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Oral history interview with Louis Siegriest,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Louis Siegriest on June 21, 1978. The interview was conducted in Oakland, CA by Terry St. John and Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

TERRY ST. JOHN: Louis, your full name is Louis Bassi Siegriest. You were born very near this house here, in 1899. In 1914 you entered the California College of Arts and Crafts and you studied under Pernam Nahl.

LOUIS SIEGRIEST: At night school, two nights a week.

TS: About that time you met Selden Gile, leader of The Society of Six, and then in 1915, when you were about sixteen years old, you had a chance to see the modern art exhibit at the Panama Pacific International Exposition. Can you comment on some of the artists that impressed you then?

LS: Well, the artist there that interested me was a Spanish artist, by the name of Zuloaga. I spent more time looking at his work than any other. I don't recall the other men at all.

TS: Why did you look at his work so much?

LS: They impressed me very much. They were Spanish paintings of bullfighters, Spanish women, and some landscapes. They were large things.

TS: Was there loose brushwork in these pieces?

LS: Fairly academic treatment of things. I have the catalogue some place here. He's a man that I figured should be in prominence today, but you never hear of him. I tried to look him up in Spain when I was there, but I saw very little of his work.

TS: In about 1916 you studied with Frank Van Sloun.

LS: Well, I went to Mark Hopkins School and Frank Van Sloun came. And then the war, let's see, the war was 1917 or 1916?

TS: 1914.

LS: Oh yes, 1914. The war was going on. But Frank Van Sloun wasn't very long at the school because he got in a fight with Randolph, the director of the school. Van Sloun said to me, "I'm quitting here and I'm going to start my own school. Would you be interested in coming with me?" And I said I would.

TS: Well, he studied with Robert Henri at...

LS: Yes, in New York at the Art Students League, I think. At that time he painted like those fellows.

TS: Did that style appeal to you after being at the Mark Hopkins?

LS: Well, I never got very much out of Mark Hopkins. I had Mrs. Macky, mostly. I forget who else I had.

TS: Was [Theodore] Wores there then?

LA: I think he was, but I didn't have him. I remember Mrs. Macky, but I can't remember who else I had.

TS: Spencer Macky, was he there?

LS: Yes, but she was much better than Spencer Macky, I thought.

TS: [John] Winkler once mentioned that the reason that he left for Van Sloun was that Van Sloun really taught an approach to painting that was a lot different than at the Mark Hopkins Institute. What was so different about it?

LS: He'd painted life size figure things. John went through there and a fellow by the name of Deppe who was very

good. They went with Van Sloun to the school near the Civic Center. I was impressed with John Winkler's and Deppe's painting because they painted life size. I spent a lot of my time just watching them paint.

TS: Did they paint loosely?

LS: They painted like Van Sloun, which was the style of painting at that time. I thought Winkler - he was doing etching at the time - was a goddamn good painter. Deppe was good, too. They were both lamplighters to get by. I think they got thirty dollars a month. They had Powell Street where they would go in the morning to put the lights out, and about seven o'clock they would light the lights. I think they had Powell Street.

TS: What was your work like at that time?

LS: Well, it was in-between. I was with the Society of Six group.

TS: You were with the Society of Six at the same time that you were at school.

LS: Oh yes, I sure was. But I was sort of confused because I saw Van Sloun and those guys. I thought that's the style for me from now on because they were painting in the New York style.

TS: What did Selden Gile, the captain of the Society of Six, think of Van Sloun's painting?

LS: He thought a great deal of him. I don't know how they met, but they did meet somewhere. Gile probably went over to the school. He thought a great deal of him.

TS: He didn't object to the color ideas?

LS: No, oh no. Then Van Sloun went Impressionist, more or less. I think in the twenties. I didn't like it. He painted a lot of nudes on scenic backgrounds.

TS: Academic anemic?

LS: Yes, academic anemic. And then Van Sloun did a mural in the Bohemian Club. It was in one big room, the dining room. He asked me if I'd come down.

TS: And you and von Eichman?

LS: No, von Eichman didn't go. I think von Eichman at that time was a salesman. He'd go up to Portland and back to New York, all around. I forgot the fellows that were there.

TS: But you were an apprentice of his working on this mural?

LS: Yes. Some guy mixed the colors. I forget who he was. I don't know whether he was a student of what, but he'd mix all the colors in jars. Van Sloun didn't have a color sketch for the mural, just a pen and ink drawing. I had one wall and the other fellows had the other wall. I Forget who they were. Del Mue came in.

TS: Maurice Del Mue. Well at this time we ought to mention just who The Six were: yourself, William Clapp, August Gay, Selden Gile, Bernard von Eichman, and Maurice Logan. Logan recently died, which leaves you as the sole surviving member. When did you first meet Gile?

LS: He lived up on Broad Avenue.

TS: In North Oakland or the Temescal district?

LS: Well that's only about four blocks down and one block up [from here]. I was painting around the place and a laundryman came and said, "I know another artist who lives up Broad: Would you like to meet him?" He took me up there and Gile wasn't home. But the house was wide open and you could walk in. Being young, I was very impressed. He had paintings all over the walls. He and Gay painted together at that time.

TS: They lived together also?

LS: Gay lived in Alameda but he would come over and stay overnight or something. Then the laundryman said, "Why don't you come up on a Saturday when Gile will be home." So I went up there with him, and I met Gile who said, "Would you like to go out painting with us some day?" And I said, "Sure, I would love to."

TS: In this district around here?

LS: You could paint any place around here.

TS: It wasn't built up?

LS: It wasn't built up; it was easy to paint. I went out again with him, the next week, Saturday or Sunday. By that time he had moved up on Chabot Road. He had built a one-room shack up there with a big porch, a small kitchen and a toilet. The toilet was in the back. And that's all he had, one large room.

TS: How many people at that time were with the group? There was you, Gay, and Gile?

LS: Well, three at that time. Then when he moved up on Chabot Road I brought von Eichman up there. I said I knew him in art school. Gile invited me for dinner and he asked me to bring von Eichman up. Right away we didn't form the Society of Six, but we painted together. And one night Gile suggested that we form a group. The Society of Six was formed after dinner. We talked about it and what we were going to do. From then on we exhibited as a group, painted together and ate together.

TS: How many times a week did you see each other?

LS: I went up there more than anybody else. Mr. Clapp would come up there sometimes on Saturday or Sunday, von Eichman, a jack of all trades, was a bricklayer. Gile worked for Gladding, McBean & Co. as a manager, and he was well-known in Oakland among the plumbers and the bricklayers. He had a yard where he had all that type of thing.

TS: And he had worked forty hours a week at that time?

