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Oral history interview with Wally Hedrick, 1974 June 10-24

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Transcript

Interview

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM
WH: WALLY HEDRICK
JH: JULIA HEDRICK

PK: Well, Wally, maybe we should get started by going back to the beginning. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about your own background, where you were born, where you grew up, something about your own education, particularly in terms of art.

WH: Well, in the introduction you said "San Francisco Bay Area artist." In the last 20-25 years I've been a resident of the Bay Area, but I was born in Southern California on July 21, 1928 in Pasadena, of all places. So I was a high school kid, that's the interesting part -- I never went to high school. People always look a little shocked, you know, here's a college professor who never went to high school. Well, at that time Southern California was into progressive education, so we went to junior high school, and then we went right to junior college in the tenth grade. So there was no place for high school, and I was never exposed to high school proms or any of that thing. But it was nice in that where I got started in art, was in junior high school. There was this nice lady called Mrs. McMichaels at Woodrow Wilson Junior High School in East Pasadena. The reason I got to like her was because she could get me out of gym if I would paint pictures which she seemed to enjoy. So I painted murals and things for her which kept me out of doing almost everything. But by the time I got to Pasadena City College, all my friends had decided they were going to go to college and things like that. I don't know what I was. I was more interested in building hot rods and riding motorcycles and things of that sort.

PK: Just like any good, young Southern Californian.

WH: Yeah, and going to the beach. Anyway, I was a typical Southern California boy growing up while the war was going on. I didn't worry about being drafted because i knew I was too young for World War II, so I just put that out of my mind. But I spent most of my time at the beach. Long Beach was 30 minutes and instead of going to school we'd go to Long Beach down Rosemead Boulevard. But at Pasadena City College, I was presented with the first real artist I ever knew, Leonard Edmonson. Leonard was teaching there -- we called him Mr. Schnark. I have no idea why we called him Mr. Schnark except he sort of looked like a "schnark" to us, I guess. Now i say "we" and this has come out when I have talked to people previously: there were a group of us and some of them have become very famous, very rich. But the people are like David Simpson and Deborah Remington. I've known both since junior high school -- Hayward King whom I met at Pasadena City College and Johh Ryan, who you've probably never heard of, but he is one of the Bay Area poets that was connected with the Renaisance and all that, and he's sort of a minor one but you hear about him once in a while. Then there were other people, but that was sort of the nucleus of the art part of our thing. We formed a little group down there around 1946 called "The Progressive Art Workers." (Laughs) This was when they were coming down hard on Communists and all that stuff, but we didn't know that from a hole in the ground. Somehow, the WPA stuck in somebody's mind, so we took those initials and twisted it around so we had the "Progressive Art Workers". The only reason we made this little club and the reason I mention it was because we entered as a group in our first competitive show at the Pasadena Museum. They had a kind of a little country art show. We entered as a group, which was kind of fun. We got stuff in and we went to the opening, and all that. But it gave use a taste of what the art world was about and the fact that we knew Leonard Edmonson, who we thought of as a real artist because he'd show his work and all that.

PK: This was around 1946?

WH: Yeah, about '46. In fact, that show was '46. Jay De Feo probably still has the catalog of that show. But we became aware very quickly that Pasadena wasn't, well what we would say now, "Wasn't where it was at." We sort of sensed this. So we started asking around and Leonard was one of the people we asked. We asked him where would people like ourselves,

aspiring young art students, go to learn something. Well, he'd gone to Cal, and I remember distinctly him saying, "Well, I've never been there, but I understand that there's a school in San Francisco, the California School of Fine Arts," that he had heard was a very progressive place and that we might try. We were interested in revolution, progression, all that stuff. In fact, I've been reading and -- at least from my viewpoint -- sort of studying the futurists recently. I've been interested in the 1906, 1910 era. And when I read about those guys they sound sort of like the Dadists, the futurists as individuals. When I read about them now, they remind me of the group that I've just mentioned, except on a smaller scale of course.

PK: "Progressive art workers". (Laughs)

WH: Yeah, we were progressive art workers and we were going to set the world on its ear, you know.

PK: Were there any political implications or goals built into this like with the futurists?

WH: Yeah. We were all reds. But by our own standards, we weren't too red. We were supporting Henry Wallace at that time. There was a third party in this country and Henry Wallace ran for President in 1948 on the Progressive party.

PK: That's as red as you went?

WH: Yeah. We had friends who were very red who were Trotskyites and all that, but that didn't mean anything to me. I mean, the closest I got to it was maybe singing folk songs. We'd sit around and sin "Freiheit" or something, and really feel like we were ont he verge of something. But anyway, we asked around. About schools. Actually, several of us went to Otis Art Institute. I think in '47, anyway, whenever I was 21, Deborah, myself, another guy John Stanley, who disappeared into Souther California, we actually spent a semester at Otis.

PK: Do you remember who was teaching there at the time, or anybody who was memorable?

WH: Harold Gebhardt's the only one I can remember, and he was a sculptor. But I've never seen any of his work, so I don't even really know what he did. All I know is that during that period we started seeing some reproductions of paintings from New york. I think I saw my first de Kooning and who wont the Pepsi Cola award that year. The first Baziotes was that big sort of thing, figure to ground thing. We were already sort of into that as a group because of Leonard Edmonson. I mean, he was out of the Paul Klee kind of thing, I _____ his work, but it was figure to ground, black stuff. So we took that grid quality from Klee and sort of simplified it. we thought we were hip, you know. But anyway, we sound out that Otis wasn't the place then. What convinced me was the morning I drove over the first freeway in California from Pasadena to L. A., and that was enough to turn me off right there, when I saw that thing. Everybody was telling what a wonderful, architectural wonder it was. I hated it. Because all I had was a Model A Ford.

PK: That's now, I think, one of the most quaint and picturesque freeways int he whole system.

WH: It's probably all green and everything, sort of weathered. At the time, I didn't like it because I couldn't go fast enough on it. Then one morning I drove over to L. A. and I came up over the hill, where the baseball park is now, I couldn't see City Hall because of the smog. I mean, one morning it was not there, the next morning it was there. That turned me off. That whole day, I couldn't even breathe. But anyway, John Stanley, who I mentioned earlier, and myself, decided that L.A. was not the place for us. It was too hot. We got in my Model A Ford,this was the summer of '46 and we drove to San Francisco.

PK: You hadn't even applied yet for the Art Institute? You just drove on up?

WH: We wanted to see what this place was. And anyway, we didn't know what was happening. I didn't know anything about the academic world. I just figured it was a school, you just go in there and -- I don't know what I thought. It seemed like something to do. So we drove up and go on the wrong side of the bay, ending up in Oakland, and had to come across on the bridge.

PK: I'm surprised you didn't enroll in the Arts and Crafts in Oakland.

WH: Well, it was at night when we hit Oakland, and we came across the bridge and it was just so foggy. I couldn't see two feet in front of the car. By the time we got into San Francisco it was something like two in the morning and it's never been that foggy since then. I think the weather's changing or something. But I had to see this place or at least touch it, to make sure i knew it was there. So we finally got directions on how to get from downtown San Francisco to North Beach, and then I found Chestnut Street. Then we got the car up the hill and that's when I got out and I almost had to kneel down o read the number of the place. It was all black and foggy; there was nothing going on. But at least we were there. I touched the place so I knew it was there, and we were happy. I have no idea where we went, but we found this place that said, "Hotel." The Archives won't be interested in the fact that we picked one of the hang-outs of the gay world, just by accident. We didn't know. So we walked in and said, "We'd like to have a room." And they said, "Yeah, how long would you want it for? An hour or two hours?" We were a bunch of hicks, you know, and we said, "What do you mean two hours? We want to go to sleep." And they all said, "Yeah." After the fact, we knew what was happening. But anyway, after the next morning we got up and I never have located where that was because it was so foggy that night. We got up and we struggled back over to the school, and by that time the sun was out and we came up to the hill, parked, got out of the car and walked in to the patio area. The first person I met (I didn't know who he was, but it was Douglas MacAgy) walked up shook hands and said, "Welcome to the California School of Fine Arts." This dumbfounded me because how did he know I was coming? Well, it turned out that he was expecting a delegation of high schools one day and he thought we were --

PK: He though you were a high school student?

WH: Yeah. (Laughs) We told him who we were and he said, "Well, as long as you're here, I'll show you around." So he took us around. We were just walking around the patio and one of the first persons we ran into was this long, tall, skinny guy, and he introduced us, this happened to be Clyfford Still. It didn't mean anything to me at that time.

PK: You hadn't heard of Still before?

WH: I'd just heard of William Baziotes, you know (Laughs) and de Kooning and Pollock. There'd been a spread in Life, I think, on Pollock by then, but I had no idea about the Bay Area at all. Anyway, he took us around the school and we went into some of the studios and there were people in there painting these monster paintings. I'd never seen anything like that in my whole life. The only person's work I remember was in Studio 19, if you ever get the layout of the place, it's a small studio off the patio and down he stairs. It was by James Brooks and I remember it was covering the whole wall, but I don't think it was really that big.

PK: So all the pictures you saw were probably by the students working on abstract expressionist paintings -- in the heyday.

WH: That's right. When I look back on it, they hadn't really hit their peak because they were still a little what I describe as rounded cubism. There was still a little bit of that. I think '47 was when they really hit their peak there. I'd never seen anything like it. I'd never seen paintings that big, and I'd never seen anything like that. So I was dumbfounded. We immediately went back to Pasadena with a new viewpoint. Here was this really good place, it seemed like heaven,full of these crazy artists. And they were older than I, the people I was there. They seemed older, and it turned out they were. They were about 5 or 6 years older than myself.

PK: There were a lot of GI Bill students there.

WH: Yeah, yeah. I was probably around 21, whatever I'd be in '46, and I went back with the good news. So everybody in this group decided that they would all go there in '47 and enroll. David, Deborah and Robert Jenkins, who I haven't mentioned previously and this guy John Stanley, John Ryan the poet, and myself. Well, we got in David's 1937 Chevrolet panel truck, the first hippie truck I'm sure, I mean we had long hair and wore sandals.

PK: No wonder they thought you were Communists.

WH: Yeah. Well, we were investigated as a group. THey never found anything out because there was nothing to find out, but we actually were called in by one of the subcommittees.

PK: Was that the same time or maybe a little before the famous investigations of Hollywood

personalities?

WH: It was just a little before that, but it was in the air. Nobody got us for anything because it was just the title which we got from the newspapers. It attracted somebody's attention so they called us in. As soon as they talked to us they saw we were harmless (Laughs). Anyway, we all sang "Freiheit". We got in this truck and we came North. And some of us, like myself, didn't have any money, so I couldn't enroll in this school. But David was a veteran so he enrolled, and Deborah had some money. I don't know what John Ryan's story was. But David had steady income because he was a veteran so we all sort of lived off of him. This is when I met all of the people that have become part of that historical group like Hassel Smith, David Park, Elmer Bischoff and Clyfford Still. I never met Mark Rothko that I can remember, but he might have been there. And then the people that aren't as important but I think are important, like George Stillman, he's a guy that you ought to look up. He's around; he was teaching there and was doing paintings thought were better than Still's by far. Jim Weeks and Richard Diebenkorn were students at that time. I think both of them became instructors in '48 _____ _____ in there. But as I say, I was never properly enrolled because I never had any money. So I was just sort of on the outskirts. Maybe that's why I never got really involved in that.

PK: So at no time then were you actually enrolled in the program, officially as a student at the California School of Fine Arts?

WH: Later I was, but on this first jaunt, no. In fact, I think David was the only one who stayed through for a period because he had a steady source of income from the GI Bill. The rest of us were sort of on and off, and I was completely off. I was more involved with North Beach. In fact, there's a bar in North Beach called Vesuvio's, I'm sure you're acquainted with it. At that time it was where we all hung out. I was hired to sit in the window because then I had a giant beard and attracted tourists. The beatnik thing was just starting and it didn't have a term then. Nobody knew what it was, but there was something happening. And the tourists just came in droves to sit around and watch the artists. I guess it's like when I hear or read about Paris. We actually sat out on the sidewalk an all that kind of thing before it became a tourist trap. I went back to Pasadena because I couldn't survive since I didn't have any way to make any money. When I got back to Pasadena I was just getting old enough that I was afraid of getting drafted. The war was over but they were still drafting people. So to beat the draft, I joined the National Guard. I joined it and then I didn't get drafted. Well, this was fine until 1950 when the division I was in got activated because Korea came around. By that time, I had a studio, and I was painting.

PK: You were back in Southern California?

WH: Yeah. I was going back and forth between San Francisco and Pasadena, but I was not up there as much as David was. That's probably why I never quite got really involved with all these people. My real involvement there was with a band called the Studio Thirteen Jazz Band which was made up of David Park who played piano, Elmer Bischoff who played trumpet, and Charlie Clark, a student who played the clarinet. MacAgy was the drummer, and Jon Schueler was the bass player.

