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**Oral history interview with Luis Jimenez, 1985**  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with A. Luis Jimenez on December 15 and 17, 1985. The interview took place in Tuscon, AZ, and was conducted by Peter Bermingham for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

PETER BERMINGHAM: Luis, we were talking about your early years in this country. You were born in El Paso 45 years ago, and you were telling me about your parents who. . . . Part of your roots are in Mexico and part in Texas. Could you tell me, summarize that again for me, just briefly?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Okay. I was born in El Paso, Texas. I was delivered by a Japanese doctor right before Pearl Harbor, and he split right after that. [laughs] \_\_\_\_\_ no bearing to the art world. It was always interesting \_\_\_\_\_. Both sides of my family came from Mexico during the twenties when there was an awful lot of upheaval in Mexico, and you had a mass immigration into the United States. On my father's side, his mother—my grandmother—was a bookkeeper in Mexico and actually was a career woman. She didn't have my dad until she was 40 years old. His father was quite a bit older, and in fact had had a whole other family before, and he died when my father was five years old. When my dad was nine years old, after having gone through a whole series of schools in Mexico, where my grandmother put him in school because she really very much believed in education as she had been raised in a Protestant mission, San Luis \_\_\_\_\_. So that's where she had gotten her education at a time when women were not educated in Mexico. And so I also come from this long family of what is really a minority within a minority, which are Mexican Protestants. They're called Hallelujahs, they're. . . . It's a whole different bag in a way.

PETER BIRMINGHAM: They're refugees. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: They are, you know, it's. . . . And so, my dad came to the United States when he was nine. He was actually not legal in the United States until right after I was born, which is another thing that's sort of not really too relevant in a way; I mean, it's certainly nothing I was aware of as a kid. But it was a fact. On my mother's side of the family, they left when Villa came to the north, as my mother put it—her dad was the mayor of the little town in Chihuahua called Meoki, and of course they were the targets for the Villa forces. And the other part of it—and of course, you know, Villa was never very popular around the house for that reason, but. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But the other part of it was that they were also of European stock. On her mother's side, they were du Fahs, and, even though her father's name was Franco, on her mother's side they were du Fahs, and before that her grandmother's maiden name had been Couturiere, so they had been, evidently there had been some French in there probably from, who knows, when Maximillian [was there]; I don't know. But the point is they had to get out of Mexico; they went to the United States. As far as a kind of artistic legacy, there certainly was a tradition of craftsmanship on both sides of the family that I feel was very important in my own development. My own, my mother's father was a finish carpenter in the United States and was actually very highly regarded as such at a time when people took more pride in craft. Her brother—who is her only living brother right now—became a very skilled craftsman making metal letters, and he was the best in town. So there was a

tradition of working, of taking pride in craft. My own mother's family also had a pretty rough time, as a lot of people did during those years, but they came in from Mexico, and then of course hit the Depression, and she was one of a family of nine children and only three made it to adults. But the oldest one died when he was around 21, so really—or maybe 25, something like that. So really they had had to go through some pretty hard times. And on my father's side of the family, while his father was a bookkeeper, he was also a glassblower and he made little glass figurines. The little glass figurines were around when my father was growing up and were an influence on him, because he actually, his father had courted my grandmother with the little glass figurines. He had made a bullfight scene and cock fight and various other little things that my father still remembers, even after his father died. And they were things that my grandmother kept around. And so my dad did have this interest in art and when he was in school in the United States, I know he. . . . You know, he had to start out school—I mean, he actually had a fairly rough start—he had to start first grade when he was nine years old. But did manage to graduate at about eighteen, so he got double-promoted there a couple of times and caught up with his age group and was fairly ambitious. His strong—I was going to put it another way—but he had a strong survival instinct.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And eventually. . . . Well, before I get to eventually, when he was sixteen it's important that he entered a competition in New York City. Archipenko was one of the judges, as was some man named Ball. I don't remember all these guys that were on at the time. I do remember Archipenko's name, because I was impressed later when I find out who the judges were. But he actually got first prize in the nation, when he was sixteen.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: The trouble with that was that it was a prize that was. . . . It was sponsored—I forget who the sponsor was; I think it was Proctor and Gamble—and it was for small carvings, and the prize was supposed to carry a scholarship to the Chicago Art Institute, but because it was the Depression years, they gave him a certificate, and he never really got any schooling, really, beyond high school. So he was never ever, never received any formal training. What he ended up doing with this artistic ability of his was that he became interested in painting signs; he became a sign painter, and used that as a kind of vehicle to develop. He went from painting billboards to, eventually he moved into neon signs.

PETER BERMINGHAM: When did he do that? The neon signs, I mean.

LUIS JIMENEZ: We're talking about the thirties.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really, that early?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Back there, yeah. Thirties, early forties.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, especially early forties. But. . . . Yeah, because he was. . . . Sure. He probably started about 1935, somewhere in there, because he was in business for 50 years and closed up the shop in '85; that puts it back \_\_\_\_\_ to about 1935.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I do know that when the war came along he was already doing the signs then. I

mean, he was already working for sign companies then. And there's a lot of stories connected with that, but the long and short of it is that he started out painting signs, eventually became a shop foreman [and combination] and design as the shops were pretty small in those days.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And he eventually became a very well known designer within the sign trade. People in Chicago and the people that were doing the Times Square signs knew him. He was sending signs to Las Vegas. . . . When I went to New York, the sign people in New York knew him.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And he. . . . About in the fifties the company became known for their designs for what they call spectaculars, which were the shopping center signs. That's when the shopping centers became pretty big.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And during that time, they received at least one first prize in the nation, within the trade, for their design, \_\_\_\_\_ shop \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: When did you start working in the shops?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I started working for my dad when I was six years old.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Six!?

LUIS JIMENEZ: When I was six years old. It was. . . . My dad was very much old- country in a lot of ways, and he really felt that I should start working when I was very young. When I was six years old—the reason I say six is that I know exactly what we worked on then because it was very important in terms in what I do now, and that is that he. . . . What made him a good designer was that he was always doing these wacky things. And one of these things—I mean it was kind of off-beat—and what he did when I was six years old was that they were doing a neon sign, that is still up, for a dry-cleaning establishment, and he decided that he was going to put a polar bear in it, but it wasn't going to be a flat cut-out polar bear like you usually see on signs; it was going to be made out of white concrete. And so I helped him work on that—as much as a six-year-old can, obviously—but I helped pile up white concrete on that polar bear. And I remember coming home, you know, with my hands all split up, as a kid, and my mother being upset with my dad because my hands were all eaten up from concrete. But, you know, it was like, he thought that was really a good thing. Also in terms of the design of the sign it's really interesting that. . . . There's obviously a lot of reasons for something like this happening, but I guess it was in about the sixties that Frank Lloyd Wright was invited to speak to the American Institute of Architects here in El Paso. Why El Paso I don't know—but he went to El Paso.

PETER BERMINGHAM: He got around. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. He went to El Paso and the architects there—there is a letter from an architect named [Doble] that he wrote to my dad, as a matter of fact, because he had been in

charge of taking Frank Lloyd Wright around town. And he took Frank Lloyd Wright around town and during the course of the lecture, they asked Frank Lloyd Wright if there was anything architecturally that he was impressed with in the town, and—you know, in the way Frank Lloyd Wright was, I mean—he said that the architecture wasn't worth two cents in this town, but he said they had some incredibly beautiful signs. And he went on to describe them; they were my dad's signs.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I'll be damned.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So it was also another way of putting the architects down, because the sign man was the bad man in those days, you know, he was the guy who was screwing up every architect's design, so it was only putting them down, but in fact he not only did that though, he actually spelled out why they were good designs and how they were an integral part of the building, which was, you know, I think pretty good.

PETER BERMINGHAM: What year was that?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh, somewhere in the sixties, probably.

PETER BERMINGHAM: In the sixties, right. When you went to high school, did you study, did you have the opportunity to study art—in a different way; I won't say a more formal way, because I'm not so sure that in some ways your father's training wasn't formal too.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I know what you're saying, and in fact my father never ever sat down and gave me any training. It was a strange thing. My father and I have a very complicated relationship. It's highly competitive. And he never ever sat me down and said this is the way you do something; my father's just not that kind of a person. And in high school. . . . I got to take art in junior high because we got to take one elective. And I took junior high art, but I never took art after junior high because my father's. . . . My father was a real—still is—I mean, a real overbearing, real tyrannical man, very dogmatic. And he felt that art was a totally frivolous situation unless it was applied to something else.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I see.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And actually what he used to tell me was that if anybody had the ability and could have done it, it was him; what was I doing this \_\_\_\_\_ stuff. [laughs] Of course, the one that was the great supporting factor in the relationship was my grandmother, who used to say, "Don't listen to him. What does he know? He doesn't have a creative bone in his body. All he knows how to do is copy \_\_\_\_\_ his designs."

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] Was he doing Las Vegas signs then?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I mean, I'm talking about blinking flamingoes, and all that sort of thing?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah, yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: That can be fairly creative work.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It is very creative work. I can tell you, they made signs that you wouldn't believe. They made signs that because they were in El Paso, Texas, a lot of people were not aware of them. They had a Green Frog Lounge, where this little frog used to jump up in the air and croak. [makes

frog sounds]

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: And, you know, he was jumping up and down all the time and croaking. They had a red rooster—I still have the rooster. I took that one. I left the shop. . . . I actually stole that from the shop, but, I mean, you know, obviously everybody knew I was taking it, when I left. But I helped work when I was sixteen on a red rooster sign. There were three roosters made. There was a series of these drive-ins; they were called Red Rooster Drive-ins. There was one out of \_\_\_\_\_, New Mexico, One in El Paso, and then there was a Red Rooster bowling alley, and they were owned by a man who'd come out from the east named [Pugrati or Pugraff]. He's a \_\_\_\_\_ man; I don't know. But anyway, he hired my dad, and my dad did most of these signs on a . . . He had a real. . . . On a personality basis, I don't know how you would put that, but he would develop a very good rapport with an owner, and the owner, after a while, would just let him go. And so he made these red rooster signs, where, I mean, you know, he was, we were working with an unlimited kind of budget! I mean, he was really. . . . But he was conscientious about it, I mean. And what he'd do for these red rooster signs is, see, he had this rooster that would crow every hour on the hour, and it was all illuminated, and, you know, about ten foot high—till the local residents got together a petition and made him turn off the rooster, you know, the sounds. So he couldn't have the sound anymore. But, you know, he knew, in fact, he knew and was friends with the man that had the Times Square smoking cigarette, the \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh really, oh, the famous. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: He has his working drawings for that Times Square cigarette.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh my.

LUIS JIMENEZ: They exchanged drawings. I mean, so he met them at conventions, and he was very fortunate that he had a good boss, because he was working all the time, working for somebody, and he had a good boss named [Bowman], who really let him run the company. Bowman was the kind of silent partner in the situation. He let my dad run the company; he's provided the capital. My father has always said that he was really sorry he eventually took over the company, because he had a much better deal when this guy was taking care of business and he was just out there having the fun, you know. \_\_\_\_\_, designing the signs, managing the shop. Because later my dad ended up buying the company out. He bought it from Bowman. First it was a three-way partnership, and he and Bowman bought out one of the partners, and then my dad eventually bought Bowman out. And that was when my dad's troubles begin, because he's been a terrible businessman.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah?

LUIS JIMENEZ: [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: What did you graduated from high school? You were still working with your father then, or. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, what happened was that I worked with my dad through—again!—through grade school. . . . I mean, I got to sort nuts like nobody, got to sort bolts and nuts, you know, and I went out on work crews. I mean, the thing that was very nice for me was that I was actually treated like an equal worker by the workers. I mean, they were actually very good about things. It's a very different situation in a Mexican shop I think than in your standard, regular shop, only because it's so

family-oriented.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And the, it was a [Tortilla Flats] kind of situation. Not only did most of the workers work together all the time and were they fairly compatible, but they had shop picnics and parties, which all the families participated in. It was a close group. They went to the same church. Most of them were going to that same Protestant church, I mean, that, you know, I went to and that I grew up in. And the churches were very small. You're talking about a congregation of maybe a hundred people. And so it made for a very tight-knit community. So I went there [the shop] when I was in grade school and then, I mean, I worked there and, you know, worked with the workers, etc. And then I worked through high school. By the time I was around sixteen, I remember being the shop foreman when the shop foreman was on vacation, when I was sixteen. And by that time, I remember that I could really pretty much do everything in the shop. I could, I was not, for instance, the best glassblower, because, you know, somebody's been doing it all his life. But if a unit needed to be bent or repaired or something, I could go in there and do it. I could weld, I could work tin, or I could paint. You know, that's where I learned how to spray paint, etc.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you draw much?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I didn't draw. I didn't do any of the designing. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: I see.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . because even later, when I was in college and I was in architecture school, my dad wanted that kind of control. I mean, you know, he. . . . I mean, you know, I remember even offering at that time, and saying, you know, "You know, really, I have some designs and I'd really like to do something," and him saying, "That's not the way it's done." You know, this is not the way it's done, and, "This is the way it's done." That's the kind of control he had. And the shop was like his thing. There was a lot of ironies there, because obviously he had started training me from the time I was six so I could take over the shop, but he would never let go of any of it; I mean, that was just his thing. In terms of my training, then, when I went to high school, I remember taking mechanical drawing as an elective because that was going to make more sense later on when I [got out], not art. I remember entering an art contest in El Paso. You know, you were talking about just, you know, these high school competitions. I remember getting first, second, and third in sculpture in, when I was in the city. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] The only sculptor?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, I was not the only sculptor! Don't be. . . . You know, I was just, I was real interested in it. I'd stay up all night, I mean, working on these projects for these things. But I didn't take any formal classes. You know, I mean, taking, you know, like first and third in pencil drawing and stuff like that.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Okay.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So, doing very well, being offered some scholarships when I got out of high school, but already, you know, in my own head that, well, after all, you know, art wasn't something you were going to be that serious about, and feeling I would probably study architecture. So when I went off to school, I went off to study architecture.

PETER BERMINGHAM: And you were about twenty then? Or \_\_\_\_\_ earlier than that.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I was actually. . . . No, I got out of school when I was eighteen. I went to school at the University of Texas in El Paso, which was then called Texas Western, for one year. And one reason was because we thought—you know, “we,” I say, my father and I, you know; I mean, I was obviously under a lot of influence there. [laughs] Ironically, it wasn’t really until I went to like New York that I finally was able to break away. But we felt that, you know, I could probably get a lot of the basic courses out of the way and it would be cheaper than going straight to Austin. Also, it was very hard for me leave home. I had never really been outside of the home very much or anything. I had been raised in a very strict situation, again because we were Mexican Protestants. You have to remember, I mean, I hardly ever dated in high school. You know, it was really awful, I mean, that way. I never learned how to dance. It was like, you know, no drinking, no dancing, no smoking. You know, I always had to be home by nine o’clock kind of thing, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Are Mexican Protestants more strict?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh, I didn’t know that.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Very, you know. . . . And then in my own family. I mean, obviously, just because I say they’re strict; I mean, there’s obviously a lot of my friends that had a lot of leeway, but I didn’t.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And it’s funny the way my dad was though, because, I mean, he was just so tyrannical that way. On the one hand, I mean, he might have been very strict that way; on the other hand, because I’d been working all along since I was a kid I had money and so. . . . I had a car when I was sixteen. I went out and bought a Model-A, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Of course it didn’t run for two years; I had to work on it. But still, I mean, there was no restrictions on like owning a car and, you know, things like that. But there was on, you know, for instance, going out.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you decorate your car, by the way?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, it was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you do any of that flaming or. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was what was then called. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . striping.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, it was then what was called a cherry Model-A. I mean, that thing was perfect. I mean, everything, all the original pinstriping was on that car. I mean, it was a beautiful little car. As a matter, I bought her. . . . No, that’s a whole other trip that you don’t want to get into is my background with the car, except that of course it was a factor later on that I grew up as a fairly normal western kid thinking about cars, thinking about making car bodies, thinking about paint jobs for. . . . The car that that took off on was. . . . Because my second car was actually a ‘31 Ford Roadster that I bought so I could take all the good parts out of it and put them in my coupe, and then sell the roadster.



PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And, but the first car I ever did that with was that I . . . I then started coveting, you know, because, this '53 Studebaker, and it was in that one that I actually did some of that, because I bought a Studebaker that had been wrecked and I made the front end—it had been wrecked in the front end—and I made the front end like the Porsche front end without any openings at all. It just came sloping down and that was all made out of fiberglass. That's about when I'm about eighteen now, you know, something like that. So that was the first car where I actually started doing stuff with it. The other ones, it was like if you had a perfect Model-A, it was best probably not to touch it.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And even then, in the Studebaker, it had an awful lot of engine work done to it, a lot of it that I didn't do myself; it came with the car. But it was very conservative that it didn't have any flames or anything like that. The flames, when I did that kind of stuff, etc., were on the soapbox derby racers. I actually was involved in building someone's derby racers. Was runner-up in A class for the city one time, where I got a lot of the [tubes] I still now use. I mean, I was \_\_\_\_\_ about then I got to go to Akron \_\_\_\_\_. But I did a lot of flames on those and \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: When you went to UT [University of Texas] at Austin, did you remain an architecture student throughout your time there?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I remained an architecture student for four years.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I was a fourth-year student. And. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: It's a five-year program? Many are, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was a five-year program then. In fact, I think then they started developing a six-year program, but when I went it was a five-year program. There were some problems with that. Number one, I think that I always, I'm probably best-suited to be an artist, number one.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I probably could have been, could have gone through the entire architecture program, except that right before I started the program at the University of Texas, was when they'd had a giant shake-up at the university. They had had a very liberal, very arts-oriented program. There's a man named Hamilton Harris who went from there to California, and when they got rid of him, the pendulum swung completely the other way; it became an engineering school. Very limited creativity. There were few people that were still around that were from the old school. And there was a man named—oh, my gosh—his name was George; he taught history. I didn't realize it, but these are the instructors that I found really compatible. And there was a man named [Montenegro], and Montenegro was—I'd never understood why—he didn't get along very well with the faculty, which were the engineering people they'd brought in. He had gone to the Art Students League, actually. I saw his paintings in New York. He was a very well known artist; I didn't know it before. You know, out of that Art Students League period, you know, he had come out of that. He was Chilean, or from somewhere down in South America, but he would drive up to the architecture school and he would get dropped off, and he had, in his Rolls limousine. [laughs] I could imagine how most of the architects felt about him. But for some reason, he still hung around for about a year or two while I

was in school there. And that man was fascinating. That was the best instructor I had when I was in college. And he was wonderful. And I had him in architecture school, but he was an artist and really all I was taking from him was sculpture as far as I was concerned. So that's what I was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: What do they call it? Three-dimensional design?