LS: Well, he used to knock off work because he had a couple of men that did the jobs for him, and he would come up and paint up in the field there. Sometimes I would go up there. I wouldn't paint, but I'd go up there and talk to him. Often he'd invite me for dinner or something.

TS: What did you think of his paintings when you saw him out there painting?

LS: Like Gay, he was so far advanced. I thought a great deal of his work.

TS: What about the color they used?

LS: Gile was against using black at all.

TS: Did you see anybody else in this area use color that way, any other landscape painters?

LS: I guess there were, but I forget who they were. Gay, who lived in Alameda, worked for some grocery concern in San Francisco. But he would come up there sometimes, after hours. He knew people in Monterey and he was always going down there. He knew Armin Hansen, he knew...

TS: McComas?

LS: He knew McComas, and what's that girl's name?

TS: The Bruton sisters?

LS: He knew the Bruton sisters while they lived in Alameda. I don't think they lived in Monterey.

LS: You have a painting in the museum by...

TS: E. Charlton Fortune.

LS: E Charlton Fortune, he knew her. He knew other people whom I've forgotten.

TS: C.S. Price?

LS: Well, I don't think he knew C.S. Price then. It wasn't until after Gay had moved to Monterey, and he lived in the Stevenson House, that both he and C.S. Price had studios in Monterey. After he moved to Monterey, he did nothing but painting. He made frames for a lot of the artists. I have frames here that he did. He did frames for Logan and Gile.

TS: He later became a wood carver.

LS: Later on he quit painting and went into wood carving.

TS: E. Charlton Fortune had work for churches and things.

LS: I think so. She did a lot of frame work. They were pretty good. William Gaskin moved there also. He was friendly with Gay and that bunch.

TS: That sounds like really a fine group of artists down there, with Gaskin, C.S. Price, Gay, Armin Hansen and McComas.

LS: And other people whom I've forgotten. Garrety [?] used to come down, he was a bookie.

TS: They called themselves the Monterey Group.

LS: Yes, the Monterey Group. You'd read in the paper that the best art was done in Monterey. I used to wonder about it, but now I believe it because they had all the good men down there. But today - you know what it is today - it's awful.

TS: Let's get back to you and The Six. We'll pick up later on Monterey. When your group met, were you Sunday painters?

LS: Yes.

TS: But not really. "Sunday painters" has a bad connotation.

LS: Von Eichman and I would paint during the week. I guess Clapp was off doing those nude things.

TS: Candy boxes?

LS: Gile used to say he would paint like an old woman. He did candy boxy covers that were all pretty.

TS: Clapp was part of The Six, so he did do some very fine painting. He was probably the one that did the least exciting things.

LS: He was a very timid sort of guy. It was very seldom that he painted with the group. He painted with von Eichman, and he'd go out by himself.

TS: Why was that? Do you think it was fear of the criticism?

LS: I don't know.

TS: It was a pretty rough and tumble group, wasn't it?

LS: Yes, von Eichman was pretty rough, you know.

TS: Was this afterward, during the critiques that you held, when you'd get back from painting? You'd put up your paintings and talk, wouldn't you?

LS: Yes, when we got back we'd line them up against the wall, sometimes after dinner, sometimes before, and each guy took a crack at everybody else.

TS: Were they tough criticisms?

LS: Pretty touch.

TS: Would you flatter each other?

LS: No. Gile was the main guy. He'd always criticize the paintings. He would say, you didn't use enough color in the thing, and your composition was lousy, and you should use more red in your painting (he was very fond of red). Von Eichman got around more than any of the group. He was on a boat and he'd go to New York.

TS: HE was a merchant seaman?

LS: Yes He used to get terribly drunk. He told me a number of time that they'd chain him down in the hold.

TS: Lou, at that time when you were painting you and von Eichman were the youngest members of the group. When you'd go out and paint with Gile, who was already a very experienced and mature painter, what was your work like? Did you try to see what he was doing?

LS: Yes, I did. I burned up piles of stuff at the time. I thought I couldn't get rid of them, but he would influence guys. Gay even painted at one time like Gile. Then he got in with Armin Hansen and changed his style.

TS: Why did Gile like your work so much? HE must have seen something there.

LS: I don't know, because he was pretty lenient with me about his criticism and stuff.

TS: What did he say in critiques of your work?

LS: When he criticized the work he would talk about color. I didn't use enough red, and I was using too much white. I used a terrible lot of white and he criticized that. At that time we used to buy zinc white by the can.

TS: White zinc rather than titanium.

LS: Yes. Well, it was terribly cheap, fifty or sixty cents. But that was the best criticism he would make with me.

TS: Would he give you any of his secrets? He was so good at color, but he wouldn't teach things directly. He was sort of indirect in what he would say.

LS: He had a great respect for his own work.

TS: He knew he was good.

LS: Yes, he would call a lot of his paintings "bucks." He would say, "Look at that lousy 'buck' I made today." I don't know where he got that term, but he'd call them 'bucks.' He wouldn't destroy them, but he wouldn't keep them around. He'd put one down in the basement if he didn't like it. After he went to Tiburon he gave me all the paintings. I destroyed an awful lot of his work.

TS: Of Gile's work?

LS: Oh, yes. I wish I knew then what I do now.

TS: Each one's a thousand dollar bill.

LS: I know! Well I burned up a pile that high. I have a couple down in the basement. He said, "What I left behind you can have, otherwise, burn it." Like his books. I never looked at the books that were upstairs, and he was a friend of Jack London's, you know. He had all the first editions of Jack London's books. They were autographed. One day he said to me, what did you do with my books? I said, I didn't take them. Somebody had gotten in the house and grabbed those books, and I didn't know it. Whoever it was stole all of Jack London's books.

TS: When you people painted, did you go out early in the morning and paint all day long?

LS: Yes, we painted all day. We generally took a lunch along, a sandwich or something. I don't recall drinking anything on the trip. We'd go to Alamo, Danville, and up to what they called Merrywood at that time. It was all open space; there were very few houses. We painted a great deal up there. Sometimes, we'd even go to China Camp. A girl and Gay would go over to China Camp and places in Marin more than I ever did. I think I worked for Foster and Kleiser at the time. It was about 1919.

TS: Who else was working at Foster and Kleiser at that time? Was Maynard Dixon there?

LS: He wasn't working steady. Paul von Schmidt was working there and Maynard Dixon would come in. He had a studio down on Montgomery Street and he'd bring his posters in. They had Ingmar Grebbs [?], Shepherd [?]. Shepherd was a very good poster man.

TS: What about Paul von Schmidt?

LS: He was one of the best in the country.

