



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Millard Sheets,  
1986 October-1988 July

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Millard Sheets on October 28, 1986. The interview was conducted at Millard Sheet's home in Gualala, California by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

MS: MILLARD SHEETS

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

[Tape 1, side A—30-minute tape sides]

PK: . . . to have to listen to our experiments there. We want to have a more dignified. . . . Gee, this is fun. I haven't done this in a while. I used to do this all the time.

MS: Yes, yes.

PK: But I've been having other people do it.

MS: Yeah.

PK: And now this keeps me honest.

MS: (chuckles)

PK: All right, I think that that's good.

[Interruption in taping; the previous is probably a warmup before the interview—Ed.]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a taped interview with Millard Sheets at his home in Gualala, California, on the southernmost part of the Mendocino coast, a place appropriately and colorfully called Barking Rocks. The date is October 28, 1986. Paul Karlstrom is the interviewer.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: Well, Millard, it's a great pleasure to be here at last. We've, I think, talked about doing an interview for the archives—oh my, I don't know, it must have been, what did we decide, it must six, seven years ago, when I was up here the first time. Not quite sure. And now, we have occasion to do so, and I think it's relevant that I say why we're here at this time. It's in connection with these wonderful scrapbooks, Reginald Johnson scrapbooks, that you, that came into your possession by a rather remarkable set of circumstances. And you dutifully called us, contacted the archives. And then back in July, I think it was, I came up here, and we took the scrapbooks, which are marvelous books that deal with Southern, clippings from Southern, dealing with Southern California art history, took them back and had them microfilmed, and we're now returning them. The reason I mention this is because I think these scrapbooks provide information that, until recently, has been extremely difficult to come by—and that is information dealing with the art history of an important region in this country, the region being Southern California. Especially difficult to find information on earlier period[s], say the first half of the century, what now many younger art historians—sort of [revisionist, provisionist] art historians—are looking at as far more interesting period and place than they had realized.

You, of course, were very much part of that. And what I'm hoping to achieve today and tomorrow—and whatever other days are necessary to do this—in interview, is to gather some of your, have the benefit of some of your direct and personal experience in Southern California as a native-born who chose to go into the field of art, and then made an enormous contribution to the art history of that area.

What I would like to do, if we may, is start with some basic biographical information. Now, it's been covered elsewhere, as we've discussed before. There are at least two monographs that I know of, and perhaps more, that detail your career and life—which I must say right now is a varied career, a complex career, because you've been involved in so many things, and all of them successfully. Nonetheless, I think that it's important to start out our discussions here, which will result in perhaps a little special insight into the art world of Southern California, with a description of the source—[meaning, mainly, namely] you. So perhaps we could lay in some of this basic biographical information: where you were born, some of your early experiences—always keeping in mind that we're interested primarily here in information that then leads on into the art, your own career as an artist.

MS: Well, that's fair enough, and I think that will easy to do in a very fairly small number of words.

PK: Shorter than the introduction, right?

MS: (chuckles) No. Personally, I'm delighted that you're here, and I particularly appreciate your being here. I've enjoyed meeting you, and I've had a very good sense of what this whole project is about, and I've always had the highest respect for it.

Starting out with the first question you ask, I was born in Pomona, California. 1907. Unfortunately, and tragically, my mother died when I was born. My father was so shaken up by her death that I seemed to automatically. . . . I was given the opportunity, which I now cherish very deeply, to live with my mother's father and mother—my grandfather and grandmother—who fortunately were only 39 and 40 when I was born. And they had two daughters still at home, one about ten and one about fourteen. And so I grew up in a fairly normal family. I was spoiled from beginning to end because my father [referring to grandfather; may have called his grandfather father—Ed.] had four granddaughters. In those days a man thought he had to have a son. And he was a great horseman and he used to bring horses from Illinois out to let them race against Lucky [Baldwin] in the old Santa Anita track in 1890. So I grew up with horses, and was involved in the breeding of. . . . He had both show horses and thoroughbred race horses. So my life was more than normal. I had an exciting relationship between my granddad and myself because of the fact that he'd never had a son. The first exciting part was that I got my first pony when—I think I was three and a half. And when I was four and a half I got a bigger one, and when I was six I got a horse.

PK: Sort of like bicycles for other kids.

