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Oral history interview with Jay DeFeo, 1975
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jay De Feo on June 3, 1975, July 18, 1975, and January 23, 1976. The interview took place in Larkspur, California, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

PK: What I'd like to do today in our conversation is lay in some biographical information about your background and your personal experiences. One of the outstanding experiences of your life, of course, was all the time and effort devoted to *The Rose*, your major painting. But I thought what we could do today is save *The Rose* for a second interview and really talk about Jay and the events leading up to that very important experience. So what I'd like to ask first of all is for you to give some biographical information, especially as it might tie in with your later career as an artist. Obviously, when you were only a couple of years old you can't remember anything that was art-oriented.

JDF: Oh, yes.

PK: Oh, you can? Well, that's good. Well, you were born in Hanover, right?

JDF: Yes.

PK: Hanover, New Hampshire in 1929, the year of the Crash. And I see that you moved to the San Francisco area in 1931. Where do you want to start?

JDF: Okay. Just a factual background, then. When I was born, my father was going to medical school at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. I lived there, I guess, for about 3 years. And I still have memories of that period, the place where we lived, the landscape and what have you.

PK: Have you ever been back since?

JDF: No, I haven't. I was back East briefly on my way to Europe after I'd graduated from the University of California, but never to New Hampshire.

PK: But basically you really are, except for those first few years, a Californian.

JDF: I'm a Westerner, right. [Laughs] Or even a Middle Westerner, because I did spend a lot of my childhood in Colorado, too.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that. After your family moved to . . .

JDF: If you really want things that I recall, I was a first child born to a student of Dartmouth. Eleazar Wheelock (sic), Ernest Martin Hopkins, as I recall, was the president of the school at the time. That name has always been a kind of outstanding one in my memory. I was presented with a perambulator on that occasion. Supposedly, it was quite an event, considering what has gone on at college campuses since. Anyway, we lived there for the first three years, and I do have personal memories of living with my parents there. Then we moved back to California, and my father continued to go to school. He went both to the University of California as well as Stanford. It was kind of a difficult time, especially because of the Depression. My grandmother had three sons, and no one could really find work at that time. My mother was one of the main sources of support. She was doing a great deal towards sending my father through school.

PK: Were your grandparents, or at least one set of grandparents, here in California?

JDF: Yes. And my mother's parents lived in Colorado. My parents didn't get along and kind of broke up when I was at an early age. Partly because of a personality conflict and also because of other difficulties.

PK: Maybe the pressures of medical school?

JDF: The pressures of the time, that was a good part of it. And I don't want to go into all the personal differences between mother and her mother-in-law. A good part of my childhood was spent living with members of the family other than my actual parents. And I lived with my grandmother a great deal in California.

PK: That was in San Francisco?

JDF: Yes. And also I lived with my mother's parents in Colorado during the summertime.

PK: So those were the schizophrenic days, the city Jay and the country Jay.

JDF: Right. And, well, I think possibly I made a kind of a joke out of that. I suppose it did have an influence on me. Everything does.

PK: How do you think it did? You say you joke about a sort of schizophrenia.

JDF: Well I did. [Laughs]

PK: Two personalities?

JDF: Well, you said when we were having lunch together that Wally commented on me being a funky girl. That might have been my Colorado bringing-up.

PK: All those pigs and horses.

JDF: I think also later I was influenced by the two kinds of painting which I'm interested in, or which I consciously or unconsciously tried to resolve in my own work.

PK: What are they?

JDF: A kind of a classic style, if you wish, for lack of a better word. I don't want to think of it as a sophisticated style necessarily. But something that's classic in nature, influenced by the Renaissance.

PK: More formal?

JDF: Formal, right. I'm not happy unless I've got that. But at the same time something that is essentially either funky or primitive. Putting it another way, a very close relationship to the use of the materials and my relationship to the process of painting. But that's progressing way into the future. Let's try to stick to this little bit.

PK: Good! I'm supposed to tell you that. [Laughs] Well, let me ask one other thing about your early years growing up. I gather then that you weren't with either one of your parents most of the time.

JDF: Part of the situation there was one of health. I kind of fell heir to a whole bunch of childhood diseases, simultaneously, which put me in a very weakened condition. And my mother, who was also going through a terrible strain with her relationship to the family and whatever, became ill, too. Now, I was put into Stanford Rest Home for about a year.

PK: How old were you then?

JDF: I was still pre-school. How-how

PK: About four?

JDF: Yes. Five maybe. And that was a partial isolation from the family. My mother fell ill, too. As a result of that, after I got out of the rest home, they wanted me to be separated from her. You know, there might be some kind of contagious effect. In fact, I was put in for that reason, too, because they thought for a while that my mother might be tubercular, which turned out not to be the case. But we were separated for that reason for quite a while. And my mother was sent back to Colorado which was considered to be a better climate for her condition. After she came back, and I finally got out of the rest home, there were other circumstances in the family that caused my father and mother to split up. Consequently I lived a good deal with my grandmother, and with my grandparents in Colorado. After my father finally graduated from medical school (which I can still remember-I think it was from Stanford). We are still in the Depression years, or post-Depression years. He worked at-I think it was called the 3C Camps. That stands for Civil Service if I'm not mistaken. I don't know exactly. But it was a program that Roosevelt instigated to stimulate the economy.

PK: And employ the unemployed.

JDF: Right, right. Anyway, he became a physician that traveled around with the worker groups in these camps. Consequently we lived in many places in Northern California. My mother and I more or less camped in a kind of small town close to the camp where he was in residence. He was separated from us a good deal of the time. And, due to his job during the early years in the 30's, we lived in a number of small places in Northern California:

Alturas, Dunsmuir, Cedarsville, Red Bluff, to name a few. Many of them.

PK: Obviously your parents were still together at that time?

JDF: Ah, yes and no. As I say, they never got along. I don't know if it was impossible for them to be together, or if it was just a question of convenience. Daddy could never be home. But, at any rate, somewhere along the line my father fell very much in love with another woman and was living with her. He was living two kinds of existences simultaneously. It was a long time before I ever found out about this. Even my mother found out about it. Eventually she discovered that things were being charged on the family account. Things like baby clothes and so forth and so on, which she had absolutely no knowledge of. And my father isn't, I guess, a very careful person in some ways. However, it all ended in a complete split. But my mother left it to my father to explain the details to me, which he finally did when I was about 12 years old. We finally settled down, my mother and I. My father and my mother having divorced each other, we moved to San Jose where I started junior high school and where I finally spent a few years in one place with a single parent at least. And my father by this time had married the woman, and is still married to her. It's been a reasonably happy marriage, I should say. He's a very difficult person, but she's the kind of a saint that can put up with him. [Laughs] I have two half-sisters and one half-brother.

PK: Do you have any natural brothers and sisters?

JDF: No. My family is a very small one. I suppose it might be just interesting for the record to say, too, that my father is Italian and my mother came from German and Austrian parentage. And again, too, just as an interesting contrast, my split existence, as you say, was quite a different one in terms of environment. In San Francisco, this is a strange irony; I've never been able to figure this out, in spite of the Depression, I had nurses and there was a maid in the house which I've never been able to understand.

PK: This was your grandmother's house?

JDF: Yes. The grandmother on my father's side. On the maternal side, it was really down home living, without plumbing, electricity, or even running water.

PK: The wealthy Italians and the poor German/Austrians.

JDF: This was, oddly enough, part of the problem between my parents. I only get what they tell me. I was really pulled apart during this period as far as my loyalties were concerned, to tell you the truth. My mother was always made to feel conscious of the fact, somehow, or at least to her way of thinking, that she came from an inferior kind of stock. I can't explain it in any other terms except through my experiences of what her reactions were to this. And, on the other hand, on my father's side, I think they had some kind of pretenses about, as many Italians do, keeping up with the Jones's and doing them one better. I think he came from a background where he was a little bit looked down upon because of his nationality. Something I have never felt. At any rate, he always felt he had to prove a little bit of something, and success meant a great deal to him. Also, an outward show of things.

PK: Did he end up as a fairly successful physician?

JDF: Yes. I mean not successful to an extraordinary degree financially. But he's someone who's always been tremendously devoted to his work.

PK: And respected, I suppose?

JDF: Yes.

PK: And did you have contact with him when you were finally settled down in San Jose?

JDF: When they finally broke up, my father frankly left my mother with very little sustenance. He did provide her with a house. But my mother really had it all to do herself as far as bringing me up was concerned, as far as any financial help was concerned.

PK: What did she do?

JDF: She was a nurse. In fact, in the tradition of the soap operas [Laughs]. . . but it was a difficult time for her, very difficult. And a lot of the reaction she had to that, I kind of understand now. She was working nights and it was difficult for her to have to leave me alone. And I didn't want to be left alone. But there was no other way to do it. So I grew up very much as an isolated child, except for the summers which I spent with my father. But you asked me, I think, if my family was small. It was, very. In fact, my mother is my only relative on that side, aside from her sister, who still lives up in Washington. And my father's side of the family is very, very small, too. There's only one cousin in the whole family.

PK: But you're not from an immigrant family?

JDF: My mother's parents immigrated.

PK: Okay, so you would be third generation?

JDF: Yes. My father's father was born in Naples. He died when my father was a child. They were raised in the Italian tradition of family togetherness and that kind of cohesiveness that Italians feel. No matter how small the family, it's nevertheless a cohesive kind of thing which is something that he's inherited. And this is still important to him, more so than it is to the children.

PK: Well, not to dwell on the early period . . .

JDF: We're getting on to high school now, which is where I left you, in San Jose.

PK: Yes, you were in junior high and high school.

JDF: The high school period was a very important period for me. I wanted to give you a little bit of background as far as my parents were concerned, because suddenly somebody came along in high school that was very influential in my life. San Jose High School was one of the very first high schools in the state, and it was still the only high school in San Jose. It was still located on the San Jose State campus. While I was in high school there they built the second high school, which was the first big innovation in San Jose as far as the population explosion was concerned. I would have given anything if I had had the opportunity that the kids have living in San Francisco now. To go to a museum and to take an art class, for instance.

PK: But do you remember feeling that lack? Actually wanting to go to a museum?

JDF: Oh sure I did! And this is one of the kind of funny ironies of my childhood. But when my mother and I were living out in the east foothills, my father had the idea that I was supposed to take piano lessons, because this was the period when all young ladies took piano lessons.

PK: That and watercolor.

JDF: And it was an absolute failure-the piano lessons. I would have been delighted if they'd said, "Take watercolor classes." Anyway, I took these piano lessons for about a year or two. It was a complete flop. I just loathed it and I would have given anything if I could have taken painting lessons. The closest thing I could get to painting lessons was my association with a neighbor out there in the east foothills who was a commercial artist. To me he was god, for more reasons than one. He did commercial illustrations with an airbrush. And I had all of these books that I used to borrow from him, like *How to Draw* the perfect circle was my favorite exercise.

PK: What was his name?

JDF: Michelangelo.

PK: His name was Michelangelo?

JDF: Really!

PK: Well, he's a god to other people as well! [Laughs]

JDF: Didn't I tell you this story before?

PK: No! Michelangelo!

JDF: Because it was really something for every reason in the world, you know. He was an idol. But I used to borrow these "how-to-do-it" books from him and learned really from a commercial artist's point of view. You know, light, shadow, and all of this. And I used to really labor over every page. This was pre-high school. But when I got to high school in the midst of this absolute cultural desert, I had one of the most fantastic teachers I would ever have hoped to have had. And that was Mrs. Emery. I still call her Mrs. Emery. She remained very close to me, even til the time she died, which was only about 10 years ago. She was old enough then. In fact, she retired as a public school teacher the year after I graduated from high school in San Jose. She must have retired in 1947, which made her-when did those people retire in those days?-about 64 or something? But anyway, Paul, she was just an incredible woman! She introduced me to people like Picasso and Matisse.

PK: She was the art teacher in San Jose?

JDF: Yes. And she was an absolute inspiration to me. She took me to plays. She took me to the San Francisco

Museum for the first time in my life. She really just opened up the whole world to me.

PK: How did you get that close? Obviously it went beyond the normal teacher-student classroom situation.

JDF: Well, as a teacher myself, I can recognize when a student is interested. If I find a student that's interested, I give them special attention, and so did Mrs. Emery in my case. Actually, she became more than a teacher. She became a kind of second parent to me. She had, unlike my parents, an understanding and an interest in the thing I was interested in, namely art. My father has an interest on a kind of intellectual textbook level, and my mother is a creative person, too, in her own way. But neither one of them has any kind of rapport with me on my own terms as far as my work is concerned. They've always encouraged me. I'm not saying that they haven't done that. But, you know, they've never really been able to participate in any kind of a way where I would really be able to say, "Come into my studio and look," and really look and see. Whereas, Mrs. Emery did. And there was perhaps a little bit of jealousy on my mother's part, which I can understand in retrospect. Because I was all she had, and still has. And my devotion to this woman was a little hard for her to take.

PK: It must have been very obvious, too.

JDF: Yes.

PK: Did Mrs. Emery have . . . she was married, I gather.

JDF: Yes, widowed. She helped me all through the Fillmore period. She supported *The Rose* to a great extent.

PK: Did she have children of her own?

JDF: Yes, she did. She had one child who was a tremendous burden to her. Josephine is still a burden, Mrs. Emery having been dead now for about 10 years. But her one and only child Josephine was a hopeless alcoholic and was in and out of the sanitariums.

PK: But not at that time?

JDF: Yes, even then. She was one of those poor unfortunates who couldn't even take a glass of beer without absolutely going on a binge for a whole week.

PK: And so it appears that you then played a very special role for Mrs. Emery.

JDF: Yes. I think so.

PK: She was important to you.

JDF: Yes. I had adopted her as a mother and she, in a sense, adopted me, you're right. I suppose it did go somewhat beyond the creative level in a sense. It was still on an art teacher/student level. And her support was always on professional terms, you know. Whenever she helped me it was always . . . well, for instance, during the period when I was making jewelry she would come and buy things. And justify the benevolence. If Mrs. Emery had had money, Paul, she would have been the greatest benefactress in the world for an artist. I think she lived the life of an artist. She started as an art student, you know. And she married Henry Varnum Poor which, for whatever reason, she wished to keep a secret. And Josephine was their child.

PK: Poor was out here working on murals at one time.

JDF: Yes. He was a potter as I remember.

PK: Well, he was a painter, too.

JDF: I think they were students together at Stanford, Mrs. Emery and he.

PK: Oh, really?

JDF: And that's how they met, I think.

PK: I think Nell Sinton, if I'm not mistaken, was one of the students who assisted Poor on a mural project.

JDF: Oh, really? Is that so?

PK: Yes. You'll have to ask her about that. What interests me very much is that Mrs. Emery was a spiritual support for you, a source of nourishment.

JDF: I make a point of it because she was the first essentially important person in my life.

PK: A contact with a broader cultural context.

JDF: Definitely! I suppose anybody that was as interested as I was would have found a way eventually, but it's important to be given direction in early years. My father, of course, as soon as I graduated from high school, said, "From here you go right into the University of California." Mrs. Emery, however, would have had me go to the Art Institute. That was her dream. But I feel that I got a great deal out of the University. Of course, my father wanted me to go there again, a bit of paternal pride as it was one of his old alma maters. And I'm not sorry that I did. I think now it's more common for kids to take a break between high school and college. But in my case it didn't really make a hell of a lot of difference, because I always knew what I wanted to do anyway. There was no problem of finding out what I was going to be interested in.

PK: Well, getting back to that, that's exactly what I wanted to investigate or determine. You mentioned first of all this very interesting commercial artist, Michelangelo. And I gather that's not his full name.

JDF: It was! Michelangelo! [Laughs]

PK: Did he give you any lessons?

JDF: No. Well, he encouraged me because he knew I was so interested. And he gave me the most stereotyped how-to-do-it type of book in the world. And maybe there was really something to it. [Laughs] As a matter of fact, Mrs. Emery was a kind of an academically-oriented person.

PK: This is what I wanted to ask, what the instruction was like.

JDF: We were talking about classic and funk a while ago.

PK: Yes.

JDF: I teach a more spontaneous approach than I myself tolerated in my own self-instruction in those days. I was very deliberate about these things. And I practiced that circle over and over again before I finally decided that I couldn't possibly draw it correctly. Or could never possibly hope to unless I bought myself a compass. [Laughs] I think what you're trying to ask me, and what I'm trying to say to you too is that I experienced an early orientation toward both discipline and freedom (or spontaneity). One of the things that I respected much about Mrs. Emery was that she, in spite of her *joi de vivre* (and I always in my mind's eye see her as an Isadora Duncan image) . . .

PK: Was she something of a Bohemian there in San Jose?

JDF: Yes. A bit. An older Bohemian. But nevertheless she was very strict with me when it came to what we did in art class. And learning perspective, all of which I've forgotten, "Let us copy a Matisse and find out how difficult it is to paint in such a"

PK: But she did admire Matisse. Even that late some of these characters were considered a little bizarre, Matisse and Picasso.

JDF: Oh, very, very much so. At least in that environment they were. And she was much more avant-garde than Matisse and Picasso in those days. But she started me off gently.

PK: But she then really provided you with your first exposure, I gather, to the School of Paris?

JDF: Oh yes. And she was a kind of a marvelous romantic, you know. As well as a person that made you do your homework, let's put it that way.

PK: So you graduated from San Jose in what? '46?

JDF: Yes.

PK: And, as you say, went directly on to Berkeley.

JDF: With Mrs. Emery's encouragement I took just one little fling in a summer class at San Jose State after I graduated from high school there. I took my first art history class, which was really my favorite thing in college. And I got my first taste of it from a Dr. Kaiser at San Jose State the summer after I graduated from high school.

PK: Oh, Kaiser!

JDF: You know him?

PK: Yes, I think I know a Kaiser. Stephen Kaiser?

JDF: I don't know his first name.

PK: Because he's still teaching, I think, at the department at UCLA.

JDF: You're kidding!

PK: If it's the same Kaiser, K-a-y-s-e-r?

JDF: I don't remember how it was spelled.

PK: He's a very popular teacher, very enthusiastic. A small man. Very communicative.

JDF: Yes, and he took a tremendous interest in me, and here I was not even a college student at the time. But I was so absolutely wrapped up in the thing. I just spent every waking moment in that library, you know, doing my homework.

PK: What was the course, by the way?

JDF: It was an art history course. I think it was modern art history.

PK: Meaning the Impressionists to . . . ?

JDF: Yes. It's been so long, Paul, it might have even been a general art history course. I don't even recall. I think it might have been a general survey course or something like that. But, my God, to me it was the most concentrated thing in the world. This was my first opportunity to really get into a library and read and look and see.

PK: Well, that must have been your first real contact then with art history?

JDF: It was.

PK: Other than maybe some picture books you would see, earlier on.

JDF: And again, Mrs. Emery was the one who pushed me into that. Because she knew it was the next best thing available to me. But from there I went in the fall to the University. And again, I've never been unhappy about that experience. I thought that the department was a good one, and I learned something from everybody that was there.

PK: You keep saying that you knew you wanted to be an artist, there was never any question?

JDF: Never any question.

PK: I'm curious about just how this happened. What was it? Was there any specific exposure or experience? Was it something innate?

JDF: I don't know.

PK: Did you want to be a commercial artist? Or did you want to be a fine artist?

JDF: I never had any feelings toward either pursuit, specifically. I remember, and my mother always likes to tell this story, that my first toy was a pencil. And indeed it was. I never really had a lot of toys the way modern children do. But I was happy with that. I also did a lot of writing when I was a child, much more than I do now. And was almost equally interested in that. But drawing and painting were always terribly, terribly important. And the event of getting a coloring book was something I still remember. And the first day I was able to stay within the lines. That was a challenge and that was an absolutely fantastic accomplishment.

PK: Well, so you basically loved to make pictures.

JDF: Absolutely! I think people find their way as artists sometimes early on life, sometimes late. And heaven knows there's been some fantastic artists in history that have begun in middle years, or even their late years. But it just so happened, in my case, there was never any doubt about it. I don't think that makes you any less or more of a creative person.

PK: But at least your way was clear.

JDF: It was clear. And I've often thought about that with students I've had, with friends and my brothers and

sisters, for instance. I think most young people do have to "seek out" their vocations. I've looked back on it and thought, "Gee, I never had that problem." But, for instance, my brother tried just about everything, you know, before he finally decided that he wanted to become a doctor like my father (who never pushed him into it).

PK: This, of course, is a half-brother.

JDF: Yes. But some of my students, too, that have started in one thing-some of them doctors, lawyers-have gone into painting or another vocation. Or a lot of people just live in limbo for a while. So in that sense I don't really feel it might have better for me to have been on my own for a time between high school and college. That is, I didn't need to "find myself." I don't really think that it would have made any difference in terms of settling my personal direction. But, it may well have helped me to become more independent. It would have prepared me to deal with life more effectively later in critical times.

PK: Well, you then entered the University of California at Berkeley in, I guess, the fall of 1946. And apparently you went there with the idea of majoring in studio art. What do you remember from the experience? I am, of course, asking a lot of things with that one question. How did you find the art department there? The teachers? With whom did you study?

JDF: Oh, I'd love to tell you 'cause I remember it very well.

PK: Did you feel that it was good?

