



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert Zakanitch,
1972 August 23-30

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Interview

PC: This is the 23rd of August, 1972, Paul Cummings talking to Robert Zakanych in his studio on Warren Street. Could we start with . . . what? You were born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, right?

RZ: Yeah.

PC: Just, you know, give me some idea of what that was like or what your family . . . Were there other children?

RZ: You didn't happen to have been there or anything, do you?

PC: No.

RZ: Well, let's see.

PC: Do you come from a large family, small family?

RZ: Well, I have two brothers.

PC: Younger, older?

RZ: Older brothers.

PC: Older brothers.

RZ: And I wasn't born in a hospital, I had a midwife.

PC: You weren't, oh, in 1935?

RZ: Yes. Well, my mother was from Czechoslovakia and her mother . . . she refused to go to a hospital, wouldn't trust hospitals.

PC: Oh really?

RZ: Oh sure, everything had to be done at home, sort of like the old country, you know, around the house, you know, from the farm outside. Well, it's just, I think, trying to maintain that whole social cultural thing because I'm sure and they tried to maintain it all their lives.

PC: Oh really.

RZ: Sure. My grandmother just, you know, like, she refused to speak English, even now. She's been here for, God, she's 82, she's still speaks almost no English at all, still chops wood in the back yard, still grows tomatoes in the back yard, has a garden.

PC: That's fantastic. Well, when did they come here, your grandparents?

RZ: Let's see, I think it was something . . . I don't know, about 1910 or something. I think my mother was three years old when they came, and she and my grandmother came. My grandmother's like an iron horse, you know. She's dominated the entire family, you know, to the point that my father agrees with anything. So we got . . . we moved eventually, but I say I was born in Elizabeth but it was right on the border of Linden, New Jersey and right across the street was my grandmother, and so, after like I think, oh a year, we moved in with them, my grandmother insisted that . . . so it really got pretty awful, you know. And then we finally moved out to Rahway, New Jersey.

PC: When was that?

RZ: That was about six months after we moved in with my grandmother.

PC: Trying to leave.

RZ: Finally got to Rahway, yeah, and that was really awful. I . . .

PC: Well, you were very young during all of that.

RZ: Yeah, I was about a year and a half or two and a half, I was the last child and that was . . . There were a whole lot of problems that there were at home, I don't know how personal you want to get.

PC: Well, as much as you want.

RZ: And it was like, you know, my mother just said, you know, no, because with my background and her background, you had, you know, the whole Catholic, Roman Catholic thing that you had sex to have children and that was it. And my mother said

PC: Well, what about your brothers, are they much older than you or not?

RZ: We're two years apart. There's one that's two years older than me, but I came last.

PC: So you really grew up in Rahway, then?

RZ: Yeah, the first eight years in Rahway and after that we came back to Linden and lived next door to my grandmother again. Oh, I don't know what happened there but I used to flee, I mean I used to just get out of . . . get out of the house on my own, I mean as a kid, you know, I'd go through all these illnesses just so that they would take me back to my grandmother, you know.

PC: Oh, you liked her?

RZ: Yeah, I mean it was the only place where I'd be turned loose and free, I guess, and that's where I really started drawing people.

PC: Let's see, 8 years old, you had just started school then, right?

RZ: Yeah, let's see kindergarten, you know, then public school, then after two years I was taken out and put in Catholic School.

PC: In Rahway or . . . ?

RZ: In Rahway, yeah. And then, when we moved again back to Linden I went to public school. My mother tried to get a good . . . another Catholic school my brother could have gotten in but I couldn't so she said, well, never mind.

PC: Yeah.

RZ: Well, you know, I was being raised Catholic two ways, like when I was born and baptized in Russian orthodoxy, my father insisted on that, in a Russian Orthodox Church.

PC: How do you mean two ways?

RZ: Well, baptized Russian Orthodox because my father, that was the church he was in, Russian Orthodox. He left the church but he insisted that I be baptized in church, though I was raised as Roman Catholic, which my mother was. So I had like a double religion and so we had the two holidays, and never had to go to church twice on one Sunday so that was good.

PC: Christmas comes twice a year.

RZ: Right, Easter, you know, the Easter season is big in Russian Orthodox churches.

PC: Tremendous.

RZ: I spent four hours and it was a drag going to And also there's the whole thing that the Russians do before they go to church on Russian Easter. They eat cloves of garlic, curative or something like that, so everyone is eating garlic and everyone is singing and you walk into church and, you know, you get knocked out by the smell and, as a kid, the only way you can avoid that smell is to eat garlic yourself and then you don't smell it.

PC: Right.

RZ: But, as a kid, I didn't want to eat garlic. But that was . . . Christmas was different, I really dug that, and if it were ever pie, then it was very disastrous.

PC: Well, what? You said you started making drawings and things when you were with your grandmother. Was she interested, or was this just . . . ?

RZ: Well, my grandmother and my aunt who was my mother's half sister. My, let's see, mother's father was killed before, well, before I was born. He was electrocuted touching wires or something that he was working with, and then my grandmother married again and she had another girl and that's my aunt and we really got along

well. It was like . . . it was all this friction in the family, you know, between my mother and father and grandmother, etc., and the only place that I found, kind of escaped to, was to get away from my mother and father and live with my aunt and grandmother and it was, in a sense, that kind of arrangement and it was, yeah, I'd start doing drawings, you know. I was best coloring book colorist on the block.

PC: Do all kinds of . . .

RZ: Oh, yeah, I did (Bugs Bunny) anyway, I started that and they were really encouraging about it, you know. They really loved it.

PC: Your grandmother.

RZ: Oh, and my aunt, they were just great.

PC: What about your own parents?

RZ: No, it was . . . there was no reason to do it and, I don't know, there was just a whole disconnection. They just didn't relate to it at all.

PC: Did your brothers think it was fun or did they do it too?

RZ: No. There was just all that sibling rivalry going on and, any time I would draw something, my brother would destroy it because it would make me better than him. So we'd go through that shit all the time and I mean that would last forever, they just . . . that was the middle brother, the one that I came right after.

PC: What are their names?

RZ: Well, Ed is the middle, and Andy is the oldest and, oh, it was just painful, sadistic It was just like too much, you know. I constantly felt like being destroyed every time I was making a step. But then again, when I'd get out of that, I could get back to where I'd start enjoying it, where, you know, I loved it. I'd get up every morning at ten o'clock and go down to a whitewashed cellar and start drawing. It was, like, it was beautiful. It was like getting out. I was looking forward to getting out, you know. It was a real adventure.

PC: What kind of things were you doing there?

RZ: Oh, I was drawing things in my comic books and occasionally I'd do Oh, I did I would do a religious thing, you know, because my grandmother, every time you'd open a closet, there'd be calendars with the bleeding heart, so I tried to do one of them once for my grandmother. I think she was out in the garden with the carrots and I came out with this drawing and she said, oh, something like that, please don't do that, draw the saints any more because she thought it was so awful. She could accept it in any other drawing, you know, the drawing was bad, she'd kind of laugh and so forth, but if I did the saints wrong

PC: That was bad.

RZ: She really got upset about that so I never drew another saint.

PC: Well, did you have any art classes in school or anything, or was it nothing like that?

RZ: No, none of that. Well, I mean except when I got into high school.

PC: Yeah, But I mean nothing in primary school or . . . ?

RZ: No, not at all. It was a

PC: What about music or reading or other kinds of things. Was there music at home or books?

RZ: No, no.

PC: Nothing?

RZ: No, there wasn't music, and there weren't books, there wasn't anything that was, I guess you'd consider, or it was considered kind of art or culture . . . or, I mean culture like we're living in, my parents were a culture themselves.

PC: Right, right.

RZ: So that's not the right word. But I don't know, there's a We Oh, the only music that I got into was through my aunt who was a 1940's spinster, you know, she had all the latest fashions and

PC: Oh really.

RZ: Oh yeah. You know, the whole Betty Grable hairstyle and . . . Oh and then I had another aunt, I forgot all about that. She was my grandfather's daughter who was a half sister. It gets very complicated. She was raised in combat, somewhere in Yugoslavia, somewhere. So she came over and she went crazy over, of all people, Carmen Miranda! Right! So she used to argue, women used to argue with her. She would say, if you're not a good boy, I won't let you look at some of my Carmen Miranda records. And I didn't particularly like Carmen Miranda at that point, but I did not want to hurt her, so I said o.k. That was my first, my first music thing, musical experience. Boy, that was so strong. I can just remember the movies.

PC: The movies?

RZ: Yeah, every weekend.

PC: When did that start?

RZ: I don't know. I guess around second or third grades, somewhere in there, because we were living in Rahway and I used to go to Elizabeth

PC: To the movies?

RZ: To Linden, yeah, and then just spend the weekend at the movies and discussed them the rest of the week.

PC: Well, who'd you discuss them with, friends or your brothers?

RZ: My brothers and my cousins, they'd see them all, so it was, I mean, that was like the big thing, you know. There was like a whole, well, it was like a survival place for me, escapism, as it was for a lot of people. And, yeah, and the problem with the forties movies is that they were so mythological, involving romance and all of that, that, it's true, messed up a lot of people's heads.

PC: So you started reading, all of that.

RZ: Reading it.

PC: Well, what about . . . ? You know, you said your grandmother was, resented learning English. What languages were spoken around with you then?

RZ: Well, the Czech, which was Slovak, it's not, it's not I guess proper Czech, simply, it's . . . because I went to see a couple of Czech films and didn't understand a word, but I was able to talk with my grandmother as a kid and even now when she talks to me, she always uses the Well, she's breaking out with a little English here and there, but most of it is foreign and I do understand her to a certain degree.

PC: I mean, well then, your parents spoke English though?

RZ: Yeah. Well, my mother spoke, God, my mother spoke Slovak, Hungarian, Polish Well, my grandmother does too. My grandmother didn't speak Hungarian but she spoke Polish and Czech and my father only spoke in English, he couldn't speak even Czech. He was first generation and, I don't know, there was never any heavy Ukrainian influence, you know, it was always Slovak, all Slovaks, you know, and the Polish relatives and

PC: Why no Ukrainian, do you think?

RZ: My father was Ukrainian, I don't know, I never could quite understand that.

PC: His part of the family wasn't as aggressive or ambitious or something . . .

RZ: Well, they didn't

PC: . . . because all the relatives you've mentioned have been maternal, you know. Were there relatives on his side that were around or not?

RZ: Yeah, but we didn't see them very much. It was like, yeah, it was really a one-sided kind of maternal thing. I really don't know why.

PC: Well, let's see, you went back to Linden, right? I'm trying to keep all these moves straight.

RZ: Yeah, it's like Elizabeth, and then moved to Linden, then went to Rahway for eight years and then came back and then just stayed in Linden.

PC: Ah, so that's where high school was and . . . ?

RZ: Oh, yeah, right. All the education except from kindergarten to third grade, that was in Linden.

PC: Well, how did you like moving around? Did that, was that noticed at all?

RZ: I liked it, yeah. I was sure the next place was going to be better.

PC: Was it?

RZ: No.

PC: It was the same but different.

RZ: Yeah. I mean, once you get to realize, of course, much later, when you get older you take it better and that when you're a kid you have no choice, you can't do anything about it except, you know, put up these walls.

PC: Well, how was high school and what kind of things were you interested in at that point? Did you keep drawing, were you drawing in school or . . . ?

RZ: Oh sure. That stayed. That was the funny thing. That just kind of stayed all the way through. I never, I never lost that, yeah. I think it's interesting But, yeah, I mean adolescence is probably the most difficult thing to get through anyway, sun's burning every day. But I don't know. Let's say in high school I was . . . I started hanging out with a group of kids, and I was, gee, I've forgot what terms I would use then . . .

PC: Well, this was what, high school was in . . . ?

RZ: Yeah, I mean I was the kind of kid who would always stay out, you know and wouldn't . . . would come in late and hang out on the corners, you know, had a blond d.a., you know and peg pants. Would be part of the whole group, chartreuse pants, you know.

PC: Well, did you get involved with sports or any school extra curricula?

RZ: I started playing baseball, you know. Oh, and I was playing basketball like on Saturday, you know, in the city. But high school, I played high school baseball. I got to be pretty good. I mean I . . . it was . . . I did it almost because I had to, I mean . . .

PC: In what way?

RZ: Well, there was so much competition with my brother, I mean, it was like . . . The third brother, the oldest brother, he's kind of . . . somehow . . . never fits into my life. You know, he's kind of like there but I don't remember him at all.

PC: The four years makes a difference.

RZ: Something, yeah. He never . . . Yeah, he was just kind of there and he was like the older brother and I liked him, but it was the one in the middle that, you know, I had to fight all the time. It was . . . I just went out for baseball because, well, you know, you play as a kid out on the streets and things like that, then it became a whole competitive thing with my brother and . . .

PC: Was he a baseball player, too?

RZ: He didn't play very well.

PC: Oh, so it was a way you could beat him, right?

RZ: Yeah, I mean, and he was so . . . it's so involved, you know. There was such close quarters all the time, so like that's what life is all about. I've got to be this, be better than he is, also to get some respect from him and also to get some respect from my father.

PC: He approved of baseball but not the drawing.

RZ: Oh, sure. Of course. Oh sure. I mean drawing was, you're not supposed to do that. Baseball you're supposed to do, that whole male syndrome. So I went out for baseball, played high school baseball. And it didn't solve anything. It didn't solve anything and I just never got any better. I mean I'd go out and I'd play a game and I'd done pretty well . . .

PC: What did you play?

RZ: I played shortstop, second base. And then I'd come home and he'd say, boy, you weren't very good today, you know that. I mean, like you could never win, you know. You keep banging your head against the wall and they were not going to let you in. It was just total disaster. But, you see, that's what's funny. When you are living with a family and you are there, it's like that's it, it's the end, all.