LUIS JIMENEZ: They called it three-dimensional design but, you know, with this man I could do anything, because obviously he'd come out of an art background. It didn't matter what you did.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did it impress you that he came up to the school in his Rolls Royce? Is that. . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, that wasn't what impressed me. That was what I heard was one of the reasons why the other instructors didn't like him very much.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I see.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You know,...

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did it occur to you at that time, maybe, that an artist could make a living?

LUIS JIMENEZ: That wasn't a factor. I mean, I. . . . You know, it's really funny; I wasn't that aware as a kid. I didn't realize. I didn't realize, number one, that he was an artist as an instructor and that the other guys were architects! You know, I mean, there was a lot of things I'd never really. . . . I was really pretty. . . . You know, it took me a long time. I was going to say I was pretty stupid, but I was, you know! What happened was that I began, the dangerous situation for me was when I started taking art courses all along. I felt like I. . . . There was no reason why I couldn't take art courses as well, and I used to carry a heavy schedule; I'd carry 18, 21 hours, something like that. You know, failed about, you know, six of them anyway. [laughs] I was trying to sort of take in as much as I could. I never once talked to a counselor when I went to school. I don't know; I mean, I just figured I knew what I needed. And, you know, I took Indians of the Southwest in anthropology, I took. . . . I took anything I wanted to, basically.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you go to the art museum there much?

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I read a lot.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Was the Huntington Museum there at the time?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No. Not the \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: There was nothing. There was nothing in terms of an art museum there at all.

PETER BERMINGHAM: So it was through the books?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Um hmm. I started taking art courses, I guess probably about my second year that I was in architecture school. And because I was in architecture school, they actually let me take some advanced courses because they figured, you know, it was okay; it was just this guy coming in, taking some drawing or taking some sculpture, taking something. So I was able to come in and take courses. And I also began dating my first wife, and she was an important influence in terms of my

making the final switch, I think, because. . . I just had never had any real support system for my own ideas, I think, and I just felt that they, you know. . . I didn't know there were other possibilities is basically what it amounted to. So after my fourth year, I actually did this totally rebellious thing; I turned around and I dropped out of architecture school, switched to art. I also got married to my first wife, and I was also in a situation where my dad and I didn't talk for about five years, I mean, you know, there was just this tremendous [rift or rip]. He just felt that I'd kind of thrown everything away. But when I was in the art school then, then I only took, I probably cut it down to about 15 hours. I needed, I went in and I just took enough courses to get a bachelor of science degree in art, tried to. . . . Because with a lot of the math, etc., it was easier for me to get a bachelor of science degree than it was to get a bachelor of Fine Arts. I was told it was not as good a degree, but in a sense I didn't care \_\_\_\_\_; I'd been so long trying to get a degree. I was also, at that time, since I was supporting myself and I was married—she was working too—but I worked as a janitor and night watchman. I remember working a year as a janitor and night watchman for the Elks Lodge, from twelve o'clock at night to eight o'clock in the morning, and then going to school from nine to five. And so, there was about a year there where I probably slept about three hours, a night. But I'd sort of been used to it from architecture school. I will say that there were some real advantages to going to architecture school rather than your standard art curriculum at the time, and I'll say that right now \_\_\_\_\_. I really believe it was very important. I think that it was very important because at a time when art education was nonstructured and it was like, "Here's some paints, kid," and, you know, "Why don't you explore and see what you can do with paints." And it didn't matter how you put them on or what you put them on, or etc., you know; just be creative. In the art school, I mean, in the architecture school, you know, there was a way of approaching a problem. You had to define the problem, you had to develop a concept for approaching the problem, and you had to be systematic about it. And I still develop my sculptures the same way, I mean, as if I was going to do it, you know, for an architecture project, you know, it's still the basic. . . . The basic approach is very methodical. And so I think there was some value to that—plus the fact that I think that architecture students really have to work a lot harder than most of the. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: I've noticed that, even on the campus here as we see them across the street that they seem to be burning the midnight oil practically every night, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You go like two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning. I know there were times when I was working on a project—and we'd have five-week projects—there'd be a lot of times when I didn't go to sleep for two nights, three nights in a row. And I became very close friends with a lot of these guys—and I'm still close friends with them—because we just spent so much time together. I mean, that's the only place we were was in the lab, you know. We just didn't have. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Maybe it's because there are no easy answers in architecture; you have to probe so much, you know.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: There are no real kind of cut-and-dried situations.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And, you know, they were ruthless. I mean, you know, every hour you were late on a five-week project, it was one automatic letter off. So, I mean, it was really a. . . . I think, you know, maybe some of that is excessive, but I think that. . . . You know, it was a very, it was a program you had to work very hard in, and so. . . . And I did okay, actually, on my design thing, but I didn't really have a problem in terms of. . . . You know, there's always a high attrition rate in architecture schools, and I was doing okay, and especially in design I did fine. I mean, that. . . . So it wasn't that. There's always a little bit of, I feel like I always have to be a little bit apologetic in saying that I switched out

of architecture because everybody says, “Oh, we always know about you guys who flunk out.” I didn’t flunk out. [laughs] I mean, you know, it was a conscious decision on my part, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sensitive on the subject, huh?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: When you got an art degree, is that when you went to New York?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, again, I was married. I got. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you stay in Austin?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I got a bachelor of science degree in art. No, at that time, I had thought that there would be several options that I might consider. But one of the things that happened was that I applied for a scholarship—it was a grant actually—to go study in Mexico. They gave you a very little bit of money—I forgot what it was, but it wasn’t much money. You go study in Mexico City, at Ciudad Universitario, and the sculpture instructor was \_\_\_\_\_. And so I thought this would be a good program; I applied for it. I got the, I did get the grant, and so my wife and I went down to Mexico City. It was a big, just disappointment. I was down there for about three months. He sent an assistant to teach the class and so I never really had any classes with him. And the classes were really set up for American students to go down and have fun. They were not very serious. And of course, I had several advantages: I had relatives in Mexico City that I had known all my life, because obviously my dad was from there, and I’m fluent in Spanish from having grown up on the border, in fact, straddling both cultures, and in fact, having Spanish as my first language \_\_\_\_\_. I didn’t speak English until I went to school, and my first report card says, “You’re speaking English nicely now. Please keep it up.”

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: So because, you know, my father had been from the interior—my mother’s own family had been—the language they spoke at home was Spanish, and of course \_\_\_\_\_ to school that I learned English. So really in Mexico City I really had a fairly easy time that way, and then since I had relatives, I had an easy in. I did get around; I actually had some distant relatives in the Siqueiros; the Siqueiros \_\_\_\_\_ Enchayo. All the rest of the other Miros were dead. Now, the Mexican connection is very important from an artistic standpoint, because when I went to school—and I’m repeating some things I’ve said before in other places, but obviously we’re trying to have a concise thing here.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was very important for me for two reasons. Number one, in terms of my own heritage, I. . . . You have to remember that I grew up as a Mexican in Texas, and Texas is a racist place; there is no question about it. You’re isolated a little bit more in El Paso than the rest of Texas, because it’s almost in New Mexico, but in fact I remember going on work crews with my dad’s workers when we would go into [the middle of; or Middleton and] Odessa, and they wouldn’t serve us in the restaurants. And so there was still elements of that there that, you know, that are always going to be there, and so I really felt this whole thing. . . . Also growing up on the border in El Paso, which some people have said is not really quite in the United States, the Mexican, or the Spanish thing was important, and so going to Mexico was an important kind of pilgrimage for me. My father had always talked about retiring when he was fifty and going back to Mexico. I mean, you

know, this was. . . . My own grand. . . . Oh, my grandmother always went back there, spent a lot of time, lived back there, lived in California. So it was an important pilgrimage from that standpoint. It was important for me also, though, because that was the years that Abstract Expressionism was in. And schools functioned—still function—as academies, as far as I'm concerned. I think that there's certain work that's in fashion and some work that's out of fashion, and Abstract Expressionism was in fashion at the time. And I felt like the image—even though I came out of architecture school, even though I knew how to make nonobjective things because that's where I started out, I really felt that for me the image was important, and there [wasn't a; was a] place for it that I could see in Abstract Expressionism. I could paint. I made A's in painting. Don't, you know—again, I feel like I have to explain, you know! [laughs] That wasn't the problem. The problem was that I had certain ideals of what I thought my work should be and should do, and they didn't fit within the framework of Abstract Expressionism. And so what I did was I began looking for new models, and where I found new models was in the Mexican hills. Obviously, some of it had to do with my own background and, you know, looking back at the Mexican situation, some of it obviously had to do with, obviously I still have some of that makeup and some of those feelings that a lot of those people down there have, I mean, you know, that's the way I grew up.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So, I really felt like it was important for me to make that pilgrimage down to Mexico. In fact, I thought I was going to stay there and live. When I got down to Mexico, I realized that I was an American. My whole way of thinking, my framework, etc., is American. I am an American of Mexican descent. I mean, it's an important thing to realize at one point, I think. And I think that's. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I've talked to a lot of friends who are Mexican-American who had to go through something like that.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I also \_\_\_\_\_, you know, I went over to [Zunga's] shop, and of all the artists I met down there, I was impressed with him, you know, because he's a hard-working man. He's actually working on the pieces himself, and I think he's a good artist. So I spent some time talking to him, I showed him what I was doing, and what he said is, "For what you're doing, you have no business staying in Mexico." He said he was going through a low period in his own career because the only people who were supporting work at that time—which meant buying it—there and supporting him were the tourists—and the government. And the government was so restrictive in its commissions—and he was working one at the time—that he said that it was a very limited artistic outlet. And so he said that besides that, with the kind of ideas and things that I was working with, I'd be better off going to where the ideas were feeding in, and that meant New York, and that's where I should go. And so I listened to him, and I took his advice. And at the same time, right after, not long after having spent time with him, thinking about that, my wife was pregnant with my daughter, and she got hepatitis. So we split out of Mexico immediately, went back to El Paso. I taught school in the El Paso school system, in junior high. I got there two weeks after school started and I taught school for a year there while my daughter was born, and, you know, to pay for the whole thing. I got \$5,000 a year for teaching in three schools. I had eleven classes. The largest class had 80-some, 87 kids, and good God! [laughs] They got their money's worth of me. And I hated teaching. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Teaching 80 students in one class?

LUIS JIMENEZ: They met in a lunch cafeteria, and I had 80 kids. I mean, and I had ten other classes besides that one. You know, in three schools! I mean, they really spread me around. And they didn't allow for travel time from one school to the other, either. It was a . . . But anyway, I got that job; I took it. . . . It was already at a time—things had gotten so bad with my dad and I, that I didn't want to go work with him and so I wanted to do something else and I borrowed, you know, I took that other job, which was teaching. After that year in El Paso. . . . There was another couple of things that happened. I ended up staying on longer. One reason was because I offered to help a friend drive to—these were the Vietnam years already—I offered to help a friend drive to Canada who was dodging the draft. And he went off a cliff in Idaho and I was paralyzed from the chest down. That laid me up for about a year.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh boy.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And it gave me, you know, some nerve damage and stuff that I still have some problems with, but. . . . And it shortened me two inches, because I was six-two; I'm now six foot. But anyway, that, you know, so there were a lot of. . . . You know, I haven't ever proceeded along a very direct route; it's really been, you know, kind of zigzag kind of thing. After that, I was recovering in El Paso. I did go back and work with my dad some while I was recovering because I couldn't really hold down a job anywhere else, so when I could, as much as I could be on my feet and stay on my back, I'd go in and make patterns for him and stuff. By the way, I didn't ever do the designs, but they would let me make patterns. I mean, after the design is made, I made the full-scale patterns, which is not very different from the big drawings that I'd done—same scale, just about.

PETER BERMINGHAM: By the way, did you ever go to the El Paso Art Museum? I've been there a couple times. I was just wondering if it was any sort of influence on anyone back then. It occasionally had some good shows. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: I lived. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . not very often. [laughs] Once a year maybe.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I lived about four blocks from there. I grew up about four blocks from the El Paso Museum. I knew. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh really. That's a nice little neighborhood, isn't it?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. Almost a totally Mexican \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And, well, except for the main street, Montana. Of course I didn't live on Montana; I lived toward the mountain. Actually, it was, at one time, it was the closest house to the mountain and so I spent a lot of time up in the hills, which is the reason for all the little animals and things in the sculptures, when I came back, once I returned to the childhood thing. But growing up there, yes, I did go to the museum. No, they didn't have very much in terms of art. It was typical of those museums that were put together probably like in the forties that were hodgepodge, that had Pancho Villa's death mask, that had the guns from the Civil War, that had a shrunken head. It had. . . . You know, it's funny; I hadn't thought about it until you mentioned it, but I did spend a lot of time there. I spent time there because we used to go there to shoot the pigeons off the columns, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh really?

LUIS JIMENEZ: That was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did that have the Kress collection there in the fifties?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, they didn't have it.

PETER BERMINGHAM: They didn't have it then.

LUIS JIMENEZ: They didn't have it, not when I was going up there. One of my friends that I grew up with went in and held up the museum and stole all their guns at one time, one of my high school buddies.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I mean, that's. . . . [laughs] He knew me so well. [still laughing, obscuring his words] I had nothing to do with it.

PETER BERMINGHAM: So much for visits to the museum.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But at any rate, the. . . . So, you know, really I guess those things are all factors, but there wasn't any real art there, not that I remember, nothing of any. . . . You know, like I said, shrunken heads, guns, knives, daggers, things like that. And it was like an old southern mansion at the time, didn't have the wings added on. Those were added on later in the sixties. So then. . . . And later on, I mean, I remember as I started doing artwork, I sent, I religiously sent them slides, sent them examples, for the [San Carlos] exhibition they had. People like [DeGrazio] come and judge, and I always got rejected.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Never got accepted for anything.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Speaks well of you.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh, I don't know. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_ speak bad of \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah, right. But no, I mean, I'm just saying there was no support system there. Unfortunately, there still isn't a support system for local artists in El Paso. It's a social institution. I have never. . . . I have been invited once to a museum function in El Paso, and that was when a woman from California went out and she had been told that I lived there and she made it a point to make sure that I got an invitation, and that's the only time. My sister goes to the museum because she—I mean, to the openings—because she pays the price. I mean, she did belong to the \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Later on, though, weren't you in a show at the El Paso, wasn't the "Recent Visions" show there?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh, I was in the "Recent Visions" show, and they did give me one show right after I got this last divorce like in about 1979. It wasn't a very good situation. They did offer me a show. I did do a show. I, you know, had ups and downs, and that was a real low period, and I didn't do a real good job on it. That wasn't their fault. But in fact, when I was working on all the early—well, not early—I mean, when I was working on the shows for New York, which included the Man on Fire [1969],

The Barfly [ca. 1969], all of those, I made all of those in El Paso, the End of the Trail [1971]. I went to the museum then and I said, "Look, I'm making all these things to take back to show in New York. Would you be interested in showing them?" And they said no. Or, I should say, the director said no. And I said, "You know, well, I just thought you might be interested." I mean, obviously, I knew I wasn't going to sell anything in El Paso. I just thought, I grew up here, and I think it might be interesting, you know, people \_\_\_\_\_ do, etc. Later on, when they did offer me the show and I did do it, you know, he said, "You'd be interested in doing this show," and he said, you know, "It's too bad that we never knew about you," and I said, "Well, I did! I came and talked to you." And he didn't remember. And he said, "It must have been somebody else. The old director looked like me." And I said, "No. Your name's still Sapiro," you know. But, you know, I feel, and, you know, I say these things, because—you know, like about the El Paso Museum etc.—it's because, you know, because they just are not supportive to the local artists and I feel like, you know, it's true that we have—I'm in a propaganda, to give you a little bit of propaganda right now—it's true that we have a situation dominated by the east coast right now, and dominated by New York, and I'm not real crazy about it. I think it'd be much healthier if it wasn't. But in order to do that, I think that the museums, you know, out here in the country between California and New York, also have to be responsive to the local artists, you know, so I'll preach about that kind of stuff.

PETER BERMINGHAM: True.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Just put in my plug. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: So noted. When did you first go to New York?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Okay, so what happened was that I was recovering from the broken back, and as soon as I could really get on my feet I wanted to get out of El Paso. And so when I had been in school—in fact while I was working as a night watchman and janitor, I bought a little garage apartment near the university for \$4,000 because, you know, payments were \$40 a month. It was cheaper than rent. And so we went back to that place and I tried to make a living in Austin again. I figured I had made it while I was in school; I'd be able to do it again. The reason for that—not going straight to New York—was that my daughter's mother did not want to go to New York. She was also an artist. I mean, she was an important factor in my switching from architecture to art, but she did not have the kind of ambition or the kind of need that required her to go to New York City. She felt like that was something she absolutely did not need—and did not want. And so we. . . . We got along very well, but that was just something we could never ever come to grips with—I mean, come together on. What ended up happening to me was that. . . . I figure, well, that's all right, because obviously, you know, we'd just had a child, we did have a bond, I was really torn. I didn't know quite what to do. I was also not very physically capable, having had. . . .