PK: What did you play?

WH: I was a banjo player. I can never think of the trombone player --

JH: Conrad Janis.

WH: Conrad Janis, Sidney Janis's son, was the trombone player. He was here, I don't know what he was here doing. I think he had something to do with the museum. There was a great revival of interest in New Orleans jazz at that time.

PK: This was about '49, '50?

WH: Well, from '46 onward, but it became popular, like the Lou Waters Band was in its heyday, in the late Forties. And all the painters I knew were interested in jazz. Hassel Smith has a great jazz collection, he's got it going full blast all day long. But anyway, here was this band that was centered at the school, and that's how I really got to know David Park, Elmer and these other people, because philosophically we don't have too much in common. I was never really interested in figurative painting. Or abstract expressionism. I was really never enrolled at the school except when they'd have a party, then I was always there. So a lot of

people were confused about that because they saw me there all the time. But half the time I was in Southern California.

PK: What were you doing? You said you had a studio in Pasadena. What kind of work were you doing if you weren't being influenced, and you weren't producing the standard bill of fare of the Art Institute, or the School of Fine Arts, abstract expressionism?

WH: well, as far as I know, there's only one painting that still exists, and I don't know where it is. It's in Southern California in the possession of a friend of mine, Caroline Miller. She lives in a town between Pasadena and the coast.

PK: What kind of a painting is it?

WH: Well, it was a figurative, round kind of thing. I was painting pretty large and the reason I know it still exists is because it's so big that people wouldn't destroy it. I know she wouldn't.

PK: So you were still working more or less, with influences from the contact with Edmonson. Were really involved in that?

WH: Well, yeah. People sometimes call it my grid. I mean, it has the grid of Paul Klee, but done in an abstract expressionist manner, I guess. I've never stopped doing it, because I really like it. Basically what it really amounted to was that I would draw, then I would paint in the holes, then I would draw again, and then I would block out everything behind a form that I discovered going through that process. So usually one form would come out and it still would have the grid on it, but the rest of the grid would disappear. And this was done fairly loosely because I'd seen a lot of action painting.

PK: So there was some influence from what you observed.

WH: Well, as a say, that Baziotes painting, I'll never forget it, with a big eye on it. I was impressed by the technique. Anyway, I went in the Army for two years. I went to Korea and Japan. In fact the whole two years all I could think about was getting back because I knew this was going to be the way I was going to get to got to school, and that was really great.

PK: It was almost worth it.

WH: Well, at the time it didn't seem like it, but I knew it was. As soon as I got my discharge, I just knew that I had it made because that's what I really wanted to do, to go where _____ was happening. Of course, it was like when I talked about Duchamp, I had imagined a lot and I made it sound in my own mind, the way I wanted it to be, and then I had to make it that way. But unbeknownst to me, while I was away there was all this crisis happening at the school. Everything I was speaking about as being so neat, what I was going to go back to, it just all blew apart.

PK: This was MacAgy leaving?

WH: MacAgy left, all the people that I knew disappeared, both students and faculty. When I came back, I enrolled in the summer session but David Park had it for that summer. I came back that following fall, and it was a brand new school.

PK: Was that '51?

WH: Yeah, that would be the fall of '51. Now is that right?

JH: You were in the Army 'til '52.

WH: Yeah, it would have to be '52, yeah.

PK: So you were a student there the same time as John Saccaro.

WH: John was still there, yeah. He was sort of bridging that gap between the late '40s and the '50s. Jim Kelly was there too. I don't know if you know him or not, but he was Sonia Gechtoff's husband for seven years. Sonia's mother ran the East-West Gallery, which was right across the street from THe Six Gallery which we're coming up to. When I got back to what was the California School of Fine Arts, it had a new director, Ernest Mundt, and a whole new faculty whose names escape me now. They were people that I didn't know; that doesn't

mean they weren't good people, they just weren't of the type that had been associated with the school previously.

PK: I hate to interrupt, but just for the record, although it is heresay, I was very interested in what you said earlier about some of the circumstances, at least as you understand them, surrounding the departure of MacAgy, and the business about Duchamp.

WH: I heard through the grapevine, and having friends there at the school during that period. The Duchamp thing didn't come 'til later, and I didn't find that out 'til later. Originally my belief was that it was a semi-political, semi-artistic disagreement among several of the faculty member which got to the board, and this is probably 50% of it truth anyway, and it centered around Hassel Smith, He's been asked the question bluntly and he won't give a straight answer, so I can't. All I know is what I heard and saw, and basically what it came down to, at least at that time, was the school was going through a change __ _____ where the enrollment was beginning to drop and finances were becoming a problem. I think MacAgy was going one way, continuing in what he thought was right, and the board felt that this would not attract a broad base student body. They were starting to talk about degrees and advertising and things of that sort.

PK: Was there a feeling that this great concentration or emphasis, on the dominance of gesture or abstract expressionist painting as part of the curriculum, was perhaps phasing out or limiting the possibilities?

WH: No, it wasn't phasing out, it was that people were becoming aware of what was happening. I think that year, '48, '49 or somewhere along in there, the art scene was having regular annuals then. THey would have a show every year of varied works, and I think every painting in the '49 show (or it could have been '50, but probably '49) was abstract expressionist. And this hit the public. THey didn't know what was going up on that hill. Remember, this was that period when the investigating committees were going on and they were looking for Communists.

PK: And modern art was equated with it.

WH: And modern art was tied in with it. And there were people like Hassel Smith and David Park, who were very liberal in their politics and very outspoken about it. Now, I don't think Clyfford Still said one word about politics. If he did, he would probably be a Nazi (Laughs). I mean, he's a natural fascist, but in a good way.

PK: Well, it doesn't seem to matter too much since politics isn't his bag. (Laughs)

WH: No. In fact, I don't think Still had anything to do with the breakup of the school. He was just there and he was doing his thing and he had a group of students who were impressed by him, but so did a lot of other faculty members. This is why I go back to my original assumption that Hassel had something concrete. And Mary and Mac could fill you in on that 'cause they were there then and were close to Hasse. But anyway, whatever it was, it came to a punch, and either Hassel quit or he was fired or forced to quit. And because of that, several of the other faculty members like David Park and Elmer, quite in protest. Now this did happen. Now why it happened, I don't know, but this is what I saw happen. And because of that, a lot of the students quit. That just made the crunch even heavier because good students are what supported the school, and so the board just went crazy. Here, they were losing everything, and so they either forced MacAgy to resign, or he quit. I don't know which happened. But that just aggravated the thing, so the whole school just shut down at the end of the Spring term in '50. MacAgy quit or whatever, he disappeared, and so did all the faculty and most of the students. More recently, I've found out this thing about Duchamp and it kind of fills in some holes. If MacAgy was continuing in his righteous march towards glorious art heaven, it would have been a natural choice on his part, because he was very close to Duchamp, to have Duchamp at the school. But the board was in no position to continue in that direction. I don't think they had anything against Duchamp, but it would have been a continuation towards this direction that they thought would do the school in if MacAgy continued it. So they put their foot down and either MacAgy was fired or he quit. We'll probably never know because MacAgy's never said and the board really never says anything. MacAgy's dead now. But somebody like Nell Sinton might know. If Nell wasn't on the board then, there's another lady who was. You could find out. But they were the artist members and they were there and could tell you because the artist members were always for MacAgy. It was the lay members who had the power; they had the vote and also they

were a little worried about the direction the school was going in.

PK: And obviously if it's true that Duchamp had been approached to come on the faculty, this would increase the credibility gap between the community, the board that supports the school, and the orientation of the school.

WH: That's exactly right. I think this was probably proven in their choice of the next director. Sure, David Parks was sort of a caretaker, but the hiring of Ernest Mundt, who has a Bauhaus Kind of background and whose concern was to broaden the base of the school where they would bring back photography, advertising art, and ceramics, and then in '53 offer a degree. You see that direction is completely alien to the direction MacAgy had. MacAgy was going toward the ultimate art school where there would be one department, and it would be art. There would be no degrees, no lecture classes, probably only had painting, sculpture, and drawing. Printmaking was not even thought of as being acceptable.

PK: I don't know if I'd agree with that.

WH: Well, you can see he was going off farther and farther. That tower became a literal, living ivory tower. People would talk about MacAgy's ivory tower up on the hill. Then Still, living it, really convinced people that this place was going to the dogs.

PK: So this was the situation at the California School of FIne Arts when you finished with the service and had the opportunity to enroll.

WH: There was a brand new director, there was a new faculty, and a few hangovers of students. Jim Kelly would be one who had been there in the late '40s and was still there because he had the GI Bill. But as I said earlier, I had my idea of what I wanted to do, and in the long run I'm not sure it wasn't the best thing that ever happened to me because of the low enrollment and the kin of low profile of the faculty. I mean, I don't ever remember going to a class. I think they just collected their checks and left us alone. It was great. We had our own studios, private studios. All we had to do was to to the registrar once a wee and tell him that we were there. There was only one flaw in my case -- I was the first returning Korean veteran, probably the first in the city, come to think of it. So I never got paid. The paperwork was never done, so I just starved, literally starved. When I came up after getting my discharge and came back to San Francisco, in the summer of '52, I was just driving around looking for a place to live and I saw this thing that said, "studio for rent." It was on the corner of Gough and Sutter, and I found out later that this was a very famous place for artists, known then as the ghost house. It's been torn down. But Philip Lamantia, the poet, he lived there. Pia -- I can't pronounce her last name, but she was a very short photographer. When you meet her, you'll know her. The reason you should know her is because she documented this building with an 8 x 10, on of those monster cameras. You'll run into her, sooner or later. Her last name was Landowsky -- or some damn thing.

PK: The description fits Imogene Cunningham.

WH: It isn't Imogene. Imogene was there, but this is another person. This person was a student at school. Anyway, I moved into this place. I didn't know what it was. All I knew was it was $35 a month and there was a jazz musician who lived there. This is when I first heard progressive jazz from people like Jerry Mulligan and Chet Baker, in addition to this jazz poetry thing. It didn't start there but with Rex Roth. That's when I first met him. He would come by to talk to the musician and this was my introduction to bebopping. I'd always been interested in traditional jazz, but I didn't know anything about Charlie Parker and all that which came a little later. I went to school, and as I said, I was starving to death because there was no money and I refused to work. I found out having a social life meant you spent every evening at North Beach. You didn't stay home or anything I could mention, that the school had a bunch of people come out at that time. Peter Voulkos was one that jumps into my mind, but there was a whole bunch of them. If you talk to Hayward King, he'll give you a list of those.

PK: Was Deborah Remington still a student there?

WH: Deborah was there then, yeah. In fact, Lynn Weeks, Jim's wife, was a student there at the time and was really good. I couldn't make it because I was very hungry. I ran into Bill Morehouse; here's where Bill Morehouse comes in. He'd just gotten out of the Army and I ran into him at Vesuvio's one night, and the poet John Ryan was there with me. Somehow we decided we would go to the California College of Arts and Crafts because we knew we'd get

money if we went over there because they were all straight with the V.A. Sounds dumb, but at the time. . .

PK: Sounds very practical.

WH: Bill had been to the school previously, in the late '40s. He was one of the youngest students there, and he was Clyfford Still's favorite. So he wanted to go back, but if there was no money there, he wasn't going to go back. We decided as a group to move to Oakland, and we rented a house on University for $35 a month. THen we enrolled at the College of Arts and Crafts.

PK: Do you remember when this was? was it about 1953?

WH: Yeah, this would have been the fall of '53. And that was just a catastrophe. We weren't cut out for the College of Arts and Crafts. None of us had any academic background, and that wasn't what we wanted.

PK: So was this one of the differences between the two institutions; the California School of Fine Arts was much looser and freer ____

WH: It was a non-degree thing then.

PK: You didn't take Art History.

WH: My first semester, my whole program was drawing in the morning and painting in the afternoon. That was four days a week. And on Fridays, I made prints all day. That's all I did, and that was a full load at 12 units. When I went to the College of Arts and Crafts, I had a painting and a drawing class, and then I had physical science, public speaking, art history, and English. By that time, I was painting, so this was just a catastrophe. But we did get paid, and finally I got the check. That was a big day when I got my big check, from my accumulated time during that semester at California School of Fine Arts, which we call The Art School. Well, when the big check came in, we had a big party and we all decided we'd talk to Ernest Mundt and see if we couldn't get the thing straightened out so we could get back over there because that's where we wanted to be, int he city. So we went over to talk to Ernest, and we told him if he could get straight with the V.A., we'd come back. He said that he was working on a degree program, and if that was approved, there would be no program, which is a terrible thing to say because I'm against it. But on the other hand, at that time it insured our checks. So to make a long story short, we went back to The Art School, and that was probably the spring of '54. I have transcripts, I think.

PK: You were already doing your own work.

WH: Yeah.