JDF: I loved it! It was a tremendous adventure for me. One of the main things I remember about that experience was that all of my teachers were very different. I felt closer to some of them than others, or had a lot more in common with some than others. There were even one or two I didn't get along with, but I think it was the variety that made a great deal of difference. You know, it helps you find out who you are, I think, seeing teachers not only as painters but as different kinds of personalities. And the first one I had was kind of the daddy of them all. You probably know about Ward Lockwood. And I think he was probably actually the first teacher that I had there.

PK: What did he teach there? Do you remember? What course did you have?

JDF: Charcoal. The medium. The class dealt with form and composition.

PK: Did you have to draw from the cast?

JDF: No. Well, I wouldn't have. Mrs. Emery had me draw from a cast.

PK: That's of course very traditional academic training.

JDF: But she knew what she was doing. The University was built on a program that hasn't changed too much in terms of art. You start with charcoal, and then you go to 2B, Watercolor. It's sort of built on the hierarchy of charcoal to oil color. I don't believe in this step-by-step approach in terms of media.

PK: So you climb the ladder until . . . you get maybe a life class and then . . . ?

JDF: But no, let's get back to that because in this particular period we were sort of hanging on to the apron strings of Cubism, as it were. And just right in the middle of this period Abstract Expressionism bloomed. And when Abstract Expressionism bloomed, life drawing classes went out the window. I've often regretted frankly that at a time when I was really ripe for it, there were no life drawing classes in the traditional sense.

PK: It's amazing! What about at the Art Institute at the same time, which was even more of a hotbed of Abstract Expressionism?

JDF: Now that's interesting. Because the Art Institute, or the California School of Fine Arts as it was called then, was a complete myth to me. Not a myth, but a kind of a place that just existed across the Bay. I had never even visited it and knew nothing about it, necessarily, except that I felt the vibrations kind of coming over toward Berkeley from Clyfford Still and Rothko and all of those people that were just a generation ahead of me. But the impetus of that movement was so powerful that it was really felt by everyone. And I think it must have been about '50, or a year to two sooner, that this happened. And Sam Francis and Fred were going to the school with me at the University at this time.

PK: Sam Francis and Fred Martin.

JDF: They had more direct contact with those people. They were, you know, a year or two older than I. And they were my closest contemporaries who were friends and who also had contact with this "magical" world. You know, I think I was sort of fed some of this through them. I felt very stimulated by what was going on over at the California School of Fine Arts. I know Fred even took a class there, if I'm not mistaken. I may be wrong about

that. But they had more direct contact. And because I was close to them I think I felt it even more strongly through them and became much influenced by it. Although everybody was feeling it.

PK: Well, who else do you remember from the faculty at Berkeley?

JDF: Well, I started out with Ward Lockwood, who was the old dad of them all and perhaps somewhat academic, if you wish, in relation to these later influences. (I can't remember exactly when he died.) In spirit, I think he was really avant garde about it all. I think it was Ward who, for his time, kind of provided an avant garde spirit at the University. And of course there was very much of a Hans Hofmann influence. Again, this is another source of Abstract Expressionism, not only from the California School of Fine Arts but simultaneously from some of my own teachers. I think maybe Erle Loran might have been one of them; I don't know if James McCray was one. Margaret Petersen, I think, was one. But many of them were products of Hans Hofmann in New York and were enormously influenced and excited by this movement. They brought that to their teaching in a sort of a second generation way. Although I think they were all working in different styles. But the vibrations that I got through all of them was that Hofmann was an inspirational teacher. And, of course, Erle Loran was instrumental in bringing a great body of that work to the University.

PK: When did Hofmann come to teach at Berkeley?

JDF: I don't know, Paul. I wasn't there. That was before my time.

PK: '40 maybe. Maybe it was later, actually. I'm not sure. But he did come out for a semester, I believe.

JDF: I have a terrific respect for Erle. A lot of people looked at him as kind of

PK: Stodgy . . . yes.

JDF: But to me he always had the most fantastic sense of humor. And I always had a respect for his response to painting. There were people that sort of looked on him as being a kind of academic, textbook sort of personality.

PK: Probably because he wrote criticism and so forth.

JDF: In my opinion, I saw him as being one of the most avant garde people, in his thinking at least.

PK: Really? In his attitudes towards teaching or in his work itself?

JDF: Not in his own personal work. Well, it could have been; I've never really been too familiar with his work. But he recognized things and directions. And after all, Cezanne was not one of my favorite painters. I think he saw Cezanne like Mrs. Emery saw Cezanne, unlike the way I saw him. I mean, I have never really wanted to have a Cezanne on the wall to "live with." But there were things in Cezanne that he made exciting for me, and she made exciting for me too.

PK: I think that's strange that you say that. That you wouldn't want to . . .

JDF: I like some of his things.

PK: . . . because you talk about this aspect of your own sensibility, this classical element in your own work. And, of course, Cezanne is of the Modernists and one of the great Classicists, in terms of imposing an order and sobriety upon nature.

JDF: He just doesn't excite me as a lot of the other earlier painters do. But there are isolated works, like some of his bathers. Some of his early things remind me of other people that I can really identify with more. For instance, *The Bathers*. Some of those early things remind me a bit of some of the later Matisse things that I like very much. *The Dance*. I mean this is my own relating of certain works of Cezanne's to other people's who I really like better, you know, to live with. Painters like Picasso, for instance. Like Picasso, I mean I find myself returning to early influences in my current work. Like *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, for instance, which is one of my favorite paintings. And when I say that, when I went to the University of California, we were hanging on to the apron strings of Cubism, I mean I was hanging on for dear life. And I've never let go because I still love that period.

PK: Well, let me ask you this, in the curriculum at U.C. I gather that there was an emphasis upon the fairly early stage of Abstract Expressionism. Let's face it, it was just happening.

JDF: Well, let's expand on this just a bit more. I said to you that the teachers were varied stylistically.

[INTERRUPTION]

Well, I said something about Ward. Then again, there was James McCray. I don't know if he was one of the

products of Hans Hofmann or not. But I loved the things that he was doing, his way of painting and his way of teaching, too—a very encouraging and quiet way. I remember one silly thing about going to Jim one day. You know, in those days I had a thing about color, that it was some big magical thing. We'll get to that eventually. It still is, you know; it's just on a low-key basis now. But my own students come to me with this. There is something about color. And every student I've ever had, I suppose, may have entertained the same thought. That there's some formula for color. And I remember going to Jim and saying, "I want to learn how to use color. Tell me what color is all about." You know, as if there's something you can say in 25 words or less. Well, I don't think he said anything, but I finally found out for myself. It's one of the most intuitive things, I think, that one can deal with.

PK: Certainly with some sort of Hofmann-esque influence in the department at the time there must have been an emphasis on color.

JDF: Yes, I think that might have been. And, oddly enough, frankly some of the Hofmann things I see I can't get with. I'm not really, in spite of what might seem natural to me, a Hofmann fan. And, to tell you the truth, when I went to see the collection at Berkeley I was disappointed. I thought it was sort of second rate. Maybe Hofmann was a great innovator and a great painter in his own right. But the message that I got from my teachers mainly was that he was an extraordinary teacher. I've never heard of anyone who had any contact with him whatsoever that hasn't given me that message. And it's sort of hard, I think, to separate as artists and as teacher. Where does one start and the other end? I mean, there's an overlapping there of your experiences as a student and your experiences as a teacher. And altogether there's painting going on as students and teachers. In terms of the great mainstreams and flow of things that were coming along at the time, we all recognize the great influence Picasso has had, as well as the flow of Abstract Expressionism. And here was Jim McCray who was really in a kind of Renaissance tradition. At the time he was doing Mondrianesque sorts of things in a kind of a Renaissance space.

Well, I was talking about McCray . . . Now this is my way of looking at his painting. He never described it or explained it to me as such, but I see it as a combination of Mondrian with a very interesting kind of Renaissance space concept. He was doing things with all kinds of infinitesimal squares with primary colors, etc.

PK: But with a recession into space?

JDF: Little compartments of endless space. Very, very much in the tradition of the Renaissance. And that's very interesting because I think Ward was instrumental in keeping alive the spirit of the Renaissance there. He was very interested in fresco. I think it was Ward who was instrumental in introducing a lot of fresco painting at the university, which was somewhat prior to my stay there.

PK: Was it true fresco? Were walls decorated?

JDF: Yes. There were vestiges of outdoor walls. There were classes in this. And, of course, that wasn't just the Renaissance influence. There was, I think, an interest in Mexican murals at the time, too.

PK: That's very true. And besides it was the aftermath of the WPA period.

JDF: It was so kaleidoscopic, too, you see, that it's hard to talk about one thing without bringing in fifty others. And so when I start talking about Hans Hofmann, I end up with . . .

PK: Diego Rivera.

JDF: Yes. [Laughs]

PK: I realize one can't simplify an experience like being in the art department during this time at the University of California. But it's interesting to try to determine just what the flavor of the department was. In other words, was it tight? Was it loose? What were you encouraged to do?

JDF: There are a few others that I would really like to discuss in terms of the stylistic things that were going on there. Let's see. John Haley was one of the most important persons that I studied with. And when I was asked what my projected program would be in teaching a graduate seminar at the college of Arts next fall, he immediately came to mind as one of the most important people that I can recall in terms of what he offered in the graduate program there. We took Picasso's *Guernica* as a point of departure, as a major work. From there we let it expand into small studies in small mediums and let small work grow out of the major work. And at the same time let small work feed into the major work. Anyway, I don't identify John with any specific style necessarily, but with a kind of tremendous awareness of what a creative direction was and how to expand upon it. How to become your own self, and how to become your own teacher. I think that was the most important lesson that I learned from him in that class. The final class that I had there was a kind of way of learning what it was like to be in your own studio away from the atmosphere of school. And to learn from yourself, to let yourself

become your own teacher. And to feed your own ideas out of your own past. I'll never forget that experience from him. At the same time, curiously enough, I remember writing John a long letter. I don't know if he would ever remember this. I can't remember much about it except that I was doing a hell of a lot of thinking at the time. I remember this one image on a note that I wrote to him when I submitted paintings, not for graduate class that I mentioned to you, but for the regular class that I'd had from him. About what my aspirations were in painting and what I wanted to accomplish. I wish I could see that once again. But there was one image that I wrote and I remember. It was that I wanted to create a work, or some kind of a work. In retrospect, I'm thinking of *The Rose*. At the time I was a very young and aspiring person. I was making some kind of image about being on "an edge." I wanted to create a work that was just so precariously balanced between going this way or that way that it maintained itself. I can't really describe it right now. I wish I could refer to that letter that I wrote. But it's just sort of interesting thinking of John. Anyway, I saw him for the first time in years. I was teaching at the Museum and the "Poets of the City" was on. And I had just gone off to play hooky, gone out for a sandwich or something, and I ran into him as he was going into the galleries. And I shook his hand, and he said, "Dear old Jay!" and he was really pleased that I had a couple of pictures hanging. He doesn't look any different to me now than he did then. Anyway, along with other nostalgic memories [Laughs], let's get along to Abstract Expressionism. Of course, they imported Felix Ruvolo from the East. He was a kind of direct current from the East coast, a contemporary person. A person like that was vitally needed in the midst of all these other people, too. He gave all of the students there a real shot in the arm, as far as what was happening from the East. Not that we needed a message from the East necessarily, but it was just like all of a sudden having somebody that was really contemporary with what was really vital and alive in another part of the country in terms of Abstract Expressionism. And, last but not least, there was the person who was probably at the very top of the heap as far as I'm concerned, if I had to name one. In retrospect I don't really know that I could say that one person was more important to me than another, in terms of the experience. But Margaret Peterson O'Hagan was a terribly important teacher to me because of what she did for me in terms of discipline. The others, in spite of all that I appreciate them for, were quite passive in their criticism-in fact, I did, more often than not, have more of a critical eye in regard to my own work than they did. I don't mean to say that I didn't thrive on praise and didn't like being patted on the back a bit and, "You're doing just fine, dear." And all of that. But Margaret was much more of a disciplinarian than the rest of them were, as far as really working was concerned. And she really made me think. She was, very ironically, kind of "anti" Abstract Expressionism in her attitude. She really fought a hard battle there for her Picasso, and for her Northwest Indians, and for her Mexico. She was also the only woman on the faculty.

PK: The token.

JDF: The token. But boy, she really made herself felt. And the other old dads heaved a great sigh of relief when she left and said, "Boy! That's the last prima donna we're going to have around here for a while in the men's faculty club." But it was all sort of understood all the way around. To digress from her influence as a teacher, the circumstance of her departure was a question of taking the oath at that time at the University. Which in recent years would have caused a complete furor among the student body as well as the faculty. But in those days we were just recovering from the war and nobody wanted to be a rabble rouser. But Margaret stuck to her guns. And she was not going to have any part of that sort of thing. And she and other members of the faculty resigned on that account.

PK: Well, that was entering the McCarthy era.

JDF: Yes. I really don't know what, if any, her feelings were politically. She was kind of a D.H. Lawrence person in her feelings about getting back to nature philosophically-"the primal instincts of man"-the flowering of that instinct into works of art. I think she resigned more on principle than anything else. The point I was making was that so few people were interested in that sort of thing at that particular time. It hardly went observed or noticed, you know.

PK: That she was out?

JDF: That she sacrificed such a job because of principle. In other words, she could have been made a martyr, you know, at another given time, depending what the climate was like at the University.

PK: Did you take classes with her?

JDF: Part of her image was very theatrical as well as being a very profound and a very knowledgeable person, and knowing a great deal about what made a painting a painting. She could really take it apart and lay it on you. But she was very theatrical. And I think it was a great part of her image for her students. Besides that, she had something underneath that could back it up. That's what I was trying to get at. I think teachers are very important. Perhaps more than as artists they're important as personalities. And, in terms of a personality, she really made herself felt strongly. I was really absolutely fearful of taking a class from her because of this tremendous-I mean everybody approached her like a goddess, you know. I was so inquisitive about everything in

those days that I remember very clearly going into one of her classes, without being formally enrolled. And sneaking into the back of the room. She was giving a class criticism at the time. I could never forget it, Paul! I mean the whole image is right there in front of me! Exactly where the room was, in one of the most vivid recollections possible, in a rainy day. I know exactly what I had on. [Laughs] I turned right and went to the back of the room and sat in one of the very last seats. And she pointed me out instantly. She took one look at me and she just demolished me. She said, "You are not enrolled in my class. You have no right to be here." I was absolutely shattered. I was in tears. And I left. Two years later I had the courage to take her class. It was her last year at the University, which is what brought the whole thing up. Because she left, you see, quite suddenly and I had no opportunity to take a class from her again after that. So I only had a chance to take her, I think, for two semesters. Didn't understand a word she said. Except everything that she said has stuck with me. And I've thought about it year after year since then. And it's finally coming through.

PK: What was that? What did she say?

JDF: One of her most important expressions was, "I want to show you what a visual idea is. Not a literary idea, but a visual idea." The interesting thing about her teaching, I could never teach that way, personally, but I went along with it because I had a feeling it was the only way she could communicate, is that you had to paint just like Margaret painted, because this was her language. And, unless you spoke her language in some way or another, she couldn't talk to you. And she was brought up in the tradition of Picasso as well as having been influenced by primitive painting of all kinds. It would take me a whole lecture to go into what a visual idea is, but just let it suffice to say that it isn't a literary idea-it's a visual idea. And it might be as simple a thing as what Picasso does in terms of putting opposites on opposites. Like you could take a blank piece of paper and paint one half white and one half black. And you put a white image on the black side and a black image on the white side. Now that's a deceptively simple visual idea that artists have been dealing with ever since kingdom come. It is what you have to say visually within that structural format that gives it aesthetic merit. But these classic structural themes persist throughout painting. And, as you know, Picasso leaned heavily on classical structure and content in terms of his own contemporary painting. At any rate, I finally had the courage to take her class. And, as I say, a lot of things she said to me, in terms of visual ideas, never really permeated at the time. But they were so strongly implanted in my head that I carried these words with me throughout the years. And every once in a while something dawns on me in my own work and in the things that I see. I never liked Margaret's painting and I dare say she probably would not have liked mine. And I've seen students of hers, in the years following, just becoming like little Margaret Peterson O'Hagan's. And kind of picking up on the superficial stylistic thing that she had, but not really seeing what the structural things were underneath and what she really "had to say" visually. I probably did some of the worst work in the class because I wasn't stylistically in tune with her. But I realized that I had to paint in that fashion in order to talk to her visually. Before I graduated the last thing she said to me-and it took me a long time to understand what she meant, but with pride I think I finally did. She said, "Jay, you're really the only person that understood what I had to say in this class." And she's been in touch with me occasionally since then. And she was very "anti" oil paint. She was an egg tempera lady from the word "go." You know, oil paint was an absolute sin. [Laughs] It was almost to the point of something kind of screwy in her own head to think that oil paint was such a disaster. Years passed and I thought that she was dead. Actually, to tell you the truth, Margaret was 50 then. Kind of getting along eking out an existence in Italy. Around 1970 there was a kind of "friends of Margaret Peterson O'Hagan" established in Berkeley that got together a little group to give her some assistance and buy a painting for the University. And so I finally found out where she was. I sent her a photograph of *The Rose*. And she wrote back a very beautiful letter that the Archives will eventually get. So she didn't mind the 2,300 pounds of oil paint so much after all.

PK: Well, you came to Berkeley when pretty callow and young and unformed as an artist.

JDF: Oh yes, definitely! And left quite the same way.

PK: Oh really? Well, this is what I was going to ask. What did Berkeley leave with you?

JDF: I hope, at least, that I've given you some idea of the variety of personalities. I've dwelt more on Margaret perhaps than the others. And I've even left out a few. But the picture that I wanted to give you was that I was given an enormous variety of philosophical as well as visual food from my teachers. I also was very absorbed in art history while I was there.

PK: I was going to ask that-if you took art history classes?

JDF: I took as much as I possibly could. And I studied too with a Dr. Horn in particular. Do you know him?

PK: Walter Horn? Yes.

JDF: He was very important to me. (I think there was a psychology class that I took from a Dr. Kretch that I've saved notes from.) But aside from that, Dr. Horn's lectures, as well as Mr. Maencken's lectures on eastern art history, are the only notes that I've saved from that period.

PK: What interested you the most in art history? Was there a period that had a special appeal?

JDF: I was very interested in primitive painting. Also, the notes that I saved specifically were the architectural notes from the Renaissance, from Dr. Horn. The floor plans of the cathedrals, for instance, were very interesting to me, as you might imagine. Although I had no notion then of what it might eventually mean to me.

PK: You were interested in Brunelleschi and Alberti and all the heavies?

JDF: Oh yes! Architecture.

PK: More so than painting?

JDF: More so than painting. Well, it's the architecture that came through heavy to me. The monumentality of the architecture. If you can see the architecture of a culture, you can practically read the culture.

PK: Yes.

JDF: It sort of happens like that.

PK: I know what you mean.

JDF: I mean, look at the stuff in this country and you can just see it as eclectic, you know, whatever our country is.

PK: Well, what was it, do you suppose, that appealed to you? I gather that you were particularly attracted to the architecture of the Renaissance.

JDF: Yes. Also, I had Indian art history from Maenchen, I believe. Then there was Dr. Amyx. For a time he was head of the art department. He also taught a class in aesthetics, which I wanted to take but never did because of schedule problems. The department had not really expanded too much at that time. Not a great variety of courses were offered. Speaking of the past, if I'm not mistaken, I think my father had studied anatomy or bone structure in that particular shingle shack the art department was still in when he was a medical student. This was long before they even had the temporary buildings which predated the final building that they now have.

But I guess what I'm trying to say is that my preoccupation with primitive art found expression in my intuitive response to materials and the imagery that emerged from it thanks to my exposure to the Abstract Expressionist movement. That plus the continuing interest in a classic discipline which was amplified when I got a grant and went to Europe after graduation.

PK: That's the next thing, when you went to Europe. Of course your horizons must have been expanded tremendously because of contact with old master works and museums and so forth. But there are a couple of things I would like to ask about again, about the years at Berkeley. I was wondering if you had any heroes as a student? And I don't necessarily mean at the department at Berkeley. I think it's unlikely, perhaps Margaret O'Hagan to a certain extent. But any contemporary heroes, national figures that you knew about as a student? Maybe having only seen reproductions in magazines or something?

JDF: Honestly, that's a difficult question. That's a question I always ask my students the first day they come into class because it's very helpful. It's a way for me to see what perhaps they might become interested in. It was really pretty vast. Well, again, Picasso has always been strong with me, although I don't like every period of his. Needless to say, Matisse and Van Gogh of the "old modern masters."

PK: Right. There are too many.

JDF: In more contemporary terms, getting back to the fact that I was across the Bay from the California School of Fine Arts, Clyfford Still, Frank Lobdell, Hassel Smith, etc. These influences were felt through my association with Sam And Fred.

PK: Second hand, of course.

JDF: Yes, and Jackson Pollock of course.

PK: So you knew about him.

JDF: Who didn't! Due to all the national publicity, everybody dripped a bit. You know, you couldn't help it. And Felix Ruvolo of course brought much of this from New York. I mean he had come right out of the New York scene and it was all very romantic, you know. All this jazz and booze and dripping paint and all that sort of thing. As for now, I have a new love of Picasso. [Laughs] But it could've been Duchamp a little while ago. I've even probably,

you know, thrown a little devotion towards Paul Cezanne, contrary to what I've said on this tape. But, probably, also thinking of Marcel Duchamp whose early work was quite influenced by Cezanne.

PK: But certainly during that period you didn't know anything about Marcel Duchamp?