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A.]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Again, I was not physically very able since I was still trying to recover from the broken back; I'd actually compressed two vertebrae down to half their size, and I was just in, I was really having physical problems. But aside from that, I tried to get a job doing anything in Austin, and there were no jobs in Austin. That was always one of the problems with Austin. It's a beautiful place, but until now, and things are changing in Austin now. There was never any industry. Austin was where the state government and the university were, but there was not really any industry; there weren't any jobs. The only area that I thought I might be able to get a job in—I didn't think I wanted to teach again—but the only area I thought I might get a job in was the commercial art area. Actually, there was a bit of irony, because I went to apply for a commercial art job and I couldn't get the job. I was turned down. I went back home, and I told my ex-wife about it, and it sounded like it was right up her



alley. She managed to get the job. So she got the job and I started trying to develop my own work then. I was doing some fiberglass pieces then. They were very different from what I eventually ended up doing with fiberglass, but they were fiberglass pieces. A lot of the ideas that I'm working with, that I ended up working with, were things that I had been developing for a long time. In terms of the ideas, seeds for things like the Man on Fire are there. The first Barfly that I ever made, even though I made the finished Barfly in 1970, that's actually about the third or fourth Barfly I made. The first Barfly I made was in 1963, and I made that in welded tin—or soldered tin. Then I made a ten-foot version in welded metal. Most, you know, the early tin one that was soldered I still have. The welded one I actually sold for \$200, some. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . somewhere down the line. I don't even know where it's at.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: There were—right around \_\_\_\_\_. Well, anyway, I don't want to go into all those things; I'm just trying to say that a lot of the ideas, you know, I had been developing for a long time. Also, when I was in Austin, while I was in school, because I had been looking at [DeMeerless's] models and because I was trying to stay alive, I ended up quitting my teaching job. Just before I got out of school—I'm backtracking a little bit—I actually painted some murals. I painted one for the University of Texas at the engineering department, which was, I think, very much like the kind of things I do, you know, the kind of ideas that I'm dealing with. It was kind of man-machine kind of thing. There was also the. . . . I painted one at the Pizza Hut, for I think I got \$15 cash and as much pizza as I could eat for three months.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Because I'd go in after midnight and I'd have to make my own pizzas. But, you know, we lived on that. I mean, you know, my ex-wife and I, while we were in school. And that was actually very much a satirical mural. That was, it was dealing with, you know, the students going in to the university as this kind of large mass and then coming out on these conveyor belts; it was like a factory, you know. You had the graduate students on one, and you had the art students coming out of another, and you had the fraternity students coming out of this other conveyor belt, and it was like. . . . But a lot of these murals—I did them for about a year—and a lot of these murals were really the kind of ideas that I deal, but they weren't done—or that I'm dealing with now and have dealt with all along—but they didn't count for school credit. At one time I asked if they would, if there was some way I could get them to count, and they said, no, it wasn't the kind of thing you do for schoolwork, you know. But in fact, they were the kind of things that I've continued to do. Backtracking to Austin, what finally happened was that I was finally just overwhelmed with this whole sense of frustration. I wasn't able to help support the family. I wasn't selling any work there. I wasn't able to really hold down a job. And I was just terribly frustrated and I felt I wanted to at least try the New York thing, so I actually packed everything up—well, not everything—but I packed a few things into the car, and I drove up to New York. I didn't know one person in New York. I didn't know anybody. And I just drove up. I just thought I'd stay at the Y [YMCA] or something. I got there. I tried to stay at the 35th Street Y. I came out of the sticks. When I went into the 35th Street Y and I saw that everybody was gay—I mean, not everybody, but I thought everybody was gay—I was just terrified. I went out and I slept in my car the first night, \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And then so I wandered around and eventually I found the 23rd Street Y and I stayed there. The third day I was in New York City I actually landed a job and started working, with the Headstart program.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: One reason was because I wanted to send money back home. I did have my daughter, I did have my wife there. And I did want to send them money so they could come to New York. And we still had this problem, though, where she just did not want to go to New York, but I figured once I was there that it might be different. And I at least was able to get a job, and that was recruiting kids for the Headstart program. I recruited 400 kids in two weeks for the low, ended up for a program in the lower east side, where they had not had any kids signed up, because for the Puerto Rican families to sign up—well, they were mostly Puerto Rican—but for them to sign up, they had to go to the school and sign up. You have a language problem there, and most of them weren't even aware of the Headstart program. You know, it was something that I could really believe in because I had not spoken English when I went to school; I had a little bit of a problem, you know, when I first started out. And I felt like even if the kids didn't really benefit anything out of that, they were at least going to get lunch. And this was, the lower east side is a real high poverty situation—well, until now when the artists have moved in—but it was always for the Puerto Ricans.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So the way I recruited the kids was that I went in and I just, I went up one six-floor walkup and down the other, and I just did that all day long until I recruited 400 kids. And I didn't tell them it was optional—if they were four years old or they were signed up for the program.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, wow. [laughs] Just keep movin', huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But, you know, it was good. So I did that, and I worked with that program for a while. And, you know, there was a lot of frustration for me because my wife never did go to New York and we ended up finally getting the divorce, and it just, she never came up, and I never went back. I mean, I just. . . . I obviously did not make it right away in the art world. I mean, I was. . . . In fact I didn't make art for a long time. I mean, I lived very cheaply. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: You were a social worker for a while, right?

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I was doing that, working at the Headstart program, but then I quit and I. . . . The social worker thing—you know, I guess that could have been considered social work. But what happened was that there was also a span of time that I didn't work in any official job. I just kind of drifted around. Maybe every artist must do that for a while. I felt like I didn't want work at another job; I just wanted to do my art. I had already split up with my ex-wife, so it didn't seem to matter that much, as long as I could send some money down. I did little odd jobs. I took care of people's cats, fish, birds, plants—whatever—for a place to stay. Nothing illegal or dishonest. Just, you know, I just didn't have very much money and I lived very cheaply. You know, I just tried to do some artwork. But if you really get hungry you spend all your time thinking about it, you know, where are you going to get your next meal. You don't have any materials, etc. And so finally out of a kind of frustration I went back to. . . . Well, there was also a matter of pride. I mean, I could have gotten a blue-collar job, finally. And I thought I'd do that. I had had such bad experiences with teaching. First of all, when I went to college, with my instructors, because they kept trying to gear me to be a teacher, and I kept saying, "I'm going into the art thing because I want to make art. I don't know how to do it. How does one go from A to B? How do you become a working artist? I don't mean, how do you become a

university instructor, or how do you become a high school teacher. I mean, how do you just become a . . .” And they would say, “Well, you know, you go to school, and then you get out of school, and then you go to a master’s program.” And I kept saying, “It doesn’t sound right to me,” you know. So I had a real . . . Plus, I ended up locking horns finally. I had been, when I first went in from architecture, I had been a model student. I mean, I wanted to please everybody, and I wanted to do everything right. And before I ended up leaving, I managed to get everybody upset. [laughs] And I, you know, I mean, you know, my drawings instructor, you know, screamed at me one day because, he said, you know, “You used to make such fine sensitive drawings, and now you’re doing these cartoony things, and this isn’t art.” And, you know, and I said, “Look, I’m really sorry but, I mean, this is really what I feel like I should be doing, I feel like I want to do.” What was happening was, in fact, that I was really, I guess, beginning to develop a personal kind of identity. Maybe it wasn’t quite there, and it didn’t look right, you know, but I thought I knew what I wanted to do, and it wasn’t going to be to do old master drawings for the rest of my life, you know. And the same thing happened with the sculpture. And to the point where, I mean, you know, some of these people just took it very hard. It was an ego situation, and I had this horrible instructor, who was in sculpture, who had been an institution in the school for so long, and this old, you know, German, and he’s a real—I mean, I don’t have anything against Germans, but, I mean, it was just this [anxious], this real, guy who just ran the place. And he actually—we had a jury grading system—and he actually—the jury gave me an A for my projects, and he lowered them down another grade because he said I hadn’t talked to him enough during class, you know. And so I left school hating school, and hating instructors, and hating teaching, and . . . That’s why it’s been so many years since I’ve . . . I never really wanted to be involved with teaching, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So the one thing I could have done when I was in New York and I was really hungry, I thought, well, I’ll get a blue-collar job. At that time, blue-collar jobs paid about \$1.65 an hour—if you weren’t union. Now, if you were union, they paid very well. And I knew the New York sign people, but I would have had to lean on my dad, and my dad and I weren’t talking, you know, and so I didn’t want to do that. So that was why I did the social work thing. I went in to the social . . . I went into the professional placement office at the state. And I just, it was just, that was just a fluke, just luck. I walked in. A lady said, you know, “By the way, there’s this tremendous job that has a federal paycheck attached to it, working—it’s a high-hazard job, but it pays an enormous amount of money. At that time, I think most of my friends made maybe a hundred dollars a week, or something. They paid, you know, two hundred and something, plus a car, plus an expense account, I mean, because it was considered high-hazard pay. And so she said, you know, “There’s this wonderful job, and it pays very well, but it’s working in the really high-hazard areas of the city.” And, you know, she, you know, I don’t know, she thinks she’s just really trying to help me out or something, and I went to go apply for it. The first thing they told me when I went to apply was it was really—it was a very small office; it was five, there were only five people working in the office—all of the street workers were black—you know, except me; eventually I became the guy that, you know, was not because I was handling all the Hispanic neighborhoods. But they needed somebody who spoke Spanish who could really handle the Hispanic neighborhoods. So I walked in, and of course this green kid obviously not from New York City, and they asked me what would qualify me for it, and I said, “Well look, I worked, I already worked the lower east side, you know, with recruiting kids.” And then they said, “Well, I don’t know; you don’t look like you could really handle it.” They asked me where I was living, and I was living in one of their neighborhoods, I mean, you know. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: [From, Been] there already.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Most of them lived in the suburbs because they made a good wage, you know. So

they hired me; they took a chance. They hired me. I lied. I needed two years of social work experience to get hired, and I lied, and a year later they found out, and my boss called me into his office and said, "I'm sorry, but we found out that you lied to get the job, and you didn't have two years of social work experience, and so we're going to have to fire you. But we're going to hire you tomorrow because, you know, you've already had a year experience on the job, and you have all the necessary qualifications, because. . . ."

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_

LUIS JIMENEZ: [laughs] ". . . that coupled with your year of teaching in El Paso, which we're going to count as social work experience, makes you very well qualified for the job." So they hired me the next day. And it's a wonderful \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, and that was a very good job for me, because I was meeting with community people. I had my days free to work on my sculpture. Mostly, I met with community people in the evenings, because that's when they had time free. So I put in, it was a full-time job, but the hours were totally unstructured. And, you know, it was very much on the honor system, but everybody was interested in doing a good job. And then I would supervise two or three dances a week till maybe three in the morning. But, you know, but then it left me my days free to work on the sculpture, and so. . . . And then I think one or two days a week we had to go in and help the at the office on something, but, again, it was such a small office. My boss was a really wonderful man, and I just had a very easy time of it when I worked at the [Youth Board, Corp].

PETER BERMINGHAM: When did you get in touch with Seymour Lipton? Or am I getting a little ahead of myself here?

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was during the time when I didn't. . . . It was during that time when I said I was only going to do artwork. The problem with Seymour Lipton was that I could never really stay alive on what I got from Seymour Lipton. And so I was really doing it for the experience. And in fact, there may have even been an overlap during the time that I was with the Youth Board and Seymour Lipton, but I don't think there was.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Why, by the way, Seymour Lipton? What led you to select him as a master?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Okay. Actually, believe it or not, he was the only one that I called. He was the only one I considered doing it with. When I went to. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, hmm. \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. When I went to. . . . I have to backtrack a little bit again, and. . . . It must be a first sign of senility, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I want to cover all the territory.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And when I went to New York, you know, the reason for going to New York was that I really figured that I needed to continue to develop. I felt I had never really had very good training.

Having to have gone to school at Texas, I felt that it was not a very good school—and it was actually true. It was a terrible school—at the time, and I think now it's a better school. But at the time it was really a terrible school, and I felt I needed education, and I felt that maybe I would go see the schools. And I had two options: one was, there was a sculptor who I respected, and that was Seymour Lipton, again, from having looked at books, and then as a school, there was a new studio school, which had just been set up. They had broken off from Pratt, I believe it was, and there were a lot of people. I think Elaine DeKooning and a lot of the other people were involved in it. I went to see them, and I talked to them, I showed them examples of my work, and they said they would give me a partial scholarship. And then I went to see what they were doing, and I wasn't knocked out by what they were doing. I wasn't knocked out by the people that were teaching it, by their work, and I wasn't knocked out by what I saw in the class. And I felt like that wasn't what I wanted to do. I went in, there were some independent studios around 14th Street where artists got together and paid about a dollar to go in and draw at night, and I went and did that. I tried to do everything I could. You know, there are also thing, the other thing with the studio school was that I didn't have the money; I didn't have any money. Because whatever money I had, aside from the, you know, straight survival situation in New York City, I was also sending back down to Texas.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I mean, I think I probably was even not very good about that, but I just didn't have a lot of money. So Seymour Lipton is an, was an important choice for me, and that's what you want to get right now, I'm sure.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Because as I was looking at artists and looking at books, when I first saw Seymour Lipton's work, there was this immediate attraction, because he was working in symbols.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And the other thing you have to remember is that I was first beginning to try to work my ideas out in metal, because that was what I, I had learned that the shop also was metal. I, you never did, you know, people say, "Well, you learned the fiberglass in the shop." I didn't learn any fiberglass in the shop. I've learned fiberglass on my own. There was, the shop was geared toward metal technology, and that was what I knew how to do, as well as casting, because I built the foundry in Austin along with three other students, and we were doing our own castings. So it was all metal. Plus there was that whole macho trip out of the, you know, early sixties of, you know, every sculptor, you know, is a David Smith-type guy. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: I know what you mean.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . you know, who's going to be working in macho metal.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so I was trying to work with symbols and I was trying to work in metal, and Seymour Lipton was an important figure in those terms. By the time I hit New York, I was already exploring the fiberglass, I was already exploring different kind of symbols, and different kinds of content, but I still had a respect for Seymour Lipton's work. Actually, he's a crabby old guy, you know, he's not really a lovable old man, you know. But he was very interesting, and my time that I spent with him was very beneficial—for me. I didn't stay very long. He still tells people that I'm

probably the shortest-lived apprentice he ever had.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I stayed with him probably long enough to use his name, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: But in fact, I got an awful lot out of it, and I feel a debt to him that way. I mean, you know, whether he consciously wanted to do anything or not. And it is true that, I mean, I just, you know, one day I just sat down on the phone and I just called him up. And I just said, you know, “I respect your work, and I’m here in New York City, I’m a young sculptor, and I would like to come in and work with you. The pay is not even so important, but I would like a chance to work with you for a while, and I haven’t liked what I’ve seen in school situations so far,” etc., etc. And he said, “Please come and talk to me.” So I went up to his place and I talked to him, and we didn’t talk very much. Mostly what happened was he just took me in the shop and handed me a torch. And then, you know, from then, really, you know, he said, “Well, you know, you can do the work very well,” and so I stayed and I worked with him. He was very interesting though because he didn’t really just, you know, use me as labor that way, in that he would actually come by once in a while, and he’d say, “Okay, I have all these drawings. Look at these drawings.” He’d say, “Which one of these do you think is the best idea or the best one.” And he always said I had a good eye. You know, and I’d say, “Well, I think that’s probably the best one, and he’d say, “That’s the one my wife picked.” [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: He didn’t trust himself, or . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right! It was real interesting. He would show them to his wife and then he was showing them to me. And there was a couple of things that happened at that time. Number one, at one point— You know, it was very interesting, I tell people, I’ve told people that I think that what I learned from working with Lipton was also, it was important to see how he functioned in his role, you know, as an artist in society, etc. It was also a scary situation a little bit, because I wasn’t that sure of myself—and this is something I’ve never really told anyone—but I wasn’t that sure of myself, and where I stood. I was standing on pretty shaky ground, especially with a lot of my ideas and things. And he’s a strong force, and obviously, you know, he’s the way he is. And he had another guy working there with him who used to take me aside all the time, and he was asking me advice, and he had kind of lost all sense of . . . He had been working on this stuff for so long, he’d kind of lost—maybe he never had anything going for him—but he had kind of lost all sense of who he was, other than working on Lipton’s things.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I started thinking about this, and I thought, boy, this guy \_\_\_\_\_, you know. Does that happen to everybody and \_\_\_\_\_ this kind of thing? Obviously it doesn’t have to, but, you know, I guess, like I said, I was kind of so unsure of myself, and then I sort of felt at one point that I’d gotten everything I was going to get out of that situation, and I left. And years later, I remember running into Seymour Lipton when the Mondales had those shows at the Vice President’s house.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: He had a piece there and I saw him, \_\_\_\_\_. He recognized me, and he says, “Oh,”—he never has remembered my name; I mean, he called me the Mexican, you know—“Oh, the Mexican!” I said, “Yeah,” and he said, “What are you doing here?” I said, “Well, you know, I have a