PK: It seems to me -- I don't want to read into this -- but you really didn't need a structured art school, you didn't need criticism or instruction as such. What you needed was an opportunity, a school to associate yourself with so you could draw the GI Bill.

WH: That's exactly right. But the reason we went back to The Art School was because it had a better feel then and wasn't so crowded. So we didn't care who was the director. We had our own little community going, and this is where the Six Gallery kind of raised it head. There was nowhere in San Francisco we could show our work. There was nothing. We weren't known well enough to approach the museums, they didn't want us. I'm not saying they wouldn't but we didn't think they were ready for us.

PK: Well, wasn't Ninfa Valvo showing some contemporary Bay Area -- artists?

WH: Yeah, from about '57 on, Ninfa was very, she really got to know the artists, and I have a lot of respect for her. There was a lady in Richmond, too --

PK: Hazel Solomon?

WH: Yeah, she was a very neat lady. And they did what they could and we appreciated it. But there were no small galleries where even a person like David Park could get a show. He showed at the Six Gallery because figurative painting was frowned upon. That was even worse than abstract expressionist in a lot of ways.

PK: Maybe you can tell me something about the Six Gallery. The Six Gallery keeps coming up with almost anybody I talk with who was around at that time. It's obvious that it was an important focal point for many artists.

WH: Well, we didn't mean it to be that way. Actually, it was a self-centered thing to begin with. We had this group which was made up of the original six of the Six Gallery: myself, Deborah Remington, John Ryan the poet, Jack Spicer the poet, Hayward King, and David Simpson. THat's the six.

PK: A number of those were from the original Pasadena group.

WH: Everyone from Pasadena except for Jack Spicer who was from L.A. We didn't know him down there. In this little community, we didn't have to have art teachers. It sounds egotistical, but we were our own teachers and we taught each other. We were so close to one another it was as if I could have called them my surrogate parents. I'm really closer to them than my family in a lot of ways. Anyway, we knew that we weren't going to be able to show our work, and so the answer to this was to start our own gallery. As I mentioned earlier, the Six Gallery was made from what was known as the King Ubu Gallery, which was an all poet thing.

PK: So King Ubu preceded the Six Gallery?

WH: Yeah. I think they probably were operating in '53 for about a year.

PK: And the King Ubu, as I understand it, was primarily for poets. There was a lot of poetry reading at the gallery.

WH: There was lot of poetry reading. I understand probably the first jazz poetry readings were held there. Not in North Beach.

PK: But you weren't involved with the King Ubu, itself?

WH: No. I went to a couple of their shows, but that was a different group. The only connection was through John Ryan who knew these other poets. I wish I could give you their names, but I just don't know them offhand. Jess Collins is the only one I can remember. But anyway, we took it over and we had a big fundraising drive which meant we had a rummage sale. Probably these rummage sales were the beginning of happenings in San Francisco, or in the world, I don't know. You can just imagine it, if you ever see this place. It's at 3119 Fillmore.

PK: Fillmore and what, about?

WH: Well, in this book I just read, it says near the Embarcadero, and it's not anywhere near the Embarcadero. IT's in the Marina.

PK: Near Filbert, then?

WH: It's the corner of Filbert, that's right. There's a hardware store --

PK: Fredericksen's Hardware.

WH: That's right. Their long room where they have the supplies and saws, well, that's where the Six Gallery was. They know about it. The person who could really tell you about it, if he's still there, is the little shoeman. Is the little shoe shop still there? The reason he would know is because he shared the john with us. The Six Gallery was long. I can't even hardly describe it. It was sort of like a bowling alley. It had a door, like a garage door facing on Fillmore, and then it went back about a hundred feet, just that wide. Then it opened up into a larger room, way in the back. In fact, we even had a stage there. The poets had put the stage in for their poetry readings. We had lots of wall space and there were just studs in there. So we had this first rummage sale to buy pasterboard. It was a success. We sent out postcards to everybody we could think of, and they brought all their junk over and then everybody came over and bought it. But the opening was like a "happening". When I say "happening" we didn't think of it in that sense, but later it was pointed out we were having "happenings". We had poetry readings and we had what we called "avant-garde movies", which were 3D movies. Almost anything could happen. We had a piano there. At one of these parties, these openings, unbeknownst to us, Art Grant had gotten some friends together and brought in

blow torches, hammers, saws, and sledge hammers. Right in the middle of the party, they destroyed this piano. Later, somebody in Europe took this up as a art form.

PK: It sounds like either that or something like Jimmy Hendricks or The Who would do, I guess.

WH: Yeah. Well, right in the middle of this party, these people came in cold and just did it. Everybody was just. . . then everybody thought it was great. But anyway, the social part of it has been described in books and things. But the art part of it, and the way we supported it was dependent upon a group of local people, who would contribute money every month.

PK: Do you remember some of the people involved?

WH: Well, Nell Sinton, Bob Howard, and his wife who died, Adeline Kent, were involved. Joel Barletta, now there's a name, he was involved too. He was a student at the school, and now he's a painter. His studio is in San Rafael where he lives. But he has a source of income that was always very mysterious. I never ask him how or where it comes from, but either he has money or he has a job that he doesn't have to work very hard at, like clipping coupons. So he showed, but he doesn't have to. He's a person you ought to talk to. You think I talk a lot, he. . . and also, he's more social than myself, so he knows a lot of names and things. But there were a lot of people, and if you talk to Hayward, he can probably tell you some of the other people. This supporting group varied from one month to the next. We babysat the thing. And then after we started, obviously there just weren't six of us; there were probably 60 of us.

PK: Who was the director?

WH: Well, I was the director. It was a rotating thing initially because we tried to run it on a cooperative basis, but I was the only one that was doing. . .

PK: You ended up doing the work. That's the way these things happen.

WH: Yeah. And by '55, I'd become the official director. I think we went until '57, somewhere along in there. That's like when Walter Hopps and Wally Berman, they all sort of got to know us through the gallery because they would come up from L. A. Hopps would arrange shows to go down there. Then the Ferus Gallery came along. The reason we quit is not only because we got tired of it, but also because other galleries opened up. The East-West opened right across the street.

PK: So the Six preceded the East-West.

WH: Oh, yeah.

PK: And they overlapped?

WH: They overlapped, yeah. Towards the end, she was open and we were open, and we would have our openings on the same day. It was really nice. There was also the Spatsa Gallery, did anybody mention that? Well, it was right around the corner where the animal store is.

PK: That Cow Hollow area down there at that time, was a jumping place for the arts. For the record when did the Six Gallery close?

WH: Well, I'm sure it was around some time in '57. The reason is because the East-West was going and the Spatsa Gallery was going, and I guess Jim Newman was beginning to think about it. You'd have to check with him to see when he opened up, but we didn't feel like we were serving much of a function.

PK: '59, I think, '58 maybe.

WH: Well, you can see, we knew he was around, and I guess we knew he was going to open. THose places had class compared to our place. All of our opening announcements were mimeographed on postcards. Somebody will have some of that stuff.

PK: I was wondering if you can recall offhand some of the exhibitions. Were they generally group exhibitions? And who were some of the people?

WH: Well, you can get that from The Chronicle, _____

PK: It was pretty well covered?

WH: We made sure it was. I don't know how we managed to do it, but we managed to have most of the shows reviewed. They were reviewed by Alfred Frankenstein, and so if you get to him, he'll have all that. We showed just about everybody.

PK: Did you ever show Bruce Conner?

WH: I don't know if he ever had a one man show, but I know he was with a group show.

PK: I don't want to jump ahead to what's going to be, I hope, another profitable topic, but some of the seeds of so-called funk art could very well be located in the Six Gallery and perhaps some of the exhibitions there.

WH: Well, I think when they talk about the funk business, it was at the six Gallery, and it had something to do with what was going on at Grant Avenue.

PK: Well, maybe we should talk about the funk.

WH: The painters I knew, their social life was centered on Grant Avenue, there's no getting around it. There was a mystique of being beat, after the term was discovered, even though we might not be happy about the term, I didn't even understand it for a long time. It came from another word. But beat sounded right because we felt a little beat. But I had the costume; I had my beard and I wore my sandals.

PK: Didn't Herb Caen coin that term? That's the legend.

WH: Well, I think he probably did. I don't know. But somehow it just happened and then everybody sort of used the term. I even have, I mean at that time I was connected with a band, and we had a beat label. We only made two records. I designed the label, Beat, which preceded the big Beat by a long time. But I thought it was a pretty good term, much better than beatnik which I thought was kind of awful. But anyway, the connection with Grant Avenue was there. There were places for eating, spaghetti and bagels, the Spaghetti Factory and The Place. Now, The Place is an interesting item because it was concurrent with the Six Gallery. We made a point of going off to another part of the town.

PK: I believe they had mainly poetry, at The Place.

WH: Yes. Well, it was a social place where you could meet anybody, almost, any time of the day. But we made sure that our gallery was not anywhere near Grant Avenue because there were a lot of little artsy-craftsy places opening up and we didn't want that. So we would go across town to The Place, and they would have their Blabbermouth Nights which were really Dada demonstrations. We didn't know it at the time, but it was just a rerun of Zurich, 1912 - 1914, where people could get up and say anything they want and then everybody'd pound on the tables and drink their beer and just generally raise hell. Knute Stiles is the guy you should ask about that because he was the bartender there and he's around. I don't know where.

PK: I have his address. I sent him a letter but I haven't heard. That doesn't mean he's not there.

WH: Well, he's a good guy to talk to because his mind is much more accurate than my own. He was the bartender at The Place, right during the peak of its activities. Miss Smith's Tea Room, which was down the street, (and they didn't serve tea, obviously), had poetry reading and it was sort of the center for bee-bop. The Place was all verbal. Once in a while we'd have a Dixieland band there, and it would sit up in the balcony and play on Sunday afternoon. But around the corner on Union was another place called The Cellar which was really subterranean, I'm sure that's where the title of that book came from, because it was underneath the sidewalk, a very dark, dim kind of place. The owner there was John Wiesjahn who was a piano player, not that that means anything. He's dead. But they were into the drug scene. The beatniks had their drug scene which was the equivalent of what goes on now but it was deeper, darker and sort of mysterious.

PK: It's a difference of color, almost, coloration between that generation, the beat

generation, and the hippie generation.

WH: Yeah, but there's a continuity. All I can think of is that it was sneakier.

PK: It certainly had to be.

WH: I guess it had to be. But the center of that was sort of The Cellar. The funny part of that was this Wiesjahn guy was continually ____ asking us to bring our paintings over. This was the place with the connection between avant-garde jazz, and they were playing the most progressive. They'd gotten way past chords. Coltrane -- wasn't even playing it then, but these guys were. There's an undocumented part of history. San Francisco was way ahead of New York with progressive jazz but there were only a small group of people doing it. They all ended up in the looney bin as far as --

PK: Was Dave Brubeck playing around here?

WH: Yeah, but nobody ever took him seriously. He was a friend of Deborah's. In fact, Brubeck, and his original quartet used to play in the Six Gallery. They would back the poets. In fact, there are tapes around. You might even run into them. If you ever get to Deborah, she knew about jazz. I never knew any.

PK: She was a student of jazz?

WH: Yeah, oh yeah. She could give you a complete run down on it. BUt it was an important part of our life, even though we might have not known about it. People were thinking about the complete art work at that time. I know I was, in the sense, what's that German word? Gestalt, it means gestalt work, the whole schmeer. And the jazz-poetry thing was one aspect of that. But we were doing light shows. That was my contribution. We would have poetry readings with jazz background and then I had my light machine --

PK: Still at the Six?

WH: Yeah, and they'd be in front of the machine. Sometimes rear projections. But this was very primitive compared to anything that's done now. But we were trying to find a connection -- at least I was -- between the visual arts. We were incorporating dance also.

PK: So it was a multi-media thing.

WH: Yeah, that's what it amounted to. I remember one we put on where a guy got an inflatable dome and we had the light machine on the inside, and the dancers were around the outside so their shadows were projected on to this inflatable dome. The people then sat around the outside. It was a giant dome, sort of run on a vacuum cleaner. But these things were a day to day thing. I wish I could say we had a program or something.

PK: It's a shame it wasn't documented. It sounds dusty and confining in a way, but it still is a shame it wasn't documented.

WH: Well, I think the people who were involved in it were too involved. Well at least I'm talking about myself now. I was more interested in doing it than documenting it.

PK: Well, that's appropriate. That's the way it should be.

WH: If I'd gotten hung up with tape recorders and cameras, it would have never gotten done because it was so impromptu. That was my point. The big artists were trying to find a connection between what they were doing and what the jazz musicians were doing. So were the poets. Everybody was trying to improvise organized polyphony from one media to the next. I remember the day we had this string quartet (I wish I could remember the guy's name). An action painter, that's what we called it then, was painting in this bar. That was his job. He made these paintings, and while he would paint the musicians would play along with him. He would go like this and they would go doodoodoop. It was very popular in North Beach. The guy would make four or five paintings in an evening.