JDF: No. That was a bit before my time.

PK: No. But I mean the interest is actually later than your time.

JDF: But it also was before my time. I think my specific sources for visual information did not include him at the time. Although, again, he wasn't an unfamiliar name. As soon as I met Wally, he became very familiar. Because he was one of Wally's greatest gods, always. And actually, having met Wally and finding out something, I found that there was a bit of latent material there for me.

PK: While Clyfford Still was holding forth at the California School of Fine Arts, supposedly at the heyday of that institution, did you ever actually see any Clyfford Still paintings? Did you see any of the heavy Abstract Expressionists?

JDF: To tell you the truth, Paul, I was really pretty cloistered over there. As soon as I came back from Europe, which was let's say, 1952 . . .

PK: What about 1953?

JDF: Or even later than '52. The tail end of my time at the University was when all this was really just starting, right?

PK: Yes.

JDF: So I left in '51 or '50, or something like that. I was away for about 18 months, which is not a very long time. But a lot was happening in that period.

PK: Of course Still was gone by that time.

JDF: Oh yes. Well, it didn't really make any difference where he was because it was terribly felt.

PK: No. Because everyone looked like Still.

JDF: I suppose my first real feeling of proximity-perhaps due to the fact that I even belonged to the same league-was when there was some kind of round table discussion at the Oakland Museum for which Fred was a part of the panel. My own painting, as well as something of Wally's and something of Clyfford Still's, kind of brought these two generations closer. As time elapses, the generations become closer together. Well, how old is he anyhow? He is probably 20 years older than I am.

PK: Still? Oh, yes.

JDF: But in those days you sort of thought of it as a generation apart. Because most of the people involved in that era were sort of a generation ahead of me. You know, like Frank Lobdell and Still. We always thought of it as a generation ahead.

PK: Well, as a student then, you probably didn't have contact with them except indirectly.

JDF: It was being bombarded by a bunch of exciting vibrations that were coming from all sources, I think. Not any one particular person. I bring up Picasso because he was a link with the past that really never left. And there was a lot of Dada in him. But, if you ask me, if there were one or two or even three particular gods that I aspire to, I couldn't name one-the influences are many.

PK: I gather, then, at Berkeley you weren't getting this same barrage of pure, uncut Abstract Expressionism that they were getting at the Art Institute? And I think that's important that you didn't.

JDF: No. Not quite. I was doing it though, for some reason or another. I mean I don't know whether it was just one of those things that happens to people at a given time, whether or not they're exposed. You know, that's happened in very strong art movements. I think, even if there's no contact or visual exposure between artists, if the feeling and time is ripe enough, these things come out. They just sort of come out in an evolutionary way in the history of art when the time is absolutely right for them to do so. I think it probably might have been even stronger, if that's possible, if I'd been over at the California School of Fine Arts. But nobody could have been heavier into this kind of a thing than I was, given less actual exposure to it than I had.

PK: Why do you suppose that is? I'm sure you must have thought about it.

JDF: That's just what I said to you. I think that artists are really a vehicle for a kind of creative response at any given

PK: So you feel it was an intuitive thing?

JDF: Yes. Whether you want to say it's ESP or whatever you like. But I think it's that certain kinds of things have to be said in a certain time. And they come through whether or not you've had any kind of a visual contact with another artist. Which has happened to me years later. You know, occasionally you find someone that is coming on with the same visual ideas that you are, unbeknownst to you.

PK: But it seems much more likely, reflecting on that time, that there was some visual contact at Berkeley.

JDF: Oh! I'm not saying that I was living in a vacuum. Yes, of course there was some visual contact.

PK: And at Berkeley, to a lesser extent than at the Art Institute, you've been saying that certainly Abstract Expressionism was in the air. But obviously, at least art historians tend to disbelieve the possibility of an absolute spontaneous

JDF: I agree with that. Certainly we weren't living in an absolute vacuum over in Berkeley. Actually, a few people rowed their boats over and [Laughs] stuff like that.

PK: Well, I think what I understand you to say is that you can't pinpoint any direct experience, like one painting.

JDF: The most direct link I had with this particular environment in San Francisco was probably through Sam and Fred as I've mentioned. And they were the most exciting contemporary people that were working with me. I was still making little triangles at a time when Sam was making great big blobs of color. And I thought, "Gee, that's wonderful but I'm just not ready for that yet." But I understood it. And Fred, of course, was doing the same thing. I was just told by a friend of mine over the telephone that Fred has left the Art Institute altogether and is teaching at Berkeley now. Which is the height of irony, his having been flunked from the graduate program there when we were going to school together, which is one of the real feathers in Fred's hats. [Laughs] And flunked especially by Margaret Peterson, by the way.

PK: Oh really? Good for her. [Laughs] This is exactly what I wanted to lead up to, sort of the last thing that I wanted to touch on during this U.C. period. And that is this close relationship with Sam Francis and Fred Martin. And I'm very interested in knowing what type of relationship it was in terms of exchange of ideas. Because obviously you were quite excited by what they were doing or what they were talking about. Did you get together and talk about art?

JDF: Quite a bit. Especially in Sam's case. Now here's another frank little remark for your tape recorder. Sam was always very kind of, you know, "Girls shouldn't be doing this sort of thing."

PK: "Male chauvinist pig?"

JDF: I would never say that about Sam.

PK: I said that.

JDF: [Laughs] But he always said it with tongue-in-cheek. Sam has always been one of my most encouraging friends, as far as my own work is concerned. He was a bit

PK: Condescending, perhaps?

JDF: A bit. But it certainly didn't spoil anything. No. Not even condescension. It certainly wasn't directed towards me specifically, I don't think. Actually Sam and I were pretty close at one time. He had sort of a crush on me and I didn't like him. And by the time I'd recovered and got a crush on him, he wasn't interested in me any more. It was one of those situations. But we survived that. At any rate, through all of this something more important was the painting. I never could jump on a bandwagon ever in my life, even though this was when I first knew Sam. And I was terribly excited by the things he, as well as Fred, were doing. And they were very close friends during this period. I was still doing paintings that were somewhat post-Cubist in style, or "classic abstraction." And I knew I didn't want to do that anymore. But I just had to work it out, as they say, and get through a period that I was going through. You know, I was making kind of stylized, geometric kinds of images. Almost sort of pre-Renaissance kinds of things. I was interested in Romanesque painting and things like that. Another thing that Ward Lockwood introduced to the department. Another very important friend and fellow artist was Pat Adams. She should certainly be mentioned here. Our relationship was close and our exchange of ideas very important. And I was looking at the things that Sam and Fred were doing and feeling enormously turned on to it. I finally got

into it. But I had to really work through the cycle of my own development before I was able. The Abstract Expressionist thing actually came along a little bit before I had even worked through several steps of my own development-before I really dived into it with a free hand. And then I did. But all through this I had a close relationship to them. And even though I wasn't quite with them at the time, they treated me, you know, as an "equal" in my thinking. And eventually time caught up with itself and I became their contemporary. Although eventually we all went our separate ways stylistically. But it's funny how in a certain period maybe even a question of six months can make a tremendous difference in terms of what your development is stylistically or as far as your growth is concerned. Time lessens or becomes more compact in what it means in terms of growth as you get older. At any rate they were, I think, my most significant links to what was in fact actually happening in the art world.

PK: Did you do things together, like go to parties?

JDF: Oh, yes.

PK: Was it a very tight social group?

JDF: Not tight. But we socialized together definitely. And Jean, of course, Fred's wife, was a terrifically gifted painter herself and did a lot of things. and later did a lot of marvelous ceramics that people are just getting into now. I don't know if you know that or not. She's always been fantastically creative.

PK: Yes, I've seen some of her work at their house. I was over there once.

JDF: On one level perhaps she and Fred seemed just worlds apart in terms of personality, but still they are very compatible personalities. I knew them before they got married when they were both students at U.C.

PK: Oh. So she was a student at California . . . ?

JDF: Yes, she was a student along with Fred. There were a number of people in our "loose social group." Of course Sam was married to his first wife, Vera, in those days. This was just after he had gotten out of the army with a back ailment and had been hospitalized and had gotten turned on to painting by David Park while he was convalescing. I guess you know all about that, too. But this is how he finally became an art student there. I think he was going to be a doctor originally. And he'd gotten turned on to painting. There's an instance of somebody who hadn't painted all of his life by a long shot. But all of a sudden he found himself in a period when he was restricted from any other activity. And heaven knows, that's what he's wanted to do ever since.

PK: And done it very well and very lucratively.

JDF: Indeed. That's for sure. I suppose the culmination here would be the classic story of Nell Sinton and how I got the traveling fellowship.

PK: Yes, because that's a good introduction to your time in Europe.

JDF: And Nell would probably have something to say about that, too! [Laughs]

PK: Yes, I've heard it from Nell but I'd like to hear it again from you.

JDF: I'll tell it to you as Nell told it to me.

PK: And also you may as well bring in at this point, if you would, the name. I think it's a source of confusion.

JDF: You mean Sigmund Martin Heller?

PK: No, no! Your name.

JDF: Oh, my name! Well, okay. On my birth certificate I am Mary Joan De Feo. The middle name is spelled J-o-a-n although it's pronounced "Joanne." I'm called by members of my family not Mary but Joan, the middle name. And the Jay came about by strictly accidental circumstances in junior high school when all of us little girls were having a lot of fun giving each other nicknames. And one of my old friends, Pat Kelly, seemed to think Jay was what I ought to have as a nickname.

PK: J-a-y?

JDF: Yes. And so, it just sort of hung on. And as I think I've told you before I kept the initial because mainly it stood for everything. You know, it stood for my real name as well as the J-a-y nickname. although I sign J-a-y, I answer to anything these days.

PK: You mentioned Nell Sinton's version of

JDF: You can tell the story! [Laughs] You told it to me!

PK: I'll tell it very briefly and then you can either disagree or agree with it. But Nell Sinton said that when you were applying for the traveling grant at Berkeley you were advised that a male would have a better chance of getting the fellowship, and that it would be to your advantage to be sexually ambiguous on this one. And that if you applied as J. De Feo, there would be a question whether you were male or female.

JDF: You're begging to be corrected, aren't you?

PK: That's what Nell told me.

JDF: [Laughs] Well, of course, the way Nell told me the story was, and I didn't remember this until she told it to me. But I think it's probably a good point. In fact, I think it was only ten years ago that she told me this. Now my understanding of it was, at the time, that the two regular fellowships, one to a man and one to a woman, that were usually offered for graduates with M.A. degrees were not offered that particular year at the University. Instead, all they had to offer for art scholarships or fellowships was an inter-departmental fellowship. But not one that was usually offered by the department itself. So that's all I knew about it. And I got it! But it was Nell who told me later that the reason I got it was that my teachers suggested to the committee-by a sin of omission I think-that my name was Jay De Feo. And it was automatically suggested by that name that I was a male, not a female.

PK: Aha! That make a little difference.

JDF: That's my version of what Nell said.

PK: The question of gender is involved.

JDF: Yes, that's right. I never heard about that from my instructors. I must say this, Paul, they did everything they could to help me. That's for sure. And I really felt that they were doing everything that they could to give me a helping hand in that direction. Regularly, as I understood it, they gave one to a woman and one to a man from the department. Now that was my understanding. But otherwise, if it were up to inter-departmental committee, they would automatically lean more towards giving it to a man. Because they just assume that maybe a woman would not continue in the field.

PK: Better risk?

JDF: Yes, better risk.

PK: But, at any rate, I'm sure that, for whatever reason, your talent had a lot to do with it.

JDF: I got my walking papers. My get-out-of-town traveling fellowship. [Laughs] That was probably what was in back of it all.

PK: 1951, the Sigmund Martin Heller Traveling Fellowship.

JDF: One-way ticket. [Laughs]

PK: Well, one-way ticket out of the University of California, but I hope it was a return ticket from Europe.

JDF: In those days \$1,000,that's all it was, seemed like an awful lot of money. Not really enough to go to Europe, to say the least. Well, just maybe a year or two prior to that, maybe you could've made it for a year on \$1,000 in Europe. But it was just after the war and in a year or two the cost of living had gone up enormously there. So I did need a little extra help. My grandmother on my father's side chipped in and I think my mother helped me too. And while I was there I got an additional loan which had to be paid back eventually.

[END OF SESSION ONE.]

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TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH JAY DE FEO (2)

AT THE ARTIST'S HOME

DATE: JULY 18, 1975

INTERVIEWER: PAUL KARLSTROM

JDF: JAY DE FEO

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

PK: Well, in the last interview we got you to Europe, in 1951 I believe. Isn't that right?

JDF: Yes. Approximately.

PK: I would like you to expand a little bit, describe your European experience, especially in terms of art-what you saw and what had an impact.

JDF: I'll just start with what I actually did.

PK: Yes, the chronology is a good way to do it.

JDF: I went over there with a friend of mine, Lynn Brown, who'd also got a master's at the university in that same year, a girl friend. And on the boat going over let's see. We didn't have any huge plan necessarily. Lynn didn't have a hell of a lot of money saved. And I had a grant, of course.

PK: Let me just ask you one thing. Did you have a specific destination? I mean were you to go to Florence? Or was it your choice?

JDF: No, that's what I was going to say. We didn't have anything specific in mind necessarily, except we sort of headed for France, you know, to begin with. Isn't that what everybody's supposed to do? [Laughs] At the tail-end of the Bohemian era. Sam Francis was already over there. He had just left. Sam and I were pretty good friends in those days and I kind of looked forward to seeing him over there. So Paris seemed to be the initial place to go.

PK: Did you see him?

JDF: Oh yes. And it was a kind of exciting time over there. That's when Sam was making his great ex-patriot debut in the art world. He went there at a very, very expedient time, I think, for himself and for his career. He kind of took abstract expressionism abroad as it were. And he hit Paris at a time when it really needed something new and he was right there to provide it for them.

PK: Well he did attract attention.

JDF: Oh yes. I always had the feeling there was a lot of excitement generated by what he was doing. I think he had been there already about a year or so. I visited his studio. He was living with Muriel at the time-I'm not going to tell you the story of Sam Francis's life. [Laughs] Well, Muriel again, just to fill you in on the Paris scene-Sam had been married to a girl named Vera when he was going to the University of California. And they had been divorced. Actually, Sam and I went around a bit for a time together.

PK: In Paris?

JDF: No, no, when we were still in Berkeley.

PK: But you never really got together.

JDF: No. But anyway, he ended up with Muriel. She was a very lovely woman and everybody liked her. She was a very pretty girl too. And she went with him to Paris. So she was living with Sam at that time. And he had a nice big studio and there was much excitement. He was doing those early things. The early things at the first part of the retrospective show that you may have seen in Oakland. I was very excited about his work and always had been. But I wasn't really ready for that kind of expression. When I got over there to Paris, I was very impressionable about everything. Even just the old crumbly walls-all that kind of stuff. They looked like ready-made abstract expressionist paintings. The old buildings and everything. The whole atmosphere of the town. The grayness impressed me a great deal.

PK: So you really responded to the ambience of Paris?

JDF: Whatever that means.

PK: The atmosphere.

JDF: [Laughs] Yes. I went with Lynn and we also met a girl named Thora, who was from Canada-I can't remember her last name right now-on the boat and she was a partner in our European adventures. But she spoke French and she had a little apartment in Paris, and we saw a great deal of her. And we stayed there about three months. Now in my European adventures I think I made one mistake. And that was that I stayed in places a little

too long to do the tourist routine and probably not quite long enough to get to know the place, with the exception of Italy. But to just sort of give you a brief idea of what we did over there-I was in Paris for three months. And then we took off and went to London for about three months. And then we decided that we would join Thora back in Paris and another fellow named Ron Dubois, who had also gone to the University of California, and happened to be there at the same time. And so we joined up with him. And the four of us bought a little car and drove down through Spain and went down to North Africa, back into Spain and then down around the coast of Italy.

PK: Along the Riviera.

JDF: Ah yes. If I had it all to do over again I think I'd live a little higher, spend less time and do more things that I wished I had done. For some reason when you travel you get into this mystique about letting your money stretch as far as possible. And when I came home I realized that I should have blown a little bit more and spent a little less time and really seen some of the things that I missed, instead of getting into that mystique of the artist trying to live on a little bit of money for a long time, which is what we all did. But anyway, we got down as far as Naples and then we went back up again. I took a great fancy to Italy and it led me to Florence where I stayed and the three of them went on. I stayed. That just gives you a summary of what the trip was all about. I stayed in Florence I guess about six months after we separated.

PK: Where did you stay?

JDF: I stayed in a pension there.

PK: For six months?

JDF: Uh-huh. I had never been so long, to tell you the truth, without painting. And I was really young and impressionable and just sopped up all of this atmosphere and I was just about ready to explode. So I just didn't do anything in Florence except paint. I did do a little painting in Paris. But nothing to speak of. But the thing I went over there for and was most interested in was-it might have just been due to Margaret Peterson O'Hagan whom I discussed with you last time. Of course her interest in primitive art was outstanding. And I think as I departed from the university I was very excited about this sort of thing, So what I wanted to do in Europe, which I did, was to crawl through all the caves and look at all the cave paintings and scrawls.

PK: You did that? You went to Altamira?

JDF: I did all that. I was very studious about the whole thing. For instance, when I was in Paris I did do some painting there in our little hotel room. I spent days and days at the Musée de l'Homme going through every book they had making tracings of these things. In fact, I have them all downstairs. I finally mounted them. They became something more interesting in themselves. I was really very interested in this. I also did the same thing when I went over to London, I spent weeks and weeks in the British Museum looking through all their stuff.

PK: When did you go to London? Was this a side trip while you were in Paris?

JDF: No, we actually-it was like three months in Paris and then we just packed up and went across the Channel.

PK: So it was before your drive down to-

JDF: Yes. It was Paris and then London, and then back again for just a brief time to kind of get ourselves together for the trip. So I was doing all this research work, if you want to call it that, when I was in Paris and London before we took the trip. And then when we took the trip, I made a point of visiting all these places. The places that were actually in Spain and France. The study I did in the museums was of prehistoric sites in England and Ireland-places that I didn't get a chance to see. The drawings and the diagrams in the reference books fascinated me-and compared to the sites I was able to visit, were far more "legible" really.

PK: We're used to seeing things that way. I was going to ask you if-

JDF: So when some guide points out a painting on a wall, you say, "Oh, painting? What's that?"

PK: When you visited the caves, the prehistoric cave painting sites, you didn't say specifically which ones, but maybe Altamira, Lascaux are the best known.

JDF: That's one of the best known.

PK: Did you sketch there?

JDF: No.

PK: Just looked.

JDF: They're pretty packed, guided tours. They're really not quite exciting.

PK: What about the Etruscan tombs sites? Did you go to Tarquinia with the Cave of the Leopards and so forth?

JDF: Oh, I was very interested in that stuff.

PK: And again you just went and looked.

JDF: Well, we did the whole thing. We had our little guide book with us, and to tell you the truth, by the time I got to Italy, I was so fed up with looking at things, I was just full of it. I'm glad I went to all those places. Don't misunderstand me. But I was completely tired of being a tourist. Let's put it that way. I just wanted to settle down and be a painter again. But I think perhaps the biggest thing that came out of the European experience, if you will, is kind of a dual interest of mine. When we finally got to Italy-that's when I discovered the Renaissance. That's what really became a very exciting thing to me stylistically. So here again, I was dealing on one hand with an interest in primitive painting, and when I got to Italy-here I was just living in Florence. I was surrounded by it. And I absorbed a great deal of it there and came away with a very lasting interest in Renaissance art which I think is pretty obvious in my painting.

PK: What did you make a point of seeing in Florence? You said that you were working a great deal. Which monuments, which churches stick with you? Or is it just a general impression?

JDF: The city itself absolutely fascinated me, Paul. I wasn't a chronic museum go-er there, but I absolutely fell in love with the floor plan of the city. Just as a total piece of architecture. I daily bicycled around the place-the streets, the buildings, the architecture itself impressed me terribly.

PK: I assume of course that you spent considerable time in the Uffizi.

JDF: But not as much as you'd think. I really did the actual tourist thing in Florence toward the end of my stay there. I was very heavily involved in painting. Although I say that I was very influenced by Renaissance painting, I wasn't working in that style by a long shot then. It was during the Florence period, and it really started in Paris, that I came into my own as an abstract expressionist. Even in this isolated place that really had little bearing on that movement stylistically. I was absorbing my environment but it didn't come out in my own work until much later, when I sort of integrated spontaneous feeling for abstract expressionism with something of the refinement of the Renaissance period. If that makes any sense to you. I think *The Rose* demonstrates that quite a bit. It's of the abstract expressionist era but again too it's a very controlled work, a very defined idea, and there's nothing arbitrary about the painting whatsoever.

PK: Were there any specific early Renaissance painters that you admired most? Any particular pictures that you'd go back to see?

JDF: Well, I don't know. Botticelli impressed me quite a bit. Well, I just like that whole period, Paul. I just couldn't leave out anything.

PK: What about the sculpture? I guess you went to see the David and other Michelangelo things.

JDF: I always sort of refer to myself as a painter, you know, technically speaking. But again, too, as my paintings evolved after a few years, *The Rose* in particular, is as sculptural as perhaps-well, it could be almost considered a relief. It is a relief in terms of sculpture. Sculpture impressed me a great deal too. In fact, I did a lot of sculpture when I came back from Europe. I went into a plaster period. Then I went into three years of very small things which evolved into making jewelry later.