TS: Would you say at this time that Maynard Dixon was obviously a very good artist. Would you say that the poster artists, the commercial artists, were very good here?

LS: At that time I think they were the best poster artists in America. They did some wonderful things. I have a few sketches done by Maynard Dixon and Shepherd [?].

TS: Did Maynard Dixon have a big impact on your work?

LS: I admired his work, but it didn't have an impact. His poster work did, but not his painting. I saw a lot of the work he showed. They only had two galleries at the time, Hamlin Town and I forget the name of the other place over there on Sutter Street where he showed mostly. Then he did a lot of illustrating for *Sunset* magazine.

TS: Well, it seems to me, didn't Dixon use - as I know you sometimes use in your very abstract landscapes - a

very high horizon line.

LS: He did, he was noted for that, a very high horizon line.

TS: Ever since the time of your involvement with The Six, would you say that you've been primarily a landscape painter? I know you've done figure painting.

LS: Well, yes. I was more or less a landscape painter. I started out in landscape.

TS: Why landscape so much?

LS: I was with the Society of Six, and that was all they ever painted.

TS: You really liked it?

LS: Oh, yes, I liked it very much. I did go into figure painting one time in a small way, when I was going to school at Van Sloun's. That's all they did. I thought I'd be a figure painter.

TS: In your retrospective at the Oakland Museum you had a coup of surviving little studies. They were quite good.

LS: I did a few portraits but not very good. I thought they were pretty bad. I thought I'd be a portrait painter.

TS: When you were in The Six you used a lot of bright color. Actually, with your mature painting, the painting that you're most known for, you use very subtle, muted colors. What did you think about using bright color? Did it strike you as dry, or did it feel artificial?

LS: At that time I think they were painting Impressionist paintings. There were other people doing it. I can't recall the names of the people. But back East there was [Fredrick Carl] Frieske and [Ernest] Lawson. I thought Frieske was pretty good. After seeing Lawson, in that show at the Oakland Museum, I thought his landscapes were overworked.

TS: Do you think he was as good as Gile?

LS: I think Gile was better. Not at that time, but now I do. Now I think he's better than both Lawson and Childe Hassam. Because we talked about them a great deal. We saw reproductions of their work in *Studio* magazine, but I've changed my opinion.

TS: Why was Gile so good? Looking back on it now, you're 79, and looking back at the work. There have been a lot of Gile exhibits recently and we've seen a lot of Gile work since the Society of Six Exhibition at the Oakland Museum in 1972. What's so good about Gile? Would you say it's his color?

LS: Well, his color and composition were excellent, I thought. Most of his paintings, and even the figure work that he put in his compositions, was very nice. He did quite a bit of figure painting, fishermen mending their nets and stuff. He'd get a lot of that in Monterey. He generally painted the fishermen. Some of them lived downstairs in the Stevenson House. In the back yard they would put up their nets and mend them, and Gile was always painting those guys.

TS: When he visited down there.

LS: Yes, when we'd go down to Monterey. Sometimes we'd go down just for Saturday and Sunday, but sometimes he would stay with Gay three or four days. He never actually stayed with Gay. He lived in a hotel across the street.

TS: It's still there.

LS: Yes, it's still there. I think a Greek guy ran the place. Gile would buy his wine from there. He and Gay always had a jug of wine. At that time there were bootleggers, you know. After on, he had to buy wine over in Lafayette. He was a friend of Theodore Geers [?], who ran a big winery. But that was still in Oakland, and he would get wine there.

TS: You talk to art critics, specifically Tom Albright and Alfred Frankenstein, and they have a tendency not to think a lot of Gile's work. What do you think that is?

LS: At that time there was very little publicity except in San Francisco, which was the art center. They didn't think very much of Oakland. Everything was in San Francisco and they'd write up people in San Francisco. The Society of Six didn't get much of a write-up.

TS: But Frankenstein doesn't know much about the twenties. What I'm trying to get at is that Gile did a lot of work. He must have done a way over three thousand canvases at one time or another. He did an awful lot of work and you have to see a lot of it to see what he did, right? And it's very hard to evaluate his work.

LS: I feel that way, too. It's amazing what I've seen. You'd see the paintings, but you didn't see them. You'd just look at them. But now that he's gone, and after seeing the ones at the Oakland Museum when they had the show of the Society of Six, I thought more of them than I did at the time they were painted. Because Gile just used to have them tacked all over the goddamn place, out on the porch and so forth.

TS: The Society of Six exhibited regularly. I think there were five exhibitions during the twenties at what was the Oakland Art Gallery. It's now the Oakland Museum. I forget the exact dates but it was in the twenties, I think. There were five exhibitions. That was made possible by Clapp who was part-time curator. And so when you didn't get publicity, you were showing at the Oakland Art Gallery, and the publicity was less than if you had shown in San Francisco.

LS: The only ones who reviewed the show were society editors, and that was only once in a while. Until that woman came...

TS: Florence Lehr.

LS: Florence Lehr. She did a lot of writing for the Society of Six. I think for the *Oakland Inquirer*.

TS: And *The Argus*?

LS: I think so.

TS: Well, the Oakland Art Gallery actually had pretty good exhibits, such as The Blue Four.

LS: Oh, The Blue Four, yes.

TS: With Galka Scheyer.

LS: The Blue Four with Madame Scheyer. Clapp must have known it was something. Anyway, he got the exhibit down there.

TS: They had a couple of exhibits there.

LS: She opened a gallery on Telegraph Avenue and I don't remember a great deal about it. I know I went up there with Gile because she invited Gile to exhibit there and it was up on Telegraph Avenue, by that Spanish restaurant.

TS: Casa de Eva?

LS: Yes, next door, I think. The Blue Four, I didn't know what it was all about. It was a group with Kandinsky, Jawlensky, Klee and Feininger. They tipped buildings around. I didn't know what the reason was, but I thought it was pretty good. I tried it for a long time.

TS: One, the yellow house, is reproduced in your retrospective catalogue.

LS: I had others, too.

TS: Gile did also.

LS: Like at the Claremont Hotel, I looked at that thing and I thought, "Jesus, did I paint that?"

TS: There was Gile's signature on it.

LS: But I thought it was mine.

TS: How long did The Six try to paint like Feininger?

LS: I don't know.

TS: It didn't last very long, did it?

LS: It didn't last very long. She came to town and it was a bombshell.

TS: Do you think Gile understood Feininger's work?

LS: I don't know.

TS: Well, you people were very intuitive artists. I mean you looked at the landscape here a lot and with most of the work that I can see, you didn't get involved with Cubism very much.

