeah, I'm sure that everything I do all day long, is like influenced there, but things I don't think about any more. They're just like how do you say, you know what, like string goes over the top first when you tie your shoes. That was like a big influence, but they're like part of my vocabulary now.

PC: Do you always work on the floor like that?

JC: Yeah.

PC: And then stencil down and spray it. Your earlier paintings had a white background and you've changed that now to black.

JC: Well, that went back and forth a lot.

PC: It did?

JC: Well, some paintings it was easier to start on light than it was on dark.

PC: So there's no particular pattern with that. It just depends on what, what works?

JC: Yeah, it seems to make more sense to work light on dark, because light has a different kind of shape than dark does. Dark is made from the areas that aren't light, so that light are like round and darks are like diamonds. Like when you put several round things together they come out, that kind of shape.

PC: I noticed the stencils that you have laid out all over the floor now in the studio. The drawings have a great kind of rhythm to it. Is that consistent in the stencils or is it just this one particular picture?

JC: No, I always try to do that, that kind of, that's something that's hard to talk about again. It's, it's like rice, the shape that water on the wet, on the drainboard makes.

PC: It's kind of natural.

JC: Yeah, it's an organic kind of Mickey Mouse shape that flows nicely and simplified.

PC: You haven't done anything that have hard edges or flat or

JC: Well, no, not for years and years. I went through a lot of that before I started on stencils.

PC: It's interesting cause so many people using stencils seem to have straight lines and you've got curves and circles and ovals. A whole new vocabulary.

JC: Just what feels right to me. It started out from the start. I don't know where it came from.

PC: What about the use of color? Cause the surface is very soft, isn't it? I mean it looks that way.

JC: Yeah, that's just because I spray, I mean I can't, I don't especially like it or dislike it. I don't think very much abbot it, it's just what happens.

PC: Do you change the colors a great deal in from the original through the slides to

JC: Well, when I was doing reproductions, I tried not to personalize in any kind of way, but sometimes I wish, well, if that were only been a green instead of an orange there, you know whatever, then I can change things.

PC: Can you change much once you get going with the stencils, once you put a color down, can you change?

JC: Yeah, I can change it, it's a big job and I usually have it pretty well. I don't vary, sometimes I do, you know it's completely flexible.

PC: There's no, well, speaking of prints, you've done some prints right.

JC: Yeah.

PC: Are you done specifically for that, or are they done after paintings or

JC: Well, I did three lithographs that I used like old masters's subjects on. I got the zinc plates up here and then I sprayed tooche and gum arabic and made my stencil. Otherwise working about the same at the paintings, except it's a little bit more of a mental gymnastic when you're spraying the dark. It's going to stand for light or dark is going to stand for yellow or

PC: Do you like that or making the lithography or not?

JC: Ah, not very much, no. It's, its, like very interesting. I could get into it, but I, I would have to really get into it to make it very interesting, just doing one once in a while is not very good for me.

PC: Well, do you make other drawings then the drawings that become the stencils or not?

JC: Uhm, no.

PC: There are no sketches or ideas?

JC: I draw, I draw all day long and day after day and I don't feel like drawing very much after that.

PC: But do you use the camera then as a kind of image making devise in a way?

JC: Yeah, but the drawings are a long way from that.

PC: Form that. Do you have any other activities that take up time besides painting? Are you interested in literature or music?

JC: Well, I don't have enough other things. I mean I've been working so hard at painting for so long that I've kind of let a lot of other things slip. But I just got a place in the country and I think I'll be able to get pretty interested in puttering around it, I love to fish, that's a beautiful sort of metal rest.

PC: I notice you've got announcements and cards and things here of all sorts of people. Do you know a lot of other figurative realistic artists or not?

JC: Yeah, I know a lot of them. They're mostly friends, mostly but not all.

PC: Are there any particular friends/

JC: Any what?

PC: Particular friends, you know, that you're more interested in than others say or not?

JC: That are artists? I'm interested in

PC: So many?