PK: Do you think that was a response to classical or Renaissance sculpture that you saw?

JDF: Not necessarily. I wouldn't venture to say so because I had been doing sculpture at the University before I left. I did a large plaster piece and I did some wood things and a couple of constructions. I was equally interested in sculpture as an expression as I was in painting when I was going to school. I wasn't turned on to it when I got to Europe. It perhaps heightened my interest in it, and then later, I think my interest in sculpture became integrated with my concern with painting.

PK: Did you work in your pension? You had a little corner as a studio?

JDF: Yes. It was a very nice place, and on a personal level-aside from the things I'd absorbed-it was a very, very heavy period for me, emotionally too. I was terribly absorbed into my painting. I think I almost overworked myself during that period. All of this stuff was stored up within me, and out came stuff that I had never really done before, stylistically. It was just sort of ready. And there were things in the environment that started getting

to me that later found their way into *The Rose*. For instance, the crucifix theme and things of that kind.

PK: Isn't that the basic theme of the Florence series?

JDF: Obviously that was sort of around me, too. Paintings of that theme. I even had a little one in my room there, it was just part of the decor that influenced me, I don't want to be misunderstood to the point that I was taking it and using it in a religious way. It appealed to me as a form, and later, of course, it became the absolute foundation of the painting, *The Rose*. That simple cross. But at that time I did do my crucifix series. Very, very brushy. In fact there's one of them in the catalogue here, which is kind of interesting. And it's right here on Merrill's chapter on *The Rose*. But you can see how that is the basic form of the painting. Stylistically, it was very expressionistic. My whole series of paintings there in Florence was such. They were all on paper, more or less, because it was easy to acquire-and portable.

PK: Tempera, in this case as an example from the Florence series, 1952. Tempera and ink on torn paper. Collage.

JDF: I used a lot of paper. I did two or three canvases too. But I was working so quickly that paper seemed to be the most appropriate for what I wanted. And it was very portable, so I was able to bring all that stuff home with me. But I did an enormous amount of stuff there in about six months.

PK: Do you have any idea how many paintings you did there?

JDF: Oh, I used to knock out three or four things a day. Which for me-knowing how painstakingly slow I am now-was my prolific period if ever there was one.

PK: How did you get them all back?

JDF: All rolled up. They came home in a big crate eventually. I became very close to the family I lived with, I still keep in touch with them.

PK: So it really was a family pension.

JDF: It really was a marvelous place.

PK: So you weren't as lonesome as you might have been.

JDF: No, and there were people that were coming through, too. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, I think even Sam came through at one stage of the game. It seemed to be a place where everybody, a lot of American people were staying at the place where I was, but it was a very Italian kind of place, too.

PK: Do you remember what it was called?

JDF: Pension Bartolini on the Lungarno Guicciardini, Number 1, right across from the American Express, as we always said-to define location! I had, for instance, friends from the university who happened to be there then-Phillip Olivier Smith, Pat Adams was in Florence on a Fulbright when I arrived. Also Clinton Hill, New York artist. Cornelia Schumann was another friend of mine at the university in Berkeley. She and her mother were there for a long time. And I met people that were new friends, too. The family members themselves were very kind to me. Most of these people came through during the summer which was the big season in Florence. It almost closes down entirely during the winter. So when the winter came around I saw mostly just the family that ran the place. But it was a very intense experience for me at that particular period. I would say I look back on it as having the same kind of intensity that took place when I was painting *The Rose*. I was confined to a certain space and I was heavily into my work. I got there in the early summer I believe and I was there at least six months. And during that time I was corresponding with Dean Dennis, who was at the University of California. He was head of the graduate division-he was more or less responsible for the grant, as it were. I was supposed to write him and give him a summary of what I had done with the money. The places I'd seen, what I was doing, etc. And we had quite a correspondence. In those days I was quite a correspondent. And he took quite an interest in what I had to say. And he arranged for me to get an additional sum of money from another institution, which I don't recall, which allowed me to stay on a little bit longer. Actually, I think it probably would have been a better idea if I had just come home.

PK: Why do you say that?

JDF: I was really worn out by that time. I wouldn't say that I was actually having a breakdown or anything but I was really in a state of exhaustion after this great surge of work.

PK: Did you stay in Florence?

JDF: I just stayed on. It was at that stage of the game-I don't know what it was that upset me so much-but I had some kind of reservations about coming back. I just had some kind of thing about coming back. I guess it sort of meant becoming entirely on my own, becoming independent and not being emotionally prepared for it. "Now I'm really officially graduated and what am I going to do with my life?"-that sort of a feeling. Actually the whole trip over there was kind of an extension of school and everything. Getting back simply meant I was finally going to be kicked out of the nest, and had to make it on my own, and get into teaching and so forth, which I really wasn't interested in doing. That is, I had a second year teaching credential which I never really made use of. I didn't want to teach on a high school level.

PK: Before we get you home, I'd like to talk a little bit about the Florence series which I suppose you could call your first important, coherent body of work. I imagine the series as fairly monochromatic. Is this true or not? Certainly much of your work is monochromatic.

JDF: I still was using a good deal of color in those days, and if it ever went sort of low-key at all, it was just sort of down to earth color. But there were black and white things, too.

PK: Was it during that period that you used higher-keyed colors more frequently?

JDF: I did some things, and other things were more low-keyed. I'll tell you one thing that really impressed me about Europe. When I first got to Paris, the atmosphere was so entirely different there. Everything is so vivid and so bright here. I was very taken with this kind of softness-a grayness, a blueness about the atmosphere. And it seems that after Paris, I absolutely responded to that very low-key-I could understand how the Impressionists became Impressionists. It struck me as being very much that way.

PK: Of course that isn't the same light or atmosphere of Italy.

JDF: No, but in contrast to our country there was a lack of garishness there, even in the architecture. There was a mellowness, a worn look. And all of the surfaces that one's eyes encountered. And again I have to get back to that architectural thing. Having studied art history a great deal, but not having seen it firsthand until I got there, I realized how entire cities looked like they were part of the terrain. They belonged there. The contrast made me see this country with a whole new perspective in that sense. But maybe that's digressing too far from my discussing my use, or non-use of color. But I got into a thing about color. I associated it with a kind of laid-on look in this country-kind of an artificial thing. And so the colors that I used, although I did use a good bit of brilliant color when I was still at the university, they became much softer in tone, much more low-key while I was over there.

PK: Is it possible that you viewed high-keyed color really as a surface thing? Like a paint job, and somehow covering up the structure?

JDF: That's part of it, and then also, I think as my work became more three dimensional in nature, that is, more akin to sculpture, it was like painting a sculpture almost.

PK: That's why earlier on I queried you about an interest in sculpture. Classical sculpture, or Michelangelo for that matter, going back to Mrs. Emery. Is it possible that in your painting there's a basic response to the monochromatic-

JDF: Yes, I think so. Nowadays, we realize that there's nothing invalid about painted sculpture by any means, but I did take more of a classic attitude toward it. And in that sense I remained, I liked that classic response to style. Even the Greek statues. We know that they were painted originally but we don't think of them that way because we never saw them that way.

PK: That's the point. Our experience of classical sculpture is brilliant white marble with shadows.

JDF: I wasn't doing it for any type of moral reason-like all the sculptors and architects are always talking about the "Truth to Materials" sort of thing, because it's not that at all. It's just my personal way of dealing with it.

PK: When did you first encounter Franz Kline's abstract expressionist painting with the broad black-again really a black and white-

JDF: I don't really know. I like him. I should imagine it would be easy for you to suggest his name in connection with my own, but I don't ever remember him as being a direct influence.

PK: What else about Europe, about Florence?

JDF: Really, to tell you the truth, Paul, there isn't at this moment too much more to say. The main thing, as I look back in retrospect, was a terrific output of work, in this particular period, and perhaps the first significant things I had done as a non-student.

PK: You felt like a real artist at this point.

JDF: Well, I really was into it.

PK: Did you go back then via Paris?

JDF: Yes, nothing spectacular. I spent around three months, no, it couldn't have been that long. I spent just a short time in New York on the way over. And on my way back I stopped and stayed with friends I had met in Europe, Clinton Hill, and had known here too. And I stayed in New York for a month or two at least before coming back here.

PK: What was your response to New York City?

JDF: That was the most foreign place I'd seen in all my travels and I loved it. I really did. I'd give anything if I could afford a trip back there and see all the things that I know are there. I've never really had the time-I was dependent more or less on the people I was with. I didn't really know how to get around by myself too well. I just barely saw the museums. I would have liked to have had the opportunity to really look at all the things.

PK: Did you get to any galleries or encounter any of the New York school? Or any modern or contemporary art?

JDF: I think I did get around to a couple of places but it's been such a long time I can't really recall just what galleries I saw.

PK: But nothing knocked you out so that you remembered?

JDF: I got the feeling. I remember seeing a show of Philip Guston, for instance. I was very interested in everything that was going on right then. I wanted to see everything because I was really heavily into this thing about abstract expressionism. On the one hand, I didn't want to come home, but on the other hand, I really wanted to get back to where it was happening. Because aside from Paris, and I suppose this is a significant thing to be said about Europe, I really felt that it was just so much dead wood as far as what was going on now is concerned, and the longer I stayed there the deeper I got into a past existence which I didn't feel alive about whatsoever. I really felt that energy back here in this country that didn't happen in Europe whatsoever, except in that little, brief encounter with Sam in Paris. New York excited me for that reason because that's what it was all about. Just during that period. I can't name anybody specifically.

PK: But you knew that was where the heavy abstract expressionists worked.

JDF: Yes, and I wanted to see it all. Even the things that I enjoyed most in terms of fairly contemporary painting in Europe were by people like Turner in England and others I could identify with.

PK: The painterly manner.

JDF: Yes.

PK: So you returned from Europe to San Francisco in 1953.

JDF: I guess it was.

PK: Okay. What did Jay do then? How did she find San Francisco?

JDF: I will talk just a little bit about Berkeley. Having left Berkeley, that was the place I finally returned to. I just want to add that I had this fantastic studio before I left for Europe. Actually, I lived with my grandmother through most of the years I went to the University of California, but my graduate year, I shared this marvelous studio apartment on Magnolia Street, I think it was, with two girl friends of mine. The studio used to be an old ballroom in a large and extravagant house. It was just a marvelous year, that graduate year. So when I came back from Europe I wanted to-of course the girls had since departed and gotten married, and so forth. But I wanted to come back to that place if I possibly could. So I did just that. I tried to find someone who could share it with me, because I couldn't afford the rent, but unfortunately, I wasn't too compatible with this person, so my glorious studio I had to give up. As a matter of fact, I think I remember that Richard Diebenkorn took over that studio after I left. I think so. At any rate, I found a smaller apartment at a more reasonable rent-a nice place closer to the campus on Delaware Street. And it was during this period that I had to start thinking about how to support myself. I wasn't interested in teaching on a secondary level. Let's face it. So I proceeded to take a number of part-time jobs. Just about anything I could get my hands on.

PK: This is right after you return from Europe?

JDF: Yes. Well, for one thing, I was working at a childcare center in the vicinity of Arts and Crafts. I also had a job

at a soda fountain.

PK: You were a soda jerk.

JDF: I never did learn how to make one either. I did a number of things. Just about anything I could get. Of course I wasn't trained for anything practical. That was the hell of it. The only thing I had was the damned teaching credential and I didn't want to use it. Actually, just doing a little bit of substitute teaching was enough to discourage me. But I did do that also. And then I also got a job teaching a children's class, which I enjoyed very much, at the College of Arts and Crafts. And this is where I met Wally.

PK: He was teaching there?

JDF: No, he was going to school there on the GI bill.

PK: At Arts and Crafts? That's funny. I thought he went to the California School of Fine Arts.

JDF: He did later. But he started going to school there. Actually, we had had a lot of mutual friends, but surprisingly enough we had never met each other. He looked me up, because he had heard about me from a lot of people and he knew I was teaching a class there. And so he made a point of looking me up during this period. And pretty soon he was on my doorstep. Oh, by the way, it was at this time that I brought all my paintings home. This is important. And people were really very excited about them. They were actually kind of a new thing in the abstract expressionist expression. Or at least this was my own style of abstract expressionism.

PK: This being, again, the Florence series.

JDF: Yes. Although they all fell into that category, I had, I think for the first time, done some-thing which was stylistically personal and my own. And everyone that saw them-Fred Martin and Manuel Neri, well, old friends from the university, were really very, very excited about them. So I did have two or three very small showings. I had a showing a Guiamar De Angulo. Do you know who she is?

PK: No.

JDF: Well, she was sort of a mutual friend of a lot of people in the North Beach era. And she had a little gallery at that time and I think I had a show at her place. We're also getting into the North Beach era. This kind of overlaps. Our spirit was more or less in San Francisco, and yet Wally eventually kind of moved in with me when I was still living in Berkeley.

PK: Sort of moved in with you?

JDF: Well, he would be there for a few days at a time, but he wasn't actually living there the whole time. So we sort of had our lives both in Berkeley and in San Francisco. It's important to get the painting part out of the way, because I suddenly became interested in sculpting again and started doing something entirely different. As a matter of fact, I think I had started making little tiny wire sculptures when I originally came back to my old studio on Magnolia. I was showing everybody the paintings I had done in Florence, but my own personal expression had gone into something else by this time. And along with that I was doing these enormous plaster things-which was taking advantage of that huge studio before I had to move into a smaller apartment.

PK: Like big reliefs?

JDF: No. They were in the round, very large wall and floor pieces. Hardly anything remains from that period because of the size of the things. Actually, I was doing a lot of "installation pieces" for this wonderful space. Stuff I knew I couldn't take with me that now might be described as "environmental art." I hauled a lot of pieces around with me for a long time but because of the nature of the material, they all sort of crumbled and got lost. Although Walter Hopps still has a couple of those early things. And Manuel was very, very impressed with them.

PK: That's interesting.

JDF: When I moved from the Magnolia Street studio, I think I must have met Manuel through Wally. He lived in a place kind of between Oakland and Berkeley. And he was painting at that time. I stored some of my plaster things with Manuel. Well, it goes on record. Manuel said himself that I turned him on to plaster. In fact, it's in one of those articles in Currant magazine. As far as Manuel is concerned, it's a mutual admiration society. I've always felt very close to the way he expresses himself too. But the point is that I stored all that stuff at Manuel's place for a time after moving from a large studio into a house. At any rate, this was a period when I was really working in sculpture before I actually went back into painting again. And it was during this period, too, that Wally and I finally decided to make the jump from Berkeley to San Francisco. In fact, I was just about to give him his walking papers. I was having a hell of a time trying to get along in those days. I didn't even have one day off a week. I was working every single day at these three part-time jobs. And he'd just sort of cruise in for two or three days

and take advantage of my refrigerator and cruise out. And I said, "Listen here buddy. Either we're just going to make it together, or I want you to kick in something." Of course, he wasn't working at the time. He was going to school. He had found this little place on Bay Street which is about a block away from what was then the California School of Fine Arts. It was a very kind of rustic-fraught with atmosphere-little basement apartment. It looked like it should have come out of the old world, because the cobblestones that were out on the patio extended themselves right into the house, The kitchen was cobblestone and all the pots and pans hung from the ceiling. It was very romantic, and it was really a very nice little place. Again, my environments have always determined what I do as far as my work is concerned. And this place was kind of a small and intimate place by nature. Wally, of course, was doing his work at school, because he had the facilities there. It was at this stage that he started going to the California School of Fine Arts. He switched over from Berkeley.

PK: This must have been in '53.

JDF: About '54. It was about a year's stretch there between the time I got back from Europe, Paul, and when we finally moved over to San Francisco on Bay Street. I'm really kind of throwing a whole lot of details at you at one time. But this is when I seriously got into jewelry because we needed the money, for one thing, and because these little sculptures that I was doing-in fact there's one hanging there over your head. They were just little oddball things.

PK: So you did things to be sold.

JDF: Not to start with. But because they were tiny, they just absolutely lent themselves to this kind of expression. Or this kind of functional thing. So I really started very studiously learning this craft since I hated everything else I was doing and I didn't want to teach.

PK: You couldn't have, at this time in San Francisco, been maintaining those jobs as soda jerks and-

JDF: No. There's another little personal note in my past that probably should go on this tape. And maybe you even know about it. I don't know, but there was one point when I was really so damned hard up. There was this hardware store right across the street from Arts and Crafts. And I went in there one day and stole some cans of paint and got caught red-handed. I had no skill at being a shoplifter-I just sort of blithely walked in and said this is what I need. There was a can of red and a can of black. Dumped it into a satchel, walked out onto the street. Actually, this was Harvey William's Hardware Store, and being located right across the street from the College of Arts and Crafts, this guy was just waiting to nab someone, because those students had been ripping him off for years. They were a hell of a lot more skillful at it than I. So he waited until I got outside the door, because they have to actually have proof that you've walked out with something. I was on my way to the childcare center where I was teaching. So the police accompanied me to my job. This is how I lost my job, in other words. And also I lost my teaching credential so I couldn't teach. I was convicted of this. I had a very good friend, Norma Lundsford, that knew Harvey Williams. She couldn't even talk him out of dropping the charges. So it was my one shot as a crook, and I blew it. I spent a day in jail instead of the Halloween party at California School of Fine Arts I planned on going to with Wally.

PK: Harsh justice. You must have been crushed.

JDF: With a bunch of drunks and prostitutes, and they asked me, what did you do? They thought it was a very colorful crime. Maybe that's why I finally went into black and white. The red paint really did me in.

PK: It must have been humiliating.

JDF: It had a tremendous effect on me, because it just tore me up. I had to keep this from my parents. They couldn't have taken it tongue in cheek whatsoever because this would have symbolized the complete failure of my whole five years at the university. That really screwed me up in many ways for years to come because this thing was on record in Sacramento, no longer, however. And it kept me from getting a lot of teaching jobs, even jobs for which you didn't need a teaching credential. But it was part of the record, and as a matter of fact, it kept me from teaching at the California School of Fine Arts for quite a long time until there was a changing of the guard and people were more understanding and liberal about stuff like that. But at any rate, to get back to the ranch, no, I didn't have any jobs when I came to the city.

PK: Well, did you two get married then?

JDF: Wally had a certain amount of income monthly because of the GI bill. And eventually we got married about a year after we moved to San Francisco, because it meant that we got a little bit more money as a married couple. But in the meantime, because I was making these little things, these little wheels were going on inside, saying, what am I going to do? I have to help out somehow. And so I really hustled jewelry. I became a professional jeweler and I really learned and did very well at it for about three years.

PK: Where did you sell these little pieces?

JDF: I was very fortunate in this regard. Of course I really worked very hard and I didn't really ever take a class or anything. I innovated again, another kind of style that was simply due to a response to the medium. Wires twist-I really didn't have very sophisticated equipment. To begin with, all I had was an ice pick and a pair of tweezers. What do you do with them? So I made some very interesting spiral-like things. Actually, a style that has become rather popular in the last few years. But then it was something unique. And I took it to, ironically enough, a woman who was a friend of Norma Lundsford, who was trying to talk Harvey Williams into dropping the charges about the paint theft. A lot of people were buying my jewelry then. You know, friends who would give me a helping hand. Some of my old professors from school did. Norma liked them very much and she had this friend, Nanny Benderson, who had one of the best jewelry stores in town at the time. Ironically enough, she was located directly across the street from what was to become my studio on Fillmore Street where *The Rose* was painted. And she was really a hardcore German businesswoman, from the word go, but she saw something in the work that she really liked. She was handling first-class professional jewelers. My stuff was really very primitive and very clumsy, but she did like the ideas. She took a chance on it and she actually bought a couple of hundred dollars worth of it, which in those days was quite a lot of money. And that gave me a chance to get started and to give me a chance to really practice. That's what I really needed-to have the time to develop the skill. She had a friend, too, one of the people who dealt with her-Victor Reis. He was a metal worker by trade, but he did do jewelry. He was a very fine jeweler. And he took it upon himself to give me a helping hand, because he was interested in the work. At the time, he was having a great big show at the de Young Museum and asked me to go. He had seen my work in the shop, and he took an interest in it. He unofficially gave me a lot of instruction as well as equipment and things I couldn't afford at the time-like real silver. The more precious things-it took time to have money in order to make the investment to buy these things. So anyway, this helped us a great deal during this period of our marriage. And eventually, it was just that commercial aspect of The Jewelry market that really finished me off. Because after a time I couldn't distinguish between what I really wanted to do and what I absolutely had to do. And it was that conflict that you just simply get into if you are an artist working in a commercial way.

PK: Did you make a decision on that basis?

JDF: Well, I just gradually lost interest and I was anxious to express myself once again in paint. I still like some of the tiny, primitive things, but they did become terribly refined and elegant. Again, they are ideas that are still important to me and are cropping up in current paintings, in a painting medium, though, not in a sculptural medium. Nanny just hung on in there with me and finally she moved down into a new shop down on Grant Avenue. At the time, it was considered The Jewelry shop in San Francisco. So she saw me through to the point where I came out with some very refined and elegant stuff. And then I was a horrible disappointment to her when I just threw in the towel. I was getting the hankering to paint again, to tell you the truth. I've always been like that with materials. The excitement, the sensuousness of the material is what triggers me off on an idea, and whether it be metal or plaster or paint or what have you, it's that manipulation of the material itself and the response to it that makes me an abstract expressionist no matter what medium I'm dealing with. So, after a while I just got tired of twisting wires and I felt I wanted to start making mud pies again. So I started painting again. But during this period, I was having shows of my paintings. I showed at The Place in North Beach-this was the so-called North Beach period.