MS: Yeah, that's right. And for years and years, we got up at six o'clock in the morning and go riding, come home, take showers, have breakfast, he'd go to his office, and I'd go to school. So it was a kind of a built-in thing in my life, and I was very actively involved with both my grandfather and grandmother who couldn't have been more wonderful.

In fact, I know now that if I'd lived with father, my life probably would never, I never would have been involved as an artist because he didn't really think that I should go to art school instead of college when the final time came.

And one of the other advantages and strong influences was that the elder of the two girls that was still at home did a lot of free-hand drawing just for fun—doodling and that kind of thing—and she was sort of my built-in babysitter in the early days of my life, and she started me out drawing at about three and a half to four years old. She'd give me subjects to do in the morning, and that took care of me for the day! And then as a result of that, was that when I went to kindergarten, everybody started talking about talent. Well, of course I didn't know what they meant, and I know I didn't have any real talent, but I just had had more experience than most of the other kindergarten people. By the time I was in second grade, the teacher let me draw the history on the blackboards all around the room. So I was kept very busy illustrating what were talking about and reading in school. And I probably didn't get as much out of the studies as I would have, but I got an awful lot of experience in drawing. (chuckles)

PK: Why do you feel that not living with your father—or let me put it in a different way—living with your grandparents provided this opportunity, opened up the possibility of your becoming an artist, moving ahead and having a career like that?

MS: Well, first, this aunt who kept me drawing—for whatever reasons, her own or whatnot—was a very important thing because I did take it seriously, not with any thought that I was headed toward a profession, but I loved to do it so much. And I also had all these horses and things that I loved to sketch. And each year that, as I moved up in grades, I always seemed so much ahead of the others in the class, that this pressure. . . . It never occurred to me, by the time I was about nine, that I would ever be anything but an artist.

PK: But you obviously, or apparently, received a certain amount of encouragement then from your surrogate parents.

MS: Yes. They encouraged me to do everything I wanted to do. That's why I said I was so spoiled from the very beginning. In fact, when I, as I grew up and lived with continuously, my father always said when I was ready to go to college he would send me to college, anywhere I wanted to go. And when I finally reached the point, which I probably shouldn't be talking about yet, that I wanted to go to an art school instead of college, he was [so, sort of] taken aback and shook up by the idea of my being artist. He said, "Well, that's why I wouldn't send you to an art school, and I'll send you to any college in the United States." And he was a wonderful man, and we were very close in most every way, and I think unfortunately he didn't have the kind of imagination and a sense of excitement about the kind of thing that I was interested in. He was one of the fairest men I have ever met and one of the nicest men, but I never would have been able if I had lived with him and his second wife, I never would have had the kind of support to do these things.

PK: What was the nature of your contact with art before—well, before you went on to art school, before you made that decision? Say, through high school—the younger years through high school.

MS: I think in answer to that I have to explain the fact that Pomona and the area of Southern California probably had less real reason to interest anyone in being an artist. There were no books. There were no museums. There were no exhibitions. None of the things that young people take for granted today; they simply didn't exist. It wasn't till I was a junior in high school, that I ever saw an art book.

PK: Really?

MS: And that was a book called *Art of the Ages*, which was then a kind of [stringy] little book that most high schools had, and that's about it. The teacher of art at that time had been the Latin teacher, and when Latin seemed to go by the wayside as a requirement, she became the art teacher. And a wonderful person, and she had a certain amount of enthusiasm but no real knowledge. The first artist that I ever really met was a teacher I had in junior high school, two or three years before the time I've been speaking of. She had studied art in college, and she had a rather typical art-college background, which in those days was anything but a professional artist's background. But she had enthusiasm and she was very supporting of all of us who were interested. Used to take us out and teach us how to observe things and how to feel about things, and I've always been very grateful of the fact that she entered my life.

PK: Who was that? Is she mentioned in your biography, in the monograph?

MS: Her name was Miss Dags.

PK: Dags.

MS: I don't remember her married name.

PK: D-a-g-s?

MS: D-a-g-g-s.

PK: Well, we'll give credit where credit is \_\_\_\_.

MS: And she was so wonderful with the class because she made, she didn't know enough to talk about such things as any ancient art or Greek art or any of the great moments in art, but she just, she believed that art was important to life, and that was the first experience I'd ever had with anyone that even referred to art as being important to life.

PK: So you wouldn't describe the Southern California of your youth as an environment, a particularly salubrious or encouraging environment, for the arts or for becoming an artist \_\_\_\_ young person.