piece here; I'll show it to you." And he just took me around, he introduced me to everybody, and he says, "You know, this guy used to be my assistant," you know, he's like, you know, going around, but . . . I invited him to shows. He never went to any of my shows. You know, just a funny guy.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yes, he was, actually. How long, you stayed in New York until, what year was that?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I left in about 1971. I stayed in New York for five years. I had my first New York show in 1969, and at that time—let's see, I'd gone to New York in 1966. Actually I probably had a good body of that work together probably by about '68. And it was very funny. I mean, lining up my first New York show. I mean, I don't know what bearing this has on anything, but SoHo, the whole SoHo scene wasn't in. There was only the galleries uptown, and in my own head, you know—I had never ever had a show; I'd never had a one-man show. But I, because, partially because I felt like I wasn't going to show until I had really lined up a show at what I felt was a really first-rate gallery. And I actually probably got my first break in terms of getting a show by going and setting my pieces up at Castelli Gallery between shows. That's when Ivan Karp was there. And it was again a strange fluke. It later became my method of operation to show up someplace with pieces on the back of my truck. But I'd gone around to ten galleries with slides, and I hadn't been able to get anybody to look at my slides. Now, I have to tell you that I was really, I had a very idealistic notion of the way gallery shows should be done, etc., and the gallery world should operate. I really felt that they should take the work because they thought it was going to be great work and it was going to be wonderful. And I didn't want to rely on personal introductions. By then I knew people in their own, New York, or other artists who respected the work, who said, "Let me introduce you to this person," and, "I can help you, you know, do this." And my feeling was—pretty arrogant—was I don't need the help. I want to it be because of the work \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: My work speaks for itself?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right. I don't want it to be because they think I'm a nice guy, because I'm, you know, all of this. . . . You know, they either are going to take it because of work or they're not going to take it, you know. And so I actually went in to one dealer, who even told me later he was sorry he had never seen me. But I went in to one dealer who actually was reading a paper, and I had my slides and I said—and somebody had already said they would introduce me to him; I mean, this guy could just like walk right in on—but in fact I went to him and he was reading a paper, and I said, "I have some slides here I think it's worth getting interested in," and he just wouldn't look. He just said, "I'm not interested." [laughs] And so finally what happened was I figured, okay, I knew that Ivan Karp at Castelli would look at work even though he wasn't going to show it at Castelli. I knew that Castelli wasn't going to show my pieces. If you've been in New York for three years you know that every gallery has a certain thing they're going to show. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . and you know that, but I also knew that he would look and that he could also function as a kind of exchange if [he wanted to], and. . . . Let's see now, by then I felt like I wasn't going to go in with slides. I knew he would look and I wanted him to see actual work, not the slides. And I took three pieces in. I took the American Dream [1969], TV Image, and a piece called Sunbather, which was a real fat sunburned man or woman—it was an androgynous kind of figure—with a newspaper over his face and on one side it said, "RIOT," and on the other side it said, ["BIEN."] It was during the Vietnam years.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Okay.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was during the rioting, and so he's kind of oblivious to it all, kind of very sunburned, you know. And so I took the, I went upstairs to see if I could see somebody, and I had the pieces down in my truck. Well, I went upstairs and there was nobody there. There was nobody at the desk, and there was nothing in the gallery; it was cleaned out. So I grabbed my pieces—they're all fiberglass, you know—I took them up and actually set them up, you know, on stands, there in the gallery. And then I went back and looked for Ivan. And so I asked who Ivan Karp was, and he said he was, and I said, "I have some work I'd like for you to see." And he said, "Where is it?" And I said, "It's over here in the front." And so we went to the front and, you know, his first reaction was, you know, I'm sure his jaw must have nearly dropped. He said, "No, this isn't the way you do it," you know [laughs] And I said, "Well, you know, I'm just so sick of people not looking at my slides, you know." I'm tired of, you know, beating the pavement, you know. I really wanted you to be able to see the work." And then he said, you know, "Do you do anything else?" And I said, "Yeah, I do drawings too." And I showed him some drawings, and he said, "These are really very nice." Actually, the word he used was, he said, "You're a virtuoso." And he said, he looked at them, and he says, "I'd like to buy one. How much would you charge for one if I sold it—I mean, if I wanted to buy one?" And I tried to think of this exorbitant amount, and I said, "A hundred dollars." [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right then he knew you weren't ready for a gallery show.

LUIS JIMENEZ: [laughs] And he said, "Well," he says, "I'd like to buy one, but I can't make up my mind between this one and this one. Can I keep both of them?" And so I said, "Sure." And so, you know, you have to remember, I mean, I'd been in New York for three years, and I had managed to sell one piece, a TV Image, for \$500 to a man from Stamford, Connecticut, who had been putting those Stamford, Connecticut shows together. That was a strange fluke. I mean, he fell in love with the work; he bought it. Some friends had brought him by. But it was a strange thing, you know, it was just. . . . So, you know, I'd never really sold anything, so—for all practical purposes—so then the next day, Ivan just called me, and he said, "By the way," he says, "That other drawing that I have, I sold it to a friend of mine. Is that all right? I can give you a check for the other drawing if you want to come pick it up." And I said, "Sure." So I went to pick up the check, and then he said, "Look, the kind of work you're doing," he said, "I can go down the list of galleries. This guy won't show it for this reason, this guy won't show it for that reason, this guy won't show it for that reason." Then he came to Graham, and he said, "Now, Graham is a good gallery," he says, "And they just had a change of directors." Because he came to Graham and I said, "I already went to see that woman there." And he said, "No, they just had a change of directors, and they're probably going to try to reshuffle the stable around. It's a good time for you to try to get in, and why don't you take your stuff over to them." He says, "But I know this new director. Do not take your sculpture in like this. Take slides in because you'll just overwhelm them if you try to do it that way."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: That's basically how I got into Graham, was that. . . . It wasn't through anything he did necessarily, other than counseling me. I actually went with my slides, I went to see them, and they came down to the studio. Again, I was incredibly lucky. I was incredibly lucky the whole time I was in New York because. . . . I was lucky because he looked at it, he showed it to Graham, Graham says, "This looks like pretty strong work, but we'll test it. We'll test it with two pieces. You can bring two pieces into the back room. I'll see what kind of reaction we get." We brought two pieces in, and the day I brought two pieces in, he walked in—Graham, the old man, walked in.

PETER BERMINGHAM: The old man walked in, yeah?

LUIS JIMENEZ: And he said, "Get them out of here." He says, "I'll keep one, but I'm not going to have



two of these things in here.” And just as he said that, one of his collectors came in and just made this big to-do about them. Big fuss over them.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And then the collector left, and I went to go get that piece and Graham says, “No, that’s all right. Just go ahead and leave it.” And then. . . . But, you know, again, I’ve said this before, but the other thing—as I said, I was incredibly lucky because I had a lot of help from people I didn’t know. I mean, one of the things that did happen—and I will say for Ivan—is that he did walk into that gallery at one point when I had my two pieces in the back room at Graham, and he did make a big fuss about them. He went on with David Herbert, who was the director then, he went on with David Herbert, he just went on, he says, “Oh my God, you’ve got Jimenez’s! I mean, do you know those are the hottest underground pieces right now?” You know, everything was underground in those days. [laughs] He says, “He’s the hottest underground artist,” and he made this big fuss about it, and acted like he’d never known they were going to be there. I did tell him they were going to be there, but, you know, I went and thanked him and said, “Look, they’re going to be there,” and he went and made this fuss. And David was this very insecure guy, and I’m sure it made a big impact on him that Ivan went in and made a fuss about them.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And then, the other thing that happened was I was told they were going to keep them for a month. If in a month they were able to do something, which meant sell them, they would keep, they would maybe consider me and maybe keep me on, start showing little by little, or something. I had sort of gotten a small break with Allan Stone. I like Allan Stone because he’s a regular guy. You probably know Allan Stone.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Just a regular guy, pretty straight, you know, and everything, but he gave me a little break, gave me a chance to put a piece in. At the same time the thing happened with Graham. So I took another piece and I put it in Graham. So things were beginning to open up a little bit. But Allan Stone put mine under a coffee table, for an opening. And I went in and I got my feelings so hurt at having my piece under the coffee table that I just took it out right there. I just said. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: He has a strange gallery, though.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I mean, he has a real menagerie. And actually, being under the coffee table, in a way wouldn’t be that insulting; it would almost be routine \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was to me. I mean, ironically I had this overinflated sense of what it was or whatever. [laughs] No, I put an awful lot into those pieces and I really felt like they didn’t belong under a coffee table.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Well, your work even being on the coffee table. . . . [laughs] Being under it was. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, anyway, thank you. But at any rate, the other thing that happened was that David Herbert knew Alfonso Ossorio. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . the artist, I know you're familiar with his work.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: One day he brought him to my loft. Now, we had a very clear-cut arrangement with Graham. I never dealt that much with Graham. I dealt a little bit with him; he was always a little bit aloof. You probably know \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_ once.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. So most of my dealings were with David Herbert, and. . . . But who has a good eye, but was a very insecure kind of guy. Do you know David Herbert? You've been around for years.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I knew him a little bit when he went. . . . He went to the Whitney later. Now I think he's director of the Downtown Gallery. I'm not sure. But I [did, didn't] know him.

LUIS JIMENEZ: This guy was never at the Whitney. He was with Betty Parsons, he was with. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: I'm sorry, David Herbert.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yep.

PETER BERMINGHAM: That's the guy I'm thinking of.

LUIS JIMENEZ: He was with—what was his name? There were a bunch of those galleries that he was connected with: [Tinley, Tindoley?], I think, or. . . . Anyway, but he really had been around all these contemporary galleries. Very insecure guy, though. But he had a good eye and he had shown some good people; he was showing some good people then. The stable then was, they had—oh, they had Nancy Graves, they had Thomas Hart Benton, which doesn't make any sense within that framework that [Tiburey] worked with.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: They had some good people. Now, what happened was—they had this guy, Albert, who's been around for a long time—but what happened was that Graham said that if I could cover the cost of a show, if I could sell enough work for a show, I could have a one-man show. Otherwise they would only continue to show an occasional piece in a group show, etc.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Now, I wanted to get that one-man show. I mean, it's like all along in our artistic career, you know, you figure, you know, you only look toward the next goal. First it's you want a gallery that's going to represent your work. Then you want a one-man show. Then you feel like, "Oh boy, if they'll give me a contract, then I'm like, you know, that's it," you know. Then, you know, it's like all these little steps. Then, you know, a piece in a museum, then it's, you know. . . . But at this point, I wanted a one-man show. And so he said if I could sell enough work, and so I just figured that. . . . Again, that was. . . . Like selling the piece, that was something that was out of anything I had any control over. I didn't know the people who would actually buy that work. And so David Herbert brought Alfonso Ossorio by my studio, by my loft. I had a loft on Mott Street, and it was in Little Italy,

between Broom and Grand.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And it was the floor above the dime store, really nice loft. But anyway—had a back yard to work in—and it was a real nice. Just lucked into that one kind of, you know; things just sort of happened. And he came by and he looked at the work, and then we went to go eat at Puglia's, and, you know, he, you know, really did this, I mean, he's really like this gentleman. He ordered all this wine, and all this food, and then we went back to the loft, and he looked around at the work, and he really liked the drawings, too. And so then he just turned around to David Herbert, and he said, "How many pieces does he have to sell to get a show?" And David Herbert said, "Oh, about four." And Alfonso didn't even bat an eye, and he just said, "I'll take four."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: He said, "And I'll take four drawings, and I want the Oedipal Dream [1968] drawing. And this drawing was like one of those drawings, I mean, it's like every now and then you do something that's like different than anything you've done, or. . . . Let's talk of myself: Every now and then I've done something that's from anything I've done. At the time I knew it; I knew it was good. I also knew it was so gross I was never, ever going to show it.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Anywhere, to anybody, or anything else, you know?

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I knew it was a good drawing. It was one of these spontaneous kind of things coming straight out of the subconscious, and I put it down. And I had told him already when I showed it to him, you know, it wasn't for sale. So he said, "But I want that drawing." And so I said, "Well," you know, I mean, obviously I'm not going to say no at this point. I want that show. So he took the four drawings and he took the four sculptures, and I got my first show out of it. Out of my first show I was extremely lucky because I began at that point to work out a series of pieces that then became my second show. So in my first show. . . . What happened was—I'm not \_\_\_ing it right—but what happened was I began working on the motorcycle, which is already a different scale and really fits more within the context of the second show pieces, which were, you know, the large TV Set, the gross TV Image, the Man of Fire [Man on Fire], The Barfly, etc. That motorcycle was really part of those pieces. It was really, you know, just getting so excited about doing the show, I just kind of moved up to this other kind of plateau. And out of that first show—I not only sold everything in the show—but out of that first show, I sold two motorcycles. The very first one went to Richard Brown Baker, who said that I could, that he would buy it if it would fit in his apartment.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And we took it to his apartment—this friend of mine and I, [Ed Tom Modell], and it as like about an eighth of an inch too big for the door.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I actually stood there and kicked it through the doorway. [laughs] And then tried to touch it up, and he is. . . . He is pretty sensitive. He saw the scrape marks on the side, and said, you know, "I hadn't seen those before. How do you suppose those got on there?" "I don't know."

[laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: The motorcycle had an accident. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: And the other motorcycle I sold was to Giovanni Agnelli, who had the big pop collection—or probably still has the big pop collection—who owned Fiat and Ferrari.

PETER BERMINGHAM: What was that name again?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Giovanni Agnelli.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Who owns Fiat and Ferrari. And I thought that was like wonderful. That was so appropriate that Giovanni Agnelli would buy that piece, because it was like, kind of, you know, it was so much about the machine, etc., you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And, but they were also very respectable collectors. I mean, and so it was. . . . But actually. . . . So the early part in New York was actually, I was very fortunate. The guy—I'm trying to remember—oh, a guy named Amaya, who was the director of the Museum of Modern Art on Columbus Circle, bought a drawing.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right, the old Huntington.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. He bought a drawing. When Matt Doty was at the. . . . Matt Doty was at the Whitney; he bought drawings—out of that show, first and second show. And I'm trying to remember now, but basically what happened was that there were a lot of people that were, that were fairly well, you know, fairly well regarded that bought work then. So I really, I quit my Youth Board job right before I did that first show. As a matter of fact, my boss at the Youth Board was wonderful with me, because as I started getting ready for the show, I went to him and I said, "I'm going to have to quit, Allan, because"—and this is a man who spent all of his time working. He was a bachelor. He spent all of his time working for the black community. And he would get all of these black kids out of Bedford-Stuyvesant or Harlem basketball scholarships all over the country. I mean, you know, it's like, you know, that was only one of the things he did. He was just so involved with the community. He was a good man. Anyway, I went to him and I said, "Al"—he's like a real father figure, an old man, all gray-haired, you know, long silver cigarette holder, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Anyway, I went to him and I said, "Al, I'm going to have to quit because I've got to get this show ready." And he said, "You know," he says, "I don't want you to quit because you've been doing a good job, and why don't you just do two dances a week. I don't care how you do them; just make sure two dances get done a week." Just, you know, meeting with community, lining it up, getting everything lined up. . . . In other words, he was saying, "I don't care if you're putting in 40 hours; I just want to see those two dances," you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I did it, but I, and I kept getting things together for the show. And I was trying to get that motorcycle finished, and so then finally I went to him—it was about a week before the

show or something—and I said, “Al, I’m not getting these pieces finished. I’ve got to get that show ready. I’m going to quit.” He says, “Just do one dance.” I said, “No, Al, I couldn’t have a clean conscious and do it.” [laughs] I mean, you know, I mean, I had built up all of this overtime because the city had never paid overtime. By then the federal government had stopped funding the project, but the city thought it was such a good project, they were funding it. So, you know, we still had everything going, and so I just. . . . By then I had so much overtime accumulated, but the city would never pay overtime, so they gave you comp time. So I think I got paid for six months after, you know, I quit my job.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I mean, I just, because, you know, because of all the night hours, and all that kind of stuff, you just kept putting in overtime. So anyway, the long and short of it is that after my first show, I didn’t really work in another job—occasionally did something, but basically I just did, you know, did my own work.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Was it. . . . A different kind of question, but was there anybody working in fiberglass at that time in New York?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, Gallo was working in fiberglass and he was showing at Graham also.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Frank Gallo also, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: He was much better known.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. Was he in New York City then?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No. I think he’s always lived out in Ohio or someplace like that.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I’ve never, excuse me, never really known him. And I think the early pieces—well, I shouldn’t get into this, but, well, okay. The early pieces he did and the pieces he was showing then, I think were important, and I think that after that he just kind of trailed off. I just don’t, really. . . . You know, the whole erotic series, I mean.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, mmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But when he was showing at Graham, he was doing stuff that was not—I guess that’s the reason for mentioning it—stuff that I thought was not that far away from what I was trying to do as well.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And that’s probably the only one working in New York. I’ve always felt like I didn’t want to make a big thing about working in fiberglass. And then, later of course, you know, Duane Hanson came along, who was working in fiberglass.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Even though I felt like what Duane and I were doing were really not the same thing; we weren’t even working the fiberglass the same way.

PETER BERMINGHAM: No at all.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You know, it was not. I was really, I have always tried to really use it in a way that I felt was an industrial approach to it, because I felt that that was always part of the statement. And it was a real conscious kind of attempt on my part. I really felt that. . . . The sculptors that I had respected and that I looked at—and one of them I have to say is Alexander Calder—I felt that it wasn't just what you do, but it was like the time was extremely important, the time that you do it, and to make a statement about the times. And I think that at the time that Alexander Calder gave his pieces it was a very important statement about industrialization in this country and about being able to produce a sculpture in metal. You know, you, sure, you had had, you know, okay, beginning in the industrial revolution you finally have, you know, Julio Gonzales doing those things, and, you know, and so that's an important statement about the times then, but I think Alexander Calder's also, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so I felt like that statement had already been made in the metal, and it was important, now, to find a new way of expressing what was happening, and I felt that the plastic, you know, it was very trite kind of situation, but I thought that, you know, certainly that the whole idea of using the plastic was very, very element to what were about, you know, in the sixties and seventies, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Do you think you got any assistance from being associated with the Pop Art movement, so-called?

LUIS JIMENEZ: When you're in New York, you know, you ride every wave you can. You know what I mean?