PK: Were these current paintings?

JDF: No, actually they were things from the Florence and Paris series.

PK: So you weren't actually painting at all for a period of a year or so.

JDF: No, about two or three years. I really got into this jewelry thing.

PK: We were talking about The Jewelry and the fact that you stopped making it, and wanted to get back to painting.

JDF: Yes.

PK: Was this about the time you moved to the famous Fillmore Street address?

JDF: No, this was before.

PK: You were still on Bay Street.

JDF: Yes. I really didn't have the facilities to paint on Bay Street. As I say, it was this very charming sort of old world underground basement apartment. There was a block long of people who wanted to move into it when we moved out. And when we moved out we took our pillows and all of our furnishings with us and all they saw were

a lot of rock walls and bare floors. I think she had trouble renting the place again. But it was charming and was an ideal setup for jewelry. It was a funky, one-room, kind of Frank Lloyd Wright arrangement, that is, all living areas occupied one space, with little alcoves on the sides, so I had this little studio in the back. It was an ideal studio for that kind of work. But when I wanted to paint again, I started out on a small scale, and there was no place to work but right there in the kitchen and that didn't do for very long. Wally was finishing school, so he wouldn't have those facilities for painting, at California School of Fine Arts. So we had to look around for something else. Paul Beatty was the tenant prior to us in the studio over on Fillmore Street. As a matter of fact, we had gone over to have dinner with them on one occasion even before we knew we would be interested in acquiring their apartment.

PK: This was 2322 Fillmore Street.

JDF: Yes. Again, as I said, this was directly across the street from the little shop where I sold my jewelry before she moved but it was already familiar surroundings. I walked into this place and I was just overcome. I had never seen the place. It was just an enormous flat, really huge. It just seemed to go on and on. Of course it was dilapidated. Paul and his wife were never very keen on decorating, or even keeping things clean for that matter. It was pretty funky, I'll tell you. But I remembered it well. For one reason or another, they were moving and Wally said, "Gee, it's available." And it was only \$50 a month, this huge space.

PK: That must have been 1953. That's what Merrill says.

JDF: If Merrill says so, it must be. I don't know what Wally says. He probably has another version. Anyway, we moved in and got just about the tail end of low rentals, you know. Of course, it was a dump!

PK: How many rooms in your flat?

JDF: It was a whole floor. It wasn't so much the number of rooms, but they were huge and even the hallway itself that separated my flat from the one next door, that Joan Brown and Sonia Gechtoff eventually occupied. Gosh the hallway itself was as wide as this room here and 12 feet high. And at least 40 feet long or more. It was really an incredible space and eventually as if that weren't enough for us, we were greedy enough to rent the upper floor too, when the McClures finally moved out.

PK: You mean you had two floors?

JDF: Yes, we had two floors before we left.

PK: Then you occupied most of that complex then. Why don't you describe it.

JDF: The complex involved four flats altogether, supposedly identical in floor plans. But our first flat was actually the largest of them all. They were two parallel double sets of tenement flats. The two lower ones were connected by a doorway through this large hall, so that you didn't have to go out and up into the other one. There was a regular doorway connecting Sonia's, later Joan's, and my studios. But that was essentially the floor plan of this fabulous bunch of tenements.

PK: This legendary tenement.

JDF: We never thought of it as such at the time. When I was still over on Bay Street, this is when I met Sonia Gechtoff. I had started showing things in small galleries, and I was kind of getting back into the scene at that point, attempting to do larger things, even though it wasn't practical in the space we were in, but we did have a patio out in front. I remember doing one large thing before we left Bay Street. I think I was on a jury of a drawing show then. It was sort of the golden age of John Humphrey at the museum at the time. I was on this jury of the drawing and print show at the museum and it wasn't really fair because the jurors were allowed to enter something jury free. Did you ever hear that story?

PK: That's a scandal. That's outrageous.

JDF: What was outrageous about it and what was unfair was that I entered something that was kind of an outrage to begin with. It was way out of scale. There was a limitation in size for everyone else that entered. The Prima donna here had something that was 10 feet high and not only that but in those days it was considered a little bit bizarre to do something that wasn't a perfect rectangle. I had stretched paper over cruciform, cross-like stretcher bars. What the thing amounted to was a great big white crucifix support and right in the center of it I put a jewel-there was a splash of paint-just a great big gaudy jewel. And I got this thing in jury free, and John Humphrey fixed it so that we could get it in, good old John, and Julius was in on this too. We opened up the trap doors so that nobody would know about it, and this thing was lowered into the basement and snuck into the exhibition this way. In those days, you didn't have to be very bizarre to bring on an outrageous reaction from the critics and painters alike. They even called me at some point during the exhibition and said that somebody had

written "fuck you" on my painting. [Laughs] If I had been smart, I would have sued. But I didn't even think of it at the time. I just said, "Oh well, that adds something to it." I think a critic took it upon himself to write a whole article about this outrageous entrance. It wasn't very nice of me to put something in that was out of scale. I should have stuck to the limitations that the other people had. Ferlinghetti, when I had my show at The Place in North Beach, accused me of painting dingbats. Wally and I still affectionately refer to early painting images as dingbats.

PK: Were you the only artists living in those flats?

JDF: At that time. I can't remember, to tell you the truth, who was living over us and over the other flat. It wasn't too long after that that the flat over us became vacated. I don't remember knowing Mike McClure before that. It might have just been a coincidence that he found out about it and moved in. But it was at this point that I got friendly with Mike and his wife. They suddenly occupied that flat. And then Jim Newman, who was director of the Dilexi Gallery, became the fourth occupant of the foursome. To digress just a second back to Bay Street, it was at that time that I just met Walter. This was before I moved to Fillmore Street. Again, I don't really remember how we got to know each other. All I recall is that he just sort of appeared. I think at the time he was only about 18 years old and I was about 24. He was all wide-eyed and enthusiastic. He had seen my work at The Place, maybe. Evidently, he knew my work and he looked me up. He said, "I'm going to start an art gallery and I want you to be in it." And I thought, "Gee, good luck." You know, in those days the Dilexi Gallery wasn't even in existence yet. I think in those days the small cooperative galleries were just starting. There wasn't anything else in town. And we all relied very heavily, and I don't think it's so important anymore because there are more outlets for showing, on the juried shows we had in San Francisco because it was the only exposure we had. There were two annuals a year and the Art Festival, which nobody pays much attention to now. At least they don't take it as seriously as they did in those days. We all entered the Art Festival in those days. It was really considered a very exciting event. And so were the annuals at the San Francisco Museum. Of course, they don't have those anymore. We all entered them-Sam and all the people who were painting in those days. It was considered a great thrill just to be accepted. I never won anything. I think Wally won a prize once. Those were really the primary outlets to show our work until later when Wally started the Six Gallery.

PK: What about the East/West Gallery?

JDF: That was run by Sonia Gechtoff's mother. That came a little later.

PK: But before the Six, wasn't it?

JDF: No, I think after or simultaneous to. And again-people living in the same complexes-it's just interesting to note that when Wally and I were living on Bay Street, Dave Simpson and his wife were living on the floor above us, and every time Dave was building his stretcher bars, the dirt would filter down through the ceiling right over our bed. I'll never forget it. This conversation is going to have to go back and forth a lot if you're interested in the people I was involved with.

PK: I'm very interested.

JDF: Again, I'll have to take another little parenthetical trip here and tell you that Wally remained very, very close to some of his high school buddies. Wally, as you know, was born in Pasadena and grew up there. And when he moved up here, he brought his friends with him. I guess you have all this on tape from him. Of course Hayward King, David Simpson, Deborah Remington and John Ryan, who was a poet. I'm probably leaving out-oh, Knute Stiles, Knute ran The Place in North Beach-I don't know if Knute was from there. But there might have been one or two others. Bill Morehouse, that's the other one. So when I first met Wally, I instantly became very much involved with these other people, because they remained in very close contact with each other-Wally and his friends. And that again was the reason that David Simpson came to live over us on Bay Street. I remember during this period that these were the people that we saw and that we enjoyed seeing socially, and these were our contemporaries that were working at that particular period. Sonia of course wasn't in on this specific group, but she was just part of the general scene, and of course her husband Jim Kelly, and Julius Wasserstein at the museum, and a number of others that I'm not mentioning at the moment, but who will probably come up. Wally has always taken more of an interest in doing things publicly than I have. Like this thing you're going to tonight, for instance. He's big on that sort of stuff. I will say no more for the record. [Laughs.]

PK: You know what it's called tonight? "The Second Coming of Wally."

JDF: To tell you the truth, I'd really like to lay one on him right here.

PK: You'll have your chance probably.

JDF: I'll get my digs in. But anyway, I think it was a grand idea at the time. I never would have thought of it on my own, but Wally did put the Six Gallery together. There's no doubt about that.

PK: You must have moved to Fillmore Street in '54. I was trying to convince you earlier that it was in '53, but you really wouldn't have had time after you returned from Europe to do all those things.

JDF: Yes, I was making jewelry for two or three years.

PK: It was a fascinating situation there on Fillmore Street because there was a group that just so happened ended up with all artists and poets.

JDF: There was kind of a network of people-friends of friends of friends of friends, and it just sort of centered there. At the risk of having to digress as things occur to me, and again too, I'm talking about people who at the time really didn't know each other-for instance, Sonia was not really a part of Wally's little group. But the Fillmore Street address kind of drew everybody together from divergent places and connections. At any rate, it was very shortly after we moved to Fillmore Street that Wally got the Six Gallery thing together. It was Hayward, and Bill, I think Bill Morehouse was in on it, and Deborah Remington, and John Ryan. There's a couple of people that I've talked about this to, and we always come up with four or five, but we can never think of the sixth member. Hayward knows who they are. I wasn't a part of it.

PK: They wouldn't let you in?

JDF: I didn't care. I babysat down there a lot though. It really didn't interest me too much though to be a founding member. Wally was there and I was a part of it because he was. Somewhere along the line we got married, when we were still on Bay Street.

PK: You mean he started the gallery when you were on Bay Street?

JDF: No, I think it was when we were on Fillmore Street.

PK: Oh, you got married when you were on Bay Street.

JDF: Yes, not at the Six Gallery, at City Hall. Actually, the Six Gallery had been the King Ubu Gallery prior to this. And it seemed to me that Deborah Remington had some connection with it. We had gone to a couple of openings there before it became the Six Gallery. I don't remember how the former King Ubu Gallery was run. My only recollection was that-it did concern painting naturally-but the poets were very interested in the place. It was very poetry oriented. I associated Robert Duncan with the King Ubu Gallery, for instance, and a number of the older, well-established poets. It was technically an art gallery but I imagine that they had poetry readings there. But it was like many galleries then, for one reason or another, the King Ubu Gallery was no more. The space was still available and it just might have been through Deborah Remington that Wally was tuned in to this available space, and got the notion to continue a gallery but to change the name to the Six Gallery.

PK: Isn't that the space where Fredrickson's Hardware is now?

JDF: You know, I've been by there a hundred times, and I keep looking for it. Obviously it's changed into something else. And I keep thinking where was that place anyway? It was this big deep wide very funky space-very damp.

PK: Well clearly it was on the west side of Fillmore between Union and Filbert, right?

JDF: That sounds right. But I think that during the time that the Six Gallery was there, Sonia came to live next door to us. She became a participant in the gallery and so did Jim. I was even still making jewelry at the time even though I was easing into painting. Although I don't remember doing it at home much, I remember being down there and babysitting the gallery and making sketches of ideas. But again I was getting into the painting trip. It was the association with the marvelous space that was available to me. It got me into the first serious series that I ever did. Not that the Florence series wasn't serious. It was sort of like a germ of what was to come. I guess it was after that that Mrs. Gechtoff opened up the East/West Gallery. I'm almost positive that the Six Gallery was opened before that. It was sort of like fun neighbors. The East/West Gallery was a totally different environment. It was a small, kind of intimate space compared to the vast space of the Six Gallery.

PK: Were they mostly Wally's friends, or your friends and Wally's friends or friends of the Fillmore Street address that showed at the Six Gallery?

JDF: I don't have too much recall. I remember we had a couple of group shows and I remember that Paul Beattie had a one man show there that was considered-

PK: Did you ever have a one person show there?

JDF: No.

PK: But you were in some of the group shows?

JDF: I showed some of my older things. I even did a little painting when I got back to Berkeley before I went into jewelry, and I had a few things from that period. I don't really remember. It was such an important period, but I mostly just remember being down there one night a week with Wally. We all just took turns sitting there.

PK: Well, maybe it didn't seem that important at the time.

JDF: Nothing ever does.

PK: I wanted to ask you if you and your friends, the other artists, had a distinct sense of something special happening in which you were involved.

JDF: Well, in a certain way, but simply in the sense that we were interested, not in any sense of posterity or history. Although Wally always approaches everything as if it's some big fucking deal. How's that?

PK: That's good.

JDF: You know, he always makes a big point of documenting everything. That's part of his expression as an artist. It's not just confined to his painting but to his performance as an artist in a public sense. And of course, as an artist, Wally is as much a musician as he is a painter. His interest in things public goes quite along with Wally the banjo player.

PK: Not unlike Bruce Conner.

JDF: Yes, this is a vehicle for that kind of expression for him. In fact, all of the get-togethers and huge parties that happened on Fillmore Street were kind of contrivances to get the band together. It's not to be rude or anything, it's just a question of fact that Wally never took me anywhere in the whole time we were married where there wasn't some kind of a thing where he could perform. Not even once out to dinner in ten years, and that's pretty tough.

PK: Not even out to a movie, although the Clay theatre was right across the street?

JDF: Oh, we've been through that one.

PK: Not on tape, though. Okay, we're getting to the issue of the social life.

JDF: You're getting the irate housewife. That's what we went into on the occasion of those photographs.

PK: The social life that centered around Fillmore Street-

JDF: Another aspect that kind of brought that social scene to Fillmore Street was that now Wally had graduated from the California School of Fine Arts and had gone on to San Francisco State for his Master's Degree. At that time they didn't offer it at the California School of Fine Arts. But he went back afterwards to become the director of the night school there. Wally has always had a very paternal attitude toward that school. It's probably come up in the course of your conversations with him. In fact, when I very first met him, he was doing janitorial work there. It was his job to sweep up the place after hours. And I think he looks back very paternally on the place. He was very upset when he finally lost his teaching job there. We all were, but I think perhaps it was a little more tragic for him than anyone else.

PK: To sever that connection.

JDF: Yes. So he started there sort of sweeping up the place and that was my first experience with the school when Wally took me over there and the place was absolutely dark. The whole school. It was really a memory, because there were no lights on. He introduced me to this school that I had heard about for years but I had never really been there, curiously enough. In my mind, it was this great myth where Rothko and Still, and the whole mystique of abstract expressionism was born. So Wally introduced me to the house of all these people in the most dramatic of circumstances, late at night, in the dark.

PK: With the bats flying around.

JDF: And all the stories about Bill Morehouse living in the tower, and the ghost in the tower. All of which appealed to this impressionable little child. His connections with the school were never severed, and this was partially responsible for the social scene on Fillmore Street. Because when he went back with his Master's Degree as the director of the evening school, he went back to daddy, to the maternal or whatever it was. He wasn't yet teaching I don't think. Of course, that school was kind of a focal point for everyone, and Wally drew the social milieu from there to our premises. Also, the Six Gallery, and the East/West Gallery, and the poets, because

Michael was living upstairs. And Wally kind of drew interest from the school. For instance, Nell Sinton and Bob Howard, especially Bob Howard, was an idol of Wally's and kind of a big daddy to us all during that period. And I think Wally, either consciously or unconsciously, kind of patterned himself as a younger generation version of Bob. As an image, I mean. I know he was terribly absorbed with Bob's sculptures and fascinated with and influenced by Bob in his sculpture.

PK: I know he admires him very much.

JDF: And Bob, here I am digressing again, for many years had his studio, his and Adie Kent's place on Francisco Street had been a kind of center for the art social life, and I think, in his mind's eye, Wally kind of had this picture of another generation establishment on Fillmore Street. And every year, we still went to Bob Howard's Christmas party where every artist of every generation attended and Bob loved it.

PK: That must have been terrific.

JDF: Oh, he's a marvelous person. The trouble is that these things kind of dissipated after Adie's death. This was really the social event of the year, Bob Howard's Christmas party on Francisco. And this went on well into the years on Fillmore Street. I think it was after Adie's death that Wally sort of picked up the tradition and transported. The Christmas parties from Francisco Street to Fillmore Street. It almost happened quite like that. But even Joan-we're skipping ahead to after Sonia left-Joan and I would go over and help Bob get ready for those events. I've been sort of giving you a stream of consciousness-

PK: Well, that's great, because it gives a flavor of the time. I was still trying to get an overview of the people who at one time or another lived at the Fillmore Street address and their relationships.

JDF: I'm having a little problem here deciding whether I should give you the whole history of the people, or if I should kind of go along with my own life and let that come on its own.

PK: Whatever is more comfortable.

JDF: Then I'll just give you the chronological thing and then I'll go back and tell you what my life was like during those periods and how these people influenced my life. I'll talk about the people that lived in this house as well as the galleries that came and went during this period, without getting off on too many personal tangents. We talked about the Six Gallery, the East/West Gallery, Wally back at Fine Arts, and Sonia and Jim having come to live on Fillmore Street. Michael McClure-I don't know if he was there. I think he came a little bit later. But anyway, first there was Sonia and Jim. They were still there when the McClures moved into the flat above us. Then Sonia and Jim moved to New York. Her mother died and that's when the East/West Gallery folded. And Sonia, who was always a New Yorker out here, was really discontent as far as living on the West Coast was concerned. She left for a whole bunch of reasons, but that we'll talk about later. In the meantime, Joan and Bill Brown were others of the younger generation that Wally had contact with because of his position at the school. And they were kind of in and out a lot. We started seeing them quite a bit at the little parties that we had. Bill of course played the trumpet, so Wally naturally wanted to draw him into the family. As soon as Sonia and Jim left for New York, they seemed to be the most likely candidates for that space.

PK: This is above you?

JDF: No, across the way. They replaced Sonia and Jim. Now also, about 1956 or '57, I don't think the Dilexi Gallery was in existence until then.

PK: I think it was '58 or '59.

JDF: Yes. Because it seemed to me at the time that Wally instigated the Six Gallery that it really was the only one. And it seems really strange that in a city of San Francisco's stature that that's the way it was. Just the museums and the Six Gallery. Well, anyway, Jim Newman being financially independent, he didn't have to cater to anyone. He could just show what he wanted to. And Walter Hopps was connected with him.

PK: Well you know that Jim really got started with Walter running some small galleries in Los Angeles. And then he came up here. That's the background. So he came as kind of a manifestation of Walter Hopps's interests.

JDF: That's probably where it all started. I don't have any recollection of Walter until later, although I remember him coming to see me on Bay Street. But it wasn't until the Dilexi Gallery moved up here that I have an actual recall of him in connection with Jim. My attitude toward Walter always was, "Well, good luck." Here's this little kid that's going to do all this. Well, little did I know what was to come of this. I said he could come in and pick the stuff-he could do all the work. I just didn't want to be bothered framing stuff and so forth. So he would just come in and in a very quiet way shuffle through all my paintings and drawings from those early days. He had an excellent eye for picking out the best of the stuff that I did. He would just very quietly take it away. I think

probably these things were being shown in those little galleries in Southern California during this period. But I was so involved in other things that I was pretty much unaware of what was going on in this regard. Actually in many ways Walter spoiled me in those early years. All those things were framed in gold leaf frames, no less. Now you have to beg a dealer to even pay for the stripping and let you do it yourself. But the reason that I went through this business was that Jim suddenly became another tenant in the building and he lived over Joan and Bill. Somewhere along the line, Craig Kauffman moved in there. I think he followed Jim Newman, or maybe he preceded him. I'm really not sure about that. Somewhere along the line, Mike and Joanne decided that they were going to take a trip to Mexico. They were going to stay down there a long time, or I don't know what the deal was. But somehow they came back sooner than they expected. But anyway, Wally and I had decided to take the upper flat. I don't know just how this transaction was done, but they then moved down to Downey Street. But we had a lot of struggle with our consciences at the time as to whether we could afford both places at once.

PK: A hundred dollars a month?

JDF: I think total, this whole huge thing, we never paid any more than, I think the rent went up only \$10 in all the years we lived there.

PK: Which was until, just for the record, what, '64?

JDF: Well, one flat was \$50, and it was a total of \$125.

PK: But you lived in that building for quite a while, what was it?

JDF: Until 1964. It was on the departure of Mike and Joanne that we adopted the upper flat and the place became a bigger party area than ever. We really had everything. And these Christmas parties became bigger and bigger, and we could open up all four flats. And we had not only one band, we had two bands. It was really great fun. And of course Nell and Bob Howard, now that focus point for socializing had sort of eased off from the Francisco address, he and Nell sort of backed the financing for our parties. The one other major figure that I should mention in this context was Bruce.

PK: Bruce Conner.