PK: Who would come to watch these things? Mainly other artists? The 'in" group, the "in" crowd, so to speak?

WH: Well, the people who go to bars, and that could be almost anyone. At that time, North Beach had its tourist places like the Purple Onion. I think was open by then, They had all the

big names, the Kingston Trio for example. I don't think the Jazz Workshop was open then, but the Blackhawk Club was. There were places for the tourists and then there were these other places and they were usually underground, appropriately. But any way, to get back to your question about funk, it was, at least in my mind, tied in with this. I always thought of it as a musical term, it has to do with funspot. I don't know if you know that term. And in essence we -- actually I don't know if it was "we." I don't think I really was too interested in it. I'm too intellectual; I can't be funky. But I'm accused of it. I do funky things, but I do them rationally.

PK: You have to be irrational to be funky?

WH: You be really funky, you have to be at least no-aware of the fact that you're funky. It's much like jazz, which I tie it in with. When someone asked Louis Armstrong what jazz was, he said, "Lady, if you don't know now, you're never going to know." That's exactly right. Either you're funky or you're not. I can fake it and I can appreciate it, but I'm really not. Ruben is. All you have to do is look at the way he lives and the way he kind of smells.

PK: This dog?

WH: He's an innocent. Not all dogs are.

PK: But Ruben the dog is funky?

WH: Yes, he's funky. And Joan Brown would agree that he's funky. He might like to draw a picture.

PK: What about Roy DeForest, speaking of innocents?

WH: Roy is not innocent. He gives you that image but he's pretty much in my league, I mean, he and I understand each other. But we're really not funky. But Joan Brown is funky; Manuel Neri is funky. BUt see, I come to the end.

JH: Except Joan's so funky --

WH: No, she isn't, any more. YOu go to see her "Bumble Bee." I mean she aspired of it. She made some sculpture that was shown for Spatsa Gallery and that was the funkiest funk I've ever seen.

PK: Well, if you had an exhibition then, I gather from your point of view of authentic, genuine funk art, probably two or three people --

WH: Well, I'm beginning to think now, Jay De Feo, my first wife, was pretty funky.

JH: Her life style is. Except she works at it now.

WH: Well, she's become more sophisticated.

PK: Were her famous parties funky?

WH: Funky parties, yeah, oh yeah, yeah, exactly. And I had quite a bit to do with them, but on a rational basis. I would take care of the logistics so there'd be enough kegs of beer. But the essence of it, yeah, joan's right.

PK: Well, what about Bruce Conner, because his name is associated so closely, almost identified with funk and I think you'd agree with this on a broader, art historical basis.

WH: On a historical basis, he would probably be one of the prime movers, but he really isn't. He isn't funky.

PK: There's too much thinking?

WH: Not too much from my view point. But, yeah, he thinks too much to be really funky. He can use it as a, a --

PK: A springboard or something?

WH: Well, as a technique, where as a really funky person, has no choice, see?

PK: Well, it's like the true post-primitive or naive as opposed to --

WH: That's right. Rousseau, I think he's funky.

PK: Rousseau is funky? Hum

JH: In spite of the sophistication of his primitive art?

WH: He was a funky person, too. Anybody that can be put down and not know it it. My antennas are always up, man. A mile away I know they're coming to put me down. And that is unfunky. But people associate me with it in the same way they do Bruce. We've done funky things and some times we act funky, but we're too rational.

PK: That's interesting because according to articles in Art America and the whole literary, and verbal history of funk art, you and Bruce Conner are considered, I guess, perhaps the key figures. So it's especially interesting to hear you say this.

JH: Well, what about that guy from Italy -- was he from Italy? He wanted to write a thing on funk art and all he knew was what Peter Selz had done. That's how things get distorted.

PK: Yeah, it's interesting. We talked a little bit about Peter Selz, there's no point in going into great detail on it. But on the other hand, the show at the UC Art Museum, the funk show which really committed the movement or phenomenon to history, there's no question about it but that most of the artists involved, at least those I've talked to, were very unhappy about it.

WH: Well, very few of them were very funky. No, the funkiest piece in there was Joan Brown's "Rat." They put that so you couldn't see it because it looked awful.

PK: She told me about that. She was going to throw that in the trash.

WH: Well, it was really funky and that's why it was objectionable because it would kind of, you know. . .

PK: She claims she dug in out of the trash can.

WH: Well, I never saw the show, so I'm no authority on it. I got you up to the Six Gallery. From there in, I started entering competitive shows and I won my first award in '53 at the L.A. County Museum. Then entering shows became a big thing with me. I just liked to do it. It became a big thing with me. I just liked to do it. It became a kind of competitive thing, and at that time, I guess everybody was doing it. I don't do it any more. But it was a way of getting my work known. Then the next thing I knew -- that's funky. Baby here's funky. Putting the food all over her face, that's funky.

PK: That's funky.

JH: Bill Morehouse did that when he was doing those things.

PK: Well, what about David Gilhooly and people like that?

WH: Well, they're fine.

PK: I'm not asking for a quality --

WH: I know. I know them and they're under the general term "funk" but they're not funky people at all.

PK: You had to be a funky person, probably, to make funk art.

WH: I think so. BUt see, that doesn't really make sense because you don't have to be an abstract expressionist person to make abstract expression.

PK: There's a difference, though.

WH: Yeah, I think I've learned to limit my term down to a very small, select group, so it's just my usage.

PK: Well, what about junk? What about the use of junk, debris of civilizations? Obviously

there, you --

WH: I admit to that. A long time ago, long before this thing about ecology and all that, I decided that I thought the idea of taking waste material and making it into something was really neat. In fact, when I show you this paper where I'm quoted in '53, I like to make something out of nothing." That sounds like a nice thing. I don't remember saying it, but at least they say I said it. And the essence of that interests me, to take garbage and make it into art, kind of ironic art. And the process of doing that. I'm sure I've inherited from Duchamp's found objects or his assisted, ready-made objects. He takes and object and it still shows up now. The beer can's a very famous object now since Jasper Johns cast them.

PK: When did you start doing this? You were basically, a painter in the beginning, right?

WH: Yeah, in Pasadena.

PK: And then you began moving into assemblage and sculpture.

WH: Yeah. I think in Pasadena, I found out about the Bauhaus and I was interested in it. The Bauhaus led to discoveries about the constructivists in Russia whom I've always admired. They just put things together, and I admired the structures that they assembled. But I never really did anything constructive until I came to San Francisco and I taught myself how to weld. Nobody at the school was welding. Bob Howard tolerated me using his welding equipment (that's one of the reasons I like him). So I began welding in '52. I can show you, it was like Bankowitz. I didn't know Bankowitz from a hole in the ground. I was taking junk, gears and things, and welding it together.

PK: You were the first person in this area who was doing that?

WH: I guess so.

PK: Objet trouve, found object approach.

WH: Probably. I mean, I don't know that to be a fact, but it's a strong possibility. I don't know if I've told you this, but it's a long, involved story of how I got to know Jay De Feo. When I first got to know her, I'd go over to her house and talk. One day when she'd gone to the john or something, I began looking for something to eat. I went to the refrigerator and opened it up and it seems that she'd put all of her old underwear in the refrigerator. It was a couple years' supply. The refrigerator was off, it probably hadn't run in ten years and she never washed her clothes and so (instead of putting it some place else or throwing it away when she'd take off her underwear) she'd just stick it in there.

PK: The scales fall from my eyes like St. Paul and all of a sudden I recognize funk.

JH: But I also think she's obsessed with being that way.

PK: I don't know if we ever finished with that topic or not, but at least to a certain degree and considering the selection of materials involved, funk is an art form.

WH: Well, I think it is. And example is Bill Geis's thing, he selects the plaster and the stained plaster and the way it looks, and then it has a funky look. But, I repeat myself, at least in my own mind to be really funky, a person has to be controlled by the materials, and those three people are. They never have gotten so that they can control their instrument. It controls them, which is great. It sounds like I'm putting them down, but it really isn't because what comes out is really more important than how they do it. But I think it does confuse people because myself, Bruce Conner and Wally Berman, for that matter, are associated with funk when really we're using it. That is when we do use it. Art Brandt probably is another person who verges on being funky. He's sort of out of it, but if you talk to Joan Brown ask her about Art Brandt. There verges on being funky. He's sort of out of it, but if you talk to Joan Brown ask her about Art Brandt. There was a pot maker way before Gilhooly and that crowd whose name I can't remember but Joan will know because it's there that she got her rat idea. This guy, would make thousands of little clay rats. So what, you know. But it impressed her.

PK: You think, then, that Peter Selz, perhaps, and the famous show at Berkely, really missed the spirit of funk? He may have recognized a look? Would this be a fair way to. . . ?

WH: Yeah. I think he was trying to give us a working term and being an art historian myself,

I'm sure this was very important to him. And he has given us a style that we can work with, the same way we work with abstract expressionists or cubists or any other title. I think what stopped a lot of the artists is that a lot of them are involved with it and they figured he should do his job as well as they do theirs. Their job isn't to title themselves, or classify themselves, or worry about the permanence of their work. I don't think they should. Their idea is to produce the work. The museum person should be accurate and should check his facts and try to get them straight. That's his job. So the artist, he sits around and says, "That guy isn't doing his job right, as well as he could." And then, to top it all off, and this is what I guess maddened the people I talked to, it gets national recognition, or international recognition, and it's all based on an inaccuracy. Here's a guy that's reputable and also internationally known for something that's a fraud. I don't care, but a lot of people are very upset by it.

PK: But it misses in several ways, and I am interested in being precise about it.

WH: Well, I think you got it, you were enlightened about ten minutes ago. I think you expressed it and I think you got the essence of what I was trying to say. You were verging on understanding my concept of it, but I don't claim that mine is the only one.

PK: Does anybody know where the term originated?

WH: As far as I'm concerned, it came from the jazz term.

PK: You mentioned that, but do you have any idea who first applied it?

WH: Well it's a German word.

PK: But I mean to the art scent?

WH: I have no idea. I heard the term in music being used in North Beach before it was applied to a visual thing. I could have, but it could have been anybody else for that matter. I have no way of knowing.

PK: Do you have any idea when it came into currency?

WH: I think '53 would be a very crucial date, '52, '53.

PK: That early in connection with the visual?

WH: Oh, yeah, because we were talking about Joan's paintings being funky in '55, and the term was around then. Again, it wasn't being used to describe visual work, it described music.

PK: But it started out as probably a carry over from music and really as an informal adjective, as we would say something's groovy.

WH: Yeah, and funky was a thing to work for. When you described, "This is really funky," that was a positive statement. It didn't have negative connotations. "Down home" is a synonym for it.

PK: Let me ask you about Wallace Berman and perhaps your relationship, whatever that might have been, and any role he played during these times in the early '50s, here in the Bay Area.

WH: Yeah, I've tried to think of when I first met him. The thing about Wally is that he was the other Wally. I have never been around so many people whose name was Wally, and it was rather disconcerting to have someone else there who was called Wally. Actually we called him Wally Two.

PK: You were Wally One?

WH: Yeah, I guess so, I was Wally One. I must have been about 1955. Again, Jay could tell you this because she knew Wally, I don't know quite what the connection was. I was from L.A., she wasn't. Maybe Walter Hopps was the connection.

PK: What about Craig Kauffman or somebody like that?

WH: Well, Kauffman was around; I never knew him very well. Actually she knew the Ferus people more than I did because they were after her because her stuff was really more definitive of that era, it's funkier and she was somewhere between abstract expressionism and funk. They liked it because they'd never seen anything like that.

PK: You mean the Ferus people?

WH: Yeah. They were coming up here, I guess it must have been about 1955, and they were in contact with her because they wanted her work. So I guess she got to know Wally that way. All I remember is, that the first time I ever really talked to him was when he lived out on a houseboat in Larkspur. There used to be, and I guess there still are, where the freeway is a bunch of houseboats, Wally used to have one. I don't know quite what the connection was, but anyway, we went out to see him once and I remember walking out over the water on the boardwalk. That's what they call it in Larkspur. And out at the end of this thing, was this houseboat and Wally Berman was there with his wife, (the one with the eyes). He had a little printing press, and he hadn't quite got into that Semina series, but he was doing some things that preceded that involving some kind of photocopying. Again, Jay could probably well you more about this.

PK: Was there any exchange of ideas?

WH: I don't think so.

PK: I'm sure you know this, he sometimes mentioned an interesting use of the term, when speaking of the publication Semina as a seminal influence on the West Coast, in terms of what might be called proto-pop ideas. I don't want to use terminology like that. I was just curious if you would say there was any influence.

WH: Well, I think we probably influenced each other but it was completely nondirective. See, that's why it's a little hard for me to get. I mean he's a really nice guy and he did nice things, but just about everybody I knew did. So he was one other person. And he was sort of from L.A. By sort of I mean, so am I, but. . . He was a visitor and I was more concerned with my immediate group of friends. But he was in and out, and I was aware of his stuff. He always sent us his newest stuff. But I connect him more with sort of a poet fan.