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: If people asked me if I was Pop, I'd say, "Oh, yeah, I'm Pop," you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: I mean, you know, it's like because it's so competitive, on the one hand. . . . On the other hand, I didn't feel uncomfortable about telling people that I was post-Pop, because that's the way they classified me. Because I felt that. . . . To a certain extent, I did have a legacy to Pop. I didn't think my work was about what Pop Art was about, but I felt that it made it easier for people to see what my work was about, to look at popular images. But I don't think my work was about Pop—or is about Pop Art—or was then. I think post-Pop is okay. I mean, you know. But when people started—I was showing at. . . . I switched from Graham because he wouldn't show my Birth piece, which is a piece nobody's really wanted to show very much.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh, uh huh. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: \_\_\_\_\_ excited about it. It's a woman giving birth to a machine-age man. It's about eight feet, three inches long, and they're connected by a neon umbilical cord. And I was really upset because I showed it to Graham and he said, "No, but maybe we can rent Macy's window and show it there for you." And I was so upset when he said that that I went straight down to Ivan's—he had just opened his gallery. He had already mentioned to me before, he said, "By the way if you ever think of switching galleries, I'm opening my own gallery."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Ohhh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so, when Graham said that to me, I went straight down to Ivan's and I said, "Okay, I've got this difficult piece. He's not going to show it. I want to know if you'll show it." And he said, "Yes." And I went back to Graham's and I said, "I'm leaving." And Graham said, "I was only kidding. I'll show it." And I said, "Nope. It's all over." [laughs] Probably the biggest mistake I've made! Graham used to sell my work like hotcakes.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And actually O.K. [O.K. Harris] never ever really did in terms of sales, you know what I mean?

PETER BERMINGHAM: Hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: In some ways maybe there was a higher visibility, but certainly not the sales. And so I went down—and then the irony is that when I finally started to show it with Ivan, Ivan flipped out. I mean, pulled it out of the show. I mean, you know, it was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. And I left. I didn't go for, I wasn't there for the opening. [laughs] But then the next day he put it back in, for whatever that's worth, you know. He had a chance to think about it. But because that was the basis for our agreement, I thought, you know. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm, sounds that way.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And. . . . I don't know where we're at now, except. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Well, you're at late sixties, I guess, in New York?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh, you were asking me about the Pop! Okay, yeah. So then was with. . . . But by then I was with Ivan. And it was very interesting, though, because at that time, when they started doing all of the preliminary, you know, sort of work on the New Realist. They were going to, this was a new development, you know, I mean, I lived across the street; I knew about all this. They came to me and they said, "You know, we're doing this stuff on [New, you]. . . ."  
[END TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

PETER BERMINGHAM: You said that when you went to O. K. Harris for a show, you went back to Graham Modern. Is that fair to say?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: You had what was what, a third show? With them?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Uh, that was third my show, right.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. What was in that show?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Okay, in that show. . . . You know, what's really interesting—and I get on backtracking, I realize that—but it's been interesting for me in all my shows that there's always been a certain amount of overlapping. I've even shown some of the pieces that I'd shown before, probably another casting.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Like I showed another motorcycle again, for my second, during my second show, even though I'd shown it in my show. When I went to show with Ivan, he said, you know, "I sure like some of those other pieces like The Barfly." Which he tried to change the titles on; he called it American Fertility; it didn't have anything to \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: And that became a reason for including the title in the piece in a lot of the later work, was that way I felt people wouldn't be changing title on me. The Rodeo Queen [1981] became Le Equestrienne, according to Ivan.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You know, but a rodeo queen's a real rodeo queen, if you've been in the west. I mean, she's not an equestrienne.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure. She's a real queen, too. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. But the, so in that show I had, again, some overlapping that I showed, The Barfly. I also showed. . . . The main focus of the show was the End of the Trail with Electric Sunset. Now, and I had come back out to the southwest to put it together, as well. That was the beginning of Donald Anderson's involvement with the work as well, because Ivan had said that he would help me raise money—not help me raise money; let's just. . . . I mean, he would also send me some money as an advance to help me produce the piece because it was going to cost me about \$5,000 in materials to make it, and I didn't have the \$5,000. And it was also, that piece was an important piece because it was already a real break with all of the pieces that were a broad look at the American culture. The terminal piece of all of those was the birth piece, which was the Woman Giving Birth to a Machine-Age God, and incorporating the neon; it was the first one I used the light on.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You know, it's funny. I say it was the first one, but somewhere in there I also did a Toy Car that had eyes, lights—I say "eyes"—lights that lit up, and it was kind of an animate demolition derby car, and tail lights that lit up. It goes back to a little toy truck my father made me when I was, before five or six, during the war years, and they were broke. He took an old beat-up fire engine and sanded it down, did bodywork on it, painted it, made little wooden ladders, put lights on it and stuff, so it was like going back to this little toy car thing. I know I'm jumbling it up but these were all part of that second show. So the Rodeo Queen was, the one that rocks, and she's riding this little hobby horse—obviously a real parody of the rodeo queen thing. The End of the Trail with Electric Sunset was the focus. The Barfly was in that show. A piece called Superstar, which was a Jimi Hendrix piece, that had a polarized lighting system, where. . . . I was trying to do what they had done in the [Maya Gliss], and the music was actually this three-dimensional object coming out of his mouth—a light show.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh boy.

LUIS JIMENEZ: A light show behind him. It was a piece that I revised two or three times after that and have shown—never ever sold it; I just kept continually, revised it, shown in different occasions, but. . . . He was sitting on a black stage with the stage lights, and there's never ever any music. The



idea was to give you the impression of the music through the lights and through the three-dimensional images.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So that piece was there. The Birth piece eventually was there. In fact, eventually I ended up pulling the Jimi Hendrix piece out and substituting it was Birth piece.

PETER BERMINGHAM: And Man on Fire was there.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Man of Fire [Man on Fire] was not there. Not on that. . . . Oh, wait a minute! It might have been there, too, because even though I had shown it at Graham I think Ivan decided to show it again.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I think it might have even been there. And if it wasn't there, he showed it on other occasions in group shows and things, so at one time or another it was shown there. There was a piece called Beach Towel. It belongs to the University of New Mexico but. . . . Some of these I've never done a full edition on, but I did show them from time to time, sometimes in different places. But the Beach Towel was part of that show, and it was a towel hanging on the wall, and it's going back again to that Sunbather idea, but it's a towel hanging on the wall and the towel hangs down, and there's also a real fat, obese—woman in this case; it's obvious she's a woman—draped on the towel as well.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Real, so it's a real transition show. You've got the southwestern images creeping in, you've got the Rodeo Queen there, but then you've also got the End of the Trail, which is a full fledged southwestern piece and already on another plateau there. I mean, already beginning now of the southwestern pieces, which are larger scale and, you know, just different [setting, aesthetic].

PETER BERMINGHAM: The End of the Trail, by the way, always struck me as something more reminiscent of neon pieces, not just because it has light, but because it had that configuration that a lot of neon signs in Las Vegas \_\_\_\_\_. They take a cliché \_\_\_\_\_ that was by then, the End of the Trail. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . and it looks like, somehow it looks like it's about to move, like the horse will tilt or the Indian will bow down farther, or something like that. It's a very strange kind of piece.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Real interesting, because what happened was, the way that piece was developed, and in fact the way the southwestern pieces developed, was that I'd done the Birth piece, and then. . . . It's important for me to say at this point that there was reason for doing the Birth piece. I felt that it was a culmination of everything I'd been doing, and I still think it's probably one of the most successful pieces I've done from the standpoint of forms, etc. I think it's a beautiful piece. And I think it's still a difficult piece to exhibit, because I think a lot of people just think it's kind of gross subject matter.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I still felt like it was a kind of culmination. I wanted to do it because I was going to get out of the art business. I hated the art world. I don't like it. And I didn't like it then, and I just felt like that was it; I was going to do it and I was going to move onto something else. I don't need this kind of thing, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Even though, to be really honest with you, especially looking back, I really had not had it too bad, you know. Really had it fairly easy.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Some have had it a lot worse.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I did that piece and I didn't do anything for nine months, and then at the nine-months period, you know, I still hadn't found something better to do, kind of, you know. I got a call and there was a bank in Texas that was interested in commissioning a piece—it was in El Paso—commissioning a, they had \$50,000 and they wanted to commission a piece for the interior of their lobby, which was about 150 feet long or more. And I decided. . . . I had been thinking about the southwest and obviously I had done the Rodeo Queen and I was already beginning to play with it, kind of hitting around. In retrospect, everything seems much clearer, but at that time I was beginning to play around with the southwest, and I thought, "This is a good chance to kind of go back—home, so to speak—with the images. And I sat around for a long time. It's funny. The critic, David, Dave Hickey, was actually staying at my place at the time. And I started doing these southwestern things and he came by—and he was a good of friend of the woman I was living with at the time, [his?] girlfriend; she had worked with him before in his gallery in Texas. And he had to come by and he'd say, "Oh wow, this is really something." So I started developing the Progress pieces, and I thought, you know, "I don't know. I don't know if this is like so hokey I can't stand it, or what." I didn't really know quite how to deal with it. It was a little bit like with the Oedipal drawing; when I did that Oedipal Dream I put it away for about six months before I knew quite what I had, in a way. But with this, it was really strange what I felt. Obviously, it's got. . . . Obviously this feels right for where it's going, so to speak, and I worked out the idea for the Progress pieces. What happened with those was that I did not get the commission. And I thought, "But you know, it was a good idea." And so I went back and then very methodically started on the End of the Trail. I thought, "Okay, we have this and it's relating to the old Progress murals. What else out there is like that but on a smaller scale, even though it's still going to be big and it's going to be the End of the Trail." I mean, it was the end of the trail. I thought, "What one image was very important as a kid for me growing up, that really was like art to me?" You know?

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And it was the end of the trail. So even though I worked out the Progress pieces first, I did the End of the Trail first. So in that show, you have that thing we just talked about—as well as drawings. I have always shown the drawings. In fact, for my one of Graham shows, the second show—the first show I couldn't take big risks; I had a lot, I showed a lot of drawings that were all framed—but on the second show, I actually had the wall that you came in on, from the elevator—if you remember the old Graham Modern space, you walked in and it was a very shallow hallway right there as you walked in.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yes.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So it was not a good place to display sculpture, especially if it had any size to it, but that entire wall was just plastered, the way I kept my studio, with the drawings—the working drawings. And most of them at that time were small. So it was just an entire wall plastered with working drawings. Afterwards, Graham convinced me that it would be a good idea to frame some of them because he wanted to sell them and he said he couldn't sell them as long as they were plastered all over the wall with pins. And so we framed some of them, but we still kept them—I have to give him credit—we still kept them, all over, you know, like it was the wall, I think, in my studio. I even had wanted to have music, you know, but that was like pushing it. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: “La Cucaracha” or . . . ? [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, no, no. Really more music out of the sixties.

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, it was really more music out of the sixties. In fact, I mean, I really felt that, you know, that, you know, the music, what had been going on in the music world was really way ahead of anything that had been happening in the visual arts in terms of what was happening out there in society, I mean, you know. So I had an early piece that was called Pop Tune, and there were all these intertwined figures, kind of like those Indian erotic elephants, you know, going around this record, you know, I mean, with this central label in the middle.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: It was called Pop Tune. So, but again, I'm regressing, and now you want to go on from there, so we. . . . The first show with Ivan was that show. It was pretty good, in that I've been pretty lucky in, I think, that I've usually gotten fairly good reviews, etc., but I didn't sell a thing out of that show. One of the things that happened was that I also didn't even get the money from the gallery. This is the early seventies, this is like 1971? Yeah, 1971, something like that. And I had been promised money to complete the End of the Trail—I had it all in clay. I never got the money from the gallery. Every time I called him, he said, “Times are rough right now. We've hit a crunch, and there's a real slump in the art world, and I just can't send you anything. The show is still on, but I just can't send you anything to cast that piece with.” And I really wanted to do it, so I went to Donald Anderson, at that time. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you know him before then?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, no. I used my same method of operation. I put my pieces on a truck and drove up to see him. I knew about him.

PETER BERMINGHAM: In Roswell.

LUIS JIMENEZ: In Roswell, yeah. I knew about him. I wrote him a letter; I didn't get an answer. I drove up. When I was 50 miles out of town. . . . I picked up the work from a gallery that closed in Austin, by the way, and so I had the piece on a truck. I drove to Roswell, New Mexico. I was in a borrowed truck because I had blown the motor out of my Volkswagen bus. And 50 miles out of town I called him. I said I wanted to come and talk to him. He said, “I wasn't interested, not to bother him, go away.” I went ahead and drove into town, found out where he lived, went to his house the following Saturday morning, and drove all the way to the caretaker's house, because the main house has these huge signs, says, “Warning. No trespassing.”

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_. [laughs] Yeah, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: All of that kind of stuff. And I ended up at the caretaker's house. Actually I . . . Had I known better, I could have even ended up at the main house, but I ended up at the caretaker's house. I was really desperate! I had this piece in clay. In fact, I didn't even have money to buy the clay. I was living in my dad's shop on a cot. I had already split up with my second wife. So I was living in the shop on a cot, eating my meals out, and I had blown the motor out of my truck. I had dug the . . . I had that piece in clay, the End of the Trail, and the clay I had dug up out of the mountains. I just went to the mountains and dug it up; it didn't cost me anything. I mean, I just, you know, I had dug it up. So, you know, it was a low period financially.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I got to the caretaker's house. The lady came out and saw the neon sign truck that said—because I'd borrowed a truck from my dad to go pick up the pieces—and it said, you know, "Electric Signs," etc., etc. And she said, "Oh, you're a repairman," in Spanish. And I said, "Yes, I am. Can you please get Mr. Anderson." So she went and got Mr. Anderson and he said, "I didn't call for a repairman." And I said, "Actually, I'm the artist." [laughs] And he said, "Yeah, I told you to go away." And I said, "Well, I'd really like for you to look at these slides." And he did look at the slides, and his response was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Let me just. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: His response was. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Excuse me.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.  
[Interruption in taping]

LUIS JIMENEZ: And his response was. . . . I guess he figured he wasn't going to get rid of me until he saw what I had. And he's a . . . You would have to know the man. He is this typical Scandinavian character. I mean, a man of no words, he's very shy, very introverted, just very dry speaking. I mean, this guy, there's no life in his voice, I mean, you know. It's very interesting. But at any rate, his reaction was, he said, you know, "This is good work." He says, "Where could I see some of it?" And I said, "I have pieces on my truck." And so I left some pieces with him. Actually one of them was a very difficult piece. It was The American Dream.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I left the pieces with him. He said, "I would like the chance to see them." And so he said, "I need some time to think about it. Let me think about it, because," he said, "what is it you want?" And I said, "Well, I don't want to be on the grant. I don't want to come here to Roswell. What I want is I want to be able to make this End of the Trail, and I don't have the money to do it with. And I'm not asking for you to just give me anything outright. I'll give you any sculptures you want at 40 percent off [laughs], which is what I'd get through a gallery."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You know, "I'll either cast them for you, or from existing work, and if there's any way that I can get the money to make this piece. I need to raise about \$5,000. And I'll give you work in exchange for it." And, in fact, that was the system we always had. I mean, I've always given him

work in exchange for, you know, whatever it was he. . . . You know it basically amounted to a kind of an advance or whatever, so I could go on and develop work. But. . . . So he called me about two weeks later and said, "You know, I thought about it, and I think we can work something out." And so, in fact, he was, he did make it possible for me to make that End of the Trail. I mean, he advanced me the money so I could make the End of the Trail. In return, I cast some pieces for him, you know, for him, and gave them to him, which are, you know, he got some pieces. . . . Actually my pieces were priced very low at the time, so he ended up with some pretty nice pieces. I mean, he's got, oh, we worked out so many deals now he's got the largest collection of Jimenez's anywhere, you know what I mean.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. Well, just the very. . . . Is it Progress One [1973] that he has and Progress [Two].

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh gosh. He's got Progress One, he's got Progress Two [1974]—that was part of another deal. I was going to go take a teaching job at New Paltz in New York, after the second show.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, after the first show, excuse. After that first show, I was with Ivan, you know, it really was a low period for the art world, that, about 1971 period, and I didn't sell anything out of the show. A year after the show, I managed to sell the End of the Trail, Electric Sunset to the Longbeach Museum. They were going to build a new facility. I don't know if you remember. And it had been shown at the Whitney; in fact it was on display at the Whitney, part of the biennial. And the Longbeach Museum bought it out of the Whitney show, and so. . . . In fact, it was even after the Whitney show. They saw a reproduction. The guy showed up with a magazine and bought it from Rick, who was like the odd-job man there. He showed up, and he said, "Where can I find this piece?" He had this magazine with the reproduction there. And Rick said, "Oh, we got it down in the basement." So Rick took him down in the basement and the guy said, "Okay, I'll buy it." And then he bought it. It was \_\_\_\_\_.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so what happened then, let's see. . . . Okay. So then, but the, what really happened right after the show, though, was that I didn't sell anything out of the show, so I took a teaching job. They called Ivan one day at the gallery and they were looking for somebody to teach sculpture at New Paltz. I went in and applied for the job, the committee was meeting, they gave me the job, and I was going to start in the fall. I went back to close up the shop—because I had done that End of the Trail down in El Paso—pick everything up in El Paso to take it to New Paltz, stopped by to see Donald Anderson, and, you know, he asked me how things were going, and I said, "Well, it's going pretty well. I didn't sell very well. Took a teaching job at New Paltz. It's not a bad place to teach. It's near the city, it's a pretty place, etc. But it's a kind of setback because I really wanted to come back to the southwest." He said, "What happened with the Progress piece proposal?" Because he knew I had that proposal in. I told him that they had decided against it. And he said, "What would it take, what sort of arrangement could we make for you to come and make them here in Roswell, make them here in New Mexico?"