JDF: I met him when Michael and Joanne were there. I always found the poets more sympathetic and knowledgeable about painting than "the dumb-fuck painters" were about poetry. Anyway, Mike was very interested in painting and he liked my stuff a lot. And of course, he was a very good friend of Bruce's and they both grew up in Kansas. For a long time there was this marvelous talk that "Bruce is coming, Bruce is coming". I used to have dreams about all these crates of Bruce Conner's paintings coming. Honest to god dreams. And by God, one day, all these trunks came full of Bruce Conner's paintings, preceding his own arrival. Bruce came on the scene a little bit later, in his own dramatic way, as you can well imagine. Mike would tell me all these wild tales about his friend Bruce and how they really turned the campus upside down. I can really believe it. When all of his stuff came, I looked at his paintings and I had nothing but admiration for the things that he did. I marveled at the skill of such a young artist.

PK: What were they like then?

JDF: The ones I remember in particular-in fact one drawing was in the de Young show at the museum-a very early, kind of winged figure. A very delicate pen and ink, Geryon. I remember one thing in particular, perhaps because I was oriented in that way. It was a crucifix, actually quite literal, if I remember correctly, it was literally Christ dying on the cross. The two drawings were very different, one from the other, but the ones I remember in particular showed a skill that I never personally possessed. They were kind of early Renaissance looking things, very skillful in draftsmanship.

PK: He's a terrific draftsman.

JDF: I was really bowled over by this. It's this lack in my own self in terms of expression that I've always deplored. Everything I've ever done that required draftsmanship has come by the absolute sweat of my brow. I don't have a natural gift for it. And I think you really have to. It takes skill, it takes practice certainly, and it takes education. But having been given all these things, I don't really think I would have had that natural thing that Bruce has. I try to excuse myself a little bit by saying that they didn't even have life drawing when I was at the University of California, which was, in fact, the case. But I've had students in my own classes and some of them have a natural bent for it and others don't. So you do with what you've got. You make mud pies if you can't do the other stuff. But anyway, Bruce was an important figure during this period. But that gives you a chronological rundown of who actually lived in the place. However, I did miss out on one thing. After Joan and Bill split up, Manuel moved in and they lived there together for quite some time. And then, after Joan and Manuel moved out, Dave Getz, later to become Big Brother of the Holding Company, moved in with his girlfriend, Cathy Cook.

PK: Not Janis Joplin.

JDF: Not Janis Joplin. That would have been too much. It was bad enough having Dave Getz living there learning to play the drums.

PK: Wasn't he actually a painter?

JDF: He was a very fine painter. He got his Master's in painting at the California School of Fine Arts. And he was really looked upon with enormous respect and promise.

PK: But then he dropped it.

JDF: He later taught there for a year. I don't think he had played an instrument up until that time, but he just fell into this little group that Wally had called the Studio 13 Jazz Band. Bill, of course, played the trumpet and Bill took a great interest in playing the drums. Boy, I'll never forget those sessions. But it was fun. I really liked living next to them.

PK: Did Ed Moses live there for a while? He was in San Francisco and had contact with some of those people.

JDF: Not to my knowledge. There were a lot of people who were sort of in and out. As a matter of fact, Jim Newman-we saw him a lot on social occasions, but he had a different kind of social thing going for him that we didn't participate in a great deal.

PK: Probably Pacific Heights.

JDF: Could be. Eventually Jim and Walter had a falling out. They just didn't make it together. There was some conflict. I don't think they got along as personalities. Simultaneously, Walter and Irving Blum got together. As far as my own work is concerned, this gets into a whole different subject, I found myself aligned with several places at once and there was a great deal of confusion as to whom my work belonged and where my loyalties lay.

PK: We should get into that in detail later. That is important to discuss. You laid in a nice view of the residents of the Fillmore Street tenements. I don't want to belabor this, but I have the feeling that there was something special-I may be wrong. I may be taking a romantic view of the whole situation.

JDF: Oh, do, do.

PK: But there was an interaction.

JDF: There was some excitement there.

PK: And what I keep looking for as an art historian is perhaps a sharing of ideas.

JDF: You're coming to the wrong person for that in a way. I can get excited about that up to a point, but when you're right in the middle of something, you don't really-I don't remember a lot of us getting together and doing a lot of art talk. On a very personal level, between Joan and I for instance, or between Sonia and I when she was living next door to us, there was a lot of exchange because we were painting next door to each other and we'd see each other at the end of a good day or bad day as the case may be. So in that case, there may be an exchange, not just of social talk, but talk about our work. But when we all got together socially, I think that's the last thing in the world that we talked about. As a matter of fact, I got a sort of flavor from Sonia. She was really very much a New Yorker by spirit. And the feeling I got from her was the difference between our way of living out here-

PK: It wasn't serious.

JDF: It wasn't serious. It was through her that I sensed the climate of this hard core professional, commercial-almost tense art community-the way she painted the picture for me of the New York attitude. She really found it dull and unstimulating-altogether too relaxed-the way we work here. She for one would like to get together socially and just talk art, art, art.

PK: Heavy intellectual conversations.

JDF: She wasn't thoroughly intellectual necessarily, but this was the whole focal point of her existence. This is not to say that the rest of us were any less serious. We just didn't feel that we had to do it all day and talk about it the rest of the night.

PK: Well what does stick with you from this period.

JDF: Well, there are a lot of personal things.

PK: Is there any of that that's relevant, that you want to talk about?

JDF: There's a lot that I want to talk about in terms of the things that happened in my own work. What I've given you is just-

PK: A picture of the context, certainly.

JDF: Yes. There were personal differences between Sonia and me that cause me a lot of emotional strain-I wouldn't talk about it but it influenced my work a lot.

PK: How was that?

JDF: This is kind of one of those touchy areas that you kind of have to talk a little about because it explains a lot of things that altered my work. But first of all, I have to get back to the ranch. I told you that Sonia came to see me in the first place because she found that there was a great similarity in our work. This has been often true with other artists, but in my own case, I had never even thought about it. I was always such an individualist. I never really fell in with any school of painting. You can usually say that somebody paints in sort of the same group as somebody else. This had never really been the case with me. Well, this started out as a very stimulating thing for me and for her too, I think. But ultimately, it ended in a break in our friendship. For one thing, I started doing my most serious work during this period. Now in those days, being an abstract expressionist meant that if you didn't do two or three things in one day, at least you did one. I still had a spontaneous attitude toward the act of painting-but the ideas became increasingly slow in execution and concepts slower in growth. Things didn't happen in a single day. There was a very peculiar thing that happened to Sonia and me. There are similarities in our paintings, but in retrospect, I don't think they are as similar as I thought at the time. But we had this continual feedback-both being on the opposite sides of the wall. It was kind of a funny thing that happened psychologically. It didn't only happen with painting. We'd actually go downtown separately at the same time and come back with the same pair of shoes. Something like that. And it got to be a very touchy situation. I'm saying that hypothetically, because I don't know if that really happened, but there were a lot of funny things that happened simultaneously between us that became a very unconscious thing, but I became increasingly conscious of and disturbed by it. And another basic difference in personality was that Sonia was a very aggressive person and very swift in her painting, and she did do a painting every day. Often times our ideas would overlap to the point where I would go over and see her, and there would be the painting before my eyes that was still in a germinal state in my head. If you can understand what kind of an impact this had on me psychologically for one thing, it kind of robbed me of my identity, and it also took the joy of discovery away from me, because that's largely the excitement in painting-this groping for the idea.

PK: That's remarkable that that would happen, though.

JDF: I really felt very strongly about this, and at the same time we were kind of lumped together by many people in the social scene who put us together as two painters who painted alike, more so than we actually did. But again, she continued to live there. My own kind of sensitive personality became more and more sensitive. She became more and more aggressive. There were certain things that I actually don't even remember now. But Sonia has been known to be almost irrational at times. Just the way she would react socially. If she wasn't happy with the way her paintings were hung, she'd have a big temper tantrum. She just had a volatile personality. Again, I'm not that kind of person unless I'm really driven to it. It's not a criticism of her. I'm just trying to draw a contrast between two people, and this thing kind of grew until we weren't getting along very well. I did have an enormous respect for her work. But I found myself being intimidated, perhaps-something that had never happened before. She would come over and say, this is no good, or this is good. And I'd really start listening to it and taking it seriously. And it got to the point where I was starting to get really depressed over it. Well, after her mother died and she made the decision to move to New York, I really was the most relieved girl in the world. It did upset me for a long time. And for the record, this is the rumor that came back to me. Some of it may not be nice to say, but nevertheless these are the facts. When I did have my show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York she circulated a petition saying that I had taken all my ideas from her, and took it to Dorothy Miller at the Museum there, who laughed about it.

PK: That document, if it isn't already there, will appear in the Archives of American Art to substantiate you.

JDF: Getting her out of San Francisco was a great relief to me. But I want to go on record as saying that there probably was some mutual influence between us. It would be impossible to think not, because our ideas were going along similar channels, but our whole way of working, our whole personalities were so vitally different.

PK: Well, how did this affect your work?

JDF: It affected my work to the point-I hate to have to admit this, but it really is the truth-I found myself

intimidated by her. When she'd come over and say this is a weak painting, some of them I actually painted out on her word alone. A few I didn't and later I was damned glad I didn't because after I recovered I realized I really did have faith in this thing. Her husband Jim was a great source of inspiration to me. He took me aside one time-these were the days when people weren't spending a long time on things. Jim was one of those unique painters who did. He would spend up to six months on something occasionally, and this was almost unheard of in those days. He was very comforting to me. He knew that I was very depressed about this, and he said once when I went over there almost in tears, "Even if you destroy a painting, it is never really forgotten-that idea will find its own proper context in your work."

[END OF SESSION 2.]

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TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH JAY DE FEO (3)

AT THE ARTIST'S HOME, LARKSPUR, CALIFORNIA

DATE: JANUARY 23, 1976

INTERVIEWER: PAUL J. KARLSTROM

JDF: JAY DE FEO

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

PK: Last time we talked a lot about your residences and your moving around-your personal relationships on Fillmore Street, your studio and the different people in residence there. What I'd like to get into today is your work and maybe we could start by telling me a little bit about your exhibitions, starting with the first show you had.

JDF: I must have mentioned early on the tapes that there were several small shows here and there when I returned from Europe. Nothing of any great stature, but during the North Beach period, I had a show at The Place. That was perhaps the first public recognition I had. Between that time, which I guess was 1954 or thereabouts, I really had no formal showings with the exception of an occasional group show, until I think 1958 or '59, at the Dilexi. I had been asked, I think around '56, to show at the Art Institute, but I felt at the time I wasn't quite ready. In retrospect, I think that I possibly could have done it, but I'm not sorry that I didn't. Speaking as we did formerly of James Kelly, I let him take over my spot at the Art Institute. So actually, I guess it was about 1958 or '59 when I was approached by Jim Newman and I think at that time he was still connected with Walter Hopps-I'm not positive. I did, of course, meet with some success and some of it circumstantial in that Dorothy Miller just so happened to be out talent scouting at the time from New York. She happened to see the paintings and liked them very much. She came to the studio and decided to include me as well as Wally in the "16 Americans" show in New York at the Museum of Modern Art. And at the same time, the one large collector who has acquired the majority of my early pieces, J. Patrick Lannon, happened to be in town at the same time. He also saw the show.

PK: Was Lannon living in New York?

JDF: He has several residences. Dorothy and he knew each other, but they didn't know they were going to be in town at the same time. Anyway, he purchased a number of paintings from the Dilexi show.

PK: Were those your first important sales?

JDF: The first and probably the last. Let's face it. [Laughs] But when the "16 Americans" show occurred in New York, he also purchased a few from that. From the Dilexi, the paintings went straight to the Museum of Modern Art. I guess some approval was there. Wally and I didn't really realize the stature and the prestige of being included in such a show. I was really unaware of the situation. It surprises many people that we were the only people included in the show who didn't make the effort to go back for the opening. The whole show was kind of a coming out party, I discovered later. It was intended to be for galleries in search of new talent. I was approached by the Stable Gallery through correspondence, which I turned down, because at this stage of the game I had launched into the painting of *The Rose*. To digress for a minute, *The Rose* had commenced about six months prior to the Dilexi showing. Dorothy Miller had come to the studio and was very impressed with *The Rose*, as was J. Patrick Lannon, who then and there offered me ten thousand dollars for it. And she wanted the painting to be included in the Museum of Modern Art show. But I didn't feel I could part with it at that time. It was included in the catalogue, but the painting itself was not in the show. So I recommenced work on it.

PK: What paintings were in the Dilexi show?

JDF: You want the names of them? I have the catalogue.

PK: Well, in that case it can be checked. I'm just trying to establish what type of work-

JDF: In that sense, I think it was a very consistent show, in the way that the recent show at Wenger was a consistent show. But they were very diverse works. One of the major things in the show-are you familiar with the big drawing of the eyes?

PK: Yes.

JDF: Well that was in it, and I always thought that it was rather strange that-I considered it one of the major pieces in the show, but it wasn't one of the ones that Dorothy chose to send back to New York.

PK: That's the painting that's based on a Philip Lamantia poem?

JDF: Yes, it's a drawing, actually. And there was one large painting that I called *The Annunciation* that I had done about six months prior to the show. *Origin*, which I considered a very important painting. No, no, *Origin* wasn't in that show, I don't think. It was included in a group show afterwards. But it was done during that period. I was doing very large, very tall drawings at this time. A combination of pencil and white paint. There were several of those. All of them are listed in the catalogue, so I don't really think it's all that important here. My chronology isn't all that complex, to tell you the truth. We had the show in New York. Also, that same year I had a showing at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, which Walter was in charge of. It consisted, not of the works in the Dilexi show, but of earlier things that were done when I was in Florence or when I just got back. A number of smaller things. I never attended that show either. Nor did I go to the opening. I remember they telephoned me on opening night and we had some communication. But that was about the end of it. I've always had a thing about openings. I've never enjoyed them. Mine or anyone else's. Anyway, I think that that was one of the major shows, although I was so separate from the handling of it that I sometimes forget that it occurred.

PK: This was a one-person show at the Ferus.

JDF: Yes, I think so. Although there might have been two people in the show.

PK: This was I imagine about '59.

JDF: 1960 or thereabouts. There are records of these things somewhere, but I get very confused about the exact dates.

PK: You had already had the show at the Dilexi Gallery with Jim Newman. Then I gather Walter Hopps had contacted you.

JDF: By this time they had split. Walter had gone south to the Ferus. They were no longer connected. I don't know if Irving Blum was with him at the time as yet. That happened maybe a bit later. Walter would come and select things, and there were significant group shows that happened in the L.A. neighborhood, and something they called the "Merry-Go-Round" show.

PK: Right. You were in that.

JDF: Right. The painting that was in that show is now rotting in the basement. All of this about the Archives and everything, but there's a couple of famous De Feo's in the basement that nobody seems interested in saving.

PK: That's a sad thing to have to say.

JDF: As a matter of fact, the companion painting to *The Rose*, which I call *The Jewel*, I started simultaneously. I have a few fragmentary photographs of it still remaining. Like many of my paintings, I started a pair of two opposite ideas. In *The Rose*, everything kind of recedes into the center, and *The Jewel*, which I didn't quite finish, was actually started in very deep reds and came out from the center toward the edges. It's still down there rotting. But somewhere along the line it got abandoned as my attention went completely to *The Rose* during this period.

PK: Well, was *The Jewel* the one that was in the Merry-Go-Round show?

JDF: No. It was another one.

PK: What was your arrangement with Walter Hopps, or for that matter, Jim Newman?

JDF: We were talking earlier before we started taping about the relationship between galleries and artists, and I suppose my relationship with galleries started to be altogether too casual. It was complicated by the fact, as you

probably know, that Walter and Jim had originally been in this business together, and later separated. So this found me dealing with two separate galleries. Formerly, I had only been with the Dilexi and Walter branched out into the Ferus Gallery.

PK: Actually it was the other way around. Ferus preceded the Dilexi.

JDF: Well, however it was, I found my allegiance kind of separated then. There was no conflict. It's just that I, as well as many other people, had been too casual in our relationship in the galleries. Not only did we not have any contracts, but I for one, neglected to take count of what paintings they had of mine, or whatever happened to them. And gradually, all those records have been lost. I'm not saying that anyone tried purposely to take advantage of me. Those records were just lost, and many of those things I did during those days, I'll probably never see again. I don't really know where they are.

PK: Well, let's take one thing at a time. Why don't you tell me about your relationship with the Ferus Gallery?

JDF: It started with the showing of those early works I did in Europe and when I'd just come back from Europe. My relationship with the Ferus Gallery was in the ensuing years, prior to finishing *The Rose*, which was a period of prolonged confidence and support on the part of the Ferus Gallery in regard to the painting of *The Rose*. At one time, to digress again, Irving and Walter did separate. Walter went down to become the director of the Pasadena Museum. But I continued to be represented by Irving. For quite a time there, I was actually getting some monthly allowance to help me pay paint bills.

PK: Well, were they selling your works?

JDF: Not to my knowledge.

PK: This was just an investment in the eventual sale of *The Rose*.

JDF: Yes. To my knowledge, nothing was ever sold through them. Although Irving bought one of the major works, *The Veronica*, as a kind of means of support. At the time, I felt much freer not having any definitive agreement. In fact, I felt a little more free in that there wasn't a written out obligation to the galleries. There was kind of an unwritten agreement between us. It was an act of faith on the part of the galleries. There wasn't much confidence expressed in me by many people at that time, because as you realize, the painting went on and on and on and on. A lot of people figured that it never would get finished, that I never really wanted to finish it. And it went through stage after stage, each really quite complete in itself, but it was not the definitive stage I was aiming at. This was all on an unconscious level.

PK: During this period, then, the Ferus Gallery, or the people who were in charge of it at the time, whether it was Walter Hopps or Irving Blum, were your greatest source of support during that project.

JDF: Oh, yes.

PK: Did this sort of loose, informal arrangement eventually create any problems?

JDF: Only inasmuch that I lost track of many of my earlier works. At one stage of the game-again, I have to touch a little bit on the personal-there was a rift between Irving and Walter. Eventually when Walter got connected with the Pasadena Museum and some of my things were still at the Ferus, for one reason or another I never have been able to understand, I had a little bit of difficulty with Irving retrieving some of the things I had down there. I received little response by correspondence or by telephone. Finally, John Humphrey was instrumental in getting some of those early things back for me.

PK: So you did recover them.

JDF: Most of them. Some of them, Walter still has. They were there when I went down with *The Rose*, and I think he still has them with him. I've never questioned it. Those things are just unofficially his.

PK: In a way you were part of the Ferus stable for a while. Did you have any direct contact with the Ferus group?

JDF: Sort of from a distance. We were talking about Ed.

PK: Ed Kienholz.

JDF: And Billy Al Bengston, and John Altoon. I'm trying to think of other names. These were native Southern California people, of course. And I would become associated with them when they would come to the city. I had never even been down there until finally *The Rose* was taken down there. Southern California was just a fictional area, as far as I was concerned. But they seemed to do quite a bit of traveling. Whenever they came up to the city, they'd drop by the studio. And the same, of course, with Wally Berman and Shirley, although I don't think-

yes, they were part of the Ferus Gallery, too, or Wally was.

PK: Well, they certainly gave him an important show.

JDF: Yes, that was the notorious show that got busted.

PK: Ed Kienholz, with Walter Hopps, was a founder of the Ferus Gallery.

JDF: Was he a founder?

PK: Yes, it started out with Ed and Walter.

JDF: You seem to know more about it than I do.

PK: Well, of course, I just talked with Ed recently. After a short period of time they separated, amicably, I might add.

JDF: I'm sure they did.

PK: Was Ed actually involved with the Ferus Gallery when you were being shown there?

JDF: Well, I think so.

PK: Did he ever come with Walter to select works?

JDF: No, frankly I don't remember him coming in that capacity necessarily. I just thought of him as another artist that was involved with it. Frankly, that's news to me. I didn't realize that they were actually-or else I didn't recall.

PK: Is there anything more you can say about your contact with Ferus, the artists themselves?

JDF: I can't say that I ever knew them intimately. They were more or less acquaintances that you looked forward to seeing when they were in town. I was enthusiastic about their work. It was a mutual thing with us all. But I didn't have any close connections with them, because they all lived in the same vicinity. I never did move, as say Wallace Berman moved back and forth. But we kind of reestablished closer relations when I moved down to Pasadena briefly after leaving Fillmore Street. I saw some of them again.

PK: We keep touching on this as a pivotal experience-the moving of *The Rose* to Pasadena.

JDF: In my brief experience with analysis last year, my analyst asked me why this was such a pivotal point in my life. [Laughs] It took six months to get it across to him. I'll try not to spend that long with you.

PK: Maybe we should talk about *The Rose*, something about the conception itself-of the painting and the ideas.

JDF: As I said before, I'm left with a complete blank when somebody asks me about the philosophical and metaphysical things that it implies. I'll let *The Rose* speak for itself in that regard. But as far as its conception is concerned, all of my early work is a building up of a vocabulary that went into the conception of the thing. And not too long before starting the painting, I was considering doing a series of paintings based on-we were all interested in mountain climbing and things of that nature. But I think the subject matter just kind of lent itself to the abstract expressionist movement.

PK: Mountain forms and jagged peaks?

JDF: Yes, that sort of thing. James Kelly was doing the same sort of thing. Wally was interested in reading about these things. That imagery was the beginning of my very heavy black and white period. I think some of that influenced *The Rose* a bit. But in the beginning, the original canvas was painted over one of those old mountain paintings. One of the ones that never quite made it.