PC: It's the whole world.

RZ: It's the end and that's what it is. And now it's like, you know, well fuck you if you don't like what I do. You know, do your own thing too and, shit, don't bother me.

PC: Well, what was high school academic activity like? Were you involved with any of the subjects? Did you like any of them?

RZ: No, I just barely got through. I You know, my aim in high school was to get out of high school, so I mean I'd pass with a C-average, that's about all. Really I would always be making posters and it was . . . they were . . . really funny because I kept being disqualified.

PC: Why?

RZ: Because they said I was making obscene posters.

PC: Were you?

RZ: No, I didn't think I was. Well, they were suggestive posters, not obscene, I didn't realize that . . .

PC: There was a hint of something there?

RZ: Yeah, one very obvious thing. One of them I did won first prize and they put the poster up, all the time, and the principal came out and obviously had never seen it before and some drums came and he said, get that thing down. And what it was, it was, if you remember, Walter Lee did this caricature called Sonya Duck, who was the femme fatale of the ducks and she wore low cut dresses, you know, and cigarette holders. So I did Sonya the duck sitting at this little table and she had on a French skirt that was cut so you see this little skinny leg coming out, but . . . and then the breast, and she had this long cigarette and there was a bottle, and that was it. They tore it down and disqualified me.

PC: Well, what did you do about . . . ? You said there were some art projects in high school?

RZ: Yeah, sure, sure. That's really what I did most of high school. In the first year you'd have to take certain classes, the second year you had to take certain classes. But during the last two years, you could drop certain classes and . . .

PC: You can choose a little bit.

RZ: . . . so I was very bad at math and I dropped that after my second year. That's really funny. You see, I got to be really good at math but, when I was in the sixth or seventh grade and then before I got to high school, we had these two teachers that were so boring, really bad, and like kids would go to sleep and I couldn't care less. And you couldn't listen to anything and then, you know, the class would be progressing and I was missing the whole thing. So, by the time I got to high school I was really bad at math again and I couldn't pick it up again. And I don't think we had any really good teachers in math.

PC: Well, what were your . . . ? What were the art teachers like in high school?

RZ: Oh, she was really sweet, she was a little woman who was very quiet and she was a . . . while, she was a very fragile woman and she only seemed to be impressed by flowers and still lifes and things, really beautiful art. I saw them . . . She was just great and she was very encouraging. I kept being pulled out of classes to do things, which I really liked.

PC: Well, what would she have you do? What kind of little projects?

RZ: Well, like any time there was a high school play or something, I'd get out and I'd do sets and it would be me and like three or four other kids who would get out of class and work, you know, and it was just fantastic, you know.

PC: Doing the work.

PC: And sometimes I did that in junior high school, too.

PC: Oh, really?

RZ: And, you know, and then on holidays the high school . . . decorations for the auditorium, and so forth. And that kind of happened to me all my life. I mean, all the way, even in the Army, you know, because they're very you know, they really have something now, I don't know what that is. At Christmas time, you know, all the cafeterias would be decorated, and so you do all that lettering and stuff.

PC: Fine.

RZ: Oh, it was great though, I really liked it. I mean that, you see, that kind of gave me some kind of superiority, you know. It was very important for me. It was like the only thing where I got some superiority. And I'm sure it has a lot to do with why I started. you know. But I don't think it has anything to do with the fact that I was able to do it. You know, it's like there's a whole thing about analysis -- that an artist or a creative person has a fear of going into analysis because they think that, if they take that drive away, you would have to be neurotic because most of us are to some degree. But it's going to take away that whole drive, you know, once they find out why they did it and how they did it.

PC: Do you think that would happen, though?

RZ: No, because the point that's really important is that why did you do that? You could have done other things, and why. You had that ability, you had that talent and that isn't just something you pick up. You can learn to draw just so much but . . .

PC: To make the next step is . . .

RZ: Yeah, well, it's really a part of you. I mean that's when you're doing it at the age of three, you know, for no reason at all, and you're just doing it and really digging it and loving it. It just gets better as you go along. But then, if you start using it, as I'm sure I did, as like my only escape and my only thing that I could do where I could get applause and the respect it brought, you know, it . . . That starts feeding into you.

PC: Do you think it also has to do with making one more an individual, the fact that you can draw and the rest of the kids couldn't?

RZ: Makes one what, more . . . ?

PC: Did you become more of an individual to yourself because you could draw and the other children around you couldn't?

RZ: Well, it never seemed that important, you know, in how we're looking at it now as mature people, you know, in fact of painting and drawing. But as a kid I just drew better than the other kids, but what I felt . . . Yeah, I felt superior in that area, but I didn't feel superior in other areas, you know, like living. But I mean just . . . Yeah, when it came to that, that was one of the reasons why I did it a lot, I'm sure. Well, I mean the whole conditioning is so different. Like, when I got out of high school I wasn't going to draw, I mean I wasn't going to do anything with it.

PC: There was no career idea.

RZ: Yeah, they kept telling you in high school, like, well, what you should do is go to art school when you get out, you know. And I said, well, okay, but I never really gave it any thought, you know. I mean I was like terrified to do anything when I got out of high school. I didn't know what to do, so I got a job in a coffee factory and I got . . . you know . . . as a shipping clerk for about a year. And then, it was then that I, you know, still drawing and So I thought well, hell, I don't want to do this. But I was . . . I didn't know if I wanted to go to art school, but I figured that was my only alternative.

PC: Had you gone to museums or seen much art or anything?

RZ: Never been to any museums, never seen a painting. God, I think the first real paintings I saw were when I did go to art school and the teachers had brought in some of their paintings and they were like real life painting. Incredible. No one can paint this well, this realistically. But that's what . . . well, you know, the reason why I think all that confusion was there was like, like I was brought up that when you . . . what you did is you went to high school and got out of there. Like so many people from lower class and middle class families, you'd get out of high school, you'd live with your parents until you get married . . .

PC: You'd get a job.

RZ: Maybe you'd get a job. That's right, and then you live with your parents. Then you get married and then you live with them with your wife, or you get another place and then you see all the relatives and maybe some day .

. . . And then you have this job, you know, and that's where it stays and you don't ever get out of that. And it's like always trying to keep you from moving. Which I think is kind of important but it's a little too hard. You might want to do something else and you can't. Well, so that's why I got, you know, the shipping clerk job because that's what I thought I was going to do.

PC: When . . . ? You went to the Newark School of Fine arts?

RZ: Yeah.

PC: How did that happen? How did you pick that?

RZ: Well, it was nearby, you know. It was like when I decided to go to art school, and my family decided to let me go, because I was still at home and I could commute, you know, back and forth. But like if I had said I wanted to go to New York, well, they'd say, well, you can do it if you can afford it. You know, like you're not about to leave this house, you know.

PC: So they really were possessive?

RZ: Yeah, very much so.

PC: Well, what was their reaction to your wanting to go to the Newark Art School?

RZ: Well, as I said, it was o.k.

PC: As long as you came home at night.

RZ: Yeah, right. And then I did start going, and I had this car and could go back and forth. That really changed my life.

PC: When was that? What year was that?

RZ: About '55, I think.

PC: You were about, what? 19? 20? Something like that?

RZ: How old was I?

PC: Yeah, about 19? 20? Yeah. Well, what was it like going to, you know, a school where lots of ambitious people worked?

RZ: Well, it was scary. I mean, well, any time you go into some new school it's a little frightening, but I mean especially when, well, at the age of nineteen really. So, really, after that whole kind of sheltered, tempered kind of life, then going out with all these people from all over the place. It really got to be very exciting.

PC: That's a fairly large school, isn't it?

RZ: No, no.

PC: Isn't it?

RZ: It's only the top floor of a high school.

PC: Oh, really. Oh, that's right.

RZ: But they have a nice reputation. I wanted to study commercial art because that makes sense, in that you can make money and . . .

PC: Have a good job.

RZ: So you can fit right into the whole thing with being an artist.

PC: It's just like moving coffee around.

RZ: Yeah, right.

PC: Well, how did you like the school once, you know . . . ? What happened once you got there?

RZ: I really loved it.

PC: How were your instructors, any you remember?

RZ: I had two instructors that . . . three instructors, but two really changed my life. The one was Dan Kelly, and Dan was teaching there, fortunately for me. He taught a class called Science of Color, which was compulsory your first year to take. And I took it, and it turned out to be . . . like I really loved that class. And another class was anatomy that was given by this German teacher, Mr. Matson, who I think has died since then and his whole thing was the first six months you drew nothing but muscles and bones and that's it.

PC: From what?

RZ: From charts, from these huge giant charts and then, of course, the skeleton which every art school has and you drew that in different positions, over and over and over again, to get whatever it is, but you'd often get part of the background. Then, when we finally got a model, you know, they all went, ah! We're getting a model this week! And the model comes in and she takes off her clothes, gets up there and he says, you do not draw the model, you draw the bones. So we had to, like, become X-ray machines, you know, and look through her to see the skeleton.

PC: Oh, really.

RZ: It was all you could do. You could make this very slim outline of her and then you'd fill in all the bone structure. And then he'd come around and . . .

PC: Count the bones and measure.

RZ: Right. This was a whole year. Then, of course, oh, Hans Beckman then came to the school. He's a friend of Dan's, the guy who was at the school, and Hans was the man I said who came in and with laryngitis the first day, Dan's class, so nobody knew what he was talking about. And he was talking about this whole Bauhaus kind of thing which I'd never heard of. I mean, really! Boy! Wham! What an opening, you know, an opening up of a type, to realize that you don't have to draw what you see, you can just draw, you know, anything. Like he sits down and, here's a piece of paper, fill it out . . .

PC: And I want you to make lines . . .

RZ: Yeah, anything, right, you know. And I really started looking at it in a really abstract sense. But I did, I mean I didn't realize then that there was going to be any influence, you know, about instant people . . . I see it now, but not then, because, after the second year, I took Ben's color classes and I really filled up on them, then the third year I took them too, because I really loved those classes, and Hans . . .

PC: What was that, a four year program?

RZ: Three years.

PC: Three years?

RZ: There were no academic classes so, for us to get a degree, we would just have to go . . . They had an arrangement with N.Y.U. and one other school and we'd have to go just one year after art school, then you'd get a degree. But I never did, I was a bona fide commercial artist when I got out of school.

PC: Well, did you, you know, have an idea that you wanted to paint and do commercial art too? Or just do commercial art, or what?

RZ: I didn't want to paint, I didn't know anything about painting. I, you know, I still, up to that point, I mean, I'd seen very little painting. The first time I saw abstract painting was Hans brought in . . . He was a close friend of Kandinsky and he put on a show at the school, in this little gallery they had, of about fifteen Kandinsky paintings. And he took me by the hand and brought me down and said, I want somebody to hang these. Of course I was honored, you know, to do that and I couldn't stand it, all negative. Yeah. It was like you . . . who is this, really ugly. I thought they were the most ridiculous things I'd ever seen. Now, of course, Kandinsky's one of my favorite painters.

PC: But had you only studio courses and no art history or anything like that?

RZ: No, no art history.

PC: So it was all practical, paste-ups and mechanicals, type setting, all that kind of thing?

RZ: And lettering, and color, and then we had two-dimensional design, and anatomy and, yeah, lots of layout classes. So, it was . . . It's a great school for commercial art because, when I brought my portfolio around, the

agencies would really like it because it is a working portfolio, you know. It wasn't full of design and commercialized, just a real working portfolio.

PC: In what way, how do you describe that?

RZ: I mean that obviously I knew layout, which is very important in commercial art, especially when you're starting. I knew paste-ups, which is never learned. You learn that in the field but I did know that. I knew color separation, I mean all the mechanics. I mean so that was like designing, plus I did have, you know, decorative design things which I guess were pretty good. I'm not to sure, but the combination of the two made it a pretty solid . . . because they were used to getting students from like Cooper who come in with their whole art array, who would do all these decorative illustrations, you know, high style design, and that's what their portfolios were.

PC: So what, you know, you came out . . . ? When did you go in the Army, was that soon afterwards?

RZ: Yeah, yeah. I was still living at home, commuting. I'd gotten my first job, after about thirty plaaces.

PC: So, what? You got a job?

RZ: I got a job working for a little agency, and I worked for eight months and then I was notified by the Army that I had to go, and went into the Army for two years. And that was the first time I left home.

PC: Right, right.

RZ: And it was really a jolt, you know, it was like incredible, I was 23 years old.

PC: Well, the agency job was where, in New York?

RZ: Yeah, it was in New York.

PC: Who was it with, do you remember?

RZ: Ed Marand, something like that. Yeah, and then going to Kentucky where I went, Fort Knox was great, I mean

PC: The ultimate escape, right.

RZ: When I first went I was in this whole shock of homesickness you know, and then the first, the first leave I got, which was about three weeks, first three weeks away from home, the first time, so I went back home and I spent the whole weekend painting, doing these little jacket illustrations, you know, and I didn't think about it. I went home and also I was doing these things, I just got there, for two days and . . .

PC: What were they of, or . . . ?

RZ: Tacky little things. I was doing little What it was, I was doing these little illustrations for . . . I think it was Verdi records.

PC: Just a project that you set for yourself?

RZ: Yeah. Then I would set up . . . then I got drunk and when I got back, back into . . . finished my basic training, I realized like, what is it that you had to get back home for, you know, this whole homesickness. And then I was completely over that, because there was no reason then to go back. In other words, just that one weekend of going back was it and then I never wanted to go back again.

PC: Well, how was the Army experience? You know, this is a new state and a new world and a whole different group of people.

RZ: Great. Yeah. After basic training . . . I took basic training at Fort Dix in New Jersey and then they shipped me to Fort Knox, to go to, what do you call it, clerking school.

PC: For . . . ? Oh, yeah, right, right.

RZ: But I had two alternatives, it was either that or one of the cooks . . . become a cook. And you know how that happens is when you first go in the Army you're given this battery of tests.