PK: Of course, there were a number of them up in this area at the time.

WH: Yeah. There were quite a few of them. But they were different than us. I've never understood poetry. Again, I'll have to go back to joan Brown. She knew Wally, very much, but I'm sure she never read a poem in her whole life. See, the poets are much more, I mean, they have programs. Like you'd look at this stuff and at the bottom it'd say Ezra Pound. We didn't know Ezra Pound from a hole in the ground, didn't mean a thing to us.

PK: So the relationship with -- I'm just trying to sort this out in my own --

WH: I'm trying to sort it out in my mind.

PK: It seems to me in San Francisco, during the '50s and in to the early '60s and maybe in the late '40s, there were germs. There was something happening that involved certainly literature, poetry. The poets are well known, the beat poets, North Beach scene, City Lights and all this. There was the jazz music; there were the painters, the artists. There were relationships, it seems to me, very much perhaps on a social level with people in different groups, if we can separate them. It doesn't need to happen, but let's do it for convenience sake. People from the different groups would know one another, they'd meet to go to Vesuvio's, they'd do things at The Cellar, The Place. And yet, despite the reach for multi-media, much of it was on a social level, much of the cross-friendships. Does this come at all close?

WH: Actually, the word "social" rings a bell because it makes my mind work a little better as far as the question goes because, drinking, openings, food, and music were all of the by-products of when a person had a show. And then dancing, too, come to think of it. Being a non-dancer, I was never a part of that. Bruce is very interested in that, yeah. And most of the group was. And so openings of any sort were much more attended during that period. In fact, part of the thing was to get loaded and just act outrageous.

PK: Funky.

WH: Funky, yeah. I mean, a person like Bill Wiley, he looks very quiet and rational even though he's crazy, like a fox. He doesn't have a name like Wiley without a reason. He's had to be restrained, physically, by five or six people when he gets on a rampage.

PK: I'm glad you've warned me before I meet him.

WH: Well, he's not physical any more. This was back when he was a youngster. Bill Geis is known to have had to be sedated. He had destructive tendencies. But it was part of being; I guess this was how we enjoyed ourselves. But, that's phased out. I would be surprised if it happened now.

PK: So really, that era is over?

WH: Yeah, it is.

PK: No question about it. Let me ask you a couple of other things, again for the record. I'm sure there is more that might occur to you quite naturally, but I'm thinking specifically in terms of your own career.

WH: So far, you haven't gotten anything of it.

PK: Well, not much. THat's right. We've jumped around a lot, but we've traveled up through the Six Gallery. One of the questions I had for you that comes up in conversation, deals with your sort of retirement or removal from the art scene or the art market. It was obviously a choice you made. Perhaps that's the best way to put it; I'm trying to put this inagreeable terms. I think you know what I mean. You said a little while ago that you were very interested in exhibiting at one point; you won the prize at the L.A. County Museum, and I gather this was in the early '60s?

WH: That was '53.

PK: Oh, '53.

WH: And I hit my peak at the Museum of Modern Art in '59.

PK: And you were, of course, exhibiting at Dilexi Gallery. I know that. You were exhibiting around here probably quite a bit, and in New York as well?

WH: That's right, yes. Again, it's like living here. I wish I could say it was a conscious decision on my part, but it was sort of like when I paint. I tend to paint out a lot and get to the painting backwards by eliminating things and whatever's left is what it is. I get rid of the stuff that doesn't work and that whatever gets left there is what it is. So I think that's probably what happened. I just stopped. I mean, it didn't get me anywhere, maybe a little financially, but morally, it was bad.

PK: How do you mean that?

WH: Well, I know this just rankles people when I just say that.

PK: It doesn't rankle me but it peaks my curiosity.

WH: Well, it rankles a lot of people when I say it because they take it personally. It's not anything personal, it's a completely subjective decision on my own. I can't see that it was getting me anywhere. All it would do was get me in the magazines; and maybe I'd make more money. Then I would just have too much to drink or I'd go somewhere, and I wouldn't get any work done. I know what happens when I get a little money. So I don't need that stuff. I'd rather run my fix-it shop and stay here.

PK: How long has it been since you've exhibited?

WH: Well, it's not that I wouldn't like to show my work, it's that nobody wants to show it. I spent ten years doing blots.

PK: Are these recent things, the blots.?

WH: Well, it took ten years to paint them and I've never been able to show them. Now, I'm not complaining, I'm just saying that people say they wonder why they don't see my work.

PK: You still are working, though?

WH: Oh, yeah. I don't do blot paintings any more.

PK: But I mean, you still are working? It's not a complete break with. . .

WH: Oh, I'll show you what I'm doing now. No, that's why a lot of people think that I quit painting ten years ago because they don't want to look at these black paintings. I mean, I show them and they say, "Oh, yeah."

PK: They don't like it if it's not beer cans any more, is that it?

WH: It's like my mother saying when I see her, she says, "Bill", -- she calls me Bill, -- "Bill, why don't you paint some nice paintings like you used to paint?"

PK: You don't mean those communist sort of abstract expressionist works? (Laughs)

WH: Well, no, that's even back further when I painted nice water colors.

PK: Landscapes? Laguna Beach scenes?

WH: Well, I was from Southern California. I got so I could do water colors like a wiz, like Millard Sheets. It's gotten now so that, for example, if the man from the WHitney, Bob Doty walked in, and said, "Wally, it's time to show your black paintings," I'd tell him I would rather not because I asked him to show those paintings when it really would have counted, at least from my view point.

JH: ALl his curators couldn't agree.

WH: Well, curators tend not to understand timing, but only historically, important painting, and that doesn't interest me.

PK: Yeah, but you're right, that's what the museums feel are safe. They want to have some sort of notion or assurance that they've got an important show in terms of art history. That's the way the Museum of Modern Art operates. But I'm not supposed to editorialize.

WH: Well, that's why I was dumbfounded when Dorothy Miller came to see me because I had no illusions about ever showing at the Museum of Modern Art. But she just came out of the blue, you know, and there it was. So maybe this will happen again. I don't know. But it'll be a shock to me when some museum person comes in and sees what I'm doing today and says, "Oh, we ought to show that," because they're usually about ten years behind me. That sounds a little egocentric, but it's the truth. People associate me with something else, and when they see what I'm going now, they just don't understand. I understand it. If I were in their shoes, I'd probably feel the same way. But it's hard for people just to accept what they see, they have to have some groundwork for it. I just don't work that way. There's no continuity in my work at all. I don't paint from one painting to the next because I'm not interested in developmental painting. I'm interested in ideas.

PK: That makes it very difficult for art historians. You should be more thoughtful.

WH: I don't date my paintings.

PK: That's even worse. I can't have any sympathy for you.

WH: I hope you get what I'm trying to say. It's not that I mind showing my work, in fact, I enjoy it. But I like to show it in a certain way at a certain time, and when that doesn't happen, then it just doesn't get shown.

PK: How long has it been since you've had a show?

WH: The last one man show was in Newport.

PK: Did Tom Garver do that?

WH: No, Betty Gold. That was ten years ago, wasn't it?

JH: That was in '67 or '68, something like that.

WH: Yeah, I don't have that catalog any more.

JH: Somebody stole it.

WH: But that was the last one man show.

PK: Were other artists painting non-objective pictures?

WH: Yes.

PK: Would you say they were what we now call abstract expressionist pictures.

WH: Well, yes. I'm trying to think what David Park was painting in 1946, whether it was a more formalistic thing. He got into it later. I think it might have been at this point. But of their students, I remember John Grillo was very much of a hot-shot there. He was painting these non-representational abstract expressionist paintings at that point. There were other students. It was by no means a dead place. It didn't have to wait for Clyfford Still to come along to come to life, it was already very much alive and kicking.

PK: Then, what was, in your opinion, Clyfford Still's role? What did he contribute?

WH: He had a very strong moral stance, a very uncompromising and stern posture. I think he was stern enough so there would be very, very few artists of the past on his list. Very, very few. And I think he was kind of unique in that sense, as a purist. The virtue of this was that he instilled int he people and the students that became attached to him, and followed him, a tremendous feeling of purpose. (END OF TAPE) WALLY HEDRICK INTERVIEW #2

PK: We probably should explain what we're doing here. We're going through a batch of your own material: photographs, catalogs, items that will be microfilmed for the Achieves. And on this tape, you're going to describe the special significance of some of the items that we come across.

WH: Well, when we finished the last tape, we were at about 1955. If I remember correctly, I think I mentioned that I'd won my first competitive prize in '53 or sometime around then. That was a painting that I'd done in Los Angeles and brought up with me, and then it ended up down there. But when I came back to San Francisco, I did a whole bunch of paintings before I got a chance to ever show them, which is usual. At this period, I was married to Jay De Feo, and one of the paintings from that period is called Jay. Me at Cat. And it's dated 10/7/51, so it was probably one of the first I did when I got back out of the Army. I don't know where the painting is now, but you can see here's me, and you can see the remnants of Leonard Edmonson and Paul Klee here, there's the cat, and then Jay. And when you interview Jay, you'll find out that this is pretty typical of the kind of work she was doing. When I said L.A. liked her, it was because of this kind of free-wheeling romanticism.

PK: Jay. Me at Cat.

WH: And I don't know, this was shown somewhere obviously because it has a label on the back, but I don't remember it and I don't know where it is now.

PK: San Francisco Art Association, 1956.

WH: It might be in one of their annuals, then. A better document, I guess, was my first one man show which was at the Art Association Gallery in '56. You can see me there without a beard and much younger. How about that? (Laughs) I had had a one man show at a gallery called Area Art, I think in '54. It was run by a guy named Zack. I don't know whatever happened to him.

PK: David Zack?

WH: No, no. Funny, I had never thought of that, they both have the same name. I don't know where this guy came from or where he went, but he had a small gallery on Sutter Street. I have no record of that. But I guess the best thing about this, at least from my viewpoint, are the titles. At this time I was quite interested in things. I was reading a lot and I was hearing a lot of lectures, and people would talk about my works, like this first one, Bottomjelly. That was the way I first heard Botticelli. The guy was lecturing on Botticelli and all I heard was "Bottomjelly." Well, it turns out that I have this high frequency hearing loss, and I guess it contributed because it cuts down the consonants or something. But anyway,

Art Through the Ages, which I still have a slide of, was done in honor of the art history books. Have Your Quarter Ready. I guess I mentioned bridges, a lot of these grid like images look like bridges, and that particular painting looked very much like a bridge. You had to have a quarter to go across the bridge. I still have a picture of Chug. Metropolitan, is this one you have in your hand --

PK: And I think it is reproduced, in this catalog.

WH: Yeah. This is the one that Fred martin was talking about later, when he said that I was painting like a cubist but didn't understand it. Well, he's probably right because I didn't have any idea I was being like a cubist at all.

PK: Well, these were the works that you were doing. Would this define your early style? You talked about the Klee influence, and that of Edmonson.

WH: Yeah, in the figure to ground. It's hard to see in this one but to me it is figure to ground. In the reproduction it's a little easier to see; there's the grid structure and then you'll notice all of these grey areas. That was an all over background that was painted later. But just about this time during '55, '56, I stopped doing that. Probably this is one of the last of them. But the title, to me, is more important than the painting because I don't think I knew what the Metropolitan was. But somehow I got the two together, so there's some kind of statement. Meanwhile Back at the Ranch. . . Between the Acts, I was smoking them then, they are a small cigar; This Way to the Fire Escape which is reproduced in the catalog. That was just when Jay and I moved into our apartment on Fillmore which later we shared (not our apartment, there were four apartments) with Mike McClure, Jim Kelly and Sonia Gechtoff, Joan Brown, Jim Newman. A lot of people lived in there. This was the front of the building which had fire escapes on it. In fact, that wall had to be torn out when we took out Jay's big painting.

PK: You know (this is an aside) Nell Sinton sent me, six or seven slides of moving this big painting out of that place. I guess it was in '66.

WH: She was there that day.

PK: I think Bruce Conner actually took these photographs.

WH: Bruce Conner made a movie of that day, the whole process. I don't know if he's finished editing it. In fact, the painting had to go out through that wall right there. Any way, Wind in the South Col, I was interested in mountain climbing and it refers to the British who had just climbed Everest from South Col. Right Traverse is a painting that still exists somewhere. You know a little bit about my sculpture The Sunflower, is in the city; it's a mobile. I mentioned Bob Howard. I think I actually did that in a class when he was there.

PK: Is that one of the beer can things?

WH: Well, no, this is more in the tradition of welded sculpture. The Sunflower is made out of a large, circular saw blade and then there's a triangular base. It has a crank at the bottom and if one turns the crank the flower goes around. But that still exists. Jay. Me at Bat, which is like the painting, only it now has bat. The Oakland Museum owns it and they still have it. I have never seen it, but people tell me about it all the time. Again, there I am three dimensional. This is a piece of Jay's jewelry that she was building then, really nice stuff. The bat was a. . . Yahgee still is around. A Yahgee is a type of TV antenna, was invented by Yahgee, a Japanese guy, it's a one we all have. And A Real Fred Cage refers to Fred Martin. It's a magazine stand, but it doesn't exist. I don't know where it is now but it's a rebuilt magazine stand.