LS: No, none of that. Von Eichman was the only one that got involved with it, I think. He did some experimental things, like the one you have hanging down there now.

TS: That has some Cubism. It's called *Back Yard*.

LS: It's not his style at all. He experimented with that type of thing at one time, and then he dropped it and went into something else.

TS: The Six painted actively together during the twenties, and in the thirties it tapered off. But you didn't paint with them throughout the twenties. No, I was away. But I'd been painting. In the 1920's you were first in Seattle, right?

LS: Yes, that was in the twenties.

TS: And then you moved back here and you went again to Milwaukee.

LS: Yes, that's right.

TS: Was that around 1929?

LS: I went to Milwaukee and I was a Sunday painter there because I was married and I had Lundy. I had a job in Milwaukee.

TS: What sort of job did you have there?

LS: Well, I worked for an advertising place and then I freelanced.

TS: Did you do layout?

LS: I did a lot of poster work, general advertising things.

TS: Did you ever feel any contradiction between commercial art and fine art? I know in the fifties there was a big thing between commercial art and fine art. Commercial artists were put down by the fine artists. Did you ever feel any difference between the two? When you had to work as a commercial artist did it bother you much? Did you like it?

LS: Well, I liked the work, but you very seldom did your own idea. The layout man would layout something and you would have to follow his idea. That's the part I didn't like.

TS: You liked freedom.

LS: I liked freedom and that was why I quit that job and went freelancing for myself. I had my own ideas.

TS: And then you taught at the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee?

LS: I hurt my hand, you know, and I got a job at the Layton Art School. I taught a poster class, mostly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you hurt your hand? You mentioned that several times.

LS: I went to a party one night and a guy was beating some dame up. I shouldn't have put my nose in the thing, but the guy hit me, and I hit back. Well, he was a big guy, and he went down. I thought, if he ever gets up he'll kill me. But it was dark, and I missed him and hit a window. I ended up with blood poisoning.

PK: Is that the reason you left your job then with the advertising firm? IT must have been pretty hard to do any fine detail work with your hand.

LS: Well, no, I was freelancing at the time. I used to go out painting. I had a rubber band I'd hold a brush with and do landscape painting. I was out a whole year. I didn't do any commercial work for a year. I had enough money saved up.

TS: About 1931 your work started to change a lot. It was a bright, sort of Fauve palette during the twenties. You were painting pretty much like the rest of The Six. In *Steel Mill*, 1931, which is hanging on the wall in your house and is in the catalogue, the colors become more somber. Again, you use realism, which you didn't use in the twenties. Why do you think the artists all of a sudden...

LS: Well, I think those were the Depression years, and most of the artists I thought of at that time were painting quite dark and heavy. I drifted into it, I don't know why.

TS: Didn't Gile's work also start to deteriorate during the thirties?

LS: No, it wasn't until later on. Sometime in the forties.

TS: A lot of the work that I saw at Mrs. Hall's wasn't as good in the thirties.

LS: In the forties, later forties even.

TS: Then you returned to San Francisco and you did landscapes again. You did landscapes of Potrero Hill.

LS: Yes, I got in with a different bunch. I got in with Lino Parrer [?] and Parker [Rodriguez?].

TS: But those landscapes are very grayish. In fact, they were done with a very limited palette.

LS: I used to go out with Maurie Logan at that time, too, and he dropped his palette way down.

TS: From bright colors, he also went down. And so did von Eichman.

LS: Yes, and von Eichman. I don't know why. I think it was the time; it must have been. Everybody was painting low key.

TS: Were the thirties a good time for you as far as creating? You had a job briefly at *The Chronicle* as an illustrator, and then you went to work for Golden Gate.

LS: I did the posters for the Fair in 1939 and 1940. I worked under Rene D'Harnoncourt. He was in charge of the Indian division of the Fair. That came about when I met William Gaskin, who was a very good painter. Nobody knows the guy, but he was wonderful. He painted watercolors.

TS: Scheyer has some of his work.

LS: Scheyer must have some of his work. Most of his work was destroyed by fire. His studio burned down and everything burned up. But he was a lazy guy. He married money, and as soon as he married money he quit painting. But he was a great talker, wonderful to be around. He wasn't involved with the fair. He was with the WPA. He was one of the officers of the WPA, and he worked for Foster and Kleiser, at one time.

TS: I think what I'm really getting at is those posters are beautiful. Even now, you get people that thing so. What was that museum that wrote to you that had an exhibition of them? One of the important things, at least what I notice in looking at your work, is that you use a lot of flat pattern.

LS: I learned flat pattern at Foster and Kleiser.

TS: And so this reinforced your interest. How do you think that this started to get you thinking in other directions, as far as breaking away from the more natural landscape?

LS: let me tell you how I got into the thing. I met Gaskin on Montgomery Street and he said, I'm with the WPA now. He was some officer of some kind, and he gave out all the art work to the different artists. Bufano was working there. Dong Kingman, all the artists of San Francisco. Gaskin just said, I've got some posters to do for D'Harnoncourt at the Fair. Why don't you come down and I'll let you work on them? So I did two for the WPA. The de Young Museum had an exhibition - I forget what it was - I've got the poster. I did that first, and then I did the Indian basket, which D'Harnoncourt liked. He came to me and he said, "Why don't you work for me instead of doing them for the WPA?" What the hell were they paying, ninety dollars a month or something? He said, "I'll give you three dollars an hour and you can put in as much time as you want." And so I said yes, and I went to work for D'Harnoncourt. The WPA screen process was the thing. I was in charge of that. I mean I had nothing to do with the actual process...

TS: You didn't actually pull the prints.

LS: No, I knew the man, a fellow by the name of Conkerson [?]. He cut the stencils, and I would see that they got out. I think they got out 1500 of each poster.

TS: After the Golden Gate International Exposition, in 1941, the war started. Some time in 1941 you went to work for the United States Army Corps of Engineers. What did you do for them?

LS: I went into camouflage at that time. There was that cowboy artist by the name of Danny Long [?], whom I

knew. He was a friend of Logan's. I met him over in San Francisco on the second day of the war, I think. He said they had just called him back. He did camouflage during the First World War, and he said they called him back to teach the younger fellows camouflage. He said, "Why don't you join up?" I said I would love to. It took me a couple of days to go through the process, but I finally went in and it was easy for me. You were assigned to a job and you made these designs and then they were handed out to different companies to do the work.

TS: Now you did a design like a flat abstract pattern. Would it be an aerial view?

LS: An aerial view.

TS: And then your design would be sent out to...

LS: Different companies. They would do the painting, nets or whatever.