PC: Right, find out what you can do.

RZ: Right, and the people who couldn't do anything, they either became clerk typists or cooks. So that was us.

So we all went out there to go to this clerk school. Well, what happened is, you see, again there was a poster contest, you know, and it goes every month, you know, and the Army is very hot to win anything. So they went through their files of all these new people coming in and of course I was one of them and it said, commercial artist in New York City. They said, oh, let's get him. So I went in and they started pulling me out of these typing classes and I really wanted to learn how to type, you know, that was the only thing I really wanted to learn.

PC: Get something out of the Army, right.

RZ: And they kept pulling me out of classes and doing these posters.

PC: What were they for? What were they?

RZ: Jesus, I can't remember. Oh, the contest was to design an Army insignia, or an emblem for one of the headquarters companies or something like that. A general had set up You know, get this kid

PC: Right. Get somebody. Get that guy.

RZ: So we did that, I mean, that's what that was for. But, after that they You see the sergeants are the people who really run the Army, you know, and they have all the workings, you know. They know exactly They're always black marketing and they're always trading and

PC: Yeah. Who's who and where's what?

RZ: They know everything, they really know everything. So I happened to come along at a time when a sergeant on the other side of the post who was working in Special Services and which was really where I wanted to get, was a good friend of the sergeant who had taken me out of classes in order to do the posters. And so they made a trade. He needed a washing machine and this guy needed an artist, so they traded. So that was it, I was shifted over to Special Services and this guy got his washing machine. And it was fantastic, you know, I mean, I just

PC: Barter, right?

RZ: Yeah, it was really like being an object. You're an object in the Army anyway, you know.

PC: How was it once you got into Special Services? Was there a great deal of difference?

RZ: It was really great because then I started to have some control over my position in the Army because I had something to offer and, if you have something to offer, you can do wonders in the Army, you know. And I started doing posters for, you know They always want posters for some reason, because some captain or some general is always going to give some kind of lecture and they always want to do it better than the other guy, you know, so they always want big charts, to demonstrate. . . .

PC: Oh, right, fourteen thousand men and

RZ: Exactly, exactly. Lots of illustrations, lots of very impractical

PC: Visual, yeah.

RZ: And when I started really taking over in that Special Services, getting to be the person who was doing most of the posters. Then the general got wind of it somehow because I did some posters for him, or that he had seen, done for one of his lieutenants or something.

PC: His own little Yeah.

RZ: And then I started doing stuff for him, and then once I started that, you know, you become an untouchable, you know, like you say General and everybody just freezes. So then once you're known as the general's artist, I was the captain's chum come and pick you up in their white convertibles, you know, very nice to you. So you really start controlling it, you know, and all the time in the back of your mind is: Boy, I can't wait to get out of this place, I can't wait to get out of the Army. There is that invisible barbed wire that's always around you. And yet it was really great.

PC: What did you do for the general that was . . . ?

RZ: Oh God, I had to do drawings, I did these drawings, a portrait of his wife.

PC: Always the portrait, yeah.

RZ: Yeah, yeah. And then I did some charts for him for his office, emblems, you know, big emblems you blow up in his office, all of these things, you know, for the office.

PC: All the fine symbols of authority, yeah.

RZ: Yes, but it was really good, and I had a friend who was teaching drawing classes in the Army and he left, he got out and I took over his classes and I was teaching the officers' wives and nay of the women who wanted to come to the class. And there were some sergeants that showed up and, of course, they wanted to learn how to draw better, to see better, so that's what I taught them. I mean, I taught how to draw apples and oranges and portraits, you know. The first couple of classes I had were just based on the face, you know, breaking down the structure of the face and the application of the eyes. How they should be formed. And that's all they wanted to know and they loved that and I was not about to start teaching them anything else, because that was fun for me, I enjoyed it.

PC: Well, what camp was that? RZ; This is Fort Knox.

PC: Oh, it was the whole The whole career was at Fort Knox.

RZ: Right, the whole career.

PC: Were there many of you in Special Services, or not?

RZ: There were only two artists, myself and someone else, and the rest of the people in Special Services took care of the films, you know. Special Services, you know, is involved with all the entertainment on the post. So that was great. We used to see films. We'd go into the office that we had for Special Services which was an old firehouse, and we'd show all these films for our own viewing. I used to sit all night and watch all the films there. And we'd get all the latest runs, you know. And they used to go around and set up boxing matches, and of course we'd all have to be there handing out these petitions, not petitions but like programs. But that was fun, I enjoyed it. It was the whole sportsman attitude that was. And because there were some really good ball players, you know.

PC: Did you play much ball, too?

RZ: No, I didn't play any at all, not at all. They were really good, you know, they're like pros. I mean, like Paul Hunting was down in those days. I'm not going to go play football against Paul Hunting.

PC: Why? Why, it would be a great experience.

RZ: Yeah, I mean Paul Hunting is like you'd walk past him on the field and he'd be out there playing football and he'd say, hey, kid, come on over here, I want to throw some passes or something. I'd say, fuck off. Oh, he was really a shit. Well he was a star, he was a star.

PC: Right, right.

RZ: It was really fun, it really was. We had Max Membry playing And you had a lot of time to read, and I really started reading.

PC: What things did you read?

RZ: Oh, everything I got my hands on. Oh one summer I never read very much, I started reading in art school. See, art school really changed things around. That's when I started realizing that like there's an awful lot to know and an awful lot to see. I became really voracious, anything, you know, I'd just read and read.

PC: You mean history, fiction?

RZ: Everything. Like, you know, like you say when you have time say, oh, I really should read Tolstoy. Well, that's kind of like You hear all these names in discussion with people and they're dropping all these names like Tolstoy God, I don't know these people. So you just start reading them. And at one time in the Army they shipped me out to a summer camp somewhere, something called Camp Rechivench, out by Paducah, way out in Kentucky. I mean really, there's nothing you can do except I finally got a job as a librarian and I think I read almost every book in the library. It was only one room, a stack of books, you know. And then that just kind of led into music, so I really You know, it was pretty good.

PC: Helping the general was good.

RZ: Sure.

PC: How long did that go on?

RZ: Let's see, basic training, I forget, is what?

PC: Six weeks.

RZ: Six to eight weeks . . .

PC: Something like that, yeah.

RZ: So about a month of getting into Special Services, and then from then on, the rest of the . . . So it was two years in the Army, say, say about what, fifteen months?

PC: So it was a pretty good situation?

RZ: Yeah. You know I really learned a lot. Not only . . . Not the Army, but I mean I had an opportunity to do a lot of reading, which, well, most of the people that I knew were similar, were from New York.

PC: I want to go back to the Newark school a bit, because I kind of jumped over that. You obviously got very involved with Cunningham while you were there. Was he accessible to the students?

RZ: Sure, sure. Oh, he's very accessible when you're a student there, he's not accessible now. I mean I called him and like I had lunch with him maybe three years ago, and even then I knew I was impinging on his time because he was very busy. Like he's got it all down, like he works certain hours and he does his teaching and, you know, that's it.

PC: Yeah. Because some instructors, you know, see their students only in class, and that's sort of it.

RZ: Oh, no, no.

PC: He was more open, more available?

RZ: Sure, after class you could really talk and have lunch or whatever afterwards. He was great. I mean he was very informative, not only in color but in painting, you know, and he started talking about painting and I didn't know what he was talking about, but I started thinking about it. And what's interesting is I still wasn't going to do painting. Even when I got out of the Army, you know, I went back into commercial art.

PC: What? You came back to work for an agency?

RZ: Yeah. I came back with the intention of moving finally to New York. I got a job with a little studio that was doing book jackets and I started doing . . .

PC: Who were they?

RZ: I can't remember who they were. Then I finally got a job with Darcy Advertising and I became, I don't know, I was like the assistant to one of the Vice-Presidents. He was also an art director so that was really kind of great, you know, it was. And I met somebody there who was not quite an art director but seemed that he had as much power, and he wanted to . . . Bill Monahan, we became really good friends and he started taking me around to these galleries.

PC: So, up to that point you hadn't really gone to galleries, you had . . . ?

RZ: I had never been to the Metropolitan or the Whitney, but I remember him taking me to Janis to this de Kooning show and I thought it was crazy. I don't know what happened, you know, since the first time I'd seen Kadinsky, which was about four years before that. And now seeing de Kooning and, Jesus, well, I mean seeing all that real painting on that real canvas, those real colors, you know. Boy!

PC: So what? You had, you'd have furloughs and things during the Army. What did you do? You didn't . . . ?

RZ: Let's see, what did I do?

PC: Go anywhere or look at anything? Or didn't you know where to go?

RZ: I came . . . Well, yeah, I had some time. Well, I usually would save it up for like Christmas where I'd go home for Christmas, or I'd go home for some holiday like, well Christmas, and stay 'til New Year's and would probably use up most of my leave then. And the other times, we'd go to Louisville, Kentucky and have a big time in the city, you know, which isn't very much after the first weekend. You use up . . . But I liked Louisville, it was really . . . The people were really nice in Louisville. Oh, and I got an apartment in Louisville which was great, so

occasionally I would go there, you know. Well, not occasionally, I used it a lot, just to get out of the Army, make me feel like a civilian again.

PC: Did you work there or do anything?

RZ: Yeah, I was doing an awful lot of kind of high style illustrations, you know, because I was getting my portfolio ready for when I was coming back and it was just going to be a whole, you know, decorative kind of portfolio, like high style commercial art, Alan Tubers and Jack Levians, that was what I was doing. I mean it was like, that was like painting, you know, I mean it was like fun.

PC: But how could you . . . ? What did you do? You know, how could you get out of the Army to go into the apartment to do this?

RZ: Oh, it was easy. You mean how could I do it physically, or how could I . . . ?

PC: Well, weren't you on base at night?

RZ: No, no. I would get passes. You could get passes. Oh, plus I

PC: The general was your friend.

RZ: Oh yeah, and then like I'd go in for supplies, you know, you work all of this out. You go in for supplies on Wednesday and you'd say, well, look, I think I probably won't be back until next Monday so And then they'd cover for you and you'd be able to stay out for a couple of days.

PC: So the little tricks started paying off.

RZ: Sure, and I'd just go in with this truck. They'd drive me into town and then I'd get the supplies and they'd go back and I'd stay in town and then I'd be free for five days, which was really good. I really liked Louisville. I have really nice feelings about it. There's the Brown Hotel and the Kentucky Derby. Derby Day in Louisville is really It's a really good weekend. Jesus, everybody is just [Pages 34 and 35 are missing] Warhol, because Warhol When I was in advertising, Warhol was in advertising and he was doing these very chic drawings for I. Miller shoes, and that, and then it was like a year later that the Campbell Soup Cans, or a year later, started coming out at Janis. And I was That's when I really started painting. So I quit Darcy then. Oh, I had I didn't know when to quit, but I knew, you know, I had to quit and so I got a free-lance job from them doing Taylor Wine Christmas cards. I got five hundred dollars for it and it was very small and I just found that I was quitting. I moved down to the lower East side, where it was the only place that was really cheap, 54 dollars a month rent.

PC: Where were you at?

RZ: Between D and C on Sixth Street.

PC: The East Village part.

RZ: Yeah. And it was like three rooms, two rooms, three rooms. One room I worked in, one room I slept in and the other room I stored in, and then a kitchen. And the biggest painting I could do was like six feet by six feet, and even that was really big. But that's when it started, and that's when I

PC: How did it become logical to you? And what, what did you mean by that?

RZ: Well, I guess what I mean by that is that advertising became a lie to me. You never do anything on your own. It's always conditioned by what was needed, by what clients want. You know, you'd go on these campaigns and you'd have to They said, oh, well, we really like this campaign on Coca Cola, you know, let's get this, press your work to it. And, say, you start with that and you're always illustrating for them and you really are illustrating and you can come up with some nice ideas which would be campaigns and

PC: Too many people in the pie kind of thing.

RZ: Yeah, and besides it wasn't, it wasn't . . . It's very difficult to say. It's like I think what I mean by logical is that you kind of know your own personal truth somewhere and that's what you're kind of looking for, and when you ask all the questions, and ask all the questions you can at the time, no matter how frightening they sound or feel to you, and you have to come up with the right answers. And when you do, then it becomes very logical what you have to do. And I remember one night it hit me. I was standing in the office and I looked out the window and I thought, my God, my whole environment, my whole conditioning was going to be interrupted and I've got Because I'm now thinking differently. And it was like, wow! Am I going to take that step, you know, and move to the lower East side and become this freak, you know, because I know I'm going to be considered that.

PC: Where had you been living before?

RZ: I was living up on, off Central Park and West 70th Street, and it was a pretty nice apartment, awful neighborhood. West side is so I just don't like it up there. It's very . . .

PC: Very down, as they say.

RZ: . . . sleezy and I never feel comfortable.

PC: But you liked the East village, or not?

RZ: That wasn't important whether I liked it or not, it was really necessity and the important thing was that I could do it. And, you know, I mean people wouldn't come and see me down there, or they'd come in and they'd bitch and complain about it. And it was like you know, don't look at where the hell I'm living, look at what I'm doing. That's what's really important, you know. That's why I'm down here. And, of course, you know, there's always this whole fear about . . . like there's never any guarantee of anything. I mean you've just got to be able to do it. And there's no room in the society for the artist, there never is. You know, he kind of has his own niche and he isn't functional, you know, and he can't work for somebody to have a job. It's a very personal mystique.

PC: Well, had you known any painters before this? Except from, you know

RZ: There were no other painters around, not at all. Oh, I looked up one painter. It was the fellow who was teaching painting in the Army.

PC: Who was he?

RZ: His name is James Cugin and he was, for some reason, was living four blocks away, which was really kind of

PC: Similar reason, maybe.