JC: Yes, an awful lot, my really closest friends, although they're artists, are not known to anyone. Just still working getting a show or gallery.

PC: Who would some of those be?

JC: Bob Pavolitch, is an old friend of mine. Michale Eastman, people I know.

PC: Nobody knows of yeah. Do they show anywhere or nowhere or

JC: Well, they have, both of them have shown, but Pavolitch had a painting in the Whitney this year, his first, Mike has had a couple of shows and some uptown galleries and years ago.

PC: How do you like living right upstairs from the gallery?

JC: Oh, it's very good. I was one of the reasons I almost didn't take this place was it was upstairs

and I thought it would be a hassle. But they actually do a very good job of protecting me, they won't let anyone come up here if I'm working.

PC: Well, that's good.

JC: And you know if I need help with something, if I need another hand or something, then there's always somebody that can come up and ...

PC: And pitch in and keep things going. Well, what about, you've had a fair number of exhibitions in the last three, four years in just the cities here and in Europe. Have you gone back to Europe recently or do the pictures travel?

JC: I went over for that one show in Germany. But I'm not very interested in Europe anymore. You know, it's like the same thing about going back.

PC: It's been done and that no longer beckons. Well, you know, prior to you know, coming here and while you were living on Rivington Street did you have jobs, did you, how did you survive? You said it was difficult for a while.

JC: No, I just barely survived at all. I sold a car and my graduation present from college and I got something like twelve hundred dollars which was a hundred dollars a month that I had sent to me which got me through the first year. Then I did actually, I went out and helped on the ranch one summer and they gave me something for that. I'm not sure. And you know, I paid 85 dollars a month rent and painted and ate on fifteen.

PC: That's cutting it very tight isn't it?

JC: It was incredibly tight, just too tight.

PC: No more of that.

JC: No.

PC: Well, you know, I'm curious, do you have any interests, do you read, or do you know ...

JC: No, I quit reading a long time ago.

PC: Do you look at the art magazines or just ...

JC: I look at the pictures.

PC: Yeah, just flip through them and see what there is and that's it. I don't know, is there anything about the paintings that, you know, one should say or that you think would be useful to have on this, that we have to ...

JC: Well, you know, like you said, there's only so much you can do without seeing a painting. I think you have to, the only way this can be of any real value is if someone sees the paintings also.

PC: Do you have any color theories that you use?

JC: Yes, that's kind of a complicated one. It's, I'm not exactly even sure where it comes from that's something I learned when I was in school. A diamond shape that stands on end with the top of it is the light. It's also a hue, value and intensity chart. The value is, like white at the top, black at the

bottom. Then as you come down, it's yellow and dark blue and then like from the other side dark blue and then the middle is red and green. It uses green as a primary.

PC: Oh, really. I don't know that scheme.

JC: Well, if you filter it works out very well for a painter. I think probably the most practical, if you filter, like you take a white light and filter it. Put layers of glass in front of it, and it first becomes yellow, then it goes to orange then red, then violet, then purple, then dark blue until it finally blacks out and that goes down one side of the triangle. The other side, you simply mix the pigment together and mix, you know, yellow

PC: Right, right. Paint and light have to

JC: Then it goes to the green side. Like from yellow to yellow green to green to blue green to blue to black. I don't think there's any reason to try to get it more technical or

PC: Cause you said you're not interested in teaching and that whole activity.

JC: And everyone I went to school with was going to be an artist and I was going to be a teacher, but they're all teachers now.

PC: Well, what do you think now that, you know, the switch has been made in sense to

JC: Well, it's only, it seems to be about the only place I really feel very comfortable and I have like a long way to go and have to work it out in my own time.

PC: Do you think that you'll keep using stencils as time goes on, do they

JC: Well, I haven't anywhere near, I haven't even started to explore them. You know, it looks like I probably will, but I'll never go on record as

PC: For quite a while anyway. Okay well

[END OF INTERVIEW]