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I told him at the time, I said, "I really want to make the pieces. I feel like. . . ." I remember something very important that I read about David Smith, and David Smith said that no

matter how good everybody thought his pieces were, he felt that during his prime years, he had not been able to build the kind of pieces that he wanted to build because he didn't have the facilities. And so everything that we were seeing was not really the best that he could have done if he had been able to work during his prime years. And I said, "Look, I think this is really a very important piece for me to work on, a very important time for me to be working, and I just want to be able to make the pieces, and if I can make the pieces, you can have them, as long as I can keep the molds and make an additional five pieces. It would be another artist's proof and complete the edition of four, I mean, of five, which would mean four more pieces." And he said, he asked me what I would require, and I told him I needed a work space, a place to live, and a nominal kind of living allowance—and assistants, although I said they didn't have to be high-skilled assistants. I would be willing to train kids from the community. And so, you know, he said it was fine. I mean, there was, it was, he felt it was a good arrangement. And that's how I did the Progress pieces.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Were you sort of, then, the first of those Roswell fellows?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No. I was actually pretty far down the line. By the time I went in, Milton Resnick had been there. . . . I'm trying to think of some people that you would be familiar with. Resnick was the biggest name. There was also Michette. Michette had spent time out there.

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_ Michette, right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: A lot of people had been out there: Manning Stokes. An awful lot had been out there, although I'm probably one of the ones that stayed the longest. But I have never even known how long I was technically on the grant and how long I wasn't. I didn't care how they funded it. He said, "Would you be willing to live out of the compound?" And I said, "Only as an interim kind of situation. I don't want any part of an artists' community." And he just didn't think that was something, anything I wanted. I didn't mind living out in that part of the country; I grew up out there. But I didn't want to be in an artists' community. And I still had these ideas of communes from the sixties, and I really was not real nuts about that whole thing. And what ended up happening, of course, though, was that he provided the living situation out there and I ended up living out there most of the time, although probably about the last two years—because I was out there for about six years—about the last two, maybe three years, I got a better working situation. I had a whole building downtown to work in, like a whole two-story building. And then I had a house that was out in the fields, away from the community, because I didn't want to be there anymore. And that house came up, and he owned it, and I went out there.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I had a pretty good working situation. It wasn't very good for my domestic life. By then, I had remarried again, and by then my wife was going crazy. You know, we had been in Roswell for close to six years and. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Was this Mary?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, by then I. . . . I had split up with Mary about 1970, something like that, '71? And then I met. . . . It was another interesting kind of situation. I met a woman named Cynthia Burke, and we were together for about, close to nine years. Now, Cynthia Burke was actually an interesting woman, because I had dated her as a kid. She was the arranged marriage. Her mother and my mother had been very close friends when they were growing up. Her mother was Mexican. She had been born in Argentina but from a Mexican family during the Revolution. They had also had to flee, they exile; they had gone to Argentina. And then her mother had returned to the El Paso area, at

one point, and—I don't know if you want to know all this—but she had married this man from like Michigan, so her name was Burke, but she had been, she had, and then he went off and set up the Dreyfus Fund in Europe, and so she had grown up going to European schools, Swiss schools, schools in Spain, etc. And she actually had grown up in Tucson, gone to high school in Tucson part of the time too.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Come out here. And her family used to take her from Tucson and go visit in El Paso, so we could, I mean, when I was about seventeen or something, so they'd put us together. I mean, it was like a matched situation, you know it was like. . . . [laughs] And then, you know, by then she had married and she'd had a child, and I had married and gotten divorced. We met again in El Paso—I was working on the End of the Trail—so we were together in Roswell, but because, you know, she'd come out of this situation of having gone to European schools and everything else, I mean, Roswell's the sticks, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And she wanted out. And it was all right for a little while, but, you know, this was going on too much. And then I got the Vaquero [1987-88] commission, for Houston, and Anderson said, "Look, there's no reason for you to leave. I don't care if you make that piece right there in that building downtown. And you can use that house. I don't have any other use for it. And why don't you just stay there and just keep working." He actually, I think, liked having me around, you know. He was interesting because he's really not a true collector; he's a patron. He's not so much interested in acquiring works of art as he is. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Helping artists.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . helping an artist develop. You know, he's an artist himself. I have a very high regard for him. I think he's a really good person. And certainly he's helped me. And so, but, you know, she just freaked out. She split and went to Denver. I mean, at that point we just like, our relationship got real bad. As a compromise I went down to El Paso, because it was a city and obviously she had family there, and so we started trying to make a go there; it didn't work.

And so we've gone now, now we go to the second show, and the second show was when I was—I actually put it together in Roswell. We began on the Progress pieces. Somehow I got, I digressed there. So we started on the Progress pieces. I didn't take the teaching job at New Paltz. I called and told them I was canceling out on them. I went down to Roswell; I began working. I told Donald Anderson that I was going to be able to make six pieces in a year, and I really, I can't tell you how long I agonized and how worried I was, because at the end of the year I had not even completed one piece.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Wow.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It took me three years, basically, between two and three years, to complete that first Progress One.

PETER BERMINGHAM: You know, this might be a good time to just. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Call it quits?

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] No, to interject a kind of brief summary of what it is you go through to make. . . . You start, I think, from sketches, go to models, go to large drawings, and then work up a

model. Can you kind of summarize it? I know it's hard to do it quickly, but. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, it's not so hard, because it's a very traditional approach. Like I told you, I have what I think is a very methodical approach, although the steps in the process are also conscious steps, and there's a tremendous amount of development in every one of my ideas from the beginning concept to what I end up with as a finished product. The Progress One piece is a very good example. Again—I'll make it very concise—the process that I follow is: I'll put down the initial idea in a drawing. It's only a concept. So the End of the Trail was this guy on horseback, etc. In this case, the Progress One was this Indian shooting at a buffalo. There was nothing more to it than that. It was as if I could have painted a bad Progress mural and that would have been the first chapter there on the left. And then I began to develop the idea. And if it's a good idea; obviously if it's a bad idea, somewhere along the line you set it aside, or it's not developed yet. So in the Progress pieces, you know. . . . Well, okay. Going back to how I developed it. I made \_\_\_\_\_ after all.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Okay, so I developed the idea through drawings, and at one point began to work out the clay. Now, up to now—I wish I could do it differently—but up to now, there is still an awful lot of the development that's going on in the clay. From the central core that I might make, which is basically the germ of the idea, I then develop it on a full scale. For that reason, in all of the early pieces I never really kept a preliminary model; it was only a rough idea. Even now, in the preliminary models that I keep, they're more developed than the drawings, but they're really, I don't really think they're finished art pieces—because they're not. I mean, you know, it's just \_\_\_\_\_ like a basic idea. And so then, with the Progress piece, one of the, you know, you make the. . . . So at one point I might make a rough little model, and then—again in the early pieces I didn't cast it; now I do—then I make the piece in clay—again, a very traditional process, over a metal armature. And the clay is basically a skin. Sometimes it's maybe two to three inches thick; sometimes it might be thicker, but mostly, you know, it's built over a core, you know, a kind of metal lath over a re-bar [reinforced bar] framework. I then pull fiberglass molds, and I pull, I use a piece-molds system. The Progress One had fifty sections in the mold. It became much more complex than anything I'd ever done before. Because one of the things that happened with the stay in Roswell was that, up to then, I had this tremendous pressure to always, to churn out the pieces almost as fast as I could because I was depending on them to survive, and I couldn't afford the luxury of making a very complex mold, or getting involved in things like things that stuck out, because. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Like fifty-part molds.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right, because that was going to make a complex mold. So I wasn't being, I wasn't able to get involved spatially with the pieces. You mentioned the End of the Trail. The End of the Trail doesn't have anything that sticks out, except for a spear, and that's made out of steel rod that you put in there. So it wasn't a casting problem. After I pulled the piece out of the molds—again, you know, the only thing that is different is the material, because I then come along and grind off all the seam lines, and then I come back and I spray it with an, in the early years, with an epoxy; now I use an acrylic urethane. I've used a lot of other plastic finishes; they've always been plastic finishes. But basically that's the process. And again, I tell people it's a totally traditional process; the only thing that's really different is that I'm using a different material, that's all. But the process is all very traditional. And then even the way I work at the material, I'm not doing anything brand new with it; I'm working with it the same way you would build a car body or a hot tub. That's exactly the way they, you know, they build one. So, going back to the Progress pieces, one of the things that did happen, though, was that all of a sudden I had the time paid for to do research, which meant I wasn't worried so much about how I was going to pay the rent at the end of the month, and I had, I



could afford the luxury of getting involved with how to develop a system, for instance, of molds for doing, you know, complex forms, etc. But I also realized that going back to do the southwestern pieces had to do, it wasn't just so much a question of going back in terms of subject matter, but was a way of going back and exploring my childhood and growing up in the southwest, etc. And I let myself get involved in all of that. I figured, you know, I kind of pushed the situation, I figured, I got real uptight about it, but I figured, you know, "What's this guy going to do if I've got a half-finished piece at the end of the year?" You know, "Is he going to throw me out?" And I had to weigh the factors and I had to think, "I don't he's going to throw me out if he thinks he's getting a better sculpture."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I was very conscientious about keeping him up to date with the development of the pieces. And I did, I was very good about going in and saying, "Look, okay, I've got the horse, and I've the guy, and I've got the buffalo, and this is the essence of it, sort of, and I can go through and I can render this thing where it's very much like the Progress mural, but I really want to get involved in developing a lot of these details that for me are important right now, and that means like little jackrabbits, and doing studies of the little animals, and putting all that stuff in there." And his attitude was, "It's going to make it a better sculpture, so go ahead." And then, when I went to see him and I said, "You know, it is very important for me, though, to know whether you're interested in displaying these pieces inside or outside, because I obviously can't have little animals sticking out, whatever, if you're just going to leave this thing outside, because those are fragile elements. On the other hand, if I'm going to develop it inside, for an inside piece, I can do a lot of other things with it." And his attitude was, "You just make the best sculpture you can and don't worry about whether it's going to go inside or outside. That's not a consideration for me."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, interesting.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And his attitude was, "Don't worry, I'll build a room if I need to."

PETER BERMINGHAM: Pretty rare guy.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So it was very nice. And that was the way the Progress pieces were worked out, and it's one reason why I ended up taking six years on two pieces. I also took the liberty of continuing to show quite a bit during all those years. I made casts of, you know, the earlier pieces, which is something I had always been doing, except for about this year. I kept taking those things out on the road. I had a show in Houston that was very important for me, right, I guess about a couple of years after I'd gone down to Roswell, you know, at the Contemporary Arts Museum. And I continued to show around in a lot of different places. The other agreement we had worked out was that he was going to keep the pieces but I could show them. And I, you know, for instance, I finished the Progress One piece in '74, showed it in New York in '75, and—I'm trying to remember now, but. . . . Yeah. That was, in fact, I had already shown it in that Houston Museum show then, but so I began showing that piece in '74 when I finished it, and I continued to show it—his piece, in fact—until about '84. I mean, I showed it for about ten years. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: He didn't seem to mind.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No, he didn't really, you know, he didn't really seem to mind. I mean, he seemed very good about it. I eventually cast another one for myself while I was working down in El Paso, and at one point we took his back to him, and substituted the one I had cast for myself, sent it out. Right now the Albuquerque museum owns it, so, you know, I mean, it now belongs to them. I eventually ended up casting a Progress Two for myself. That was even much later. I just sold it this last year.

And, you know, I had continued to show it, and so those things had been showing around.

PETER BERMINGHAM: When did you do, in all of this, where was *Man on Fire*, which has always struck me as kind of a critical piece and quite different from all those.

LUIS JIMENEZ: *Man on Fire* was an atypical piece, and it was quite different—in one respect. In the other respect, it's really not that different. I made the *Man on Fire* in 1969. 1969 was the year that I just, I went crazy. I produced like I had never produced, in 1969. There are a lot of reasons for it. I was, it was the sixties. There was a big issue about you turning 30—I was 29 in 1969—and I had had a lot of things happen to me. I felt that I was really coming up from behind and I needed to make up a lot of time. I spent time in architecture school, I had gotten married, I had a child, I'd broken my back. All of these things I saw as setbacks—in terms of time, in terms of developing pieces, in terms of all the. . . . And then in 1969 I'd had my first show already, and so I had just that bit of reinforcement. Plus this tremendous amount of reinforcement in terms of the acceptance of the work. So I rode this wave, you know, of. . . . Plus I also had money. I sold that show out, and I had a lot of money to work with. I mean, I won't say I was wealthy, but I didn't have to work at another job. And I was able to afford any material I needed. And so I was riding this whole wave. I was also involved in a new relationship with Mary Wynn. So I just turned out an enormous amount of drawings, and one. . . . Let's see, 1969, the pieces that led up to the *Man on Fire*, there were some reasons for. After, or right before I did the *Motorcycle* piece I had done an old woman in a, *Old Woman with a Cat*, in an easy chair. And that was actually a portrait of my grandmother, so it's a look back at, you know, what I'd come out of, what I'd grown up with, etc.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: That was also a kind of atypical piece, except that it ties in with what was happening with old people at the time. *Man on Fire* also ties in with the riots in New York. He grew out of those riots that I saw in New York, when I was doing the teenage dances. And I got to see guys throw Molotov cocktails. And I began doing drawings of not only the dancers in the street when I was doing the dance program, but the guys that were rioting with the Molotov cocktails, and usually they were black or Puerto Rican. A lot of times I would sit around and wonder why I had this fascination with the guy with the fire. I realized that I really very much believed in that whole notion of archetypal images, and I realized that it was a Promethean image, but I wondered why I had the fascination with it. And I realized, going back again to my grandmother, now, the old woman with the cat, that when I was a kid she had always told me about the man on fire as a Mexican image. *Man on fire* was used by all of the Mexican muralists as a symbol for the Mexican revolution as a positive image of the Indian, because the Mexican revolution in 1910 was a social revolution. You have the Zapata forces saying, "We want the land. We want the political power." And the important thing there is that up to that point it had always been the Spanish that had ruled Mexico, and the more Spanish you had—in other words, in quotes, "The better blood you had, the more European blood you had, the higher up on the echelon that you were, and the more Indian blood you had, the lower down on the echelon that you were." Here all of a sudden you have the artist depicting the man on fire as a symbol for the revolution as a pure Indian.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And he was a perfect figure for the revolution. The man on fire comes from the Cuauhtemoc image of, you know, from Cuauhtemoc. Now historically what happened was that—to make, I'll give you the Mexican, the conquest of Mexico in about 30 seconds—Cortez came into Mexico, came into the valley of Mexico, presented him as a god, was welcomed into the city by Montezuma, who was a very weak ruler, at the time. And eventually Cortez and his men took over

the entire ruling class, made a captive of Montezuma and made slaves of the Aztecs. It was Cuauhtemoc, who was an 18-year-old—he's perfect hero material—who gathered the Aztecs together and said, "Hey, this guy I don't think is a god, because, you know, they're going around raping all our women, stealing all the gold. . . ." [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . and they're not acting like gods.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yes. Maybe they're not.

LUIS JIMENEZ: [laughs] And, you know, "We've got to get them out of here." He organizes the Aztecs and throws Cortez out of the city. When Cortez comes into the city, he then does what they did with—what they did because it was during the Inquisition in Spain—he then does what you did with anybody who was a heathen, who wasn't a Christian, which is you burn them at the stake. So he burns Cortez at the stake, and creates the image of the man on fire. I mean, you know. I mean, burns Cuauhtemoc at the stake, which is, you know, this wonderful image now, because, you know, as they say. . . . I mean Cuauhtemoc stood there, and of course he was an Indian, he was stoic, I mean, you know, he showed no pain. He just was this guy, you know, with the flames. And so when the Mexican muralists began looking for a positive image for the Indian in Mexico, I mean, they found this perfect image in Cuauhtemoc.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Now, why is that important? Well, my grandmother came out of the Mexican revolution. You know, she had lived a long time, I mean, she went through the revolution, she saw this change, she herself was very dark-skinned, but with green eyes, of Indian stock from San Luis Potosi. Again, educated and knew what was going on. She knew about all these images, so as a kid, you know, I was told about Cuauhtemoc, and I was told, for instance—I've said it before, but I'm saying it again for this tape, because we're putting everything together—that when I was a kid, you know, if I scraped my knee, for instance, and I'd come in crying to my grandmother, she say, you know, "How can you cry about a little thing like that, because after all they burned Cuauhtemoc at the stake. They burned his legs off and he never cried." You know. So it became this kind of hero guy for me, and when I go into the dentist's office, I mean, you know, "How can I can I be afraid of a little dentist's drill when after all, you know, Cuauhtemoc. . . ."

PETER BERMINGHAM: He became a hero for you. He would have been a real drag for a lot of other kids who were looking for sympathy. It's like the starving Armenians and that kind of thing.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, you know. Right. What I, the point, you know, I guess the only point I was trying to make at, is that it's not like I did this very methodical, "Oh, gee, I'm going to pick on a hero. I mean, this is going to be a good guy." It's that I grew up knowing about this guy, thinking of him in a mythic kind of way. I mean, you know, this guy is like some kind of Superman. And so I realized at that point that that was my fascination with these guys with the bombs, with the Molotov cocktails, it was, and with the man on fire. At the same time, you have the Buddhist monks burning themselves in Vietnam. And a lot of my work—all of my work at the time; I won't say a lot—all of my work at that time had to do with the social situation at the time. And I was very aware of these monks burning themselves. I was very much against the war in Vietnam and what the United States was doing. I really saw it as a very. . . . I saw it as a racial kind of situation as well.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Me too, \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And I just felt like this really had something to do with the times, even though it was a Mexican image. And so, you know, so you end up with what has happened in a lot of the pieces in that it's not a clear-cut—it's a synthesis of a lot of different things coming together, including that Indianhead on my father's Pontiac that I always liked, you know?