RZ: Right. Well no, he was painting before that. He had Oh, that's right, that's where I really saw a painting. He used to show me his slides, and he was a serous painter. But I think he was in Chicago or something like that and he was painting somewhere in the midwest, and then he, he was now in New York. So I looked him up but I didn't We just kind of saw each other, you know, once a month or so. But I didn't see any one, but I was really crazy, I mean I was, I really started going about it again. Because again, it's, again it's a whole first time again, it was the first time I was ever by myself, really, you know, working.

PC: Oh, this was really by yourself, no family, no Army, no school.

RZ: And also with your own mind, philosophically you're by yourself, you know. You're really, really after your own again, your own personalized truth, and that's what you're really looking for all the time, I mean

PC: Well, what do you think provoked all this? I mean, you know, your friend had taken you to see the de Kooning. Were there other things that you saw that really posed the question?

RZ: Oh, everything I saw after that I mean the whole painting thing became really exciting.

PC: And you started going to galleries and the museums?

RZ: Oh sure, finally went to the Metropolitan.

PC: What about art books? Had you read art books before this or before that de Kooning experience, or not very much?

RZ: No, I never got very much out of art books. I got more out of just books, but not art books. Like seeing the real thing is just, you know, you just can't write about it. Because it is, that physical product is so important. It's one of the problems that I think a lot of painters have who are living again, I say, the midwest or outside of say New York City, who read the art magazines and are influenced by the pictures. And, boy, like I have a friend who lived in Washington and she was so turned on to like two painters, you know. One was Motherwell and one was Kline, and she had never seen their work. Well, she had only seen them in these magazines and so she was very influenced by them. And then she came to New York and saw them. She said, my God, I wouldn't even recognize them. The energy is so different, you know. But she still liked them, but they were really different paintings.

PC: Well, do you think your reaction to the de Koonings was then kind of an emotional gut reaction rather than a mind . . . ?

RZ: Yeah, I was really, really straight, yeah, It was, I couldn't understand, you know. It was just there it was, and then Kline did the same thing, and Motherwell's Spanish, homage to the Spanish . . .

PC: Oh, the Elegy, yeah.

RZ: And then I just went from there, saw Pollock. It was all the abstract expressionists. I mean I really loved that painted painting. When Lesley was doing these . . . Jesus, he was doing these beautiful paintings. They were like almost geometric but they were action paintings.

PC: Oh, right. Yeah, yeah.

RZ: They were like de Kooningest or something. Boy, were they beautiful, and all of that lushness really got to me. And that's why I really started working and . . . But it was much deeper than that, I mean it wasn't just that. It was there was something going on.

PC: Well what? You said you couldn't work larger than six by six in your space. Were you working on any kind of material or canvas or boards or . . . ?

RZ: Yeah, canvas and boards. But, you see, six by six for me at the time seemed very big because I had never done a painting that was larger than maybe 24 inches. So that when I finally graduated to six foot by six foot painting, that was a big painting.

PC: How long did that take from the time you moved down there and started?

RZ: I painted for seven years, started there. I lived there for two years and as far as I know still I didn't know of any . . . Oh, yes, I got to know some painters, Doug Olsen I got to know. I got to know Bob Truett first, through the girl that was living next door in the back.

PC: Who was that?

RZ: Eugenia Carthold, who's super. I lived there for six months and never saw her. I'd hear her sometimes but I never saw her, and when I got to know her I realized why I never saw her. She was an artist, and a very good artist. She was also making . . . And she knew everybody. She knew all the artists and she knew all the filmmakers and she knew writers and she knew all the jazz musicians. There were a lot of them. Her thing was like she would sleep all the time. Her mother would be sending her money from Indiana and here she was. She'd get up, well, like at ten o'clock at night and then she'd go out, 'til around . . . and then she'd be coming in at seven o'clock in the morning when I would be getting up. Because I was . . . I put myself on a rigid schedule. I would get up at seven or eight, have breakfast nad then I'd paint all day, and then I'd read and then I'd go to sleep at ten and then . . . But, you know, it was like this whole devotion, constant. So, and then she was just on an opposite schedule, she would paint and then go out.

PC: What was her last name again?

RZ: Karto, Caux, she was a . . . well . . . Then she started introducing some painters. We got to be real close for a long time, you know. She's now in California, but that was one of the real good things. Well, otherwise I would have stayed isolated. And I never, you know, I would just go to galleries, come back to my room and then I had to get . . . When the five hundred dollars ran out, which was like, it took about three months for it to run out, living then I'd just get all these part-time jobs, doing commercial work and, you know, doing mechanicals and paste-ups. Because I knew that in commercial art no one wants to do that and so you can get that work and, if you work free-lance, you can . . . I think at that time it was six dollars and hour, which was a lot. I think it's up to around ten now, or twelve. So that's what I could do. But then you find out that if you start free-lancing that starts becoming a thing because you have to work to get it. So then I just started taking part-time jobs.

PC: What kind of . . . ?

RZ: Mechanical paste-up jobs and studio jobs.

PC: So when you needed money, you worked?

RZ: Because I had this big background, you know, from the big agency thing and I would go into the small studios and it'd be fine, usually would work.

PC: So how much . . . ? How much time would you give to jobs like that?

RZ: Part-time. I did the work in the mornings three or four days a week or in the afternoons, three or four days a week and I did that for, well, let's see, two years I lived on the lower East side and then I found a little loft in the fur district for five years, so it was about seven years and I was, well, six years, because it was seven years when

I finally decided to show something to somebody and then everything started breaking.

PC: Well, what kind of . . . ? Who were you seeing in those days, I mean what painters or what people in the art world were you moving around with?

RZ: Nobody as far as I know, I don't I didn't really see anyone. I said I knew Bob and I would see Bob every now and then, and Doug. And I can't think of anyone else offhand that I'd see.

PC: You didn't go to any of the bars or any of the places that people . . . ?

RZ: I hate bars, I have this aversion to bars since we owned a bar for eight years out in Jersey, all through high school. And oh, I used to go to Stanley's on Avenue B and 13th Street, wasn't it? Living on the lower East side, I used to just walk up there, go there, get drunk or something and thinking I'm going to meet the artist, you know. Well, there aren't any, weren't any artists to meet, I mean I guess they were there, but I mean I didn't Well I was

PC: Well, it used to get a lot of jazz

RZ: Well, he was, and you know, I couldn't come out and talk to people. I mean it was very It's still a hard thing to do, but it's much easier now. But I mean analysis really did that, you know, really did a lot.

PC: When did you get into that? RZ; Seven months after I moved down to the lower East side.

PC: Oh really? What was that?

RZ: I almost cracked, I just went. Well, I got a call and my brother said, that, you know, my father had just died from a heart attack. It was like an instant thing and I didn't even realize that. And then I said, fuck it, you know, I'm really going to go crazy because I know I can't handle my mother, you know. And I really needed help because I didn't even know who I was, you know. I mean I was just beginning to get to find that out.

PC: Your identity first.

RZ: Yeah, that's true, I guess. Yeah, that's what you call it.

PC: Well, what about your brothers Were they curious about what you were doing? Or they left you alone, or was there any kind of reaction there?

RZ: The oldest one was very, quite, close and the other one didn't care. That gets very complicated because of the whole thing about what was going on in New Jersey at the time. You see, after my father died Well, before my father died, my mother tried to commit suicide once. That was after I left. Then my father died and then she went through it again and so, see, there my middle brother was living at home with his wife and kids at the time. So, you know, the fact that I was not out there, not sharing in all this grief, really made it very difficult between us, more than it usually was. So that, that was really about to

PC: Well, what kind of analysis did you go into, was it analysis or therapy?

RZ: It was analysis. I mean it was like really eclectic, is what it turned out to be. The analyst was, well, he was so great, I mean I guess everyone says that about their analyst.

PC: Well, not all the time.

RZ: That's true, not all the time. But I felt like I was really saved at that time, because I wanted to be saved, you know. And, I don't know, it's like what he did was I would do all the talking. Not all the time, no. He was very directive but he would just kind of bring in whatever he thought I needed, you know. If I needed Jung, he'd bring in Jung and Adler, it'd be Adler and Freud, it'd be Freud, Bergler. It'd be Bergler and he would just, you know, whatever I was into he would just feed it back, you know. And it all comes together in the same place. He was brilliant, I mean he was really great, seven years of it.

PC: That's a long time.

RZ: It sure was. Oh, sure, I really don't know if you're ever really through, you know. And he was always so Really would like to talk about Yeah. Well, I was through. I mean I was We had both agreed I was, really, after all that stuff, you know, functioning well and operating well.

PC: Well, how do you think that affected your painting?

RZ: Oh, great.

PC: In what way?

RZ: Well, you see what happened, why I say I almost cracked up, you know. Like after seven months of really intensive, like every day, rigid schedule and then all that shit that was happening at home in New Jersey was really starting to make me crazy. And of course I wasn't seeing anyone because I, well, I don't know, I just didn't, I just couldn't.

PC: You were on that schedule.

RZ: Yeah, and it was like shutting out everything, you know. I don't know exactly what it was, but, where was I, what was I saying . . . ?

PC: The effects of the analysis on the painting.

RZ: Oh yeah. Well, after seven months I ended up doing these white paintings and I was, like I couldn't paint any more. It was like I painted into this

PC: How do you mean white? What was . . . ?

RZ: The paintings became whiter and whiter and whiter, and then I was just doing these white paintings, which isn't like Bobby Ryman who was doing it with some other kind of reason. But I didn't, you know I was still painting like other people, you know. I was being influenced by them or any painting, so they weren't really mine completely but they were mine in that I was doing them. I believe in influences because you only take what is a part of you which you're seeing now in your work. And then I couldn't paint any more, and that, on top of what was going on, I really cracked. It's like, wow! I can't paint and, you know, it's going to continue.

PC: I'm curious about, you know, what preceded the white paintings?

RZ: They were paintings that were like influences, as I said. I would start painting in the abstract expressionist, whatever you want to call that, yeah, with those theories and with those philosophies. And I always wanted more, you know. I'd say okay, well, that's fine, you know, but where's mine, where am I?

PC: And it finally became white.

RZ: Yeah. I just kept going and going until I went through like six influences in that short period of time, really painted the hell out of it, and then there was no place else to go. So I was So it was like a clearing out process, you know, it was like now it's me.

PC: Who else were you influenced by besides de Kooning and Kline?

RZ: Oh, a little bit of everything. I guess Leslie when he was doing those beautiful things, and Larry Rivers and Rauschenberg, and they all had that very flacid kind of beautiful Yeah, which I'm sure I'll love

PC: Do any of those things from that time exist now?

RZ: Rolled up. Well, my brother has a lot of them out in Jersey, my oldest brother has a lot of those early ones. But when I stopped, and you know then I started analysis. Then I just got calm and said, well, I'm just not going to paint until I want to paint, and I'm not going to push that hard because I didn't have anything to push with. That's what it was, you know. it was like I really had kind of exhausted myself.

PC: You mean you hadn't . . . ? What do you mean exactly? Nothing to push with, you mean no . . . ?

RZ: Well, I felt really drained at that point, you know. And what it was is I'm sure I was just . . . what I said before, that. About I had cleared out all of this and then finally had gotten to something that was very close to me. I mean I had then come up with, o.k., you did all these paintings that are influenced by others. Now, where are your paintings, what are you going to say about painting? And I just wasn't prepared for that, I mean I didn't know what to say about painting.

PC: Well, what did you start doing then after the white paintings? An entire space of not working?

RZ: Well, what I did, I started to do very personalized drawings, and that They were very organic and they were, I wouldn't call it surreal, but I immediately got very involved with surrealism, but not so much in surrealism but more in the philosophy of surrealism, you know, what the whole concept, and that was really the very beginning of like automatic drawing, you know. Automatic writing, and all these other This whole area just began to open up. Then where the source or what you're doing comes from, and why is it coming in that way. I, you know, really started getting into the really, I think, are really important questions. So the work I was doing was really personal, little drawings that could relate to nothing but me at the time.

PC: I mean, I'm curious about what you mean by the philosophy of surrealism. There were no surrealist artists who interested you particularly as far as direct imagery went, it was the ideas behind it?

RZ: Yeah, the idea of how the imagery is derived at was more important to me, you know, then. The whole thing of dealing with your dreams, the whole thing of dealing with your unconscious, dealing with your own personal unconscious, you know. Well, to be a little clearer, I think taking your doodles, you know, and everyone doodles, and they're really personal things, and they come from somewhere that's not in your brain but they move through your body. They're almost like rhythms that you have and they come out in these doodles. So it was like, well, take that doodle then and blow it up and then intellectualize it, you know, consciously paint it. But you already have a given form that's yours, personally yours and then what you do with it, you start bringing in the other emotional aspects of yours in the painting, what to do being very emotional. And then you start feeding your intellect into that. Then you start relating it to everything around you, other paintings, and how they're arrived at, and you really begin to understand, God, painters and paintings, and why they're doing what they're doing. So, the drawings and paintings that I said were really personal drawings and they were kind of all in . . . from that whole vein. And the problem . . . You see, I think, what happens is that you do that for just so long. And then I started to realize the difference between fetish work and good work, and, when it is too personalized, it can become very fetishistic.

PC: Because it just goes around the circle.

RZ: Right, it's just, you know . . .

PC: Doesn't develop.

RZ: . . . very confined and very restricted and the whole thing is that, o.k., now that you've got this, open it up, take it somewhere. And fetish art is just so emotional and so internalized, and of course conceptual art is just the opposite thing. You know, it's so cool, but there's never really any like emotional, any emotionaal thing in that. But fetish art, well, one is fetish and the other is, becomes sterile. It's like I think good painting, I'm not speaking specifically of painting, is the combination of both of these things. So that it . . . because painting is very physical and that has to be felt as well as in the production because it's that And there's such It's a total thing, I mean it's a complete being. It's a state of being, it's more than a state of mind.