PK: Did you start out with the idea that a new painting was going to grow out of this image?

JDF: No, no. It was just an old canvas that was handy. As a matter of fact, there was another one-night stand painting underneath it called *Jacob and the Angel*, which never came off either. That was painted out. Then I got the notion of an idea that had a center to it. And to digress just a trifle again, I had been working on some very large drawings of roses. Huge ones. Eleven foot ones, a couple of which were in the Dilexi show. And the rest of them were finally destroyed. But when I started *The Rose*, I had no notion of *The Rose* about it. The title came later. It was just a painting. And all I knew about it was that it was going to have a center. When I started, it wasn't a symmetrical thing. It was off-center. After working on it for six months, this was the stage at which Dorothy Miller saw it. This was the stage at which it was reproduced in the "16 Americans" catalogue. After six

months of working on the thing, I decided that the canvas should be symmetrical and it wasn't really the right proportions. With the help of Bruce Conner and Wally and a couple of other good buddies, we transferred the original canvas and glued it on to a larger format the format that it's on presently. So the format started expanding beyond the original sized canvas. That's when it really started going in earnest. It went through, I would suggest, a lifespan, a chronology of different stages. The first stage was reproduced in the museum's catalogue. It's almost like an infancy period. One could consider it almost complete in itself. If I had had-I don't know whether I would have done this; somehow or another all this had to go on a single canvas-but if I had the facilities and a large number of canvases, I could have easily had a complete showing of the different stages and the metamorphoses it went through. Anyway, I'd say there was that first beginning stage. And then there was a very geometric stage. This is generally some of the information that I've already told Merrill Greene about it. It was actually kind of a crystalline sort of thing. In this period, it was reproduced in *Holiday* as well as *Look* magazine. There are no curved forms whatsoever. It's very, very geometric. There were even sticks introduced to support it in a very geometric way. But then that didn't seem to satisfy me, although that did seem a complete stage in itself. It held up visually as another version of the concept. Then it started getting much more organic in character, which pleased me. Although the structure of the thing remained, in the final version, I then started the interweaving of organic shapes. It actually went far beyond the finished state that you know it as now. It went into a super-baroque period that's reproduced in the catalogue. Very, very flamboyant. I really wasn't aware of how flamboyant it had become. I had been so involved in the thing, and suddenly I walked into the studio one day, and the whole thing seemed to have gotten completely out of hand. I felt that it really needed to be pulled back to something more classic in character. That again, became a kind of tearing back of the thing. Every time this happened, it was the work of a sculptor as well as a painter, because of the nature of the material. It actually had to be carved and hacked. It was a very hard physical job.

PK: How did you carve it?

JDF: Well, I just had to hack away at it. It was done with a combination of building up and tearing back during every stage of the game. More than once, it was removed to the original canvas. People sometimes think this was just gradually built up over the years, and so it was, but more than once, the whole thing was scraped down to the canvas. And the whole thing commenced from a scratch. The curious thing about the concept-well, this can be true of any painting-but when you see one area, and you think that this is causing the trouble, and it turns out to be something else altogether. There were many optical illusions going on in it. To make such a mistake could set you back a year or two in a project like that.

PK: Why such a commitment, not to the work, but to the original canvas? Wouldn't it have been easier just to start a fresh one?

JDF: Well, there are probably several reasons for that. One is that you feel you've put in such a time investment in the thing. You're quite right. I say this to my students. Rather than fighting the surface, tearing it all back, wouldn't it just be easier to start a new one? But I think psychologically speaking, you feel you haven't lost anything if you continue the work on the same canvas. That's on one level.

PK: And of course the ideas would have evolved to that point that would have allowed you to move to the next one.

JDF: There's also that you want to see the whole experience as part of a single support. There was also the limitation of space, and the awkwardness and expense of building another support. That was a factor involved. For instance, if I would have had the wherewithal of Sam, I'd be able to have an enormous studio and be able to line up canvases and go from one to another. I think it's deterred me a great deal in my creative life to be limited to a small area with a single work, because you lose a little bit of freshness and objectivity. That's the current problem I'm having down here. I'm wanting very much to work on a series of things simultaneously, and it's impossible to do so with the space limitations. But as I say, I don't know whether I would have done that with *The Rose* or not. The one thing I did do was start the other painting, *The Jewel*, as a kind of counterpart to the idea. It helped me objectify both concepts. Two things that were similar, but not identical, in spirit.

PK: *The Rose*. When did the title come, and why?

JDF: J. Patrick Lannon had sort of a sentimental title for it-*The Endless Road*. [Laughs] Which turned out to be more fact than fiction. When the title finally clicked with me, *The Rose*, the first version is called *The Death Rose*, which is what appears in the brochure. But I soon realized that this was too melodramatic, and besides, it didn't define what the idea meant to me. Death has kind of a negative connotation. I wanted the sense that *The Rose* was as much an aspect of life as death, and so for that reason, I later changed the title to *The White Rose*, which was synonymous with kind of a life image. In the final version, I just left off both. I called it *The Rose*, which was the unity of both of those opposite ideas.

PK: Does *The Rose* have to do with the image itself, or has it to do with growth and growing?

JDF: You can say all kinds of things about it. I think people can just-

PK: Obviously, there was some reason that you chose it.

JDF: There's a history of symbolism in regard to *The Rose*. Somebody just presented me with an excerpt from Cirlot who has done work with symbols and their meanings. And historically speaking, I'm sure you're aware that *The Rose* has been an important symbol in all kinds of paintings. I was never really conscious of that. I've never been conscious of that. It's always been rather amazing to me to read these things in retrospect. "Ah-ha, yes, that's true about my Rose too." How many petals mean this or that, or the color. It has a basic mandala image, which is again, an image that's been universally used since we can remember. It's sort of an archetypal form that artists have drawn upon. But in regards to the philosophical, I'm just not the kind of person who would care to intellectualize about it. Because it's after the fact for me. I feel that it's rich in that content. It's a question of what you want to draw out of it.

PK: It's not really an illustration of an idea in that sense. Say, a philosophical idea.

JDF: *The Rose* is a symbol, and yet when it got to that more organic stage, it became an abstraction of a rose. It does relate very definitely to the way actual rose petals are formed and how they relate to each other in the flower.

PK: You mentioned that before you started *The Rose*, you were involved in a series of rose drawings. Were you familiar with or attracted to Georgia O'Keeffe's work?

JDF: I've always liked her. I feel that she probably is motivated, much as I am myself, by natural forms, and I think I respond to them much as she does. Perhaps there is some parallel between us in that regard. There's one other thing I want to make a point of without going into it in great detail. I'd like to do in the future a kind of diagram illustrating the relationships between some of the early works that I've done. One of the very important early paintings of mine is called *Origin*, and another is called *Veronica*. Then comes *The Rose*. Now all of those three paintings I think of as a triptych although they didn't occur simultaneously, but over a period of time. They all draw upon plant forms of some sort. With the exception of *The Rose*, they are not named after plants, but they all draw upon forms in nature that are similar to each other. *Origin* is a symbol of beginning and *Veronica*, which the San Francisco Museum has, is actually named after a pass in bullfighting, but the forms themselves are very, very floral. It stands for me as a kind of middle painting, another stage of growth. And then *The Rose*, seen in this perspective, is the full-blown, mature version. So I do see my things over a period of time, related to each other in time. Even though they weren't done simultaneously. I'm doing things now that relate strongly to the continuing of early concepts, with great breaks in between, but I see a continuity there and keep it in mind when I'm working.

PK: You dropped the "Death" from the title of the *Death Rose*. Did you ever talk to Ed Kienholz about his concepts of death as the subject of art? He feels, very briefly, that that's what his work is about-not in a morbid sense, but as an affirmation of life. Death is a condition of life.

JDF: Well, that's the way I considered *The Rose*. I think you phrased it as well as I could phrase it-just in those terms. It was neither a negative nor a positive thing-it was all inclusive. You can't leave out one without the other.

PK: Did you ever discuss these ideas with Kienholz?

JDF: Not to my knowledge. It's been so many years, we just may have, but not to my recollection. It's a classic theme that artists have always dealt with. I don't think it's unusual that it should crop up with more than one artist at any given time.

PK: Well, the thing that happened with *The Rose* was then a coming together of circumstances. I gather that you and Wally were evicted and it had to be moved.

JDF: That's as accurate as you can get. I think a little more accurate would be to say we were just plain kicked out. But what happened was-we lived on the verge of being kicked out all through these years. That's what made the painting of the darned thing kind of a cliffhanger, along with the expense and the rest of it. But the building was basically condemned and we were constantly living in dread of the building inspectors coming and really giving us the final word on it. But what finally happened was that the building changed owners, and of course the new owner wanted to clean up the building and rent it for higher rents. We probably had a case legally, but we didn't know it at the time. He just doubled the rent on us, and told us to get out in 30 days or less. Our rent was going to be \$300, not whatever it had been; \$125 I think was all we paid for those two huge apartments.

PK: Now this was in 1964.

JDF: Yes. Fortunately, it was a miracle that I was finally getting to the stage I wanted on the painting-what no one thought was going to happen and what I myself was starting to have great doubts about. But I had faith in the fact that I would finally get to the version I wanted.

PK: You mean you were on the verge at this moment-you weren't actually there.

JDF: I was there, I just didn't have the refinements I wanted on the painting. But the final version is as you see it on the reproductions. I felt that it needed a little more clarity, not only in the linear way, but in the relationship of the textures. I wanted more smoother areas in contrast to some of the rough edges that occurred. It always has troubled me, but I think I was pretty lucky to have been able to stay on long enough in that studio in order to get to that stage of the game. So it was practically as good as finished when we got evicted. Of course, that was the marathon month of moving. We had nowhere to go, so Wally came across a friend whose father owned some property in Ross (Stephen Goldstine, now director of the Art Institute). So we spent a month of backbreaking labor moving our stuff out to a huge barn. Wally was doing some very big heavy sculptures. All of our supplies and all of the old paintings, and our personal belongings, and so forth. We moved all of that stuff out to Ross. The last to go was *The Rose*. Walter supervised this. He came up from Los Angeles and took a look at it. Wally and he conferred and called up Bekins.

PK: Walter came up with the intention of moving the painting for exhibition at the Pasadena Museum.

JDF: Yes. But the idea was that the painting had to be moved, and it couldn't be moved to Ross, and the less times it had to be moved, the better-both for our sakes and the painting itself, as well as the enormous expense that moving it entailed. So I might mention here that it was Dorothy Miller at the Museum of Modern Art who suggested that the painting go directly to New York. And J. Patrick Lannon expressed a desire to purchase it when and if it was ever completed. But I felt, (and I'm really not sorry about this, although it may have been more sensible if I had agreed for the painting to go directly to New York) somewhat of an allegiance to the Ferus Gallery because they had given me so much support. I felt I owed both Walter and Irving a West Coast showing of *The Rose*. It was initially Walter's discovery. He kept close track of the painting from the beginning. I remember he and Irving coming the first week that I started it. Somehow or another, they sensed in it, as I did, that it really was going to be one of the important ideas in my life. And they stuck with it all those years. So I felt they really deserved a showing of it here.

PK: Was there any chance or hope at the time that Pasadena would purchase the work?

JDF: Yes. Walter very much wanted it for the Pasadena Museum. Now we're getting into the complications that ensued. I had never even once been down to Pasadena. I had never even seen the museum. I didn't have any understanding of what the circumstances were. One of the things we had to reconcile ourselves to was the fact that Walter was so completely dedicated to the goal of having *The Rose* in the Pasadena Museum that no expense and no sacrifice was too great. I found out only later that the project was costing the Museum far more than it could actually afford. I found myself during this period really caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. It's necessary to say here that as soon as the painting was removed, this triggered off the breakup of our marriage, and Wally moved over to Ross where all of our belongings were, and I had nowhere to go. So the idea was at the time that I would go with the painting to Pasadena and stay down there for a brief period of time and attempt to put on the final details, if that were possible. So Walter came up and conferred with Wally about the moving of the thing. This is before Wally and I knew that we were breaking up, however. The first people we had contact with was Bekins. Just to give Bekins a plug here, they did a magnificent job. They came over a week ahead of time and sized up the situation which is absolutely unique. They'd never moved anything or seen anything like it.

PK: Most people don't have furniture like that.

JDF: Even Mr. Bekins himself came. In fact, John, didn't you say that he lived in Sausalito?

PK: Mr. Bekins himself? His name is Bekins?

JDF: This was news to me when John told me. I said this isn't the real Mr. Bekins, it's just somebody who represents him. I choose to think of it as Mr. Bekins. I never really asked, but he looked the part along with all of his workers in their darling white uniforms with the label in the back that are so prominent in Bruce's movie. Here's this businessman that came along with them-dressed in tie and immaculate suit and all this and looking very official and very efficient. And indeed he was. I really have to hand it to them. They made several trips to the studio that week. They sized it up and thought of all the possibilities and the best possible way of handling this. And, of course, this was all conjecture on their part because they'd never really handled anything like this before. It had to be wedged out of a very tight window out in the front with no leeway whatsoever. They did everything at the warehouse. They built the crate for it and they made all the arrangements, so actually when

they came to do the job everything was in order. Bruce was there with his camera.

PK: That's Bruce Conner, of course.

JDF: Yes. I don't know what the name of that equipment is, but you've seen in the movie that platform that they had to raise and the special equipment.

PK: Well, didn't the wall actually have to be removed?

JDF: It sounds a little more dramatic than it actually was. It was about two feet below the window that had to be cut out so that the painting could be moved in front. All this was done in the space of an afternoon. The painting was eased out, just as the wall shows, and the wall came down. Later, I gave that part of the wall to Walter. I took it down on the plane and presented it to him. It's a marvelous sculpture in itself. All this chicken wire.

PK: Who replaced the wall?

JDF: Well, they had a regular carpenter along with them. You see him in the movie, working. Just as in the movie, you see someone sweeping up the last crumbs from the sidewalk. This was the marvelous drama of the thing. I think that Walter was somewhat responsible for this. A small truck could have done the job, but they sent over the biggest van that Bekins had for it. And the whole thing went down to Pasadena. And getting back to the poor Pasadena Museum again and about the expenses. Nowadays that doesn't seem like a hell of a lot-what *The Rose* had cost everybody, but \$2000 for moving the painting from San Francisco to Pasadena was a hell of a lot of money. And it still is. But now it's estimated that it will cost \$2500 just to move it from the Art Institute to the San Francisco Museum. I wonder now what it would cost to move it down to Pasadena. This was the first thorn in the side of the Pasadena Museum. It got billed for the moving of the painting. And not only that, it got me too.

PK: They hadn't bargained for that.

JDF: I know. Imagine the scene, if you will, not realizing that the Pasadena Museum wasn't-well, you know, I had it pictured sort of like the Smithsonian or something, whereas in fact-

PK: A little old Chinese building.

JDF: Right. It looks like Grauman's Chinese Theatre or something, or so it did before I got down there. It was one of a long list of galleries or museums that closed as soon as I'd had a show. But anyway, it resembled more a large gallery than it did a small museum. It was run on a shoestring, which again, most museums are. But I wasn't aware of that. The staff was terrific, really nice people. Jim Demetrian and Barbara Berman, handpicked by Walter to be co-workers. And I guess he did innovate quite a lot. Marcel Duchamp had his big show there not too long before I went down.

PK: You were in good company.

JDF: Oh, indeed. I think Walter had fantasies about *The Rose* in connection with Duchamp. At any rate, I had nowhere else to go. And Walter had a large house there and he had just broken up with his wife who later married Irving Blum. It think this was a part of the delicate situation that existed between them. Well, he had a whole separate apartment on his house there. And there was another sculptor, I forget his name, who also lived there and had his studio there. So there were two separate living quarters, besides his own living quarters. It was very convenient. I was even within walking distance to the Museum. It was really a large apartment-about five good sized rooms. So I would go down to the Museum every day. Just imagine my picture in this small, intimate museum. They gave me a little room directly to the right of the entrance. It was my little cell of solid black. The only light was a little grate. If you peered up you could see the sidewalk or see light coming through. It reminded me of being interred in medieval days.

PK: You were in a basement?

JDF: It wasn't a basement. But the blackness of the whole thing was like being in solitary confinement. I think they had painted it black for a photography show that preceded my arrival.

PK: To please you, probably.

JDF: [Laughs] It didn't have a very constructive effect on my morale. But anyway, it was all furnished-complete with a chaise and all the comforts of home and a bar and everything. And my own special key to the museum. They were really terrific to me. But all these turpentine fumes would come wafting out into the museum proper and then there was the expense of me being there and the weekly journey back to San Francisco, if you can believe that, so that I could maintain the class I was teaching at the Art Institute.

PK: How long did that go on?

JDF: This went on three months. And I tell you, going there in the first place, with the very unpleasant personal situation in San Francisco, was really being on a honeymoon. It was like a fantasy world. I was eating up all this hospitality. If Walter was busy, Jim Demetrian would take me out to dinner. I would be going here and there and meeting people that I'd always heard about but never really seen before. Walter took me to meet all the artists in the vicinity. And I really enjoyed it. Sam, of course. And I visited Wally Berman whose house had once again almost been demolished by fire, famine or flood. I can't remember what it was in that particular case. This was all the good part of it. All this was like a lovely honeymoon and a great vacation for me after all the years of solitary confinement in my studio. I felt as though the red carpet had been laid out. And indeed it was. But I got terribly sick. I caught what was then called the Asian flu and contaminated the whole museum with it, which didn't add much to my popularity in the long run. It was really terribly ill, and it was a long drawn out thing. The good thing about it was that I lost about 15 pounds. But it did have after effects. I had trouble with my teeth and some kind of palsy that sometimes happens after the flu. The main thing was that I was absolutely unable to work while I was down there. I was still stumbling back to my teaching job-I think I missed a couple of weeks. So during this period I wasn't doing what I should have been doing when I was down there-mainly finishing the last details on *The Rose*. So they were supporting an invalid and they were very gracious about it. Nevertheless, it wasn't the immediate staff, they were terrific to me during the whole period I was there, there's always the people behind the staff who are actually supporting the museum, like the boards of directors and people like that. In all due respect to Walter I have a very fond regard for him and all that, I was in a terribly awkward position. I had nowhere to go up here at the time, and it couldn't help dawning on me that I was putting a terrific strain on the museum financially, that they actually couldn't afford me. There were also things going on in Walter's personal life that made things seem much more complicated. It was a very difficult time for all. I mean, he had just separated from his wife and was in the process of putting together a relationship with another person. All of this strain on top of his position at the museum and his commitment to me and the painting and the fact that I had no alternative at the time but to stay there. It made it all very difficult for everyone.

PK: Were they paying you some kind of stipend?

JDF: They were just more or less supporting me. I had a little help from my mother at the time. None from Wally, of course. I was just kind of living along in limbo. For that matter, I guess it's not inappropriate to say that before I went down there I was just moving from one student's home to another because I just didn't have anywhere else to go at the time. Thanks to their hospitality, I sort of maintained for a time. Then I finally did go to Pasadena about three months later. Again, this was complicated by the fact that I had to look forward to some kind of change in my life. I was even considering staying on down there, maybe teaching at the museum, or something. Trying to pick up the pieces and make a complete change and live down there. But that didn't seem to materialize. It was more practical to come back here. So what happened ultimately was that I did come back and the painting stayed down there. I moved back temporarily to Ross. Wally and I tried to get back together again for a brief period of time but it didn't work out. So we parted-I think on reasonably good terms, and I think we've managed to keep it that way. It seemed the most practical thing to do. We were both teaching at the Art Institute at the time. I thought we should maintain as cordial relationship as possible, and I think we managed to do that over the years. So the painting stayed on down there. All of this was partially responsible for Walter's change, I'm not saying entirely, to another position in the East. Just the general conflict and difficulties that occurred over this whole situation with *The Rose*.

PK: Were you able to do any work on *The Rose*?

JDF: I did a little bit, but actually I think I pulled it back rather than pushing it ahead because a few changes had to be made before I could push it ahead, but I never really got to that stage. But essentially, it really is the same painting as appears on the brochure. The minute changes aren't really visible. Only to myself. But at any rate, I stayed in Ross and Wally moved back to San Francisco. Those were really tough times for me. I continued to teach at the Art Institute and I got an additional class which helped me maintain myself financially during this period. Again, I was pretty isolated and I never did learn to drive, as you know. People would say how could you dream of living in a neighborhood like this without driving? I got a lot of exercise, I must say. But gradually I made mends in my personal life, and once again started painting around 1970. But the painting stayed on in Pasadena. The original intention was for Walter to show the painting down there and hopefully find a buyer for it to donate to the museum. But when he left, it just sort of stayed on in that little room and nothing was done about it. The painting just sat there until about 1978, and it was during this period that they were going to move the museum. The old museum was going to be replaced by the new building. They wanted to have a showing of *The Rose* before they moved. And once again, Jay closed a museum with a show of her work. So I made a reappearance. By this time, I had met John and we were living together happily in Ross. So Barbara and Jim, who replaced Walter as the director of the museum-that's Jim Demetrian I'm talking about. He was in charge of the showing of *The Rose*. I had asked Fred if he would kindly write something for the brochure. And what he wrote surprised me and always struck me as being a little melodramatic, the statement he made on the brochure. And I think it referred a little too heavily to the unhappiness I was going through at that time. But John and I went down there, and the brochure was presented to me and I took it in stride. And they really handled the whole thing beautifully. They showed Bruce's film and they restricted the opening to a limited number of people who

were friends of *The Rose*. People that I knew down there, but not a huge opening by any means. It was a very warm reception, and it was a very nice thing that they did for me. Jim and Barbara were largely responsible for it. They wanted me to stay in the old green hotel where Marcel had stayed. And I threw up my hands and said, "No, I want a TV set in my hotel room." So they switched me over and treated me just like the Prima donna I had always dreamed of being. At least, queen for a day, as it were. After all the hassle of the prehistory of this soap opera, I left Pasadena with very warm thoughts and good feelings. And Walter sent a very kind telegram from the East saying that he was thinking about the opening that night. It was really very nice. Very shortly thereafter, the painting was sent up here and was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

PK: In 1969, I guess.