MS: Not at that time. The L.A. museum did exist, but it was a four-way museum: history, art, and science. [What was the fourth?—Ed.] And the art was always the second-runner—or fourth-runner of the three areas. (chuckles) And they did have a permanent collection of a few good American—very good American paintings. And they occasionally had a regional exhibit.

But the first time I ever really became involved with a real artist was when I was sixteen and a half, I sent my first painting—I had been painting in oils since I was twelve—I sent my first painting to a professional jury at the Laguna Beach Art Gallery, which was run at that time completely by the artists of the region. They had about 25 to 30 very good professional painters, most of whom were in their sixties, seventies. And they ran this beautiful little art gallery that they supported. And there was one show a year that people outside of Laguna could send to, and so I sent this picture, and I was accepted for the first time in my life in this show when I was sixteen and a half.

PK: That's pretty good!

MS: And one of the most marvelous parts of that experience was the fact when I went down—as I could hardly wait to do, till the first Saturday after the exhibit opened and after I knew I had been accepted—to see my painting hanging, needless to say I was standing in front of my own painting, when a very quiet voice from behind me said, "Are you the young man that painted that picture?" I said, "Yessir." He said, "Well, I like that picture a lot." And he said, "I want you to do me a favor." He said, "My name is Clarence [Hinkle, Hinckle]." I found out later that he had just returned from five years in Europe, so he was the first really modern artist that I ever met, who knew everything about all the things that were going on in the post-Impressionistic world, and was an excellent, was a marvelous painter himself. And he said. . . . Well, I said, "Well, what is the favor, Mr. Hinkle?" "I want you to come down the first Saturday of every month and have lunch with me and my wife, and we'll talk about art." Well, you can't imagine what an opportunity that was and what an incredible thing for a man to take time to do just for a kid. We became very close friends, and we used to paint together quite often on short trips, and just the excitement of hearing about all these people I never heard of, and hearing about the way he talked about art, and then all these developments were going on, it was just, it was an incredible

experience—nothing that an average high school kid had an opportunity to enjoy.

And for that reason, I met all of those artists that lived in Laguna and had been. . . . They were the people who predated the period that I lived in by the number of years that I've already mentioned, but most of them had been trained in Europe or in New York, Philadelphia, New England, and moved out there because it was a very beautiful place to paint and lovely weather and all that kind of thing. And they created this little artists' center that was a real good art center. So many of the little art groups sometimes are just what they are: little art groups. Amateurs mostly. But these were all professionals. And by meeting them through Mr. Hinkle and having had my first picture ever accepted there, I'd created a little stir among them because they hadn't had many people that age accepted.

So I look back on that moment as being one of the most important moments of my life. I knew that there was no question about what I was going to do all the rest of my life.

PK: Already by then, you. . . .

MS: I knew it before, but I didn't know why, and then I knew why. Because the kind of lives they lived and the way they thought about what they were doing was so real and so different than I think art today is to most artists. And they were all so utterly warm and [helpful, healthful] and enthusiastic about my efforts. It was the kind of thing you can't buy; there's no way you can arrange it. It just happened.

And of course only a couple years later I finished high school and had my choice to go to any college, and made that decision to go to an art school. And here again, I think the fact that I grew up in Chouinard, which at that time was by far the best professional art school—though they did have some commercial art, the emphasis was on a fine background in the fine arts. Then if you chose to go in another direction that's fine. And I had three or four of the finest teachers that you could ever want to have in your life.

PK: Who do you feel was the most important influence?

MS: Well, the first that was most important was a man named Tolles Chamberlain. Now Tolles Chamberlain had—he was probably in his middle sixties—but he had won a Prix de Rome when he was in his thirties and had spent eight years in Rome, having the Prix de Rome extended that long. And the result was that he knew Egypt; he knew everything around the Mediterranean. He knew it well. He traveled to all these different areas while was there at the Rome Academy. Marvelous teacher in figure drawing. He was a very good painter in oil.

PK: Excuse me. Let me, while it occurs to me. . . . You mentioned your classes in figure drawing. Did you have at that time in Southern California nude models?

MS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

PK: So that battle had long ago been. . . .

MS: Long ago. There were two or three schools in Los Angeles and all of them were using models.

PK: Okay. So you would maybe describe the program there as very similar to art training program anywhere else, for instance in New York?

MS: Yes. Oh, yes.

PK: The curriculum would be very similar.