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, I was going to say the Winged Victory, but. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right, in the Winged Victory. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: But come to think of it, the Winged Victory is very similar to the\_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah, and, you know, I have to tell you that that's again something that—nobody's pointed it out to me before—but I have to tell you that one of my favorite pieces of all times, of course, is that Winged Victory, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so, you know, god! It really is this. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you ever see. . . . I don't think you had been to the Louvre by then, but had you ever seen casts of it?

LUIS JIMENEZ: No.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Because there are a lot of smaller-scale casts in art schools. Art Students League I'm sure had one.

LUIS JIMENEZ: No. I was familiar with the Winged Victory from architecture history.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And from this very wonderful architecture history instructor that I had named George. In fact, when I transferred over to fine arts, I remember going to the art teacher and her saying, "Well, we can't consider architecture history as art history. Who was your instructor?" And I mentioned this guy George, and she said, "Never mind, we'll give you credit because he's, he really knows his stuff." And I had a very good history instructor in that man.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I don't know what happened to him. You know, I, but he was, he knew his stuff, and then I saw the Winged Victory and, I mean, I saw all that stuff.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Did you, you know, it's a big jump, but I wonder if you could, you can go from Man of Fire [Man on Fire], which is, what, a work of a decade and a half or so ago, up to the American Pietà [Southwest Pietà, 1984], because it seems to me you're working again with heroes, again with legends, and a born hero, if ever there was one. There was a kind of "Sleeping Beauty" story there and so forth.

LUIS JIMENEZ: That piece is so complex, you know. It's like I've put off working on it for a long time. I think for a while I felt I had bit off more than I could chew and I wasn't really ready to make it yet. It's hard to tell a city that. I think it's a good idea. I think it's going to be one of my good ones.

PETER BERMINGHAM: How did that develop, though? Originally, I mean. It's a pretty daring move,

you \_\_\_\_\_ that out.

LUIS JIMENEZ: All of my pieces, you know, I can talk about them on a lot of different levels. And I mostly talk about the really obvious symbolism in a lot of the pieces, etc. What I usually don't talk very much about are the very personal motives. And for the benefit of this one, I will. I had just gone through a really rough divorce. I had been divorced before, and I've had people say, or friends say, "Well, you know, you've been divorced before. This shouldn't be a problem." I think one of the things that happened was that I thought that because this was like the relationship, the last one, with Cynthia, and I felt that this was a relationship that was sort of, you know, decreed by God, or something—that we were the matched couple or something, that it was going to go on forever. And there was, it became a very rough situation for me. For a lot of different reasons. It was not a very clean divorce; it was messy, it was awful. There was a lot of pain involved. There was a lot of grieving involved. And at the very core of the piece that's what it's about. I mean, that's what that piece is about. And I will tell people, I've given. . . . I know you've heard a lot of different other explanations for it. And I think it's like the Man on Fire, in that there's a lot of things going on there for me. But at the very core of it, that's what it's about. And, but \_\_\_\_\_ personal. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: You've kind of layered it over with other things, I mean.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Oh yeah, oh sure.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I mean, you know, you've got, so you've got this grieving, you've got this grieving figure. I mean, you've got the guy mourning over the woman. I mean, that's obviously, I mean, there's a kind of. . . .

[END TAPE 2 SIDE A]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Ahhh, here it comes. Okay, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, again, at the very core of all of these things, there is very personal motives for a lot of these things. I mean, like it's not really, like I'll tell you that, I mean, you know, in the Progress One, for a lot of different reasons, the Indian is my little brother.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Really.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah, he physically is my little brother. You look at my little brother and you look at that Indian and it's my little brother. But, you know, anyway, well. . . . I mean, you know, of course, like with the old lady and the cat is my grandmother, and \_\_\_\_\_ there's all this stuff going on. Okay. But on, at the very basic core of the idea for the Southwest Pieta is the fact that I was going through this very, very, going through all the turmoil over this very painful divorce. And, you know, in addition to, you know, finally needing help, not functioning, going through some kind of therapy—not some kind, but going through some. You know, reading, you know, On Death and Dying [Elizabeth Kübler Ross, 1969], which just comes out at the time, you know, and they tell you that a divorce is just like mourning over a person that died, you know, and you've got to go through all that stuff. You know, so it helps you, you know, understand your situation. What we as artists do—and I say "we" because I think I can speak for other artists as well—is that you work it out through your work, and this is exactly what I was doing. And I worked out the image. Okay, now, which one came first, you know, trying to find the proper image for what I was going through? Yeah, to a certain extent. In the same way, I think maybe the Man on Fire is very appropriate, from 1969, as a kind of self-portrait. I

used myself as the model. I don't pretend to say that my face is like the Man on Fire; it's not. I mean, I gave it very Indian characteristics, etc. But in fact there was something about it that was very much like, I mean, I used myself as the model in that. His ribcage, I have this very funny high ribcage. Anybody that sees the Man on Fire and says, "That's not the way human ribcage is. . . ." I'm sorry; I have a deformed ribcage. My ribcage just goes cheeoo! straight across, and I've got a chicken bone right there.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Indians have it.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Is that right?

PETER BERMINGHAM: A lot Indians do, ribcage that's \_\_\_\_\_ a little bit of that.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Well, that's the kind I got. Yeah. And, you know, it just, I mean, everything about it, I mean, I just used myself. I didn't have another model. I didn't realize; I think that it was a kind of spiritual self-portrait. Going back now to the Southwest Pietà, again, that's what I'm going through at the time. It's a little bit easier for me now to deal with it with a certain kind of distance. I was very emotionally involved with it at the time. I knew what I was getting into proposing that for a city. At the same time, I knew I couldn't develop that on my own. I also knew it was a very powerful Hispanic image. And I knew that there would be a lot of support for it in certain areas. I knew I could probably do that piece easier than Albuquerque. I thought I could that piece in San Antonio or east L.A., but east L.A. and San Antonio didn't present themselves. And I thought El Paso would have been the perfect place, but I thought they'd never get their act together in El Paso. Ironically, I'm going to do a piece for El Paso. But that's, you know, that's bizarre.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: But anyway, it does happen. But, to backtrack, I proposed it for Albuquerque. Now, there's a lot of transposing that's going on. I know it's a Hispanic image, but at the same time I know that it's about a, a statement I'm trying to make about that. . . . I know it's also about a statement I want to make about a very powerful Hispanic image that I'm plugging into. I also am aware—again, because I really believe in that whole Jungian idea of archetypal images. I've had people argue with and say that's all bullshit, but I can't believe that, because I really believe that it's true. I mean, I believe that they exist from culture to culture. Now, the only thing I have to tell you is that you may disagree with me or whatever, but I believe it, so if we're talking about my ideas [laughs], I have to tell you, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yes, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So I really believe this is a Pietà and, you know, as I analyze it I think, "Okay, why. . . ." Okay, and I've done this with a lot of images, because that's what fascinates you, your symbols and images, and, "Okay, what is it \_\_\_\_\_. Why are people carrying this kind of baggage around?" I mean, it must be an archetypal kind of thing, and it must hit at the core of a kind of psyche that's going on with those people. Otherwise, it wouldn't be important. And then when you boil it down, again, and then come up with this thing of "Yes, it's the archetypal images, the Pietà. Only in this case, the man's holding the woman. And it's a Romeo and Juliet story, which every culture has. You know, it's at the very core of what we're about; it's human beings kind of thing. So I like that; I like all that kind of stuff. I like the fact that it has connections with the whole ecological thing. I see your walking stick. I love to spend time. . . . That's why I always loved Roswell. I mean, there's no problem with me being out in the country because if I. . . . You know, I can get off and go up into the mountains and I find, I can still find something there. I mean, it's really nice for me, and I—beyond nice; I think it's

important for all of us as human beings. And so there's an ecological kind of statement there, if, again, you're familiar with everything that has been done with sculpture before, etc., and you realize that sculptors, Lechaise for instance; I'm trying to think of some of the other ones, but I don't need to name them all—have used the woman as a metaphor for a mountain.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so now if I make a mountain out of the woman, you know, it's the mother earth kind of thing—on a trite level. Then you start maybe making some kind of ecological implications there. Let me—this is real rich! I mean there's all kinds of levels and implications that I can develop in the piece, if I'm successful. Now one of the problems with this piece and where it's dangerous for me to talk about it is that I may not succeed in all of them; I don't know. I mean, it's not a completed piece, but I'm just telling you what is going through it for me. Then, you know. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: But, you know, it has about it the essence of a lot of striking and yet at the same time, you know, almost glamorous Mexican imagery. You know the way they can take gods and legends and so on and mix tragedy and glamour at the same time.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Very strange. And I've seen parts of that in your work before, long before, I think, even going back to *The American Dream*, even and so forth. That strikes me too as quite a heritage in art because if you, the most famous Pietà is Michelangelo's, and yet he said he made that—that first one; he made two, one of which was very expressive and not all that glamorous—but that first one, he said, "I wanted to make the most beautiful piece I could, so the Mother is beautiful, Christ is beautiful"—he reclines in a way that's almost stylish—and so on \_\_\_\_\_. I think there's something about that in that piece too, at least as I see it.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Sure.

PETER BERMINGHAM: It's an image that somebody must have been familiar with, I guess. There's just a lot of, they're many layers to that piece. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Hope so.

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . and obviously more of them personal that I would have guessed, anyway. Luis, hang up.  
[audio break]

PETER BERMINGHAM: The Southwest Pietà is a sculpture which is still in process as sculptors like to say. But one piece that was finished several years ago, the *Vaquero*, has a public history which, like much public sculpture, is interesting, rather checkered, and I think it says a lot about both the symbolism, the content, and the form of your work. Can you tell us a little bit about how that sculpture was developed and where it's been? And where it might be, even in the future?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Kind of like the *Man on Fire*, when we talked about it, I can actually talk about the *Vaquero* on a lot of different levels. I probably won't go into all of them right now, except that theme-wise it is the *Progress Two* piece. I worked out the idea, the idea was worked out the same time I was working on the *Progress Two* piece.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: There's a lot of overlap there. It also is the very first public piece that I ever had the opportunity to do and develop—the first truly public piece, because the Progress pieces are a very strange kind of fish that's somewhere halfway in between. They were leading up to the public pieces \_\_\_\_\_ and developing the systems that I was going to use on them. I wanted to, or I had—again, talking about it at different levels—I wanted to see what had been successful in iconographic public art, because I felt that that was going to be my strong point, that's the kind of comment I wanted to make, and so it was definitely moving away from what I would call bent-metal pieces that have been put out in public, because the content becomes a very integral part of the idea. So it's public in that it's sitting in a public situation. It's also public because it's speaking a publicly accessible language. Looking at the successful forms before, one of the most common is the equestrian—and of course one of my favorite ones. Now we, of course, have gotten to the point where I think we're slightly jaded about a lot of those public pieces, and with the mediocrity that a lot of them were done. And, you know, Washington is full of equestrian pieces. I made it a point to go to Washington, and when I was there in Washington, I did a series of studies—looking for scale, looked at what had been done with it, decided I wanted to do an equestrian, but I wanted to do an equestrian in a way that you would look at the form all over again, the way you had in the End of the Trail.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: In other words, try to take it beyond the motel-sign kind of motif. In the case of the End of the Trail, in the case of the Vaquero, try to make you look at that form all over again. And since I was using a different material, I was going to try to do things with it that you could not do before with bronze \_\_\_\_\_. Because of the fiberglass's light weight, the Vaquero has a steel skeleton, and I was able to kick the legs up in the air and, you know, have a lot of action in the piece.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It's very dramatic because it's cantilevered out, etc. I was also able to incorporate color because of the plastic, which is something that you don't see in equestrians, and as a result I think a lot of people don't really immediately see it as an equestrian, but in fact the scale is identical to the Washington pieces—most of the pieces in Washington are sitting on about a ten-foot base. And then, as has happened so many times in my life, the ultimate irony was that the very first place that that Vaquero was shown was in Washington. I mean, it's so funny the way some of these things just seem to kind of fall right into place, and many times just not through any kind of control on my part.

PETER BERMINGHAM: How did that happen, by the way? How did Josh Taylor at the Museum of American Art get to see it? How did it wind up in front of that strangely contrasting portico?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Joshua Taylor was very supportive about the kind of work that I was working on. I first became, first met him during, actually first met him at one of the festivities in Washington. I was actually active politically a lot in terms of lobbying with basically a couple of organizations, one of them though was the Hispanic Task Force. And I spent a lot of time lobbying. I had not been involved in that kind of stuff, but I felt like I could actually effect some kind of change, and I felt we had for a while, but it's like fighting the tides, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: The water comes back and you've got to build everything up all over again.



PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But I spent time in Washington. I think I first met him there then. But where he first became really familiar with the work was with the Western States Biennial, and he showed the Progress pieces at the museum. He was very enthusiastic about them, wanted to know what I was working on at the time. In fact, I was working on the Vaquero at the time, and he wanted to show it. The problem was the City of Houston. Hammarskjold Plaza in New York had wanted to show the Vaquero, and they had wanted to show one of my pieces. I sent them slides of the Vaquero. The City of Houston wouldn't let them do it. By the time Joshua Taylor asked if he could show it, the City of Houston had not built the base for the Vaquero and wanted me to store it until they built the base, which is something that took a year and a half. But because they had not built the base, I had some very good leverage for going back to them and saying, "Look, I don't think you can keep me from showing it if the piece is complete. I'd rather have it at the Museum of Modern—I mean, Museum of American Art," which was in the NCFCA [National Collection of Fine Arts].

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . "than to put it in storage." And so I had a little better leverage then. So again, going back to the levels that the Vaquero is working on, through a long series of complex situations that had to do with the politics of Houston, I had been first given this site that was going to be, it's called Tranquility Park. It's sitting there next to the library; it's where they're putting in their public sculptures. Because of the politics of Houston, the site had never really been approved. They still were not even sure about the funding for completing the park, so they couldn't really approve putting the sculpture in there. And somebody came along and said, "We can't approve the piece there," and said that was the second time they'd applied for NEA funds and received NEA funds, but because Houston was such a mess at home politically and with its funding. . . . The first time they had to give back the money, and I didn't really want them to give back the money the second time. It was also my first opportunity. They said, "We have a Mexican-American neighborhood in Moody Park that would really like to have a piece by you. How do you feel about that?" And I said, "I think it's really great because the concept behind what I do is that I would really like to be making community pieces." In other words, pieces that a community will relate to, and be able to identify with.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Excuse me. You don't feel patronized by that, when they say, "We'll put it over there where those people will understand, and we won't give you a somewhat more auspicious site."

LUIS JIMENEZ: I had. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Is that a choice a community sculptor has to make?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I actually loved it. I loved it. I loved it when they did it in Albuquerque. I guess you have to really look at, and we've been talking about my background, so, you know, the whole idea that, for instance, only wealthy affluent people should have art is something that is a notion I don't buy.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So if there's anything I could do to change that, I really like to do it. So it really was playing right into my hands, so to speak. It also was pretty wonderful, because what ended up happening out of it is that all of a sudden I had the opportunity now to make a political statement. I

was going to make it before too, but the situation now becomes much more relevant there than it would have been at Tranquility. In a sense it sort of released any constraints I might have had, made it a much more open situation. Because the piece now becomes about the Mexican-American community in Texas, of which I am, a member of. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And it also becomes about Texas. It also becomes about creating an American symbol. So this is the way I posed the project to myself. At the very beginning I'm sure that that little model looked like a little cowboy, I mean, nothing much more beyond that. Probably because it's going out into this Mexican-American community, I was really left alone, although I probably would have been left alone otherwise, but you don't know. Because, I mean, the kind of static that we got when we were trying to get it approved was. . . . For instance, we got static from one of the councilman—I can't remember, his name was Mann, I believe, who fought the [Claes] Oldenburg; he's an ex-fire chief or fireman. And he fought the piece on the grounds that the man had a faded red shirt on. He read it as pink and he said that it was a gay cowboy.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Oh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And he couldn't approve a gay cowboy for the City of Houston. So, again, by putting it out there I was really left all alone, which sometimes can be a blessing. Certainly the Mexican-American community there was very supportive. What I came out of it with was I was able to make a statement about the contribution that the Mexican-American community had made to Texas—the cowboy, the vaquero is a Mexican-American invention; it is a, well, a Mexican invention. Because the Spaniards brought the cattle and the horses, and the Mexicans, you know, developed the, just the whole notion of being cowboys. They went out and started working these wild cattle. They developed the technology for it, and so all of the terms connected with the American cowboy—corral, remuda, lariat, etc.—are all Spanish words.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: So it was a way, too, of reminding the Mexican-American community that they had made that contribution. I grew up in Texas, and I disassociated myself with anything that rang of the cowboy, feeling that it was a real redneck notion, and not really thinking that it was a contribution that my community in Texas had made. And so. . . . You know, when I was in high school, we called them shitkickers, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, right. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: Something we didn't want to have anything to do with. And yet, you know, it was, you know, as I've said many times, you know, the original cowboys were probably not all that glamorous. They were Mexican-Americans. They were out there on the range. They were poor. They're not John Wayne, you know; it's not Hollywood, I mean, not in reality.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And so it becomes an educational kind of piece.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And at the same time, it's making a statement about a very American image. I've always held the notion that for Europeans or Japanese, Orientals, etc., looking at the United States

—I remember running into them when I first left Texas—and their notion of what was glamorous about the United States were cowboys and Indians. This is what, they didn't see us as being this terribly sophisticated society. What they saw as exciting was this kind of raw western quality, a sense of the frontier. And I think that certainly as an American image, this is something that I was really trying to plug into.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Now, just going forward a little bit, the Sodbuster [1980s], which is another American image, strikes me by contrast to be a much less complicated commission, in certain ways. It was done for a very different kind of town—well, it's a plains town, at any rate, Fargo. Can you mention a few things that went into the thinking about that particular place, vis-a-vis its site, the people, the community around it, and so on?