JDF: That's about it. I shared the show there with Ed Corbett. He was a very well known painter of about a generation older than I. He died shortly thereafter. I had always admired his work and I'd never met him. I felt very flattered to share the museum space as well as the opening with him. He had his retrospective and I had *The Rose* at the museum. Then Fred said, "We've just built the wing on the Art Institute."

PK: This is Fred Martin.

JDF: Yes. And we agreed to move the painting over to the Art Institute which was a place to have some exposure as well as to hang it and store it. Of course, it never really got the proper treatment that it should have over there, but on the other hand, it was agreed that it was also just a storage place. And it was done some-what as a favor to me as well as to the Institute. Fred always took a great interest in the painting, not only Walter. It was an image that was very dear to his heart too. He wanted it at the Art Institute. And of course, it was a place where I was teaching, too. It was very proper and convenient to do that. And it worked out fine, except in view of recent history. Do you have any questions you want to ask me up to this point? I was thinking that the most appropriate thing to do is to go on to the Bruce Conner part of the saga.

PK: I think that could probably be dispatched rather rapidly, because we do have the correspondence on that.

JDF: I'll just briefly terminate it then. I had a show at the Oakland Museum. It was like a comeback for me after all these years. I had done absolutely nothing from the time I finished *The Rose* until 1970. I was repairing my personal life as well as my psyche after the heavy experience that the painting of *The Rose* was. I needed that time to restore some kind of equilibrium and gain some kind of perspective on my life's work and get some feeling of what could naturally come after that. I did start again when John and I moved to a little house in Larkspur. And all of my circumstances here are modest in terms of space, but at least it did afford some studio space within which I could start working again. By this time I had gained some security and peace of mind that made it possible to work again. So in a very modest way, I commenced working.

PK: How long of a period did you remain inactive?

JDF: For about four or five years. I guess I started again in 1969 when we moved here. It had always been said to me, "Well, my God, what are you going to do for an encore after this blockbuster?" I always just figured that you have to just let those things come as they will. It's very curious that when I did start working again, it wasn't with these giant monumental concepts, but I almost went back to my childhood, in a way. I started working with some very simple forms, in many ways very similar to what I did in Europe-things that were shown at the first Fe-rus show down there in 1960. Anyway, it was kind of like relearning your vocabulary. When I started working again, I really had to sit down and work with something on my lap right here in the front room where we're sitting now. To stand down on that porch-my knees started knocking every time I stood up to a large canvas.

PK: You had battle fatigue, it sound like.

JDF: That's really what I had.

PK: The *The Rose* took it completely out of you.

JDF: To some degree, I knew that people were kind of watching me slightly and think-ing, "My goodness, what is she going to come up with now?" And I couldn't let that possess me as a concern. But it did figure as something in the back of my mind. There was a little bit of self consciousness and just a touch of stage fright toward really getting back into it again. But gradually I did. And that first little modest showing I had at the Oakland Museum gave me just the little bit of foo-thold that I needed to start getting into the larger things that ultimately culminated in the Wenger show. But the reason that I bring all this up was not just to fill you in on recent history but in regard to where I left *The Rose* at the Art Institute-it sat there until 1969 or '70. There was some talk about the Oakland Museum purchasing it. I had been in touch with Thomas Aibright, who initially recommended me to the Oakland Museum for this first showing. It amounted to a one-man show in a group of one-man shows. Terry St. John and George Neubert became interested in acquiring the painting for the museum. Now you have all this on record for the Archives anyway, so I won't go into this in a long drawn out way, but this ultimately fell

through because Bruce finally came along, I guess this was about 1973, took a very close look at the painting, brought Tony Rockwell over to see it and it was soon realized that the painting definitely needed restoration before any final placement or purchase could be made. So this is where the long battle on the part of Bruce, to whom I'm forever grateful, took place. I realize that *The Rose* is a part of Bruce's career as well as part of mine. Essentially, I have nothing but gratitude and thoughts of a very good friendship over the years, as far as Bruce is concerned. And in spite of what you tell me today, that he's throwing over the art world, he continues to be a solid source of common sense advice to me. In fact, just in this last episode with the Willis Gallery-that was something that I would always consult him about before I made any moves. I just like to talk things over with him because, as you know, he has a very sound business sense and a very practical way of approaching things. But anyway, he took Tony over there and before I knew anything about it, he was conferring with Tony on the condition of the painting. Of course, you have the report on all the repairs that were necessary and the stages of its restoration, which is not necessary to go into now. But he had talked about this to Tony long before I had ever known about it. It was not until Bruce and I both got a National Endowment fund in 1973 that he first broached the subject. Because he figured that for the first time I could afford to contribute something to restoration, it was well agreed by this time that that was absolutely the last I could give actually. I really couldn't give any more. But I was in the position to give \$1500 worth of my grant as a kind of act of faith to Tony Rockwell, who hasn't of course yet been recompensed for the total amount that he's put into it. It seems probable that with Bruce and I and Tony all having as much of an investment in it as we do, something will happen eventually. And for the record I should say here that the last thing we've heard about it is that there is an effort being made to get the painting back to the museum so that the second stage of the restoration can take place. The first stage has been completed by Tony and his assistants and the painting now has a covering of plaster over the face of it which has added considerably to the weight of it. No longer is it one ton, but two tons. And I was just talking to Phil Linhares the other day and he seems to think that it's not too heavy to wheel out the door, if it were properly done. Although it was Fred's thought that the floor would not hold something of that much weight. Consequently, the estimate of moving the painting from the Art Institute to the San Francisco Museum went up from the \$800 or \$900 that Henry Hopkins had agreed to pay to an estimated \$2500 or more which Henry Hopkins can't afford to pay, at least not at the present time. Again, referring to my talk with Phil, this is news that I haven't even talked to Bruce about, and it's certainly-I'm speaking here to you, tape recorder-it's just an idle rumor. Nothing to count on. But he was referring to a fund, I don't even know exactly what it was, but he was thinking of possibly using just a little bit of it to help *The Rose* out. So that's just a slight op-timistic note on which I could conclude the-

PK: Saga of *The Rose*, to date.

JDF: Again, there's been so many ups and downs that I never count on anything any-more. It's always nice to know that Phil's backing me up, too.

PK: Well, does *The Rose* hang over you in a negative way?

JDF: Not now. It did. I felt kind of released from the thing as soon as Bruce came along and somebody else took an interest in it. But for a while, along with all the other reasons that I've stated, I felt it was absolutely impossible to commence working again until this thing had been disposed of in some way positively-one way or another. I felt this was an unfinished piece of business that I had to settle. Now I feel that it has been settled, in an unsettled way. In the sense that Bruce has come along and somebody besides myself has shown some concern that it is a significant work of art and eventually something has to happen to it. We'll give it some permanent place somewhere. Of course, there was a time when I was feeling very dependent on it as the only source I had financially for the future. Those hopes have been dashed so often that I've sort of ceased thinking of it in that way. I made out a will, by the way, and I've never mentioned this to Bruce, but there's a very clear statement in the will as to what percentage of the sale of the painting would go to Bruce, if and when it should be sold after my demise. This was an unwritten agreement between us, but I wanted this really settled on paper cause I really feel I owe him a great deal. This was done too-this is no secret. Everybody knows that John and I have never married. In the event that I die an untimely death. Jerry Nordland advised me to do this. I would have never thought of it myself, but you never know, do you, what's going to happen. And just thinking, more than likely, the value would go up if I should die. So I wanted to make some arrangement that, whatever my work should be worth at that time, it should go to John instead of just ending being owned by whatever gallery it happens to be residing in at the time.

PK: Well, you want to avoid that, that's for sure.

JDF: Because I've heard of hassles over stuff like that.

PK: Well, what did you actually do during those three, four, five years when you weren't painting?

JDF: Freaking out, mainly. This was my "happening" period. Everyone else was staging happenings during that period. I was living one. Really, for sure.

PK: Well, were you teaching at all?

JDF: Oh yes. I was teaching at the Art Institute. In many ways, I was escaping things, but also, I just needed some time to mend. I lost myself in all kinds of activities-just doing all kinds of crazy, nutty things-meeting all kinds of people. Leading what everybody else would consider an absolutely meaningless, destructive existence. But in retrospect, it's like painting, too. You have to destroy a little bit in order to build a little bit. Looking back on it, it's a wonder I didn't self-destruct altogether, but I seemed to have come out okay. And I have a lot to thank John for, of course.

PK: Well, you were with him at the time?

JDF: Not all of the time. I met him during that period, and he was going through kind of a tough period too. He was going through a period that that whole generation was going through-evading the draft and the whole heaviness of the period was felt strongly by all, but especially by those of his generation. But, again, that all ironed itself out.

PK: So you weren't doing any work at all. That's really remarkable.

JDF: No. I was really doing absolutely nothing. I was meeting lots of people.

PK: Going to parties?

JDF: It was just sort of like a party at my place all day long. For one thing, I met a lot of young people out there-that's how I actually met John. As you may or may not know, Ross is very conservative, very much a part of the establishment-sort of highbrow, Orange County arrangement. I didn't know this when I moved out there. It looked like I was moving out to the wilderness. But that was only by appearances. I soon realized that the good citizens of Ross were keeping a very careful watch on me. The reason being that when I moved out there-I told you earlier on the tape that we got the place through a friend of ours who had property out there. And it was a little cottage that had originally been a part of the Maybeck estate next door. It was a little gardener's cottage-a charming place on a whole acre of beautiful land with a great big sort of fallen down barn that Wally and I had originally intended to convert into a studio. Well, you don't know the Rossonians. The barn had been, to their way of thinking, an eyesore ever since it had been erected. And they were just waiting for the moment when they could find an excuse to get the thing destroyed and taken out of the way. It's still standing there, by the way. You couldn't do a thing in that building! The door would just open a crack and some good citizen would take a peek at a paint rag and rumor would go around that it was not only a fire hazard, but you were trying to use the place for commercial purposes. That, plus the fact that Wally had all of his sculpture out in the yard, which was a great eye-catcher for all the kids that were walking by. I had to walk down these stone steps, and from the road you could see these beer can sculptures, which really intrigued them as you can imagine. So the younger generation of Ross became very alert to the place. One by one, they came by the place to check it out and size it up. Then they would ask their friends to come over, and eventually I had to move in self-defense. It turned out I was running a youth hostel with all the hazards that you might gather from that. Because all the very concerned parents of Ross were very disturbed, not to mention the police department. And I didn't know half the time whether those kids were going to go down there and drop acid or what the hell was going on. I was put in a very precarious position.

PK: I should say so.

JDF: They wouldn't take no for an answer. I still have some very good friends from that period. They're all grown up now. I had about 30 teenagers, and they'd all take turns coming down. Sometimes there would be several there during the course of the day, and they wouldn't just go away. No amount of notes or discouragement. I enjoyed their company. I needed company at that time but after a while it became just too much. There came a time when I really wanted to do things. I simply didn't have the privacy or the wherewithal or the facilities to do them.

PK: Was that when you moved here to this place?

JDF: Luckily, John's parents put a down payment on this place and made it conceivable. The landlord wanted a new tenant who could pay more rent. So we had to find a place that we could afford. Buying a place seemed to be the most feasible way to do it, since the rentals are so expensive here. So actually, it was moving here that gave me the chance to start again and the time was right too.

PK: Well, how did you hook up with Leslie Wenger and eventually have your first show in a number of years?

JDF: I had written to Thomas Albright when I started painting again, because he had always been very enthusiastic about my work. I didn't know anything about current galleries. I had just lost my job at the Art Institute in that purge of 1970, when several instructors, including Wally, were just let go, as it were. And I

thought, as unrealistic as it sounded, I thought I'd better start promoting my painting career again and get connected to a gallery and see if they can do something for me. So I wrote to Tom and he wrote back instantly. So here starts all the correspondence now that the Archives has. He suggested a lot of galleries that I should get in touch with. Leslie's not among them, by the way. She is a very good friend of his. And she, simultaneously to this correspondence with Tom as well as my show at the Oakland Museum, had gone—are you familiar with the show that Rydar Wennesland had in about 1970? He had a very informal showing of his collection. Tom had written an article about it in the paper, and Leslie went to see it. She didn't know who I was at the time, but she really fell in love with the two long stemmed roses that were in Wennesland's collection. She checked out the name of the artist. She was talking to Tom and found out about me and who I was. And she called me, and it was just stick-to-itiveness on her part. I didn't even approach another gallery. It might have been good if I had, but she just stuck very closely for a couple of years, keeping very careful track of when I would be ready for a show. I had every right to choose my own gallery to be sure. But I don't see any harm, and in retrospect I feel that it all worked out. Maybe it would have worked out better if I would have approached somebody more prestigious, like Hanson Fuller. But I just thought I'd go along with it in a fatalistic way. As I said before, she really took a great interest in my work. Even if she doesn't have the most prestigious gallery in town, she really took a lot of pains to find out the history of my work. She probably knows more about my past work than anybody else does.

PK: Did she select the show?

JDF: No. It was just sort of an odd thing that occurred. It wasn't even a question of selecting. It was one of those crazy things. I just took over everything that I had done in three or four years and it just fit on the walls perfectly. There was no hassle about where to hang what. It took us a couple of hours to hang it. And it seemed to hang together very well. I felt very good about the combinations of things that went together.

PK: Well, do you then feel that you've moved safely beyond *The Rose*, the emotional-

JDF: Oh, I think so. It's always there, but I have a much more positive feeling about it than I did for several years. For some years, I couldn't help but connect it with the difficult break and readjustment in my personal life as well as the unfortunate circumstances that befell me in Pasadena, and so forth. But I've divorced it from those associations now. It's still in disrepair, but it's on its way to being completely restored, and hopefully will be sold in my lifetime—to my benefit.

PK: Do you feel that *The Rose* grew out, in any way, of pressures in your personal circumstances? It seems to me that there's a connection, in much of your work, between the life experience and the work itself, which is true, of course, of most artists and most art. But in the case of *The Rose*, it assumed a position in your life of gigantic proportions. Do you feel that the painting itself is a manifestation of events, relationships, in your personal life at the time? Or do you think that *The Rose* had its effect on your personal life?

JDF: Well, certainly the latter should probably be true since it had a great deal to do with the eventual collapse of my marriage. I'm not saying that it might not have happened anyway, but it certainly triggered off the finality of it and certain events that happened thereafter. As far as the conception is concerned, who can't say that whatever happens in their life must undoubtedly have to do with what comes out? But I can't think of anything that happened directly in my personal life that caused it to occur, as much as it did in reverse—you know, the things that befell me because of it after it was finished. Rather than a direct result of anything that occurred in my life, it seemed to me a rather natural—if you could see all of my work in retrospect, you would see it as I do as a kind of natural outgrowth of all the works that came before it.

PK: Do you feel that the project itself became an escape from the realities of your situation?

JDF: No. I recognize the fact that a lot of people held that opinion during that period. And seeing myself as others saw me, I can't blame them in many ways. Because I'd work and work and work and work, and then destroy the whole thing and have a new version the next year. But I had an inner core of faith that this thing would emerge into an ultimate form, of which I had no knowledge. I just kept reaching for it intuitively. But I can't think of any period during that time when I considered the studio an escape mechanism of any kind. As a matter of fact, I don't think of myself as a compulsive painter, regardless of other people's opinions. Sometimes I really have to drive myself to it. I feel that all that time was well spent. I'm glad it happened. I can't imagine what I would replace that period of work for, instead of *The Rose*. If *The Rose* were painted in this day and age, I guess it still would be considered kind of a unique thing that someone could spend that many years on a single thing. But I think it would be far less unique now than it was then. In those days, it was considered unusual not to finish a painting within a week or a day. The first time I spent a month on something, I thought I was really retarded. In the flowering of abstract expressionism, one should be able to paint a painting in a single day, like Sonia Gechtoff, for instance. There were many years when I did, given another medium and another image, work rather rapidly. But it was considered rather strange in those days to dedicate oneself to a single concept, one of this stature was even more far out, I suppose. For instance, Bill Martin works very slowly. I don't know how prolific he is. But I suppose it takes him months and months on some of those very detailed things that he

does. That kind of working process was almost unknown in those days. I think it's an important point that one's awe of something like that would be far less now than in the context of when it was painted. During that period, it was a bizarre way of working.

PK: Drawing from a quote from Merrill Greene's catalogue, you describe yourself as both an expressionist and a symbolist.

JDF: Indeed, I still do.

PK: I wonder if you could expand on that in some way.

JDF: Well, this last question is a big one, and to tell you the truth, I am getting rather tired. I hope I can be as articulate about it as the subject merits. You ask about being a symbolist and an expressionist. I think that sort of speaks for itself. But there is a point that's related that's always been an important one for me, and one that makes the painting process I go through kind of a cliffhanging experience. And that is, and I find it even more pronounced in the current work, this absolute necessity to maintain the spirit and freshness of the abstract expressionist ideal-the spontaneity, let's say, and the growth of the image from one layer to the next, which is what happened with *The Rose*. But also, I demand from myself and the image, too, a sense of refinement and exactitude. For instance, I still haven't finished some of the things that were here during our first interview last year. They're practically complete, but they're going through a very difficult time right now. So I decided to get out of my studio for a while, and give myself a rest.

PK: Is that why your Christmas tree is down there?

JDF: Yes, just being kind of a sentinel right now. It's taking my place for a time. I demand that the form is very exact and defined, but within that form, I don't just want to paint it from one area to the next, but it has to grow in the sense of the expressionists' ideal-through a series of experiments. As good old Picasso says, the definition of technique is the covering up of one's own mistakes. The organic growth of the painting process itself remains very important to me. But added to that, the necessity for a very defined image makes it a very difficult goal to obtain. It takes a great deal of courage to blast into something and still maintain a very refined and defined image. I'm not really being as articulate about this as I'd like. Some time, if I ever do write about the relationship of various things I've done during my whole lifespan, one to another, as well as things I feel about the painting process itself-the way I feel about expressing myself in those terms-I'll give you a copy. Because I think I can be far more articulate about it in writing than I can verbally. Hopefully the paintings themselves speak for this ideal, but I'm just trying to clarify it.

PK: Well, I understand your roots in abstract expressionism, in the gestural tradition, but what about the symbolist aspect?

JDF: Well, I don't know what other way to put it. I mean, a symbol is a symbol, isn't it? I don't work-with the exception of maybe one or two things that I've done-in representational terms. Certainly not in the sense that we think of representational painting. Even when the images do reflect real things, such as the drawing of the eyes or the paintings of the teeth, I think they transcend to a general abstract image that assumes a little more of a universal character-the idea of teeth or eyes, for instance.

PK: A symbol of what-a symbol of an idea, a world view? A system, perhaps?

JDF: Maybe symbol is the wrong word. A symbol not in the sense that they have a very inelastic meaning that should be defined the same way by every person. This has become a very hackneyed phrase, but it's sort of like archetypal images-common denominators to everybody's experience, but people can translate them into their own terms. What I'm aiming at is not so much the specific (the specific is involved) but something that transcends into a universal language that's meaningful to all people, except that the meanings might be a little different from one to another. I would suggest reading a passage out of Cirlot's symbol book which would tell you all about all the historical symbolic meanings of *The Rose*. In a very subjective way, these things were going through my mind, but I never referred to them intellectually as to what this form actually means historically speaking and then applied them to a painting.

PK: But do you feel without studying the meaning of forms-?

JDF: I don't think you have to study it at all.

PK: You feel it's commonly shared-

JDF: And the example I was going to state, this is kind of an obvious one, in the painting of *The Rose* I had the feeling that that painting kind of reached everybody on some level or another. There wasn't a person that came into that studio when I was working on the painting, whether they were an artist, a layman, or a painter or

whatever, that didn't respond to it on some subjective level. Maybe they didn't like it, or maybe they did, but nobody every said, "What is it?" or, "What does it mean?" Everybody seemed to know what it meant for them and it seemed to transcend a verbal explanation. The somewhat corny title that Lannon gave it, *The Endless Road*, for instance, he saw a little bit of a universal thing in it-it could be a road, it could be a rose.

PK: Well, the thing is that a symbol usually stands for something else. I understand what you're saying. I'm just trying to clarify it.

JDF: Well, I suppose so. I guess in that sense I've probably used the wrong word. Then in those terms, I would say that it is symbolic, it's just that it's symbolic differently for each person. I do feel that there's a common denominator there somewhere, but I couldn't define it any other way, except as a visual image, not a verbal one. That's been said and said and said, and perhaps it is an escape phrase but I really do feel it's true in my case.

PK: Well, I think that's what a lot of the best art is about so you're on safe ground.

JDF: I know that I'm less articulate. You ought to have Clyfford Still to talk about it. I'm sure that he could do a magnificent job of it.

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