TS: What was it like over at Fort Cronkite and around there? Didn't they use different colored plants and things like that to create patterns?

LS: Yes, but I did the Benicia thing up there, Benicia arsenals. That was designed mostly in there and I wouldn't have a great deal to do. I'd look at how it looked and then I would fly it.

TS: They'd put you in an airplane?

LS: Yes, I'd go to Hamilton Field, get a plane and go up there. At 6,000 feet I'd look at it.

TS: How did it look?

LS: It was okay, sometimes I'd change the design.

TS: What did it look like at 10,000 feet?

LS: It looked like an abstract design. The way I did it was to go up there first and see what the land looked like on the outside. Then I'd bring the land in to the buildings; if there was a green patch over there I'd bring the green patch into the buildings. If there was brown, or dark, I'd bring it all in. So I'd go up and look down and see if that was right. And then there were other ways of doing it. I went up to Klamath, which was a radar station, and bought an old barn and moved it down (the barn) over the top of the radar station. We were on the coast.

TS: How did it look?

LS: Oh, it looked like a ranch, I'd build fences all around.

TS: What was your experience as an artist? How did you feel about this, was it fun?

LS: Oh, it was a hell of a lot of fun. Jesus, great. I went with the officers and would eat with the mess. But I didn't have a great deal to do, even at that.

TS: Did this turn you on to any ideas for your later paintings?

LS: Well, more or less, I guess it did. At that time I painted. I even took my paints along.

TS: What kind of paintings did you do?

LS: I'd do things along the coast, you know.

TS: More straightforward kind of landscapes?

LS: More straightforward landscapes.

TS: Previously when you were doing landscapes you were looking straight ahead at them, and that's a very abstract way of looking at landscape, like looking down.

LS: I even painted some of the installations. I got into a lot of trouble by doing it because the Army thought I was giving secrets away. They took all the paintings from me and locked them up. I got them back. Well, that was good, working for the camouflage. And then, during that time, *Life* and *Time* had war artists.

TS: Lucien Labaudt, Henry Varnum Poor, were they some?

LS: Yes, most of the guys were from back East. They would come to our office, which was their headquarters. And Aaron Bohrod. I said to Aaron Bohrod, "Jesus, I'd like to get in that thing. How can I do it?" He gave me the

address to write to. I got a letter back from them saying that they weren't taking any more men in. Lucien Labaudt was the last guy, and good thing I didn't get in because Lucien Labaudt was killed.

TS: This lasted through the war? You did other stuff, I know. You worked for the USO doing drawings.

LS: After that I went to the USO and I'd visit all the hospitals. I did portraits, 900 portraits. I'd make quick pen drawings (I'd use a Speedball pen). Mostly in the psycho wards. The first job I had was over at Oak Knoll, and I'll never forget that. I went in there and a lot of the guys were lined up against the wall, they wouldn't even look at me, see. They were psychos. And I thought, "Jesus, how am I going to draw these guys, they won't even look at me." And one guy said to me, "What are you selling?" I said, "Not a thing, I'm giving them away." I finally got out of there. What I'd try to get was the easiest guy to do first, because if you missed you were out of luck since they all stood around. It was tough at first. Then I got used to it and I went as far as Seattle and Utah and different hospitals. I got used to it, I learned how to handle the guys.

TS: Shortly after World War II was over you went to Virginia City, right?

LS: I went there in 1945. I was up there by Armistice Day.

TS: Why did you go there?

LS: I went there because I got a divorce from my first wife. I'd been to Virginia City before and I knew a woman in Carson City, an older lady, a sister of a friend of my mother's. I asked her if I could stay at her place in Carson City for my divorce. She arranged for the lawyer and all those things. All the while I was up there I was going to Virginia City practically every day. I didn't paint there. I made drawings the whole time. Drawings of Virginia City, of the buildings, et cetera. It was a documentary type of thing. At that time the contractors were going up there from Sacramento and all around. You could buy a brick building on the main street for five hundred bucks at that time. Now they want fifty thousand or more. So I thought, somebody ought to stop it or something, before they tear the whole thing down. So I used to make drawings. Then tourists would come around. Finally the tourists would come up there and they'd say, are those drawings for sale? And I'd sell them for twenty or twenty-five bucks. I could do them in a short time, you know.

TS: Well then, when you returned to the Bay Area, you didn't do any paintings there, or very few.

LS: No, I did a few, but not many.

TS: But one painting, anyway, *White House Rooming House, B Street, Virginia City, 1949*, is close in feeling to the drawings.

LS: I did those here from drawings.

TS: From the drawings, you did a series of them.

LS: Yes, I must have made 150 at least. I had a big exhibit at Bullock's in Los Angeles, and I must have had a hundred. That's where I met Dick Faralla, you know. He was working at Bullock's in the drapery department. I was walking down the aisle and this guy called my name out. I didn't know Dick Faralla. I heard he was up in Virginia City, but he recognized me from a photograph or something. So I finally got with Dick and he came to San Francisco. I have a few left of the Virginia City paintings.

TS: In some ways they weren't too different from some of the things you were doing in the thirties, they grayish ones. Except that they were done with different media. What was it, casein you were using? They were also a little bit more distorted. They establish maybe more of a mood, almost a romantic mood. But they're still fairly straightforward landscape paintings. I mean, they describe the building. But then, all of a sudden, in 1952, you did that outrageous painting called *The Miner Going to Church*. It caused a furor in San Francisco. Do you want to talk about it? It has a much more abstracted figure and building in a surrealist, almost stage-like setting. Do you want to talk about that painting, and that exhibit you and Lundy had at the de Young Museum?

LS: Well, I had to take a studio at the time. I'd make drawings at night time of that type of figure. I thought, why not do a series of that type of figure, using the people of Virginia City. People like the tourists who came up and the crazy politicians that lived there. So I did this series like *The Miner Going to Church* and the M.H. de Young Museum offered to give Lundy and me an exhibit there. It happened that *The Miner Going to Church* didn't have a title on it. The head of the department over there, Ninfa Valvo, said to me, "What do you call that painting? I'm going to put that on the catalogue." I looked at her and I said, "Oh Jesus, I forgot to put a title on that." I said, "*Miner Going to Church*, see, the church in the background." And she put it on. A couple of days before the exhibit was to go through some woman who was on the Board said I was communistic, sacrilegious, everything. So Dr. Howe pulled the painting out of the show. I wanted to talk to Dr. Howe. I wanted to find out why he took that painting out of there, but he wouldn't talk to me. And I said, "To hell with him, I'll take the goddamn show

out of there.” So I pulled it out.

TS: You pulled the whole show out?

LS: The whole show. I had two days to go.