PC: Yeah. Well, it's interesting, because that's a very . . . almost a very good description of what the abstract expressionists would say about, you know, like they lived their paintings and the way Their way of living reflected their art, their art reflected their way of living.

RZ: Well, art always reflects either your way of living or a way of living. It may not be seen when you're doing it but, twenty years from now It makes perfect sense when you're doing it. You may not see it now.

PC: But did you get interested in any of the surrealist painters at that point?

RZ: Sure, oh sure.

PC: Who interested you?

RZ: Gee, let's see, de Chirico, a very strange painter, and some of Max Ernst and the early Salvadore Dali, not to equate the three, define, categorize those, because the old ones are just games, very facile games. But when he first started, they were really beautiful. And Magritte, really loved Magritte. And there was, is it Andre Masson who did the automatic drawings?

PC: Right.

RZ: I never liked them but I really liked what they were about.

PC: Well, did Pollock interest you ever?

RZ: Not for a long time. I came to Pollock much later. I don't know why, I couldn't get past, couldn't get past the initial, you know, what you see.

PC: Were you painting, you know, real objects at that time? Were they non-objective paintings, or what? Or were they dream . . . ?

RZ: They were objects but they were not objects that you would see outside, you know. I mean they were forms, they were forms which you carry around in your head. They were very real to me, but they were not real. I can see it walking down the street, you know, this thing going around the corner

PC: You wouldn't start from real . . . from a real subject like the still life?

RZ: No, not at all No, because that's how it all really started, you know. You start abstracting from reality, not from reality, from the little things you see around you. No, it was past that point, it was like pure abstraction, from yourself, you know, again very personalized. Yeah, they would get very intricate, I mean they came out like these organic shell shapes and very kind of sensual and curvy.

PC: Well, that preceded the circles, right?

RZ: Oh yeah. The circles came later. The circles, yeah, the circles came after that, the circles came, God, how did they come? They were It was There was a whole spiritual thing that was happening with the circles. It was happening with the organic work but somehow the organic work was so personal it couldn't relate to anything. I mean it wasn't universal at that point. And I don't mind, I mean I wanted to do things that were mine but were also much bigger than just me relating to it.

PC: So you were really pushing yourself in various directions?

RZ: Right.

PC: Well, how Again going back to the analysis and its effect on working along on a day-to-day basis on the painting, was it apparent to you or did you use it in a given way, or was it . . . ?

RZ: Well, you know that, the more you know about yourself, the more, well, not only the more you know about yourself, but the more experiences you have, it all feeds into you and you bring that much more to what you're doing and, you know, you resolve the questions, not, many times, not directly to what you're doing but through analogies that exist outside. Like certain painting problems can be resolved by reading a book and documenting certain And I think everything is sort of relevant.

PC: So everything becomes a potential source or pass or . . .

RZ: Sure. Yeah.

PC: Well, you know, during all this time you're still doing these part-time jobs, right?

RZ: Yeah.

PC: And changing, going through analysis?

RZ: Yes, right.

PC: You had a very tight schedule.

RZ: That's right.

PC: You varied it, rather than just painting all day?

RZ: Yeah, I had to work to get money for the shrink.

PC: Right, right.

RZ: And also to live on. But of course it was very little. I mean you can feel these But I mean it was such an incredible revelation that I could function, in . . . like fresh air being pumped into you as fears began to kind of disappear.

PC: Well, you know, you had . . . You had a show at the Henri Gallery in Washington.

RZ: Yeah, they were the organic work.

PC: They were the organic works. What year was that?

RZ: '65 I think.

PC: So that was really the first show that . . . ?

RZ: That was the very first show, yeah.

PC: How did that come about?

RZ: Friends in Washington I knew already and used to visit down there and they said, you should really see his work. I brought slides down.

PC: You hadn't shown anywhere before that, group shows or anything?

RZ: No.

PC: Well, how was that experience for you?

RZ: It was very mixed. I was . . . Well, I think an artist likes to show his work.

PC: But this was really the first time you'd seen things out of the studio?

RZ: Yes. Oh, you mean the whole thing?

PC: Yeah, the whole experience of having a show.

RZ: Oh, well, looking at the work outside, I really liked that. I mean they really looked great.

PC: Did they look very different out of the studio and in a gallery setting?

RZ: No, it was just nice to see them all at one time, you know.

PC: Kind of up on the walls and lit and all that?

RZ: Yeah, it was quite an experience to see that. But I don't think it changed them. And I'm not sure if I learned very much, because I think I had probably learned all I could from the paintings when I was finishing them. I could see them outside, I don't think it was any . . . I learned very much from them. This doesn't always happen. I mean I, you know . . .

PC: But you were doing something as part of that thing, or was that . . . ?

RZ: I can't remember. I guess I really don't remember what I was doing while the show was up. I was still, yeah . . . I can't remember, I can't remember my initial break from that to get the circles. Oh no, I was still painting, like the paintings were beginning to change a little more, they were getting quieter and less personalized. Oh, and there was one painting that I did after the show, yeah, still doing, that had a circle in it and that was painted with little glowy lights in it and that was the light source of the painting and like that's what really turned into the light source. And then I started doing these oil paintings of these globes that were kind of opalescent, just a grey space, with all these globes that were kind of glittering and this soft kind of opalescence, it was very . . . And I started getting into that whole meditation. I used to stare at what I was doing, all the energy of the light and the color would start moving into a whole other realm. That's when I really had that organic sort of light.

PC: Well, what were the globes for? How did they . . . the light globes develop? You know, what was your interest in them and . . . ?

RZ: Well, there was . . . The circles became important to me, and there was that whole floating quality that the globes had, that . . . just that quiet floating thing. It was very exquisite, it was very beautiful, you know. And then to make it kind of glow was even more beautiful. It's like looking at a photograph of the moon, it's a very nice thing. And I say that now, I didn't know that then, that there was something very attractive about it.

PC: What about the contemplation aspect. I mean did that, did they develop through that or did that develop afterwards or did they kind of intertwine?

RZ: God, let me see if I can think back to what that was. It had to do with the fact that the painting could be as powerful with less elements in it, and it began stripping away and getting to a simple structure which is loaded, and in which there's so much power that, almost through the simplification of being forced to look at one element, of just sitting there, almost kind of emitting a very strong force. I mean you didn't need all of those turnings and twistings. I can't recall exactly when, well, it was something about simplifying, something about stripping away to get to the answer.

PC: Well, this was still mainly in problems of light, right?

RZ: Yeah.

PC: A very simple structure.

RZ: Yeah, I guess it was then.

PC: There's no particular involved then?

RZ: Yeah, because I confused light with color, you know. They're kind of the same thing and I wasn't quite sure

where one stopped and one began, or are they really the same after all?

PC: Well, when did the color activity start? Was that after this?

RZ: Yeah. After I stopped painting in oils, I think. All the globes were done in oil. All the paintings up to that point were done in oil.

PC: Why did you stop using oil?

RZ: Again, it was a simplification, you know, in that See if I can paint, certain The stripping away of all kind of just excess elements and getting well, actually we're down to the globes which is like the simple thing I had gotten to. And then it was, well, why do you need the depth and the space and the shading and the molding? Why can't that same kind of thing be done on a solid color, just by toning one area? What I did, I painted, well, with acrylic. Oh, the reason I went to acrylic was because I had started working with color pencils and you can't work with color pencils on oil, so it was kind of functional.

PC: You mean old

RZ: Well, I painted the canvas with acrylic and then made this circle

PC: With a colored pencil.

RZ: And then I would just color the top and then shade it so that it just disappears and then you just had this toned area on a flat surface and you got the same effect and it was, well, it was even stronger. Well, it was stronger, it was It would start out using You could really start getting the color now, the color pencil, and other colors in many different emotions. I mean because color is so loaded and you can do the identical painting with five different colors and you've got five different reactions, or five thousand, or as many people who look at it.

PC: Well, as Albers.

RZ: Well, see, it was that kind of simplicity, not only in elements but in thought that started to happen. I mean it was when I said color instead of emotion and like that's so simple, you know. That's so simple that a whole painting is different because the color is different.

PC: Well, were you aware of Albers at this time? Were you interested in what he was doing, or . . . ?

RZ: I always I saw Albers, and, sure, I was aware of Albers. As a matter of fact I had a job, one of my part-time jobs was doing that, working for a Seven Arts Book Club. And it was that . . . I was there when that two hundred dollar book came out of his. And when I looked at it I started laughing, because I thought it was one of the most academic boring things that I ever had read. Because of all this background with Cunningham I mean that's like the first time And he did all the tricks and he did all the optical illusion and all those things that I didn't find very interesting. So Albers was there, and I appreciated him in a way.

PC: But in a way you had learned about a whole color sensibility through Cunningham?

RZ: Yeah. We're jumping a lot, here. Because, you see, when I said I was doing those circles and I realized about the color thing, I didn't realize then the power that color has. I mean I was still shading things and toning things . . . but getting flatter and coming under the influence of Greenberg and, you know, the whole contemporary way of thinking, of purity of materials, you know. Everything must relate to the painting, but still not into that completely but starting to move into that American

PC: How was that, through anybody or through your reading?

RZ: Just seeing.

PC: But I mean just picking up the whole Greenberg comment?

RZ: Well, I was just seeing. And he started to make sense because of the simplification involved in that. I mean the whole concept is very simple, and with him that simplicity is very complex, meaning that there are many variations on that little thing which is what has been going on, gone on, since Morris Louis and

PC: But do you feel a part of that group?

RZ: I did for a while.

PC: Group, you know.

RZ: Sure, I did. Very strongly. It was a very strong influence on me and I started moving into that and because I thought it was very legitimate and it made very good sense and it was something to really learn. One of the most important aspects of American painting is space, I mean using giant spaces. Like you'd say, well, why are they painting things so big? And then the bigness was a part of the painting. I mean that scale and that size, making this invisible space visible, and it's so powerful to do that so that it . . . really important reason, yeah. But I mean, this stripping away, that's when it really started happening, all the painting to me then started to be, let's get to the essence of something. You know, let's get to the simplicity and in those circle paintings they . . . , They're Simplicity to me was a space which was a colored ground and then by toning this ring which I started with colored pencils, you see, you completely change a whole space and then you get into a whole illusionary thing just by one toned area. And that was so simple and so beautiful to me.

PC: Well, were those paintings shown ever?

RZ: Yeah, I had a show at Stable of circles but they weren't . . . not the colored pencil ones.

PC: Not the colored pencils?

RZ: No, they were sprayed, I started spraying them and toning that down. It had to do with pureness at that point, because the color pencil kept falling off and I had to do this thing. Oh I really like it, you know, and then three months later it'd fall off. See this spot in it, like a whole area would start bleeding in. So I started spraying over it, that was a clear acetate or something, acrylic spray. But then that would change the whole color because acrylic is so flat and dry, and then you put spray over it, it darkens it, so the whole thing would start changing. So then the next natural thing was to just use the spray gun and not worry about it, so that's what I did.

PC: Well, how did you get into the Stable Gallery?

RZ: Sam Green.

PC: Oh right, he comes in here doesn't he, somewhere?

RZ: Yeah, that's where he comes in, after the circles, because of the spray. Yeah, that's All that started through

PC: How did Sam appear?

RZ: Well, even before Sam, it was Bellamy who finally came down, and then he said he'd write a letter to Agee who was at the Whitney Museum and he came down and I went into the Whitney show, and then the painting was bought by one of the committees. And then Sam came down in a few weeks. They called me and said they wanted to come to the studio and then he came with her, and that's what happened. And it's helped a lot, I mean really helped a lot.

PC: Well, he moves around a great deal.

RZ: God, the most wonderful thing about Sam is that you never know what he's doing and yet he's doing a hundred things, right? So then someone would say, well, what's Sam up to? I'd say, well, I don't know, and here I've just had a conversation with Sam, you know, talking with him for like two hours. Like, what are you doing and why are you doing it? And when I walk away, my mind is so confused and I don't know what he's doing.

PC: Well, what's he done for you, brought people to you and shown work?

RZ: Yeah, he's brought a lot of people to me, a lot of collectors. I've sold a lot of work and then had started writing from other sources, you know. Then everything started to connect with everything else, it just started going . . . snowballing.

PC: Well, where did Reese Palley come into it?

RZ: Oh, that's a sore spot, oh shit. Well, I have to admit I was very innocent about this. I didn't know anything about Reese Palley, as no one else did. They knew he had a place in Atlantic City, right? And everybody knew he was coming to New York City and he had this beautiful new space that he was opening and everyone knew that, you know. And they still didn't know who he was. Then, Sam brought Reese down to look at the work and Reese came down with this whole entourage of people and I just sat there while they looked at the work and it became very clear that he didn't know anything about painting. And there was one person that felt he did know something about painting and he was very young and he was just getting the place started, so then we connected on

PC: Who was that?

RZ: Jason McCord. He was working for Reese and then he was with Tibor for a while.

PC: I think so.

RZ: Well, he's been with Tibor but then they closed that time, I don't know. But anyway, Jason was there and then I went with the gallery and what a disaster! It was one of . . . undoubtedly the worst experience I've ever had in my whole art career, and I don't think I'll ever have another that bad.

PC: For what reason?

RZ: Well, I mean the opening was just unbelievable, you know. I mean Reese Palley first of all makes up these announcements that you probably saw. You know, it was like Reese Palley and there were several little things on each one and each one of them in a tune or something like that.

PC: Oh right, right.