PK: SO the titles really were --

WH: Well, the titles were really more important than the works.

PK: They're not arbitrary titles.

WH: Every one of them meant something.

PK: They referred to images within.

WH: When I had my show in Sonoma around I guess '68 or so, some of those same works

showed up. That's His Master's Voice back there; it's hard to see it but it's there. This is one of them, the Christmas Tree which isn't listed there. But along with some of the more modern pieces that. . .

PK: You just passed up your Madonna and Child here.

WH: Well, that's about 1958. It isn't dated on the back. I did one of those because I saw there was a book of 100 Madonnas and I figured that if a hundred artists did a hundred of them, I should do one. So I did. It's about ten feet tall.

PK: It's like an altar panel, a Renaissance altar.

WH: Oh, yeah, well it's done with a completely Renaissance technique, gold leaf on the halos. The crack came later, which I always liked because it looked like white lightning. This is all gold leaf.

PK: But what's the demon down there? What's the ichnography here? Is that supposed to represent evil or the devil?

WH: It's the devil. It's a four-legged devil; and the rose refers to Jay's big painting called The Rose. Pax is obviously peace but it's a Pax of Spade which is a series of paintings I never got around to doing but I want to do. This exists but I don't know where it is. I mean, somebody we know has it.

JH: Schroeder has it, I think.

WH: Does he? Dick Schroeder. Here's Between the Acts which is listed there. I always liked this one because it sort of leads up to my black paintings, even though it's hard for people to see that. I see it.

PK: When was it done? What's the date?

WH: Well, it'd listed in the catalog as '56.

PK: And you say this leads up to the black paintings. I can see that.

WH: Well, when we get to them, you'll see that the texture -- in fact, this painting might have been made into a black painting, I don't know. No, I don't think so. While it still has some of that gridlike quality the technique is much looser so that I'm afraid that the San Francisco and pasadena were sort of fighting one another technically at the time. But as i say, the idea is much more interesting to me.

PK: What do you mean specifically, Pasadena and San Francisco? Abstract expressionism?

WH: Well, Pasadena represents the kind of static, sort of neocubist, two dimensionality, in opposition to the freer, abstract expressionist technique. But even more importantly, it's a play on words. Between the Acts actually is a cigar, but. . .

PK: A-C-T-S. Is that it?

WH: Well, Between the Acts is a cigar, so Between the Acts to me, seemed funny at the time. But this is sort of a little --

PK: It's another pun, basically. A lot of these paintings --

WH: Yes, there are some puns involved. Here is a close-up of Bottomjelly.

PK: Yeah, that is almost funky if you want to carry the title to the implications of bottom.

WH: Well, you said that. But in regard to that, the guy who organized my show at Sonoma gave me this title. It wasn't my suggestion. The catalog is in here. These are all dated. This one, was always one of my favorite ones. It was made up of smashed beer cans in a kind of pyramid. But I thought of them as sort of a mountain, so I called it American Everest.

PK: It looks like the Matterhorn, that thing at Disneyland where they've reproduced the mountain.

WH: Yes, sort of like that. This one --

PK: This is the Sonoma show, right?

WH: Yeah. Max. What happened to Julie? (Baby crying in background)

PK: For the benefit of the tape, this is Wally's nine month old son Max, who obviously has more to say than we do. Ok, here we go again.

WH: In this installation shot, there are several works illustrated. The Sunflower is the one I wanted to show you. You can see it back here, way in the back.

PK: Right. It's a tall thing with a crank at the bottom. Is that a saw blade, did you say?

WH: Yeah, a circular saw blade. But the one that has a story attached to it is this Christmas tree which is in several of them. That dates from, well, I built that the summer that -- I started collecting stuff which was in '54. I had the idea of building this Christmas tree. I was going to have a wooden Christmas tree and I was going to hang things on it, like American things, junk. But then I decided I had so much stuff that I might as well just build a Christmas tree out of junk. It had two radios and two phonographs and flashing lights and electric fans and a saw motor, and, these were all controlled by timers. Well, John Humphrey can tell you about it because it became kind of a celebrity at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I don't remember when it was, probably '57 or '58, some where along in there. They had a show and they invited me to have a piece in it. I took this thing down there and rehabilitated it. It had these timers out of washing machines, you know how they cycle them selves. Well, I hooked it up so it would cycle all these things. Like one of the record players played, "I Hate to See Christmas Come Around." It was a very big tune at the time. Any way, I got it all going and I plugged it in, but I set the timers so they wouldn't go off until the opening of the show, which was later that evening. So precisely at eight o'clock when the show opened up, the thing started up. At the beginning (now I've been getting this second hand because I wasn't there) it just flashed its lights, honked it horns, played its records, while the people were standing around with cocktails in their hands. One lady with a fur coat was standing close to it drinking and talking to her friends. It had a n aoohgah horn out of a very old automobile, and it only went off about once every twelve hours. Well, it went off right next to this woman and she backed right into it and got tangled in the mechanism because there were machines going around in it all the time. Her fur got tangled in it also gave her a shock. SHe was going to sue the museum. Then it just blew up. I wasn't there.

PK: The machine blew up?

WH: Well, because she stopped it, it started smoking.

PK: They should have sent it to Wally's Fix-It Shop.

WH: Probably. But anyway, it caused quite a sensation; not because of its artistic merit, but because it attacked this lady, which I thought was very nice.

PK: Was that the first piece, then, that moves into the area of found objects in your work? Or junk sculpture? Or was this an idea that you'd had earlier?

WH: Actually, I'd been doing it for quite a while. This was sort of the pinnacle of it because I'd never attempted any thing so complicated. The electrical circuits for this thing took two pages of, well, I don't know how to describe it, but the kind of paper I was using was bout one by two feet, and the circuit was quite elaborate. The one thing I hadn't done was ground it, but I didn't think of such things, and there were lots. It was a trap and the lady probably did get a shock. Ever since I learned to weld, I guess I started somewhere along in '52, I've been making mobiles, but most of them were hand operated I always wanted to make a three-dimensional of Klee's Twittering Machine. I tried many times, but it never worked. However, I did make things that you'd turn the crank and they'd make noises, play tunes sort of like musical boxes. And I'd made individual, motorized things.

PK: Did you create them, though, as art objects? Were you consciously thinking, "I'm working as an artist", or was this something that you were doing like an avocation and then more or less as a joke, you would submit something, like The Christmas Tree, to the San Francisco Museum? Of course, that had already been in a show.

WH: No, I was making things. I was aware of the fact that there had been people who had made art objects. I was conscientiously aware. I knew about the Bauhaus and I knew about the Russian Constructivists, I knew about --

PK: Duchamp, perhaps?

WH: Well, I can't say that I knew about Duchamp. I knew about his work. I didn't know about him.

PK: What about the whole idea of Dadism?

WH: Well I knew about it, yeah. And it always appealed to me and I probably am a Dadaist, but a left-wing Dadaist, you know.

PK: What ever that might be.

WH: Well, when you asked me if I knew it was art, I knew it was art in the back of my mind, but I wasn't making it as an art thing. I was more interested in making a "thing", and if it attacked people -- well, I guess I knew it was going to attack.

PK: THe truth comes out. I might be the first time you admitted that.

WH: Nobody's ever asked me. But I knew it would probably attack them because I laid the trap. So it entertained me; I thought the evening was a success. Well any way, the reason I mention that show was because a lot of the work that I don't have slides of at least appear in this installation. The next item I have here is Rest in Pisces. Now see, there again, the title almost took me longer than the work. It was made up of cat food cans, that contained tuna which symbolizes the fish.

PK: I get it.

WH: I was just becoming aware of the war in Vietnam at this time.

PK: That interests me. 1957 it says here.

WH: Yeah. We weren't really there overtly but we were there. I was starting to hear things on the new broadcasts, "We're sending 20 advisers". And I said, "Uh oh, here we go". But see, I'd only been out of the Army five years, and somehow I don't think I knew the difference between Korea and Vietnam. To me it was all the same. All I knew was we were there and we were going to get screwed again, you know. So it was sort of in honor of the people being killed, I guess.

PK: I don't mean to lead you at all, but was this particular piece a manifestation of a political consciousness to a certain extent?

WH: The title was. The piece itself, well, I did see a resemblance between that and these wreaths. They had a pedestal like, you know. . .

PK: Like the wreaths which are some time put on a grave, is that it?

WH: Yeah, and they have these little tripods. But now I have to admit, I saw that afterwards.

PK: So it was really the title rather than something int he nature or the look of the piece it self.

WH: Well, I made the piece and I made the title as two separate things. They just happened to be related. Now that doesn't sound too clear, but it's true. The relation was that it was made out of cat food cans and sort of looked --

PK: Yeah, that part's clear. Well, I guess just the theme of death would tie it in with your new awareness of what was starting again in Vietnam. I'm interested in this because, as you probably know, Bruce Conner talks a lot about a politically engaged art in San Francisco and the awareness of the war and so forth.

WH: Yeah, his first movies got to me. THat first time when he showed up out here with his suitcase filled with film clips and he hooked it all together and called it The Movie. That to me had a great impact.

PK: I haven't seen that movie. What was it?

WH: Well, it was just shots of man. Now, at the time, I didn't have the reaction that I'm giving you now. I've just seen the thing recently because he was down at San Jose and he brought that film along, so I saw it again and I re-examined my feelings about it. It's about the spirit of man, man trying things like all his crazy flying machines. There is a great shot of this flapping machine trying to get off the ground and just collapsing. Funny things like guys driving cars through barns or into brick walls just to see if they can do it.

PK: Like Laurel and Hardy.

WH: Yeah. But he then tied it in with the Hindenberg coming down and showed a great shot.

PK: Didn't he use that in Cosmic Ray, as well? It was the film I remember which Bruce Conner did.

WH: Probably, it's so amazing.

PK: Is that the one with the bridge disaster?

WH: The bridges all these things_____. It's just a series of things showing man trying to do something and just falling on his face, you know. And war being one of them. But anyway, I guess probably the last painting I did that involved this kind of grid-like thing was called The Round Painting, then retitled A Round Painting, which the Museum of Modern Art has now. This is not too good a reproduction and it's also at an oblique angle, but you can see a close-up of that central part.

PK: It looks almost like the great Aztec sundial or something like that.

WH: Well, it has that two dimensional quality that I was sort of working my way out of, I think.

PK: What was the date on that? Do you remember when?

WH: It was '57, I think. But it's listed in this catalog. I guess that's the easiest way. Might as well perpetrate the mistake that I gave them the first time. That's a terrible thing.

PK: Well, at least you're consistent in your errors.

WH: But around that time, and I'm sure this was '57, too, I started painting a little more freely and also in what I considered sort of a theatrical, three-dimensional style. I mean, everything was modeled.

PK: Well, this looks like it's based on a round painting.

WH: I was looking at a lot of, what was I looking at?

PK: There're ecclesiastical symbols in here.

WH: Well, I think they were Russian --

PK: Icons or something?

WH: Not icons, but jewelry or something.

PK: This looks like the bishop's orb.

WH: Yeah.

PK: With a cross on top of it. I see.

WH: But I kept that. This was in '59, when I stopped depending on the imagery but kept the modeling. I would set a light source and do it. With Hermetic imagery they're always making madonna-type things, and they'll have very high class titles and names. I use them myself. They're usually in Latin. Well, this was sort of the height of, I mean, I was tired of all that intellectualism, of using Latin. So I substituted the things. This has Latin for example, and was actually done after this one, so I'm not as great as I'm making it out to be.

PK: You mean this is a hermetic image?

WH: Yeah.

PK: And it was done in '69.

WH: It has earth, water, fire, Jesus up at the top, the Devil down at the bottom, and all of the usual.

PK: They're not religious paintings, I take it, but you're using the imagery.

WH: Oh, the image was what interested me.

PK: Was there any sort of a statement involved?

WH: Well not in that one. But in this one there was even though this pre-dated that one. I had taken things that interested the person in the 15th or 16th century, and these are the things that interest me. All I do is start anywhere. I mean, this was like a color wheel to me except it had to do with my living. The primaries might be love, art and spirit. That's right, I remember now: love, art and spirit. If you add love and art together, you get rose, which refers back to that painting of Jay's; sex and spirit makes field; art and spirit makes me. Those would be the secondaries. Love and rose is gin, which had to do with openings. And each one of those had a symbol. They're hard to see here, but sex had whip, love had heart, gin had x's, rose had a rose, art had a triangle, me had a capital one, and spirit had wings. Wings were big then.

PK: What's this, the photo on the cardboard above the hermetic image?