LUIS JIMENEZ: Yeah. It took me a little while to develop the idea for the Sodbuster, as kind of simple as it may seem now. And, you know, in retrospect, it's so totally logical. If I'm going to be doing the cowboy for Texas, then the logical piece for the Dakotas is going to be the farmer. It's also a logical piece as an extension of the Progress pieces, which I had been trying to develop because he is the next logical guy after the cowboy, becomes a really companion piece to it. The scale is the same; you know, it really fits. I went up there. Their first reaction in North Dakota was they were a little bit, a little bit uncomfortable with the idea that people might think that they were all a bunch of ignorant farmers. And my feeling about that is that they're still very close to the whole farming thing, much more so than Texas is close to being a cowboy.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I think, at this point, the Texas cowboy exists more as a myth than as a reality. I know that there's working ranches out there, but I know an awful lot of working ranches now that never see a horse. It's a, it becomes more like a machine-type operation. That glamour of the cowboy as we think of him is really not there so much anymore.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Except as a kind of myth. In the Dakotas those farmers, until just recently, you know, were still doing pretty good. They were still active. It's a little bit difficult to begin to think of it as a romantic, mythic kind of image, but I don't think it's very far away. I think, you know, agribusiness is certainly wiping them out. But the fact of the matter is, is after having spent time in the Dakotas—and I do end up spending time with a community, and it works both ways. During the time that I worked on the Sodbuster for North Dakota I had two museum shows at their local museum. They actually applied for funds from the NEA- they were matching funds—and went to local citizens and matched them, and bought two other pieces, which are major pieces, of mine anyway, I feel. One is the End of the Trail, and the other one is The Barfly. So they went out of their way to understand what I was about, and I think it worked that other way. I think I had a fairly good understanding about what was going on with them, and so out of that came the Sodbuster—in fact, came the title of the Sodbuster, because I was going to call it A North Dakota Farmer, and, you know, it was a wisecrack from a real estate agent, who said, “Oh, you're making a sodbuster!” I said, “Oh, God, that sounds terrible.” He said, “Well, no, I mean, you know, we all grew up out on the range and that's what we were; we were sodbusters.

PETER BERMINGHAM: It was the sodbusters that turned a lot of that area into the dustbowl during the Depression, too; I happen to know that. So there are good sides and bad. The work ethic at work, certainly; on the other, this kind of destruction of the range.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Now that's real interesting.

PETER BERMINGHAM: But it's a heroic image that you've created.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right. Now, it's real interesting what you were saying about the work ethic, because it became real obvious to me at that point that, obviously, I couldn't connect very much with being a farmer. But I could connect with the work ethic. And it was the work ethic that managed to civilize that area, you know. Because it's a very hostile situation. You have, you go all the way from, in terms of the climate, you go from a hundred degrees in the summer to about minus fifty or sixty degrees in the winter.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Tremendous wind-chill factor.

PETER BERMINGHAM: \_\_\_\_\_, yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: and tremendous cold. Adverse conditions. And it was the sense of community and the work ethic; it wasn't one guy alone. At first, I had really been trying to portray the community, but that's something else. I actually first thought of doing the barn dance.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Uh huh.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But at any rate, backtracking on that, but they're Scandinavian Lutherans and the work ethic is so ingrained in them that the whole notion of them even seeing themselves in a frivolous way was something that I thought that there would always be an ingrained kind of hostility to, because they were, they just cannot see themselves in that frivolous way, as they said. I mean, "All of that went on, but we don't like to make that public." So then the next notion was to really plug into that work ethic thing. There was also more to it in terms of it, because I began to think of it in terms of the Progress pieces, and I began to think of this whole notion of a linear kind of progress which, I'll interject, I don't think it really holds true in art. I don't think we've progressed in art. I think Phidias's stuff was a lot better than most of the stuff that's around right now.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] Phidias would be pleased to hear that.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I'm sure he would. But what I'm saying is that. . . . I mean, I was trying to reach back, as far back I could and find a name.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah. Ah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But in, certainly in terms. . . . Certainly we Americans tend to think that, you know, everything is better next year than it was this year, and this year than it was last year, and we're constantly progressing, and constantly, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ the frontier.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Does that have something to do with the piece you called Progress, which is not very progress-looking to. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right, right. That was that whole issue of progress, and of course plugging into that with the Sodbuster, you know, instead of what you had with the Progress One, which was this Indian, you know, with the buffalo, and even with the Progress Two, where you still have these wild animals, now you have the Sodbuster, who has, who is, you know, working these straight lines, you know, all day long. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, oh, gee, this dumb oxen. [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: And who is. . . . And these dumb oxen, who have, you know, been cut on both ends. I mean, they've got, they've been castrated in the rear, and they've had their horns cut, and they're out there, you know, working lines.

PETER BERMINGHAM: And they've been locked together with, with [their, the] \_\_\_\_\_.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Right. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, I mean, they've been. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: And the whole notion of the team; it's really a much more mechanical kind of, you know, grinding out kind of situation. You know, I always try to do all of that, you know, I. . . . But, I think that, you know, I was also trying to make a very positive statement about the farmer there too. And the community, you know, that's been a very, they've been very responsive to that piece. The general reaction was that it was very different, but they liked it.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Great. I'm, because I had the opportunity to see both working drawings, life-sized working drawings and, at least, I've seen the whole piece itself, it appears to me that at some point in your working method you add a kind of heroic rhythm to these pieces. It's very interesting to me because I saw the earlier models of Sodbuster, and it seemed like a pretty cut-and-dried kind of thing. Apparently those drawings turn you on a great deal, I think, to possibilities, very plastic possibilities in the sculpture. Is that a fair assumption, or does it happen somewhere else?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I think that it's not the drawings that are turning me on. The drawings are the result of a process that's developing, because. . . . I think developing is a good word for the way that I work, because what happens is that at the very beginning of a piece, I really don't have a very deep commitment to it. And I begin to focus more and more and more attention, and then the more attention that I focus, the more things begin to develop. To be really honest, a lot of the things that I've managed to say about the Vaquero I didn't know why I was doing them when I did them, and in retrospect I can give you a lot of rationale now, I can give you a lot of reasons, and I can be fairly articulate about it, but at the time that I was doing it, I probably couldn't have even told you why I was doing something. I'm working out of an intuitive, you know, I'm working on an intuitive basis. And I guess I've been blessed with a good subconscious. I can't take any credit for it, because most of the time I don't know what's really going on. I just know that I'm putting it down, and then as I begin to develop it, I become more aware of why that idea is important to me. And then, especially afterwards, then it all starts fitting together why something happened. But at the time that it's going on, the drawings are the manifestations of where the project is at. I'll put it down because all of a sudden this development becomes important, that development becomes important. You know, I think it's for that reason that I've had a very difficult time now with the scale pieces, in that I'm very far behind. It would be nice if I could subcontract some of this work out. I know that's the way it's done, but I'm afraid of losing a kind of control because I know that when I work out the models, when I work out the initial ideas, I know that for me to really make that piece work, it somehow has to go through this process, and I don't, you know, I mean, that's just the way it's been working.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah, I can't see you ever becoming part of an assembly line for sculpture, because I have a feeling you're changing it almost right up to the very end. Let me draw a very strange analogy. I don't even know if I'm going to tape this, but when I was in school as a kid we had what we called the Palmer Method of writing which is a way of getting the whole arm, or at least

from the elbow through the hands, into it. And I noticed that in your very large drawings, there's extraordinary kind of building up of rhythms, almost convulsive rhythm. And I sense somehow that that translates into the sculpture. If you did, if you continued to do smaller drawings I have a feeling that somehow the sculpture might be different. Is that a private theory that ought to just stay with me, or. . . . [laughs]

LUIS JIMENEZ: No.

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . does it work at all that way? I just, you know, it's like a dance, some of those large drawings. Very extraordinary.

LUIS JIMENEZ: You've got a, you've got a certain amount of insight. I think that. . . . But, again, I think it's funny. Yes, I prefer working on larger drawings to smaller drawings. But, you know, larger drawings can even mean. . . . I worked, for years, I worked on paper that was somewhere around twenty-seven and three-quarter inches by. . . . Well, it would have been a hundred centimeters by around thirty-nine and three-quarter inches. That was a size that enabled me to draw with my entire arm instead of drawing with my hand, because I draw differently when I draw with my entire arm than I do with my hand. And I love to get into the drawing. It's a sensual, it's a sensual thing for me. I enjoy it. I like the way the pencil feels on the paper. You know, so it's a real sensual kind of thing. I again get into it when I get into the clay. The clay is a very sensual material. And you're very, you're observant with what you're saying, because I have difficulty initially with either a drawing or with a sculpture until I begin to develop a system of relationships, and that's what I was trying to show when I showed that Sodbuster, the oxen, and I showed the shoulder of the oxen. That was a real breakthrough for me on those oxen, because I had been battling those oxen, and it wasn't until I began to develop the forms in that shoulder that I began to develop a system of relationships in the—you can call it—in the pattern of the clay, that I was, that was right, you know. And it was at that point that I could then start working through the whole thing. And so, I do the same thing with drawing; I have a system of relationships, although in the drawings I think it's probably the same. There's probably less changes than there are in the clay, and it's much easier to plug right into it. By the way, I always did poorly in the Palmer Method when I was in school.

PETER BERMINGHAM: I can tell from your signature that you did dreadful.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Good grief. [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: I wasn't inferring that you kept it with you. [laughs] I'd like to ask you one final question, which is, has mostly to do with some work I've seen in your drawings and your lithographs and not in your sculpture, and that is, would you like to do a kind of large group piece, like the Honky Tonk [1981], for example? Would you like to build an environment? Even if it was, say, a fairly modified piece like George Segal's Dance. I don't know if you've ever seen that circular group of figures which itself is taken from a Matisse painting. Have you ever wanted to try that? Or is it too expensive, is it too time-consuming, or do you see that as something you might like to try down the line?

LUIS JIMENEZ: I wanted to work within the whole notion of making some dancers, from the time that I did the, that I was doing the Youth Board dances. I used to go home and do drawings of the kids, and in fact I sold a lot of those out of my first shows. I don't have very many left, but I do have a few. So. . . . There's a lot of reasons for liking the dancers. I like the idea of relating pieces spatially without having them physically connected, and I like, it's, I like the situation that a dance sets up, in terms of those relationships. I've tried, the Honky Tonk obviously was an attempt to get people to think along those lines, to think, "Oh boy, wouldn't that be a great piece to commission," because

already that's too expensive for me to do and finance on my own. I have to convince somebody else that they want to do it. And, you know, that's something else that I just want to make a point about, and that is that every one of these pieces that I'm doing for a community is really one of those pieces I really want to make for myself.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right.

LUIS JIMENEZ: It's just that I have to somehow find the marriage of community and, you know, and. . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: Money.

LUIS JIMENEZ: . . . you know, and the financial backing to do it. And, you know, and respect the community. I'm obviously not going to try to do something for a community that isn't going to work. I mean, I hope not; I'm trying not to. But going back to the dance piece, I went to Omaha, Nebraska, actually, and did a preliminary piece that was the followup to the Honky Tonk pieces, and it was made, cut out of duraply, and it's twelve feet by twenty feet, and it's done with oil paint, it's painted with oil paint and with oil sticks, and it's really a much more developed piece than the Honky Tonk. It hasn't been shown as much. It's called Omaha Barn Dance. The notion was that I thought, "Boy, if anybody's going to finance building a barn-dance piece, Omaha is." And they were working with, there was a kind of framework that kind of helped tie them together, which was the half- finished barn, you know, the posts and the lintels, which I think are just really pretty nice in those old barns, you know, just as architectural elements, before the barn has been covered. And so I have some of those posts and lintels up, and then I have the figures that are working in there, and then I have the, you know, the musicians. And in that area they used accordions a lot; they had a lot of Bohemians that played for the barn dances. I spent time there and I was, you know, I thought that one was going to go. It didn't go, but, sure, one of these days I would like to do a dance piece, but it's going to take a community that, you know, wants to do it. Now, what happened with the Honky Tonk, though, was that initially the idea was to make a barn dance. With the Honky Tonk though I was using the dancers again now as a play on doing a self- portrait, and so I really put them in this dive, and I really. . . . I say, "them." They were people that were all important to my life at the time. And I put myself in there. Now were I going to, and if I was going to do a public piece for a particular place, I'm not sure that I would portray it as a Honky-tonk scene; I think as a public piece it would become something else.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Honky tonk is very different from a barn dance, though. The barn dance is family living; honky tonk is. . . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: That's why I said it was the. . . .

PETER BERMINGHAM: . . . yeah, right, or the underground \_\_\_\_\_. Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: Honky tonk's full of rejects, you know.

PETER BERMINGHAM: [laughs] Well, you know, artists, a lot of artists feel that way about themselves, sometimes. Luis, I guess we'll have to end it here. I thank you a great deal for all of this, and hope we can have a sequel real soon. Is there anything more that you'd like to put on here, or. . .

LUIS JIMENEZ: I'd just like to say a couple of words here.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Okay, sure.

LUIS JIMENEZ: One of the things is that you did ask me, and I did answer briefly, and I'll answer again for the tape. You did ask me briefly about where the work was going, and I will say that it's really been very nice for me because I can look at my old journals from when I first went to New York, and I remember setting my goals then, and feeling that what I really wanted to do was to make public pieces eventually. But I felt that I had to establish myself as an artist first, and I tried to do that in those New York years, which are '66 to '71.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Um hmm.

LUIS JIMENEZ: And then I really felt that I was going to come back out west and begin the public work. Now, in terms of my own goals it's taken me a lot longer to get those public pieces going than I ever thought it was going to take.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yeah.

LUIS JIMENEZ: But, in fact, right now that is what I'm doing, so in terms of what's down the line for me, I really envision it as being very much what I'm doing now although I don't think that I would ever stop showing in a gallery/museum context because I think that I also want to function with a kind of seriousness that is expected in a, you know, in serious art.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Yes, I understand.

LUIS JIMENEZ: I mean, that is the kind that is going to be shown in a gallery and in the museum, and that it's not, that, you know, I'm not some kind of, you know, commercial sculptor out there that is just making signs for communities, because I think that I'm trying to go beyond that with the work.

PETER BERMINGHAM: Right. Yeah, well, that's as far ahead perhaps as you want to look at this stage, anyway.

LUIS JIMENEZ: [laughs]

PETER BERMINGHAM: Thank you very much.  
[End of taping]

PETER BERMINGHAM: This is Peter Bermingham with a few concluding remarks about my interview with Luis Jimenez. The interview took place on December, most of it, on December 15, 1985, in my office at the University of Arizona Museum of Art. The last 25 minutes or so took place on the 17th of December in the same location. Presently, Luis is in the midst of moving his studio, moving all of his worldly goods—in Tucson at any rate—back to his major studio in Hondo, New Mexico, where he will be spending most of the next six months catching up on a number of major projects of his. A recent injury to his leg has forced him off his feet for a good part of the day, and although that's a rare state for Luis to be in, it was an advantage to me since sitting in the office for three hours with his leg propped up was on the whole a good thing for him. I was first introduced to Luis Jimenez's art in an exhibition I helped organize about ten years ago, called "Roots and Visions," which opened here in Tucson, actually, at the Tucson Museum of Art, and then proceeded on to the National Collection of Fine Arts, as it was known then, and then to various other parts of the country. I recall quite a few tremblings amongst the staff at the National Collection concerning the inclusion of Luis's Man on Fire which is a large, red, rather aggressive piece of fiberglass sculpture, and apparently those misgivings were quickly done away with when they saw it in the flesh since the National Collection bought that piece a few years later. Ironically, my association with Luis, which still did include a personal meeting, continued when I arrived in Tucson in September of 1978.



I noted a mild brouhaha here at the Community Center downtown regarding a piece called, needless to say, *Man on Fire*, which was located at the time at the Little Theater in the Community Center. The piece was owned by a collector and art dealer here in town, and I immediately tried to have the collector donate it to the Museum of Art. I wasn't very successful. He wound up trading it to someone up in Scottsdale, and from that someone in Scottsdale Museum purchased the piece a few years ago. I think the interview certainly reveals Luis to be a very giving, honest, blunt individual. He manages to be good-humored and blunt; in fact, sometimes within the same sentence. Among the thousands of Hispanic/Chicano artists in this country who are either trying to enter or trying to avoid the mainstream of American contemporary art, I think Luis Jimenez is perhaps the one who, as a model, serves to demonstrate ways that an artist, specifically with a kind of regional and ethnic pride can retain that pride at the same time that he develops his art in ways that accommodate a wider sphere of thought. Luis is an extremely intelligent individual, one whose background is as mixed as some of the metaphors that he occasionally applies to his sculpture. He is, as an artist, almost squarely at mid-career, I think. He has an extraordinary amount of technical experience behind him, and I think the future will continue to make him more and more, not just a resource to the American-Hispanic community, but something of a natural resource for the whole country at large. He tells us a great deal about ourselves and the culture which, for better or for worse, we are creating for ourselves in this century, because Luis is right down there amongst it, in the midst, looking and thinking. He's someone definitely to be watched in the years to come. A little postscript on the interview itself, for the unfortunate transcriber. I can't think of too many moments during the interview where we have mispronunciations and the like, but a couple do come to mind. One is my reference on one or two occasions to a piece called *Southwest Pieta*, which I refer to as *American Pieta*. Another one is my occasional use of the title, *Man of Fire*, instead of *Man on Fire*. Beyond that, I'm quite prepared to help you along if you get to any particular points of difficulty. Good luck.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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