TS: Ninfa Valvo, of course, she—

LS: Oh God, she was for me. But Dr. Howe, he acted awfully funny. He was scared.

TS: Wasn't that at a time when there was a lot of fear of communism?

LS: But I made it up to Dr. Howe later. I belonged to the Bohemian Club and Dr. Howe was a member. One night he came up to me, held out his hand, and said we should have a drink together. So we went in the bar and had a drink together.

TS: One thing that strikes me about your work, Lou, is that starting from about 1953 on your approach and everything seems as if you got into something that's uniquely your own, in color, in subjects, and everything. Like the *Autumn in the Comstock*, 1953.

LS: Well, that was a collage. I did a series of collages.

TS: Was that a turning point in your art?

LS: Well, no, not particularly. I think the reason I turned to that was because I got acquainted with Nate [Oliveira], and Lundy, Nate, Leon Goldin and Maurie Lapp all hung around.

TS: Pete Voukos?

LS: Pete Voukos, I knew them all then. And so I went semi-abstract, semi.

TS: That's a good way to describe them.

LS: Yes, semi-abstract, and the more I did, the more I got into it. But I always had a subject matter in the thing. I got into that gypsum thing, polyvinyl and gypsum. So I painted fairly big. And the way I would do it was to put a lot of the gypsum with dry color on the thing and take a spatula and move it around. Then I'd look at it and I'd see certain things in there that suggested a desert or whatever it was. And so I'd work to that end, to keep that image in there.

TS: This is in your later work, not the collage pieces. Works starting in the later 50's.

LS: Yes.

TS: But the collage ones were fairly abstract. You'd see buildings, but you'd also see a lot of flicking jagged shapes.

LS: Well, that was down in the tank house. That came about because I had a lot of newspaper on the floor and I flicked my brush on it. One night I picked it up and I said, Jesus, I'm going to make a collage out of the stuff I have on the floor. And so I glued it all together on a thing, and that gave me the idea to do a series of collages which are practically all in newspaper.

TS: How did the circle of artists that were around you respond to them?

LS: Well, see Lundy and Nate went to school together and Leon Goldin was teaching there, Maurie Lapp was living in Berkeley, I think. There were others, I've forgotten who they were, who'd come over here during the day. Lundy lived across the street, and they'd all come over to see what I was doing over in the tank house and that's how I got in with them.

TS: Did it feel good associating with younger artists?

LS: Oh yes, see I was part of the whole at that time. That was in the fifties and they were all much younger than me.

TS: Virginia City was important to you because, naturally, your grandmother and grandfather lived by there. You had an attachment to that and an attachment to California landscape. Then all of a sudden didn't Lundy go to Mexico on a scholarship in the early fifties?

LS: He won a Phelan Award and he went to Mexico for three or four months.

TS: And then he came back and he told you about it.

LS: He said, you ought to go down there. I had never painted down there; I never painted any place away from here. I didn't even make drawings. I would look at the landscape. I did a lot of things based on Mexico.

TS: Like the *San Sebastian 1956*, based on the churches and the buildings. What excited you so much about Mexico compared to the California landscape?

LS: The landscape lends itself to painting, it's dry and very colorful, with old buildings.

TS: You took a lot of slides, didn't you? Why did you like the slides of the buildings so much? I remember once we went all through the slides, and they are very abstract images.

LS: Well, they painted the buildings down there, in the country part, with certain high color and some of it peeled off, I'd take pictures of that, of certain sections of the building. I'd take quite a few of that type of thing.

TS: I think it was about 1958 that your painting started to be more abstract. It was still landscape, but they started to be very abstract looking, without reference to -

LS: Well, it was semi-abstract.

TS: Yes, but still, for some of them, like, well even the building on the wall which - I don't know the title of that painting - but it has a reference to landscape but it's very generalized.

LS: I always had landscape in mind because that's the best thing I could do.

TS: With this new technical break though of yours with the polyvinyl glue and the gypsum, why did you respond to that so much rather than with oil paint?

LS: The reason for that is because they used to mine gypsum this side of Virginia City. U.S. Gypsum Company had big piles of it, and I used to look at that stuff and say, if I ever found a medium I would use that. Then glue came along and so I tried that out and it worked very well and I used some commercial color but mostly dry color, earth colors.

TS: Didn't you use dirt off the ground some times?

LS: Yes.

PK: Dirty pictures.

TS: From about 1958 until recently, in the last couple of years, you worked with polyvinyl, glue and gypsum. You explored a lot.

LS: Then during the seventies (if I can jump that far ahead) I went in for the stuff you use on the roof, asphalt.

TS: Was that your Spanish series?

LS: No, I made a series of asphalt paintings and I had an exhibit at Jack's, Triangle Gallery. They were strictly asphalt. I got into that because Lundy used it. You know that big thing he's got in the front room? Well, he used pure asphalt, and I would cut mine with water. Asphalt will cut with water, but once it dries you can't budge it. You could buy a whole can of it for three and a half dollars. So I used straight asphalt, too.

TS: You did a series of Russian paintings after a trip to Russia and you did a series of Spanish paintings. It seems like after you'd make these trips, you'd do a series of paintings based on your recollections of the landscape, never literal but recollections, right?

LS: I did one based on Spain. What influenced me there was the Goya paintings in the Prado. He was one of my favorite painters anyway, so I painted a lot of black in the paintings, and I made a whole series of Spain. Then I went to Russia in 1966, I think. The series was done after I got back. Looking down from the plane. We went down to the Persian border, terribly rugged country. There were very few roads in there, but looking down from the plane impressed me very much. I didn't do too many paintings of Russia, I think eight or ten, something like that.

TS: Was that because Edna, your wife, died about then?

LS: She died in about 1966, after we came back and went to Mexico. Then I got into the lunar type of thing I was doing. I saw the first photographs of the moon shots at the Bohemian Grove, before the public saw that thing.

They had a big black board with photographs up, and it impressed me so I did a lot of things based on that. I did quite a few. Jack never exhibited them.

TS: He didn't like them?

LS: No, he didn't like them, but I have them all. There were quite a few of them.

TS: Somehow we're talking about your paintings, but we don't seem to be really. They're so unique in color and in every other way, and we don't seem really to be getting at some of those things. I guess because it's hard to put it in words. But in that article on you, in *Current Magazine*, there's a painting called *Lunar Excursion*, 1965. One of the reasons we chose it was because of the beautiful color. You know, we wanted it to reproduce well because it was fairly matte paint. But your color's so unique and it's so mute, how do you get it? Is it intuitive? Do you think much about the color when you're doing it? Gile, I'm sure, would think a lot about things like the orange of the hill being too bright, or it'll have to be punched back, et cetera. When these came about how much were you thinking about how the space was working?