WH: Well, this is one of the big black paintings only it's in the shape of a room. You're seeing the outside of it here. I'll show you some other photographs of it. This was the stretcher bar that forms itself into a square and a door to go in it. (Laughs)

PK: So you're creating an environment.

WH: Yeah. About this time between '56 and '58 was the first time I made a black painting. But I was doing other things concurrently.

PK: You were doing the junk sculpture at about the same time.

WH: Yes, I was welding beer cans, this carried over until --

PK: 1969.

WH: Yeah. This is why I said there apparently is no continuity in my work in the sense of one painting to the next. I know there is but it's not a stylistic one because to me style is a controllable thing. I try not to let it get me down, so if I want to paint freely, I know how to do that. If I want to paint tightly, I know how to do that. But I try not to let that control the image. I want the vice versa to work. If I want a tight image, I paint tightly. You've never seen any of the black paintings. There are about 50 of them. The earliest one was '57, but it really wasn't a black painting until probably '58. Earlier it was more like a spirit painting which is different. This is the one that Rudy Turk has. As I said, wings were big, lots of people were putting wings on things. At least I did it thinking of spirit, but the real spirit painting came along --

PK: Well there's obviously a heart here, and that represents the spirit.

WH: Heart with wings on it.

PK: Really a very old-fashioned notion of the spiritual quality, man's spirit being located in the heart, the soul.

WH: And then being able to fly. But this is a real spirit painting. The museum has one of those, too, come to think of it.

PK: That's not a black painting.

WH: No, but like the one the museum has done in '58, which is concurrent with it. I

remember painting both of these paintings at the same time.

PK: And they're all called Spirit.

WH: Well, spirit was in the title somewhere. Like this is Spirit Three, 1958.

PK: Was this one probably done in 1958, too?

WH: Yeah.

PK: And we could just call it a spirit painting.

WH: That was probably four, five or six, somewhere along in there. I don't know where that one is. This image continued, I mean, I made some lithographs very recently and it's still like it. And all it is is this kind of part in the hair. Now, that's not the way I describe it, but that's how people describe it.

PK: These are the chambers of the heart?

WH: Well, I don't know.

PK: Did you think of it that way?

WH: I think of them as things going, you know, sort of like --

PK: An expansive --

WH: Yeah, sort of growing. OF course this painting I've always liked, which to me is very similar to this only it doesn't look like it. About 1959 -- and these aren't dated -- I had a show at the New Mission Gallery which was a place you've probably heard of. There's a review of it in Art Forum which John Coplans did. But I went through a pornography period --

PK: Oh good. Let me see one of those!

WH: The show was in celebration of my tenth year in San Francisco, so it was '52, but I was doing these from '59 on. Not getting ready for the show, but I was doing them.

PK: You say pornography. I guess I'm not very observant, but i'm finding it difficult to see pornography.

WH: Well, that one is not very pornographic, but I have some original ones out here that I can show you.

PK: This looks like an American flag but with a crescent moon and a star.

WH: Well, and there are two people there, even though they're very crudely drawn.

PK: I see. It's very subtle. You think this would date about. . .

WH: That was probably '60. Also, at that exact same time, I was building a robot out of beer cans which was shown in '61. IT's dated on the back '61.

PK: You know what this reminds me of? Leger.

WH: Yeah, yeah.

PK: Very likeable -- for instance, like the Woodcutter is one famous painting where the bodies are built up of cylindrical forms.

WH: Yeah. Well when I did them, I was not only trying to make something out of nothing -- it was just junk -- but with the idea of making up a thing that was made up of little bits, that maybe added up to the total. The idea being that the sum would be greater than the individual parts. And example is the individual beer can; even though the beer can had been pointed out to us by that time by Jasper Johns, most people thought of it as nothing.

PK: It's something to hold beer, that's something.

WH: That's right. And it's the sum total of the beer can being all that beer that was drunk

and the effect it might have had on people.

PK: Let me ask you, why the beer can? You have a special attraction to it. I know you like to drink beer, but why the be er can? Did you just have available a lot of beer cans and so quite naturally they were incorporated into your constructions as assemblages?

WH: Well, to me, the beer can had a mystical quality about it. I contained something that contributes a lot to my way of living. But also, most people throw them away and it's always been a concern to me to try to make something out of nothing. You've heard me say that several times, but it is. I like to make something out of nothing. To me, that explains why I'd have a fix-it shop, because I'm taking something that's useless and bringing it back to life. Well, a beer can that's been empty has lost its usefulness. You can't reuse them. Well, you can now; we have aluminum. But when I started these things they were all right. With some of the early beer can things, I made a point pouring acid on them so they'd be rusty. Or I'd find rusty beer cans. They weren't all beer cans; I shouldn't call them beer cans. I started using beer cans because there were lots of them and I had them segregated by color, by shape, and by materials because by the middle '50's, they were starting to put pop tops on them which meant aluminum tops on steel cans. THen they went to all aluminum cans which really screwed me up. Over there you'll see is a failure because I couldn't arc-weld the aluminum cans. I've never found a way. Aluminum cans I smash and epoxy them together. There's other ways of approaching it other than epoxy. I don't really like it. And I can weld aluminum but I lose interest with it fast.

PK: Are you still doing any of those?

WH: Well, I've done some since I've been out here. I'm more interested in this, it's right behind you, in its present stage. It goes through various stages.

PK: Is that paper?

WH: It's paper, yeah.

PK: It's really a pyramid that we're talking about, although I'm sure it has a better description than that.

WH: It's never had a title. See, there's another style that I haven't even mentioned, and that's a linear style, because I've never, ever said it to anybody, I guess. But it goes back to this thing I was trying to explain earlier which has something to do with that Paul Klee style, but it really is different in that this is a built up thing. It's a natural form that you get by using geometric tools, a straight edge, a pencil, and a compass, and you'll get this image which is different, at least in my mind, than --

PK: It suggests the mathematical interest of a Renaissance artist in a lot of ways to me.

WH: Well, yeah. I spent a long time trying to trisect an angle just because somebody said I couldn't do it. I finally admitted that I couldn't. But by going through that process, i discovered all kinds of other things that I enjoy. These concepts, like the square root of minus one are something that I like really. That sounds superficial, but I do know enough about in to know what it is now. It's like when you have second year algebra and they introduce an imaginary number. Well, at the time it was introduced to me, the guy who was teaching it should have told me what an imaginary number was because it's a concept that is so human. No one else in the world has ever thought of an imaginary number except human beings. I think it's probably more important than a lot of things.

PK: What purpose does it perform?

WH: It has no purpose. It's useless.

PK: Yeah, it's an abstraction.

WH: But you know, who needs a robot made out of beer cans either? I never finished that, by the way. It got up so tall and something happen, it just never quite got done. BUt some of these got quite large. That probably stood fifteen feet tall.

PK: What in heavens name is that? This is a spirit thing?

WH: Well, it has to do with mountain climbing,really, which i a lot of ways is a spirit thing.

PK: What is it? The idea of reaching out?

WH: I guess so. If you get to Leo Valledor, who I mentioned last time -- as being a guy who might have a lot of information about the Six Gallery, he'll insist that I invented the use of the word in this thing. But I insist that he did. There was a use "spirit" in titles because we were both interested in jazz at the time, he in progressive jazz and myself in traditional jazz. I remember him doing a series of paintings called The Blues. My black paintings came right after his blues -- that may come as a surprise to him. Here's one of those. They're really not pornographic at all, but John Coplans though they were, "scatological," I think was his term.

PK: This looks like David Park.

WH: Well, it was sort of painted in honor of David, I have to admit.

PK: When was it done?

WH: That's not dated? Well, all of these are circa 1960 because the show was in '62.

PK: Why all the Christmas tree lights around the painting?

WH: Well, I love Christmas tree lights and I use them all the time. I mean, when I first built my color organ -- there's another thing I've been doing since longer than almost anything because I started that back in the '40s. I was trying to find a connection between sound and light. But lots of people have tried to do this? I don't claim to be innovative. It's just everybody does it individually. One of the manifestations that I came up with was what people have described as a "dancing Christmas tree." I wouldn't describe it that way. It's where you have an electronic thing that takes music and translates it into three bands, low, medium, and high, which drive the Christmas tree lights. So you can have a Christmas tree that dances visually. Actually during this period Mike McClure was living at that place on Fillmore right above us. He used to bring the poets down and they'd get stoned and I'd entertain them. I don't know if you smoke grass or not, but if you do, you know that --

PK: This is on the record!

WH: Anyway, colored lights are a great manifestation of something. I would entertain them. Some of them even wrote poems about it. And funny, later, I guess in the middle '50s or by '62, '63, a whole generation of light people had grown up. They had no connection with me because very few people saw what I was doing.

PK: You mean their connections were in sort of a more commercial way? Like the light shows, the Rock shows.

WH: Yeah, well, they ended up at the Fillmore. Each one of those guys, if you talk to them, will insist that they had no precedents, that they just did it themself. And the nice thing about it is there's a book written by an Englishman in 1938, which gave a complete historical survey of people who've done similar things since 1400, each one claiming that he was the first one to experience this thing. I mean, I run into them teaching. Students will come to me and say, "You know, I was at a party the other night and the lights went out and somebody got out a flashlight and a piece of cellophane. The next thing we knew, we had a new light form. A new art form of light." Well, anyway, about this time I started painting my black paintings. This one reproduction is probably between 1957 and 1964. There were apparently only three of them. That doesn't sound right, but according to my own records, I consider this an early one even though it's dated wrong.

PK: Are all of the black paintings an outgrowth of paintings like this entitled Vietnam Series 3.

WH: They're all subtitled that, all of them, including the Big Room. They have overt meaning, though they're not the obvious one. Luckily, I've had enough time now to look back on them, and I can fairly well sort out what it means. Sure, black might have something to do with our conscience or soul, but that is not what I had in mind. Black to me is the absence of light, and I'm very concerned with light. And so black paintings were not so much that they were black, but that they weren't light. That's about all I can say now. But to me, that makes it all very clear. (Laughs)

PK: It provides a metaphor, and an analogy to the Vietnam situation. without pinning you

down on the --

WH: I don't mind being pinned down about it because I was very strongly and violently against the war. It didn't take hold, I mean, the paintings got bigger as the war got bigger. And in '68 when I made The Room which is a 12 foot square room, that's when our involvement was at its height. But it's been pointed out to me by some other people, that i left a door in this structure. So even though you're in there and it appears to be a solid structure, there's a way out.

PK: Which was wishful thinking at that time.

WH: But being a born optimist. . .(Laughs) There's a wing thing out of beer cans.

PK: American Ka. That's the Egyptian deities?

WH: The Ka ___ the thing that lives forever, even though you die, so it is a spirit. The nice thing about the Ka, is that they say when you die, I think it's in the fourth or fifth day after you've been dead, your Ka escapes from your mouth in the shape of a butterfly. They show this in the Egyptian drawings with butterflies coming out. And there is some reality to it because they say -- I mean, I've never seen this but people who've been around a lot of dead people say -- that some times as a body dries up and hardens, there's air in the lungs, which is expelled, and if the weather happens to be a certain way, you'll see a kind of cloud issuing from the body.

PK: Well, in Renaissance paintings, giving up the ghost is part of dying and actually some times little spirit figures come out of mouths. Certainly when a devil is exorcised, they come out the same way.

WH: And if you look at that word in the title, it's America, America's Ka, well, if you've ever seen America spelled with a "K" it has something to do with that, too. This is a better picture of that flat. That was the original tin can sculpture.

PK: This is the mountain?

WH: Yeah, I don't know if the tile is that there, but it's, yeah.

PK: This is one of the first ones, right?

WH: That was the first one.

PK: The first one. It's called here Flat Cans, Metal Sculpture.

WH: Well, when I originally -- see, some of these titles come later. American Everest, was earlier, before I got interested in mountain climbing, actually. There is a good picture of the Sunflower.

PK: Ninety-six inches high, 1952. That's a very purist form in many ways.

WH: Well, I tie it into, the constructivists' sculpture I had seen alot of, not real but photographs and things. It impressed me with its cleanness. And also, the Picasso, I had seen impressed me. Picasso had made some welded sculpture, or he hadn't but Guy Gonzales had made them for him, and they were pretty clean. But actually what happened is I found a saw blade.

PK: That's what started it off?

WH: Yeah.

PK: What you needed was a proper pedestal for the nice saw blade. Have you got something more to show me?

WH: I was going to show you my 1963 catalog here, "Pop Art USA," organized by John Coplans. In '63 I had decided that I would withdraw my services from almost everything.

PK: Withdraw from the art world you mean?

WH: Well, yeah, I was going to stop the war by not letting anybody see my work. That

sounds a little optimistic, I admit, but I did all kinds of things. I was marching in parades and all kinds of things. Also, I was supposed to be in the Pop Art show which I thought was really dumb, but John had organized it and so I had committed myself, I guess, earlier. But somehow, I don't remember what the circumstances are, you'll have to ask somebody, but the best thing happened that could have happened. This is the best catalog I've ever been in. This is my page.