RZ: And he got all these mailing lists from people, got him three or four and five and . . . Really became fucking angry, showed up because I was so furious at the whole thing. It had totally gotten out of control. I said, Reese, what I want you to do is like, you know, stop, you know, mailing those damned things out. People are calling me, you know. They're sending them to me. I was angry, you know. They got two or three thousand and oh, I was getting these things back in the mail from all these possible friends, and there you are. I was just going to have my show, just wanted a decent show. So, what else was there about . . . ? Oh, and then Reese came into the gallery while I was hanging the show and, there Reese was. He said, I just wrote a letter to my friend in the New York Times telling him about the show and my gallery opening, you know. So I said, well, I wanted to read the letter because I started then getting wise to Reese Palley. So I read the letter and it was so embarrassing, I said, look, you can't send this letter. And he really got mad, went through his whole childish screaming act, called Susan and told her, Susan, you talk, I can't talk to him, you know, change the letter, do whatever you have to do but I can't talk. And he walked away, you know. So any time Reese meets me in a comfortable situation, he walks away. And the whole thing was trying to get some integrity back and Reese Palley has no integrity. He doesn't know what that means. He's really involved with his gross education and so he showed that after a week and I almost had a heart attack with all this shit coming back in the mail. That's why I won't mention . . . And then his son called the gallery and says he's involved in the gallery and then he starts laughing and thought I was a and he and I are like this, you know. So I go to the opening and I find a thousand people show up and it has nothing to do with me. It has nothing to do with my painting. And what Reese did was just simply make a circus for himself and he just invited these thousands and thousands of people, literally. So I got panicked and I went down to the office and locked the door and said, I'm not coming out of this office until everybody leaves. And I just stayed locked in all night and then friends who wanted to see me came down to see me in this little office and I was just white as a ghost. I mean I . . . I had taken some tranquilizers before and I had a glass of champagne and I was just, oh, very green. That was so awful, so awful, I mean I thought I could never live through that, live that through. And then the gallery started changing, but it was because of the artists. He got Heratus. Of course Heratus learned very quickly that Reese is not going to take a back seat to anyone and then he ended up with the same thing we have in California and they were backing the whole thing. And they got someone else in and that ended and then all the artists were just kind of hanging on and saying, well, okay, it seems to be calming down. But he would always pull that stuff and what it turns out is that he was using all of us for his own . . . getting his own picture in the papers because of us. He did it all the time. Finally I quit.

PC: The green light. Well, I hear he's going to close now or something.

RZ: Well, I quit and David Diao quit the day before, and he announced to me . . . It was an incredible turn of events. And then he kind of accepted that, so he decided to write out these press releases saying the policy of the gallery was going to change and, from now on we will show . . . You know, all this bullshit. Because he couldn't deal with the fact that he was an asshole, because of the crap . . .

PC: Did he sell anything? Was there anything sold there for you?

RZ: Well, I sold, he sold probably two paintings of mine and the rest were sold to people who had been mine before. And that was another thing, you know. I was in the gallery and I brought all the people who had been interested in the work to the gallery. David Diao goes to the gallery, the same thing happens to him. Al Hilley goes to the gallery, the same thing happens to him. We're bringing all the people in. Reese didn't know anybody. He's selling to his dentist in New Jersey and he'll send out paintings . . . he's sending out paintings on consignment out to Lakeland, New Jersey, so the paintings can sit by this Doctor with plastic to decide whether he wants them. You know, he doesn't want it, he's buying flowers, you know. He doesn't care. And of course it always comes back and it would always be a little damaged. So I mean the major sales were all done through us, I mean, so it was like we were doing everything for him and he wasn't doing a damned thing for us, plus we were giving him fifty percent of our lives, you know.

PC: Yeah, he really has a marvelous ambiance. So as of now you really have no dealer?

RZ: No.

PC: What about some of the museum group shows you've been in? Are any of those important to you or have they been useful in any particular way?

RZ: I don't know. I think one of the most important ones of course was the first Whitney I was in, because that's when I think everything started happening to me. I think exposure is, well again, is important in terms of the painting scene today which has There's a real danger of pulling the artist away from himself, instead of painting for other motives.

PC: You mean too much exposure, or the wrong kind?

RZ: Well, the whole power of the art galleries, you know, the pushing and the shoving and all that. You know, the whole art . . . the way the whole scene is turned over. That it's become such a big business that the artist can be really screwed up by having to need to get a piece of the action. So therefore he will start painting for that and not for himself any more, you know. And he starts losing a little bit of himself and a little bit more and it can be very dangerous.

PC: Ends up being commercial art.

RZ: It's messed up a lot of people, you know. I mean I know of a couple of people who were really messed up, and who were very young and just kind of got out of college and started painting and got right into galleries. And I mean there's nothing to fall back on really, because the gallery process becomes the art scene for them. They never really understand where the hell they are as a painter before And I think that apprenticeship is very important, just to draw and paint and survive as best you can while you're doing that. Maybe sell a painting somehow but not as a primary thing.

PC: No, I think the fact that so many young painters in the last ten years, you know, in their twenties some of them, become known and the star system and, you know, you have five shows in five cities in five weeks and five countries almost and you It's hard to handle.

RZ: It's a hell of a lot, there are . . . I can name maybe four or five, I mean, they screw around so But I can think of many more who aren't, I can say, gee, whatever happened to so and so, that's really sad, tragic.

PC: It happens. Anyway, that's [BREAK IN RECORDING]

PC: Let's see, it's Side Three and this is the 30th of August, Paul Cummings talking to Robert Zakanych. We had just taken care of Reese Palley, but I think it would be interesting to say something about Sam Green and what he has done for you and what kind of relationship you've had with him, because he was only peripherally mentioned before.

RZ: well, what Sam has done is he sold a lot of paintings.

PC: But has he operated like a private dealer then?

RZ: Only with very, very specific people, you know, people that he'd worked with when he was in Philadelphia and then with the Carnegie Institute. Well, he started that whole thing at the University of Pennsylvania.

PC: He didn't start it.

RZ: He didn't start it, that contemporary thing?

PC: Yeah.

RZ: I thought he did.

PC: Ti Grace Atkinson started it.

RZ: Oh, what was she showing? I didn't know that, you see. Well, he brought in all that Warhol stuff, no one would touch that down there.

PC: After she did one show and showed all those pieces, then he did one-man shows.

RZ: She showed Pop first?

PC: Yeah.

RZ: Really.

PC: And David Smith and Clyford Still and other people like that.

RZ: Well, anyway, it was established then before he got down there.

PC: He once at lunch said to her, you know, the thing I really want to do is have the job you have and finally he got it.

RZ: Well, you see, I don't know anything about Sam. But he's just sold a lot of paintings for me and one of the amazing things about him is he's never taken a percentage, ever, you know. He started taking a percentage from the people he was selling to, but it wouldn't come out of my percentage. That's about all, we've just been good friends. I don't . . . can't say anything more.

PC: I mean did he take you around anywhere, or bring you to . . . ?

RZ: No, no. Just occasionally I'd go over and have lunch with him or something. He'd call up, but that's about as personal as it is. We're just kind of friends. I think it's kind of an interesting relationship.

PC: What about Bellamy? Do you know him too? Or not?

RZ: What, do I see Bellamy?

PC: Richard Bellamy.

RZ: Oh, I only saw Dick once or twice. Once when he was down to see . . . which took four months to get him down here, which was really impossible. And then I went up to talk to him when I was up at and we just kind of know each other.

PC: But Sam has really done a lot of business.

RZ: Sam has been, you know, the major force in selling the work.

PC: How about the exhibitions you've been in, have they come after you, I mean, the group shows and the museum things?

RZ: Did they come after me?

PC: Yeah, I mean, have they contacted you or has Same done any of that?

RZ: Some, yeah. The one in Munich which was a "New Art U.S.A." I think it was about two years ago. And that was one, and then there was one in Philadelphia in the Center. And all the others came through, well, through seeing the work, I guess, through the gallery. There have been numerous shows . . . I mean I can't even list the group shows, yeah. I forget them all the time.

PC: One after the other.

RZ: Sure. Last year there were like six of them, and then the year before that there were like five or something like that and I don't . . . I can't remember exactly how they all came about. Well, as I was saying, that things start steamrolling, you know, once you start being known and start being seen. Then you get responses that are positive or negative.

PC: Well, have you been able to, you know . . . Reese Palley I don't think did a great deal from what you've said before, but was he cooperative when somebody wanted to borrow pictures for an exhibition?

RZ: Oh sure. But Betty really started to handle that.

PC: That's Betty?

RZ: What?

PC: Who, Betty who?

RZ: Betty Finnigan, yeah. She really took charge, I mean, she had no power there but she took charge. She just ran it and made it run smoothly. I mean she knew who the good people were coming in and didn't ignore anyone. Reese kind of stayed on the periphery, luckily, in that situation.

PC: Well, what about . . . ? I think the whole business of making a living and jobs, we had talked about that, up

to, what, three or four years ago? I guess, so that . . . ?

RZ: Yeah, the part-time jobs.

PC: Right, but since that time you've been living off the paintings?

RZ: Yeah, for about . . . I guess since about '68, so it's close to four years now.

PC: Do you have any interest in teaching or have you done any teaching anywhere?

RZ: No, I never taught before because, well, I never really felt I had anything to teach because I felt like a student myself. And my situation was funny because, as I said before, I wasn't involved with a lot of painters, and that's how the teaching comes about.

PC: Right, they pass the jobs around.

RZ: Yeah, but I've started giving some lectures around and they are terrifying.

PC: What kind of topics?

RZ: Well, I gave one at Temple, at that tiny school of art and it was well, it started with a slide thing of my paintings but it really got into color, which then got into everything and just went on and on and on for five hours. It was great, it really was great. Then after that I went over to the instructors' loft, you know, only I think . . . The last year's students came over and then it went on again until two in the morning.

PC: It was a party.

RZ: It was, it was.

PC: Oddly enough, those things are very good.

RZ: It was really gratifying, I really enjoyed it, you know. But it's that whole tremor you go through before you start, can't eat, can't think.

PC: But you try.

RZ: Yeah. But some people get, you know, kind of frightened, but they kind of make that work. Really I have to kill myself to get through that.

PC: Well, you know, one thing that we talked about before only slightly was Cunningham. I'm curious what you feel about him now in retrospect as a teacher, and what did he kind of open up for you as a student that you now find useful? I mean was he that kind of a teacher, or did he imply that he had a formula or he had an idea and that was superior or better?

RZ: Well, the way he taught was the scientific approach, this whole scientific color, so that you got to understand color pretty thoroughly. But that leads to other areas. I mean, once you understand color then you start using it arbitrarily, you instinctively know what's going to happen with it, not totally, but you have an idea and you forget all about the science of it and you forget all about the equations of certain amounts of this and, like, certain amounts of that, the perfect balance. But, I mean, my interest wasn't entirely color, it was in painting, which is one aspect of painting.

PC: But did he also teach you the chemistry, or was it just, you know, so much of this and so much of that?

RZ: No. Yeah, it wasn't any chemistry at all; it wasn't that scientific. It was probably more visual. Oh, how can you say that? Well, what happens when colors are put together and all the different ranges.

PC: Well, what about . . . ? Does he talk about Albers ever, or was Albers not a good topic?

RZ: Not very much, because he had a specific way of teaching and he said . . . Yeah, he talked about Albers as a wonderful colorist and like that, but Albers . . . It wasn't important to know Albers at that time, because we had no information to understand ourselves from him and what we were doing. Well, Albers . . . After that then we saw Albers and he was . . . It was so obvious what he was doing, you know, it became so clear. So, I guess that's why he never pushed Albers.

PC: Yeah. Was Albers simplistic after that?

RZ: I thought he was. I still think he is, I mean, very clearly. I think the really important thing about Albers was that statement that I think he made about color in itself can be a painting. And I . . . which is the reason why he

selected the interference of the rectangle so that you would see that so much that you would stop seeing it. You would just deal with the color and that was it. I can't imagine how he could continue painting that way for ever and ever and ever. I mean it's a long time, you know.

PC: He told me a couple of years ago, oh I think I can still do a hundred red paintings.

RZ: That's just incredible, and they're all the same. I mean they're not I mean the colors are always different but the whole concept is so constant.

PC: Well, it's just a little like one degree over in the variation or another degree in another degree. It's a long way around the circle.

RZ: Right, yeah. It was kind of earth-shattering I'm sure when he started putting this white line in it, you know, that's quite a departure.

PC: Right, right. Well, did Cunningham push the students? Or did you really learn what Did he push you in any area, or direction rather, that you were interested in moving, or was it pretty much a formula?

RZ: No, it was really just straight color. You see, it was an advertising school and so he was there to prove the more you learned, even going into advertising, the better advertising artist you're going to become if you become color conscious. And his whole thing was to make us become very conscious of color and how it functions. So that was all he taught, I mean there was no reason for him to push us anywhere because we were in the school for a specific reason. As I said, I didn't realize that there was going to be any influence at all, you know, because I learned advertising. And it was only like years and years later when I started painting, you know, even after I started painting, I still wasn't involved in color per se. I mean that that came about just, oh, maybe two or three years ago. So that's a big joke, because so it was ten years later that I'm picking up on all of that I learned. I went to have lunch with him once, just to get a quick refresher course in a half hour.

PC: How did that work?

RZ: It was fine. He was very busy of course and . . .

PC: When was that?

RZ: That was about two years ago. And I wanted to find out what film color was, you know, because that's a process, I mean it's how you apply colors next to each other so that the color going over another color appears transparent when in fact it is not transparent.

PC: Oh it's like water color?

RZ: Well, it looks that way, but it's flat and it's solid, then to find out how to get to that, and that's very complicated. In art school I did a whole plaid in color and I remember I thought I knew it well, but then I completely forgot it. It's a complicated process, I'm still not sure of how it goes, and he explained it to me and he drew diagrams and, you know, worked all these numbers down This goes with that, and you can't go wrong if you do this. And I couldn't understand when I got home and everything got all muddy. So it wasn't fine at all, and I'm still trying to figure that one out. In fact, if I see him again, I'm sure we can.