LS: I don't know, Terry, it seemed the thing to do. I mean, I guess I've painted so long that...

TS: It's completely natural?

LS: It's a natural way of working, I think. I don't know.

TS: How do you know when the painting is finished?

LS: Well, that's a hard thing to say. You could overwork it. Generally, before Lundy's house was there, I worked outside. I'd put it on the fence and I'd walk way up to here. If it carried well enough I'd leave it alone. I remember John Humphrey used to come over and we'd line them up on the fence.

TS: John Humphrey, the curator of the San Francisco Museum?

LS: Yes, he's pretty good. He'd point out things that I wouldn't see. After he'd point them out I'd make the changes; I could do that.

TS: Starting about 1955, who were some of the contemporary painters, that you had a chance to see in this area or other areas of the world that you traveled, who impressed you?

LS: Local painters, you mean?

TS: Local Spanish, whatever. I mean, you traveled...

LS: Well, as I say, Goya was one of my favorites.

TS: Yes, but modern painters say abstract painters. There are a lot of painters that you like, you've mentioned Giorgio Morandi. How about Tapies, the Spanish painter? Did he influence your style very much?

LS: I liked him very much, but I never saw enough of his work to influence me. I saw some in a magazine or a book that came out on Tapies, which I liked very much.

TS: But you actually told me you were working in that direction when you saw his work. How about Frank Lobdell, do you respond much to his work?

LS: Not a great deal.

TS: How come?

LS: I liked it but he didn't influence me enough. It wasn't my style of painting. [Richard] Diebenkorn I like very much and I like Nate [Oliveira].

PK: Let me ask something. Do you see any connections at all in any way between your own work, in a certain phase, and that of Nathan Oliveira?

LS: No, no connection.

PK: Not a feeling, or possibly a tonality?

LS: Well, maybe the tonality. See, Nate did that thing over there. Well, he did both of them, but he did the lower one and that's more the way I painted. But he did that when he came out of high school. I must have influenced him the way I was painting at that time, but he got away from that. I like his figure paintings very much. I think

he's one of the best figure men in the country, even more so than Diebenkorn.

TS: As far as the art scene in the fifties and sixties, how do you remember most of the abstract painting, the non-objective painting of the time? Was it dominated by the Art Institute, a lot of people from there?

LS: There were a lot of good people in the fifties that came out of the Art Institute, but you don't hear of them anymore. I forget the names.

TS: At the Art Institute?

LS: Yes, they were all students up there at one time and they used to have big...

TS: Well, there was Hultberg, Bischoff, all those people were active...

LS: Well, Hultberg at one time I liked very much, but what I saw lately I didn't like. He was pretty good at one time.

TS: What did you think in the early sixties when the art style started to become Pop Art, Minimal and all that? What was your reaction? Already, you were 63.

LS: Well, I didn't like it. It wasn't my...

TS: What do you think about airbrush painting?

LS: So what. You have some down at the Museum down there. I've seen commercial guys do very good airbrush work.

TS: Was this in the thirties? When did airbrushing come into commercial art?

LS: In the fifties.

TS: Oh, it didn't come in earlier. Remember, we went over one time to the Daniel Weinberg Gallery and saw the Saul De Witt exhibit. I'll never forget I walked in the door, and Lou just walked in and walked right out. You like more in a painting, rather than less.

LS: Yes, much more. No, I don't like that type of painting at all.

TS: You've spent a lot of time, I've noticed - I've known you since 1972, six years - and you go around on your own a lot and look at a lot of different exhibits. Exhibits with not only name artists but all sorts of different types of work of artists. You seem to find a lot of things, even things that I never looked at before. You seem to see things with certain artists, and parts of a painting, and then get a lot out of it. It's a very open sort of thing.

LS: Well, I did at one time but I don't do it anymore. One time I saw practically everything.

TS: But you get a lot of enjoyment out of looking at good art and it doesn't necessarily have to be the big names.

LS: Well, at one time they had annuals, which I thought were very good. It gave the younger artist a chance to show his work, but today where are you going to show? There is no place. Oakland had one or two a year, as did Richmond, San Francisco and the East. I know Lundy and I used to send practically every month. We'd send back East to different places for annuals, which they don't have any more. No place has them that I know of.

TS: There are a couple but not too many.

LS: Take Nate Oliveira. He came in prominence in Richmond. He was going to art school and he won first prize up there. Diebenkorn and all those guys showed. All the younger artists showed up there at one time. Oakland wasn't so good. They had a phony jury system down there. When Clapp was there, it was a three-man jury: conservative, intermediate and radical. Oh God, I thought that was awful.

TS: I've got these reviews from the twenties about these things. It's just a mind boggler to read because The Six would be all the way from radicals to conservatives. How they wanted to jam them into the exhibit.

LS: It was terrible. All those painters for Hayward, San Leandro Alameda would show there and the conservative group would knock everybody right out.

PK: You're leading into something that I think is very interesting - excuse me for butting into your interview and Terry's - but it has to do with opportunities and, perhaps, limitations here in the Bay Area. Lou, you're an artist who from the very earliest days really chose to stake out your own career right here on your home turf. I'm wondering if, with these many years now for reflection, you have come up with some views on what this meant

to you, having made that choice to work in the San Francisco Bay Area. What this meant in terms of, perhaps, limitations or advantages to your own career as an artist. You must have thought about it quite a bit.

LS: Well, I did, but I figured I had a lot to learn from different groups of people. At one time I figured that I'd go back East to understand more what they were doing back there, but I never did. I always talked about it but I never went back.

TS: But you knew East Coast artists, like you were a friend of Kuniyoshi's.

LS: I knew Kuniyoshi and I met de Kooning through Nate. He had another fellow I liked very much, an Italian painter that was with him.

TS: The guy who taught at Mills?

LS: No, he didn't teach at Mills, he had an Italian name but he lived in New York. He painted abstract expressionist types of things. I can't think of his name.

TS: Not Marca-Relli was it?

LS: Marca-Rellie, that's the name.

TS: You told me a story once, when you were a younger man – or maybe that wasn't maybe that was when you went back there in the fifties – and you went into a gallery and you happened to mention The Society of Six, why don't you tell that story?

LS: Oh no, I went into a very big gallery and the guy came out and he said, where are you from? I always said I was from San Francisco.

TS: You didn't say Oakland, you said San Francisco?

LS: No, because you always had to explain where Oakland was and if you said San Francisco everybody knew. The man in the gallery said, "Well, you have only two good painters out there, Matt Barnes and Charles Howard." That was a good gallery, too. He was the head man there. That was in the forties. He said, "That's all the good men I know of out there – those two."