PK: It's blank. Page 31, "Pop Art USA." Completely blank. On the opposite page, a woman, a rather ample woman in a girdle and a bra. And this is your favorite catalog.

WH: Well, yeah. To me, that gave me some clues. It wasn't because of that, but I stopped showing for all kinds of reasons.

PK: What was the date when you stopped?

WH: Well, that was '63. But I think that show at the New Mission Gallery sort of convinced me that that was the end.

PK: Why? Aside from the war and making a statement, which I gather was part of it.

WH: Well, it tied in with the fact that I didn't like the politics involved with the art world; and I had been involved. I knew about them because I'd gone to the pinnacle, the Museum of Modern Art, just a few years earlier and I'd been approached by the new York galleries. I only say this, everyone says a few times, but luckily, I'm glad I did what I did, not for any altruistic reasons but because if I'd done something else I wouldn't be here now. So whatever decisions I made and whatever reasons I did it for, I'm glad I did it. As I said, I've seen a lot of my friends hurt quite badly by the galleries and by the museums, and maybe it's their own fault. I'm not pinning it on anybody. But I decided that wasn't the way I wanted to do it, so I didn't. And '62 or '63 was probably the time when other things were happening to me. I was getting rid of my first wife, or she was getting rid of me, whatever the story is. We were splitting, going our different ways. And she had finished her big painting which was sort of like our baby, I guess. The only thing holding us together was that monster painting. And it was moved out in '64 or '65. So it gave me a vision of how it would be to do what I -- well, my whole main concern was not to have any strings attached to me. Not to me personally, I mean there's always strings attached to a person, but to my work. The only way I could see my way clear to do that is to not have any responsibilities about my work after it was finished.

PK: In other words, gallery associations, exhibitions.

WH: Yes. Or even crating or shipping or what show or what piece I'm going to enter to impress what jury member. You know all about all that stuff. And I've done it.

PK: Did you lose interest in selling? I mean, to be crass about it, an artist usually likes the idea of placing a work.

WH: Well, I found out that I could do it and I probably could still do it. Like any American, I could use the money. But on the other hand, I found that there's other ways of living than the way others do. See, when we were talking about Ron Davis a little earlier, -- and Ron is a good friend, still is a good friend -- he went one way and that's fine. And he seems to have handled it. I'm not sure I could have handled it. I probably would have become an alcoholic and probably ended up living in Knossos or somewhere and not doing anything. Now, I'll never know.

PK: But avoided the risk.

WH: I avoided the risk. That doesn't sound too exciting, but on the other hand, I'm pleased with myself now.

PK: I sense that your view about all this has changed just a little bit. If you were approached in the proper way by the right people, I gather you would agree to an exhibition or to re-entering the public world, so to speak.

WH: Well, yeah, because since whenever that date was -- again, I don't know exactly when that date was but about 10 years ago -- I was different then than I am now. Also what I am doing now is different. I don't have to be uptight about someone not wanting to show it. I

don't know if that's clear. Because I don't care. Ten years ago I cared.

PK: So it's not an issue the way it was, it really meant something.

WH: Yeah. Well, fifteen years ago I would have really been uptight about it not because I wanted to become rich, but that I wanted to become famous. Well, I found out that that's easier than it looks and wasn't what I really wanted. Well, I'm not explaining this too well.

PK: I think I know what you mean. I have a couple questions I'd like to ask, obvious questions, I suppose. John Coplans did include you int he form of a blank page in the Pop Art USA Exhibition. A very natural question: Do you or did you ever consider yourself a pop artist? Without going into an elaborate definition of pop art which is still debated.

WH: Well, no, I never did. People have accused me of being one -- photo pop or something -- primarily because I used material that was what came to be known as popular.

PK: But for very different reasons, it seems to me.

WH: I hope.

PK: As I understand pop art and I understand what you were doing, there was content, a statement in your work that one doesn't find in pure pop art.

PK: Well, I'm glad you said that because that's better than myself saying it. But you would agree with that?

WH: I agree with that. When people who know me quite well say, "Well, Wally, you were painting pictures of television sets in the '50s." I mean, that's true, but I wasn't painting them for the reasons that became known as pop art reasons. They were my own reasons.

PK: You're not painting TV sets for the same reasons Tom Wesselmann would paint it.

WH: No. Even though I enjoy looking at his work, we are different, completely different. I would fight being classified in any way. I would. I would wonder what it would be to be a pop artist, you know. How grim. What happens if you didn't want to do one or if you didn't want to be popular? Actually, that's interesting I said that because I really don't want to be popular because I don't trust it. I'm not just talking about artists, but the people I admire were not popular.

PK: Like whom?

WH: Well, see when we were talking about jazz on the first tape, most people think of the well known musicians. I just read where Being Crosby said Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong were the two greatest jazz musicians in the world. Well, that's his opinion. My opinion would be Bunk Johnson -- who nobody ever heard of -- and Jabbo Smith. That doesn't mean anything to you. I'm not putting you down, I'm just saying I know it doesn't because my little world is so --

PK: You were really into that, too.

WH: Well, if you're going to do something, that's what you have to do.

PK: I'm not putting you down.

WH: I realize that, but I'm putting down Being Crosby for making a statement like that because he knows better. He could have at least said --

PK: "In my opinion. . ."

WH: Well, or Bix Bighterbet who he knew, he might have let Bix have a little.

PK: But he's evoking well-known names is what you're suggesting.

WH: YEah. And actually I'm nit-picking, but if somebody asks me who I admire as a painter, they might expect me to say, like, "How do you feel about Joseph Raffael?" Well, I don't really feel anything about Joseph. He's a nice guy, you know, he does what he does and i do what I do and we don't have any problems.

PK: Still, you do have opinions. You obviously don't have to name names, but you mentioned earlier when you made a statement -- I forget exactly how it went -- , those wouldn't be the figures whom you admired as a painter. So there obviously are individuals that may or may not have affected your work, out that's not the point.

WH: Well, we talked about Duchamp and even though he's becoming more understood and appreciated, ten years ago very few people knew about him. I'm not saying that means anything, it just means that at one time I was presented with, "Do you like -- " here was Clyfford Still and here was Marcel Duchamp. I could never ever get with Still, even though I admire him as a man and as a painter.

PK: Well that says something about your own sensibility. That is interesting. What about Tinguely or somebody like that?

WH: I think he's very funny. Well, I don't know. I'm interested in what he does.

PK: Making machines that destroy themselves and machines that grab people.

WH: Yeah. They're nice ideas but it's not like I have the feeling I wished I had done it. Like Bunk Johnson's work, I wish I'd done it. I'll play you some Bunk Johnson. Again, it's like pinning you down and saying "Listen to this. I want you to hear this."

PK: Let me ask you one other thing, sort of bring it up to date if that's really possible. You said something about your current paintings earlier before we were taping, and I'm very interested. We took a look at them last week. Here's where you are right now and maybe you could just describe what you're doing. These paintings which are actually reproductions, that is the proper word, are based on images of old engravings.

WH: Did I ever ask you last time if as a kid you ever knew about the Johnson Smith Company?

PK: No, I didn't.

WH: Well, when I was a kid, there were two books that really interested me. One was this encyclopedia that I had which was an English encyclopedia called The Book of Knowledge. It must have been printed about the turn of the century and I haven't found one or I'd be painting some of those things. But it had Victorian imagery.

PK: Wood engravings, this type of thing?

WH: Well, I mean they had some cuts but most of it was engravings. They had things like how your stomach works but it was shown like plumbing. It was sort of like commercials they do now except they were done very carefully to show kids how their stomachs worked, in the terms of an engineer. Or there would be an illustration of a bunch of trees, a line drawing, and it would say underneath, "How many people do you see in the trees?" Then if you looked very carefully, you'd see there were people hidden in the drawings of the trees. Then it would give ten minute French lessons and it would have an illustration of these Victorian people done in very beautiful line drawings. They looked kind of like surreal images if I remember them correctly. I haven't seen them in a long time. It's how I remember them. But that was one of my favorite books and the second was this catalog which I have, since you were coming I got a reproduction of it. I was seeing these things when I was a little kid and that image came through.

PK: This is the Johnson Smith Company catalog, 1929.

WH: They weren't bound like this when we had them, they were a soft bound catalog. But all of those images there were imbedded in my mind because I would study that catalog. In fact, I knew some of those blurbs by heart.

PK: When did you start doing these? It's been recently, hasn't it?

WH: Yeah. I thought about it for 30 years and never quire knew how I would do it. I thought about doing it photographically and screening them, but that is a little too cold. Or just blowing them up photographically, but I still like to paint. So I stole the technique of the photorealist. I use a opaque projector but I don't do it the way they do it. They draw it and turn the lights on the paint it from a photograph. I paint it in the dark with the projector on,

which to me works much better. I've tried both ways. Much more accurate to do it my way.

PK: You've got an image of the big head of lettuce in there, I think. DO you view these images as if they have more meaning to you as something beyond the personal memories? Are you simply illustrating something that stuck with you, an interest that stuck with you?

WH: Well, no. The nostalgia part is, insignificant. They do have significant content. I know you can't record what went on in my face but (Laughs) no, they really do. But I'm not ready to announce what that is (Laughs). I don't really know yet. See, I know about the black paintings now, but I don't really know what that is.

PK: Are you interested in the technique, the way you're doing these things?

WH: Yeah.

PK: Could it come down to a -- I don't want to say "formal" but a technical consideration?

WH: Well, I'm painting them in the same way I would paint a sign. I paint them as accurately as I can. They're very realistic paintings, they're more realistic than I've painted in a long time because they're exact reproductions of the subject matter. The subject matter just happens to be non-real.

PK: There's something kind of Pop-ish about that too.

WH: Yeah, oh, I'm sure.

PK: I mean, you're going to get confused once again. Somebody's going to say, "Here's a post-pop."

WH: Well, the idea that the painting's based on print, which I hadn't thought about until Julie kind of brought it up because I'm continually making cracks about it. I mean, i've made prints of paintings but this is the first time I've ever made a painting of a print, of somebody else's print. I mentioned Tom Marion; he had a show when he was at the Richmond Art Center, and this was my first show since whenever it was I decided not to show. THis was my com-back-to-the-real-world. The reason I did it was because he had this show that was called Invisible Paintings which he talked me into being in. So I did and it just happened that I just finished a fairly large black painting. But we had a discussion about it and he very hesitantly asked, "Well, you know, it cost quite a bit to have a photographer come in and then make a cut from the photograph, and engraving and all that and print it. WHy don't we just. . ." And so I said yes. So the printer just printed a black blot. To me, the reason why it's important and why I wanted to document it is because that gives a clue to the meaning of the black painting. At least to me it does. Again, it's the absence of light. I mean, it has not so much to do with the surface of the paintings or the paints, the pigments, the canvas, but the blackness. And that reproduction is just as efficient as a painting.

PK: So it really is a philosophical --

WH: Yes.

PK: It's quite obvious from what you say that it is.

WH: BUt it took me a while to find that out. THat's why it makes me feel pompous, like a serious artist, but I guess I have to be stuck with it.

PK: There's one more thing I want to ask you that comes to mind right away. I can't remember if I asked you on the last tape or not, but why weren't you in the Funk Show, Peter Selz's notorious Funk Show at the Berkeley Museum?

WH: Well, I guess the main reason is I wasn't asked.

PK: Right. But do you have any idea why not? You're probably not the right one to ask this, I realize, but. . .

WH: Really, I can't answer that. I didn't even know the show was on until after it happened. But I think probably it's because Peter Selz doesn't like me.

PK: I'm sure he must have known about your work.

WH: Oh, yeah. But we have never gotten along. He knows what I think about him and I know what he thinks about me. Now, I know what You're going to say, and I hope this has nothing to do with the documentation, but philosophically, we just don't have anything in common. To me he represents all the things that I don't like, even though he might not be those things.

PK: Somebody has to.

WH: Somebody has to be. But it works both ways because he doesn't like a lot of the things that I stand for. He doesn't really like artists because they're not cooperative, they're kind of dirty, they cause a lot of hell, they won't be nice at his openings and they have no respect for museums. So we just don't get along. But I have no idea if that has anything to do with me not being in the show because I don't remember when that show was, but I probably wouldn't have been in it any way.

PK: Sixty-nine, wasn't it?

WH: Well, it was somewhere along in there and i had nothing to put in it any way.

PK: The only reason I bring it up -- and I probably shouldn't have asked you, is that when a lot of artists criticize that show, they site your absence from the it as an example of how bad it was. You're the notable omission, let's put it that way.

WH: Well, that's alright. But that was somebody else's decision. I don't think it was very funky.

PK: Yeah, I know we've talked about it I've also told a couple of people you excellent examples of what is funk and what's a funky thing, like Jay de Feo's underwear in the icebox.