PC: Well, you know, when did the whole color . . . ? Because those early surrealist type plant-biomorphic, whatever you want to call it, images have unusual color quality. When do you think you really got involved in it?

RZ: Oh, look, you see, that's what I'm talking about. In painting it was a natural thing for me to work with a specific kind of color up to that date, and they were very grey, and they were in lots of greys and blues and things. But how that changed? I mean how did I get over to color?

PC: Yeah, how did you move, you know, out of that into . . . ?

RZ: Well, there was a light quality that I was after in those paintings. All right, there'd be the shell shape and then the bottom of the shell would be lighter. There'd be like this incandescent light emanating from one source. And that started to take over the paintings, that light. And I did a painting that was almost like a primitive staff, would be like feathers and things and in the center of it was a circular form, and I had these little other round forms inside the circle and that was the light source. That was painted in kind of whites and pinks and oranges, kind of like a minaret, that mother-of-pearl kind of thing, and the rest of it was just flat, dark colors and there was just one light source. So that then the light source took over and . . .

PC: That was when the circles developed?

RZ: Yeah, it was right after that then I went into doing the circles with this central light source and I got very

confused because I didn't know the difference between light and color. I'm not sure if I still know the difference between light and color. So after, gee, this is after, if I can remember Oh, the globes came after that, that I was talking about, that all floated in the space and were kind of incandescent, and then went to the singular ring that was toned, you know, and shaped. Pencil first and then sprayed and it became less light, less about light and more about color and space and what color does to space, and it kind of shifted then. And after I did this whole series of circles and then I went into hexagons, and then a friend came from Washington and said, why are you doing these hexagons? They're just like the circles only they're hexagons. And she was absolutely right.

PC: Well, that was really a shaped canvas, wasn't it?

RZ: Yeah, that's what it was. I was afraid I was being influenced by

PC: The whole shaped canvas syndrome.

RZ: Yeah, and I didn't Well, I thought it was very beautiful I really liked Stella's work and I thought they were really exciting and I liked what he was doing, so I got very influenced by it and started doing these shapes. It became kind of silly after she made that statement, like, what are you doing the shapes for? You're not even interested in that really, you're interested in the color only. I was with Stable at that time and Eleanor Ward, who was the overseer I set four of them up, of the hexagons, and she called me and said something about, oh, I think they're really beautiful, what other delicious flavors do you have, you know. Because what she was talking about was the color, just started taking on like sherbets and beechnut and all that kind of thing. And that made me realize that they were really about color. So then I threw away the shapes and thought, what's the best way of doing color straight, just no form, just have color there. And so I did a long strip, you know, just a long rectangle, fourteen inches by sixty inches, just filled this form with some color, equally broken up.

PC: They were like bands, right?

RZ: Yeah, and they grayed and they changed color and that was the first thing that really got into color. That's when I started realizing that color by itself was a complete entity, I mean the force of it was

PC: Well, you know, I'm interested in the idea of color without shape. No matter what you do with it, it's got to have some kind of shape, either on a surface . . . ?

RZ: Well, the only way to see color is when it's contained in something. I mean it has no form of its own, so that's accepted, whatever shape you use as a shape. What I was trying to do was to use something that was the most appropriate shape so that the color could just run through it and let it create its own images, you know, as it grades and as it flows, the heavy parts, or here where the oranges are and where it gets lighter as it goes into blues and whatever. But it's creating its own form, and it's creating its own shape. And, well, you establish the shape, but it creates its own form within the shape. Well, we all have to work with shapes.

PC: But, after doing that one vertical one, didn't you do a series of kind of panels, like?

RZ: Yeah. That grew, it was just the one and then I said, I wonder how two would look together and how three would look together. And it also gave me the opportunity not only to run the color straight up and down but sideways as well, and that's exactly what started happening. Then I liked the panels because when you fill totally the canvas with color in that very soft modulation it just goes into this infinite space and the panels, the physical panels, you know, like six lines of seven panels, really anchored it. It really kind of ground it. So you really You saw that it was an object on the wall, In fact, when you got into the color it did something else, so it was a physical as well as an optical thing. That was really why I did that.

PC: Well, these were all These were not sprayed or anything, were they? **PZ:** No, no.

PC: They were all painted?

RZ: They were all painted, right, right. It was funny because later I read a review of the show and it talked about a grid that I was using. It was really interesting to me because I didn't know I was using a grid, you know. I was just filling in this chain so that the color was into it. But, yeah, it was a grid, I guess. To me they were just little areas of

PC: Rectangles.

RZ: Yeah, and the space.

PC: Well, how did you decide what your color patterns would be or what colors you would use? Was it arbitrary?

RZ: Yeah, very arbitrary.

PC: It was?

RZ: It was just, yeah. It was just completely arbitrary. I would start with a color and print two, it would be nice if we run through this, but when you're working step by step by step, then as quietly as the steps were, you never knew if you would ever get to that color. And most of the time you never did, so that painting always inferred those colors when actually they were not those colors. You know, if you isolated one part of it, it would not be the color it appears to be.

PC: Well, because of what's on the other side of it?

RZ: Right, right. And it always just kind of got to, but not quite, you know, and you never knew what . . . Oh, and I think that's where the disasters came because you couldn't break from say orange to get to a green, you'd just get into brown. And how far do you have to take it before it starts inferring blue. So you start adding on these panels, you know, because the color controls the size as well, but unfortunately what used to happen was that you would start with these kind of oranges, and by the time you got to the blue, what you would have is a brownish tan, which is exactly what you didn't want, so you just threw it away or painted it over.

PC: Well, how did you do that? Did you know how many panels, how many vertical panes, you were going to have when you started?

RZ: Usually, yeah. I would try to work with nine, seven, or eleven panels and then try to see . . .

PC: What was the reason for that?

RZ: I just liked the way the shapes looked, the scale looked. The scale looked good in relationship to the whole, you know. It wasn't just simply doing the big painting, it was doing something with the scale and it worked with movement and color.

PC: I often wondered, when I looked at those, if you painted them vertically or horizontally, in the sense of those narrow panels, you know. Were they standing vertically when you painted them?

RZ: They were, yeah. But you did them all at one time. I mean it was like the twelfth notch down you'd start the color and then around the next one it would be the eleventh and the tenth and the ninth if you wanted to go up, and if you wanted to go down, you'd go the other way. And then you'd have this line, when the first thing is painted, you'd have this kind of shape and then you could start with that color going to another color and then on the outside you could go to another color because they wouldn't touch. **PC:** Well, you know, do you intend to move based on light to dark or dark to light or . . . ?

RZ: No, they're all the same tone. That is, I didn't want any change in them, I just wanted color changes, not value changes. And when they had to be photographed, you know, in black and white, the galleries who shot them called me and said, these are disasters. Why don't you come over and see them, there's nothing I can do with it. And I went over and I said, it's fantastic, I mean that's exactly it. The photograph came out perfectly grey and I knew the painting was fine, you know, because that was exactly what I wanted. But, as reproduction goes, yeah, they were disasters, sure. But of course now that's all changing. I mean I'm into different tones and light and dark.

PC: Well, how did you move then from the vertical panels into solid canvas, I guess, right?

RZ: Yeah. I think one of the main reasons was it was really a drag bolting them all together. That is they were so convenient to move, you know, you could fit them anywhere, in any elevator. But putting them all together was such a hassle and it may be an awful reason to stop painting that way. Also, I was just kind of bored with taping, and doing it like, I wanted to stop using tape and I wanted them to be less cool, I wanted them to be more physical. And so I started using a singular . . .

PC: Started using a what?

RZ: . . . a singular shaped canvas, you know, just one canvas that was six and a half by ten, and also I started getting into creating an image now on the surface. I started breaking it into these kind of rectangular squares of shapes, so that the color is still painted in these modular things but there would be a break at six certain points so that you would see another image or then another color. And leaving the ends with . . . So you'd see the paint kind of sloppily hanging on the ends, so it kind of locks in the canvas. And I was very happy with that, I mean, and the color changed and it went away from all those off-whites, white kind of paint, kind of colors, differential color, because the white is easy, by the way, you know, being very close is very easy to deal with.

PC: But, as I remember, maybe I'm wrong here, the edges of the canvas there is about, what? Half an inch or something where it was all, you know, like . . . ?

RZ: Right. I never went off the edge, I stayed on the canvas. And what I wanted to do with that, so that it didn't read as edge but it read as a form, just fitted kind of crookedly on the canvas. And that was a problem I hadn't quite resolved when I showed those paintings. But they were about the color and the other image that was beginning to happen, and also the color changed so much, I mean, I really liked that.

PC: Also, the difference between the painting part on that edge, the . . . ?

RZ: Yeah. Well that's what I found, that's what I'm now involved with . . . just that whole raw kind of splot of color that's on the canvas, but within that are all these variations going on.

PC: Yeah, but you now have some kind of pattern or something, don't you?

RZ: Yeah, but the whole shape becomes a shape on a canvas, and then within that it's woven into different patterns. Whereas the others didn't quite read as a shape, they read too much as an edge, surrounding, and that's what I was trying to get away from.

PC: Well, how did you decide on the . . . you know, that kind of S-shaped pattern, yeah?

RZ: Oh, I just wanted something that was kind of curvy, that's all, so I did a reverse S and filled it in. And that of course changed then because it seemed a little too small and a little too rigid. So then I started using a big kind of almost streamer shape around the circle. Well, what I'm into now is so different.

PC: Well, you know, I'm curious about the whole . . . about the business of light, because you've mentioned here and there and here and there . . . ? How do you . . . ? Can you plan the light effect, or the light quality that's going to happen in a painting?

RZ: More or less. Oh, sure.

PC: Yeah, I mean you really can. You don't make sketches or studies for them, do you?

RZ: I used to, yeah. I used to do little studies, but the problem with the studies is that it never worked the same when it went up in scale, because the scale completely changed the color and you can't do the color exactly the same way every time you do it. So that always changed, and you either went a little more blue or a little more red, or whatever, which completely can destroy the painting if it's not what you're after.

PC: But you, you know, you've been able to maintain a fairly flat image, and with too much kind of light shape you could distort the whole . . . I mean it would look not flat or rectangular.

RZ: Yeah, right, right, of course. I mean hot colors always rise, cool colors always sit back and, if you go from hot to cool, the canvas would start bending a bit.

PC: Vasrely does that a great deal.

RZ: Yeah, well that's really optical tricks. I mean that's just op art, there. That's, well . . .

PC: What?

RZ: We'll change the subject. Yeah, I wanted the color to be color. I didn't want it to be optical tricks. I mean I just wanted to do its own movement, but I didn't want it to be, you know, orange and turquoise so that one bangs out and the other bangs in, you know, they vibrate. But I want to keep it flat. But I really kind . . . I have one painting that was called Blizzard that started with kind of an acidy green and it fed out I think to a kind of a grey, grey lavender and then it kind of went out to a grey blue, but it was all the same tone. But it was the brilliance of the green that raised the center, you know, made it come up a little, but still kind of stay flat because all those other colors were brought up to the same level with white. But it created a very nice tension, a very tight tension. Also that's another reason why I didn't go to the edge, because, if it started to bend, it would lock on the edge. I mean you couldn't bend it and still see the flatness. You see, it's that flatness that I was talking about about the Greenberg thing, you know, who was such a strong influence and he still is. I still am learning from that, and there's something very valid about flatness. It's a nice, it's a nice illusion to work with because, once you establish the flat, then you can do all kinds of space illusions within the flatness.

PC: But do you know him, Greenberg? RZ; I only met him once and I liked him.

PC: You don't have any personal relationship with him?

RZ: No, none at all. Just met him once and we talked about analysis for an hour. It was a very nice conversation and I just found him through my experience, and I still respect him a lot. There are others, but he's . . .

PC: Who were some of the others that interest you?

RZ: Well, Barbara Rose, she's up and down, you know. She's sometimes really brilliant and then it all disappears. I don't know exactly what happens to her, and you can never really pin her down. I mean she'll say one thing this month and then the next everything you read is just completely different or completely opposite. And of course we all have the right to change, I mean, that's growing or whatever.

PC: Are there any others who you find stimulating?

RZ: Sam Hunter is pretty good, and Goosen. I haven't read any reviews. He hasn't . . . hH doesn't write reviews but there was one essay that I read of his that I thought was very, very fine and cleared up a lot of thoughts of mine. I don't know, I don't think Gene's writing at all now. I think he probably will start again. I hope he does.

PC: Well, are there painters that interest you, you know, of your own kind of group or generation? **RE:** Well, I don't know if it's my own generation, you mean people that are painting now? Most of them are older.

PC: Yeah, yeah.

RZ: Well, painters my age, I think, who interest me . . . Bob Duran does, he sometimes really gets to painting well. I don't . . . I didn't like his last show, but I was very interested in seeing it from previous paintings I have seen and I don't know what happened. But I think he's a good painter. And Ralph Humphrey had a beautiful last show. The two shows before that were not good, but the show before that was really good, like there's a two-year lapse, three years ago and this show were really fine shows. It's funny they're all with the one gallery.

PC: What does that mean?

RZ: I don't know. I guess there are others. I like Vinnie Longo's work. I just saw Vinnie's work this weekend and they're really nice, very interesting. He's really working with a grid and breaking it down, and his prints are beautiful, and his paintings are really fine. A lot of people don't know that he even paints, you know.

PC: I know, I know. It's very arbitrary how he does all that too.

RZ: Yeah, I asked him about that and he said, well, I just paint what I paint and do these prints; there was no set-up thing, it's all the same. Oh, I think Doug is an interesting painter, Doug Olsen, yeah. They're never resolved, that's the problem with them, but they're really interesting work.

PC: That's one of the old abstract expressionist problems.

RZ: Yeah. but they were usually resolved -- those abstract expressionist paintings.

PC: Well, a lot and, because it took de Kooning years before he could finish paintings and that was part of the whole thing, of being an abstract expressionist in the forties and fifties.