TS: Then did you mention The Society of Six?

LS: Oh no, well, I don't think they were... like Armin had some...

TS: Of course he wouldn't know Armin Hansen.

LS: No, no.

TS: Those people didn't exhibit in New York then, did they?

LS: But Armin Hansen sold back there, so did William Ritschel.

TS: Who?

LS: Ritschel. He would get ten thousand dollars for his paintings back East.

PK: Seascapes of Carmel?

LS: Yes, he painted Carmel. He had that house by the water on the rock, facing the water.

PK: Well, I don't think you've really answered my question, though because it's an important/ I'm wondering if you really considered what the effects on you and your career has been by making that choice to work here in Oakland or in the Bay Area. What has this done to you as an artist and to your career as an artist? In terms of success, perhaps, or whatever.

LS: I figure that everything is here. Why move to a different section of the country when in a short time I could go to the desert or go here or there.

TS: We've been talking pretty much about things up until the time of your 1972 retrospective at the Oakland Museum, Lou. Let's bring it up to the present a little bit more. In 1973 you had a slight stroke, and that set you back for a couple of months. Then about 1974 you and I started going out landscape painting and you painted a little bit, I think, on masonite panels. But mainly you've been painting on smaller pieces since then because it's hard to lift the masonite and to continue with the way you were working. But one thing that struck me was how

you overcame this stroke with good spirits and you'd go out, even in the winter. I remember freezing days you and I would go out there. And now you're going to have another show at the Triangle, a retrospective of all your work and examples of some of the recent work.

LS: That stroke - I'd be able to paint, even today, but my eyes are going bad. I see you over there, but I have a haze on things, which came about a year ago. I used to go paint with you...

TS: You still go out with us.

LS: Up at Mount Diablo and I had no trouble at all but lately it's been bothering me. I still paint, but I have a hell of a time.

TS: But in spite of that, you have about twenty paintings tacked up on the side of Lundy's house there, and you're working on a whole new series that looks pretty good.

LS: The stroke stopped me from doing the big ones because I can't drive a nail anymore and those things are backed up to beat the band.

TS: They're heavy.

LS: It's like making frames or matting around a picture. I can't do that.

TS: You enjoy just looking at landscape, though.

LS: Yes.

TS: How does the landscape strike you now with all the houses continuing to go up. We got to Black Hawk and all of a sudden we find a beautiful spot and there's pavement and it's covered with houses.

LS: Well, there are very few places you can go any more. But you can go to China Camp, you can go to Mt. Diablo and that's it, as far as I know. They haven't changed. But the rest of the country has changed.

TS: Was that the reason that you took so many trips to the Southwest and Nevada?

LS: No, I liked that country, the desert country. I lived so long in Nevada that I just love that desert country. That's why I went to Arizona and New Mexico and so forth. But I wouldn't paint; I'd just look.

TS: And you don't memorize the scenes you look at?

LS: Well, when I was painting there were certain areas I would have that would suggest certain places I had been (in Arizona and New Mexico) and I'd work for that. But it was all a suggestions.

TS: I'm going to ask you a sort of funny question. Do you think art is the most important thing in life?

LS: It's one of them.

TS: You like a lot of things, though. You like food, you like conversation, you mix it up pretty much.

LS: I like to drink, too. But I took acupuncture and ever since I took that I can't drink any more.

TS: They poked the wrong needle in the wrong place.

LS: I had two of them working on me. Dr. Chung said, "Don't feel bad," he said, "I go to a cocktail party and I drink a half a glass of a drink and I'm drunk." He explained to me but I can't tell you in medical terms what it does to you.

TS: One thing I'd like to comment on. I'm looking over at a small Seldon Gile watercolor that Lou recently bought out of an exhibit in San Francisco at Joseph Baird's North Point Gallery. It's one of many that he did. Lou constantly talks about it. When he was young he said he never paid attention to Gile's watercolors. But you look at it and see how well it held up after all those years.

PK: Look how fresh it is, too.

TS: The freshness, the color, the abstract qualities are all still there. Yet he has the cows emerge; there are details on them and it's much more than the subject.

LS: When you look at it you don't see those cows, the pattern in the thing looks like the rocks. I needed another picture like a hole in the head. I went over to the North Point Gallery and I wanted Mrs. Meyer, my doctor's wife,

to buy that picture. She already had bought some very good cow pictures of his, which he had in his office. So she said, no, I already have one. I thought about it and figured somebody will buy that picture and I'll never see it again; so I'm going to go buy it.

PK: So you did. I'd like to ask a question, if I may. This whole interview seems to be leading up to it, in a sense. You talk about landscapes so much and the fact that landscape just feels right for you. You tried to work with the figure and at one point thought that might be your métier. Not so, you returned to landscape. Obviously, you have established in your art a very special relationship to landscape and beyond that, a special relationship, I would suppose, to nature. You spent a great part of your life confronting nature directly, interpreting and recording. Does this represent, now even, perhaps slightly, your own unconscious philosophy of art and life? Now there must be a reason why you're attracted to nature. There must be a reason why you think it is, at least for you, the proper subject for art. I'm wondering if this is something you could clarify for me because it seems very important to you.

LS: As far as my being attracted to landscape, it was my first. I started out painting landscape and I guess it's second nature. It comes to me very simply because my first attempts were to do with only landscape. I did figure drawing, in fact, I taught over in San Francisco at the Art League of California. It was very good at one time. Gaskin and I taught there. But the guy that ran the school was a politician. He screwed it up because they had students who came in the school and he'd call them Commies and all kinds of goddamn things. I said, you're going to get in trouble some day. Finally the students didn't go for the guy, so they started dropping out. But it was a good school. Lundy taught there.

TS: What you're getting at is that you taught figure drawing there. But you liked landscape mostly. I know that when we'd go to Benicia, or Martinez, or 5th Avenue marina, you didn't like it. But if we go to Mt. Diablo you realize that this is pure landscape.

LS: Yes, pure landscape.

PK: What is it about pure landscape that makes it so attractive? I think that's what I'm trying to find out. Some people like impure landscapes as a matter of fact. They feel that it has more character.

TS: John Hultberg does.

PK: Or urban landscape, which for you, is something else. It may be something that you can't really answer, I realize that.

LS: I don't know.

TS: Well, I noticed that you never put a telephone pole in. You like it unspoiled, the way it was before it was settled, like Nevada.

PK: Does it have something to do, then, with a longing for a natural state, or at least, an interest in a more nature state? I don't want to say nostalgia.

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