RZ: Well, I mean they left the paintings half done, so they'll be there not knowing what to do. Then they come back and come back and come back. They did resolve them before the show, usually.

PC: You were in an exhibition at the Larry Aldrich Museum, were you not? One of those?

RZ: Yeah, two. One was "Lyrical Abstraction," which I couldn't quite understand, but I was in that show and then

PC: Did he get things from you here? Did he come to look?

RZ: Let's see. The painting he got was, yeah, it was from the studio, right. And then another show up there was called "Highlights of the Season" and that was the same year only later. Yeah, that was after the first show. That was good.

PC: Well, how'd you find him as a collector?

RZ: Well, I liked Larry, you know. Let's see, you're really putting me on the spot here, what I think of Larry Aldrich. Well, Larry thinks he's really doing wonderful things for other painters, prides himself on discovering young new talent and showing it. And that's how he thinks, but it goes a little further than that as far as the painters are concerned, because half of them are starving and he'll go in and he'll say, what do you want for it, and they'll say, you know, four hundred dollars and he'll give a hundred dollars. You know, he's kind of dubbed the "99.98 price." And a lot of painters do it because Larry Aldrich has a . . . is Larry Aldrich and has his reputation and they don't want to be excluded, although they know what Larry Aldrich is.

PC: Yeah. Did you sell any pictures, you know, because you were in those exhibitions there?

RZ: Probably, but there's no way of showing that.

PC: No. Some people But I mean there are many direct lines to trace, you know.

RZ: Oh, well no. There wasn't anything directly from Larry Aldrich. I mean he didn't call and send people down or anything like that. But what did happen is that the painting that was in the "Lyrical Abstraction" show eventually, you know, went around the country and it showed and it ended up in the Whitney, as given to the Whitney. Meanwhile the Whitney had already bought a painting of mine, so that painting then went to the Phoenix Museum that Larry has something . . . some involvement with. So it went there and that's where it is now. So that's about the only thing I can think of. I just thought he was He's a very insecure man, you know, like most of us are. But it's on the sleeve and, if you don't see that or read it, then he comes off as a tyrant. And once you do see that, then he comes in and you can handle it, talk to him, you know.

PC: You know, to get back to the painting, you did some spray painting at one time, didn't you? I mean you used spray. Why did you give it up? Didn't work any more or . . . ?

RZ: Well, I didn't like that whole attachment in the painting, the mechanical thing of painting it, you know. Again, I guess it was a whole physical thing. I wanted to feel closer to it and it was like working a new tool and you were one step removed from your painting, which was kind of cool, I guess, to do, you know. During that whole sixties period, there was that whole coolness attachment, which I got very sucked into, you know, like so many people did.

PC: In what way?

RZ: Well, I think we talked about, or maybe we didn't, about Artforum and art criticism.

PC: Not really.

RZ: That started to really come into the fore in the sixties. I mean it became almost the powerful force, and, as a friend of mine said, which was a good line, was something about: well, Artforum has replaced the Cedar Bar, which is exactly what it did, you know. So all the discussions were done in the book and that There are a number of things that I think account for that, one of them is that a lot of the painters were college graduates who wrote well. And, unlike the fifties where painters were just the middle class which didn't go to college or whatever and didn't do a lot of writing. And then in the sixties, of course, the whole thing changed and then art criticism really started taking hold, and the power of that magazine, you know, the students or whoever would read the magazine and would say, oh, well, this is where it's going because Artforum kind of said so, so let's start painting in this direction. It was that whole thing of being accepted, and they had the power at the time, you know. And then I got really fed up with that and it was, like, I can't paint. I mean, the critic is not going to determine how I'm going to paint.

PC: Well, that's very interesting that the publication as an entity became such a tastemaker or, you know, it pointed directions for people. I'm curious about the whole idea of a painter. In effect, what you're saying is that they were painting for those critics.

RZ: Yeah.

PC: Why was that? I mean

RZ: It was the art scene, you know, as mainstream. They even, you know, write from all of that stuff and, no, I don't know what the personal motivation of every painter is. But there is a need to, I'm sure, for almost every painter to get some recognition, you know, and this is a way of getting it. If someone is telling you this is where it's at in painting and this is where it's going and this is why, and they give you an entire essay of why it's valid painting, you know. Then you start thinking about that. And you say, well, yes, that makes sense, or, why don't I do such and such and such.

PC: But you found that criticism in the sixties then as a valid statement of what was going on, or not?

RZ: Well, it was kind of insidious because it kind of came in and everyone kind of went with it. But then, before you knew it, before you realized it, it was controlling you and there was an incredible power that it had. And when you finally realized it, you just break it and say, I can't do that, you know. The critics have to follow the critic. I'm the one that's painting, they're not painting.

PC: Gee, I always find that interesting because a number of people have brought up this point but in a little different way.

RZ: Well, it got so into art history, you know, and you can't paint art history, you are history. I mean yesterday was history, everything you paint becomes history. You can't paint it, it's in the past.

PC: You really can't paint some art critic's theories either.

RZ: Yeah. Well, I think I said to you last week about that, you know, that what happened was that the greatest painters in the sixties were Barbara Rose and Michael Fried. I mean they're the people who did all of the accomplishments.

PC: But I find it very interesting because the critics historically in this country have never had more than a kind of superficial influence.

RZ: Until the sixties.

PC: Until the sixties. And then they took over from the painters and the museum people, and the dealers even, in some cases.

RZ: Yes, I think what's happened after the critics had taken over in that sense, I mean they still have a lot of power, but I don't think it's as much as it was because I think the younger painters coming up are realizing, well, they don't want to do that kind of painting, which is what that "Lyrical Abstraction" show was about. As much as I disliked the show, I did like the fact that they were painting, they were breaking down all the coolness and they were splashing and thrashing and carrying on on the canvas. Well, that was good. Whether or not the paintings themselves were any good, the intent was good and I think that's why I think it's beginning to change. Even the critics now are not being as specific as they were, you know, They're It's as if they had brought painting to this crashing bottom, you know, just by It didn't go anywhere. Sure, it sounded fine in words but it didn't go anywhere in paint, which happens all the time. Conceptual art I think that the ironic thing is the whole interest in McLuhan, you know, and McLuhan's statement of the printed word is dead and, without it, you wouldn't have, you know, conceptual art.

PC: That's what seems so fascinating. Yesterday I got a demographic chart from a Reader's Digest and you can name a city or name a country in the country and it will say how many subscribers they have, and it looks exactly like McLuhan's newsletters ten years ago when he had a newsletter. It's extraordinary.

RZ: That is.

PC: I was flipping through this thing. I said, well it's just like the Dolinger before it, fascinating, you know.

RZ: Yeah, there was a further contradiction with that: Printed word is dead. We found that out by reading the printed word.

PC: Right, it's like painting is dead because you see more painting around.

RZ: Painting is dead, it's just starting to be alive again.

PC: Right. You know, going back to younger artists and people, do you feel a part of any particular group, informal or formal?

RZ: Not now. I did at one point, of who was influencing me at the time I felt closer to, particularly painters, but I don't now.

PC: Who were they?

RZ: Well, I felt well influenced by, as I guess that's what I mean by "close" to . . .

PC: Well, then people, say, in your own peer group as opposed to kind of older artists.

RZ: No, in that sense, no. I was I don't think I was ever influenced like by a school of thought.

PC: Who were the older artists that you feel influenced by?

RZ: Oh, well, Ken Noland and Stella for a time, you know, just for a real short time, but it was an influence. And, well, all the abstract expressionists we talked about. But contemporary artists, I mean more contemporary artists

PC: I mean there is no group now you can identify with?

RZ: No, no, not at all now. It's I'm not You know, they had their say and they're still saying things, but

I'm kind of moving somewhere in my own voice. I'm not absolutely certain where it's going, which is fine. That happened with this series of last paintings at that last show where it was pure color and it was the purest I could possibly ever paint color for itself, you know. It was just It was the beginning and the end of the painting and the emphasis was only on that and knowing that and I thought, well, where do you go? And, you know, I can't just keep doing the same kind of painting. And of course I realized that color is just one aspect of painting, there's line and there's form and there's composition or whatever and then it was a matter of getting to those other elements.

PC: Well, did you set up problems for yourself to move into different directions or not?

RZ: No, you move in a direction somehow, that happens and then the problems begin. I don't think you set them up first, they just kind of start happening and you have to resolve them and you're not sure of exactly where you're going, which is why the problems are very vague. Some specifics happen, like I don't like the way this is drawn, you know. It's not working with this area here. I mean those things automatically begin, you have to start before the problem begins. I felt, I mean after I was thrilled with those paintings when the show was on and I was already beginning to paint other things, more gestural things and patterns and things like that and didn't quite understand them, but they felt good to me and it was then the problem started.

PC: Well, they seem to be getting more complex. Does that . . . ?

RZ: Yeah, there's that whole thing about less is more, and now it's . . . I feel that more is more, you know, it's just making them all work and

PC: Well, do you think the fact that you had an exhibition of that last group acted as a terminal effect?

RZ: Yeah. Exhibitions very often do act as exactly that way. It's an end of something.

PC: It's sort of all there and you can look at it and say, well

RZ: And you've worked so hard on this one specific thing and then there it is. You show it and (that's happened to me anyway) and then when I've shown them usually I'm already going somewhere else. I mean I'm through with that problem. And, of course, you don't leave it until you've resolve it completely, to the best of your own satisfaction, and then, when you put it up, you know, it kind of That's kind of the final say. You say, well, that's it and it's over, you know. But when you start going somewhere else you bring that with you. It's a very slow change. You may think it's such a giant jump and someone else may look at the work and say, well, sure it's a perfect logic. It's not a jump.

PC: But they always notice the logic after the fact.

RZ: Right.

PC: What about the scale of the paintings? Because you always work in a fairly largish size I don't know what a large size is any more, but, you know, you don't do traditional easel size paintings.

RZ: Well the size is I think we talked about it last week, that one of the most important things in American painting is scale, you know, the size, scale, the huge spaces, you know, making these invisible spaces visible.

PC: But you worked with, you know, those small modules within a larger format.

RZ: Sure, sure. But they filled the format and they went then beyond the small module, they became that whole end statement on scale, filling up a whole space. Yeah, that you see scale is very important. What if the scale is wrong? The painting falls apart. I mean there are painters who do big paintings and they're just big paintings, for no reason except to be doing paintings that size. There's nothing for what they're working with.

PC: Their energy isn't enough to fill it up.

RZ: Well, they don't understand the size they're working with or why they're working with that size other than, well, everybody's doing big paintings so we'll do giant paintings and kind of see what happens. Well, if content on the painting is nothing then it's just a big nothing painting. And there's always a reason for the scale and the size. And I know how I'm working now. I like the scale of six and a half by ten feet, or six and a half by eleven feet. Now there are certain paintings that I do when what's going on inside the painting just doesn't work with that scale. That's hard to see at first, but when you do see it then your scale changes. You're always adjusting to your statement. That's why when I was doing more models, more studies, why I said it's impossible to really see what's going to happen to them until they get up there and see if these are just big monsters or they work. It's nice with a scale if they feel comfortable and all the space is being worked on. That's why I've been working with more and more rectangles. It's very difficult, I mean there's a reason for working with a long rectangle, you know, if you want If you were just to see a part at a time, so that And each part by itself starts to work

with the other parts, but you can never really kind of see it all at once. If that's what you're after, then there's a reason for that scale. But if you want it to be seen at one time, then it's got to be shown outdoors or something.

PC: But do you feel that your paintings should be seen from a distance so that they just fit in the eye, or do you see them . . . ?

RZ: Well, I think both. When you're at a distance, you kind of postage stamp it, you make it small, and you see this entire form and . . .

PC: Kind of overall

RZ: . . . and shape of it, and then, as you get closer, all the intricacies begin to happen and it starts getting kind of -- well, the emergences that begin when you get closer are kind of fascinating, as you say this net that I'm looking at or this grid that I'm looking at I didn't see before. And it looked like this solid block and then, as you get closer to it

PC: So, in other words, it's more of a rich, rewarding and enriching experience closer.

RZ: Both ways. Because you have to see it far away before the close really works and vice versa.

PC: Back and forth.

RZ: You know, it will change all the time and then finally it will all start coming together in your head, of the distance and of the closeness and they all have to work.

PC: Well, is there anything we haven't talked about? You said you would like to . . . ?

RZ: No, I mean I don't want to talk about what I'm doing now, because I'm not quite certain about it. You know, it's I'm much surer about it now than what I did a year ago because this last year has really been hard work. It's really all of that stuff, you know.

PC: Do you ever go back and look at your early paintings?

RZ: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Or paintings that you, say, worked on even last year. Do you have things out and look at them?

RZ: Sure, sure. There are paintings that you do and you put away, you're not You think they're resolved and sometimes you know they're not, but you put them away because you don't happen to do any more on them at the time, and it's going to take a whole number of paintings before you can get down to that problem. So maybe you'll see it in another painting. So then, if you pull that painting out six months later, you'll get it and then usually the answer is there. Not always, but

PC: Sometimes.

RZ: You usually resolve it and you finish it.

PC: Do you make drawings now for paintings, or sketches or studies?

RZ: No, I haven't. I wanted to work right on it because now each painting is creating its own problem. It isn't as before where it was just a color problem and the format was all there, or the paint, but the color would change and, of course, that was a problem. But they were all painted in a similar way. But here they're not.

PC: You've got a lot of things.

RZ: They're all different.

PC: So you really have to

RZ: Each one gets very complicated.

PC: They have to be done for you to find out what they are.

RZ: Right, and hopefully it's going to help the next one, and when you start on the next one and you've got all that ammunition, but then the whole thing changes because of the shapes and the colors.

PC: Right, right. Okay, if That's it, right?

[END OF INTERVIEW]