MS: It was very similar to what went on at the Art Students League or the National Academy—except I think it was, I think the people were, again, affected by the fact that there was so little here to create a certain attitude or to create a certain concern for styles and that kind of thing that has existed in other places.

PK: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about this. Could you expand on that a bit? How do feel that your teachers, whom obviously you admired, and maybe even some of the Laguna Beach crowd, that dealt with this, overcame this liability?

MS: Well, they overcame it I think by not having much in the way of art criticism in any of the newspapers or magazines, and they just painted how they felt and they painted what they loved, which was the country around them. And it was so different than today, where a student can go to a good university or good art school and they're taught style from the beginning, and there's certain techniques that a teacher likes, a certain part of the new world of art that the teacher likes, and they can grow up in complete ignorance of what I call the painting language. If you learn only through style, you don't learn the language at all. The language doesn't make an artist out of it; it gives you freedom, complete freedom, to become an artist and express who you are—if you understand the language.

PK: Are you talking about basic vocabulary or tools?

MS: That includes all of those things. Not just words to describe it, but the \_\_\_\_\_, the basic knowledge and structure, which I would always. . . .

PK: The grammar \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: . . . I would put down knowledge and structure \_\_\_\_\_ of drawing. The basic way light operates, how color is an absolute science and it's an intellectual process to learn it. Instead of saying it's all done by feeling.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Now that doesn't make an artist out of you. If you're a deadhead, you're going to be a deadhead. And you may be intellectual—and that is an intellectual side of being an artist—but I think it's a terribly important discipline that makes artists free. The more they know, the freer they become. And if you compare to—to today particularly—I see so many hundreds of young people who've wanted to become artists—really from inside are—at the end of five or six years, and even advanced degrees, and they can't, they just can't meet the pressure of what is necessary to know to operate as an artist. So either one or two things happens. They either quit, which is a terrible waste of all the time involved—and their spirit—or worse still, they teach what they were taught in the same limited way. I think the weakest thing about art today is art education, without any question.

PK: But you obviously feel that, despite the very obvious disadvantages of teaching art or studying art in Southern California at that time, that there were a number of really dedicated, knowledgeable teachers. . . .

MS: Very knowledgeable.

PK: . . . who had the experience of the broader world and were able then to give absolutely sound and solid instruction right in Los Angeles.

MS: Oh, absolutely. They were some marvelous teachers. And they were as at home in talking about the art of ancient Egypt or Greece or Rome. . . .

PK: So you got some art history as well.

MS: Oh, yes. Not as separate courses, but just every day in class. Particularly this wonderful Chamberlain would just erupt with excitement about something, and then the next day he'd come with fantastic reproductions in black and white that he had bought in Europe, and the whole class would just spend the day, and he'd just emote about these things. And it was the most real experience about the meaning of art, and how these [talents, towns] evolved always one on top of another, inevitably, because of the constant search for change and for society's needs. Because it wasn't until certainly long after the Renaissance that the churches gave up the [absolute \_\_\_\_\_] of art, it became a totally different thing in the nineteenth and twentieth century. But he was so equally appreciative of the differences of each of these great moments in art, and he could talk about contemporary painting, not with the same feeling that he had maybe for twelfth-, thirteenth-century Renaissance because that just happened to be his special love. But he had a very marvelous feeling in his own painting, a kind of a timeless quality that was not particularly produced by trying to show off, but just because he loved what he was doing. And he gave us all a tremendous sense of the importance of really learning structure, really learning these things, and not trying to be merely academic at all. They were not academic classes, in the restricted sense that so many people talk about—the academic versus a free new world. But he just believed that you should understand color, and you should understand how light and color have to be used in, not only in harmony, but in terms of how they \_\_\_\_\_ each other. And his approach to composition was so different than the kind of rules that you hear about today—don't put two spaces the same, and go on and on and on. His idea was that you should sit long enough to study the subject, whether it was a figure or landscape or a still life, until you saw what the essential lines were, what the essential shapes were, and not try to impose a regular style on everything you paint, but to get the quality from the subject. It's a totally different approach. Today, of course the great artists, you can always tell when it's their style; nobody wants to hide that. But you don't approach it through trying to arrive at a style. You approach it by getting so deeply concerned with a problem that you understand why no color is repeated—ever, ever—in a good painting. You can't find me one good painting, from any period, where there's an exact copy of the same, \_\_\_\_\_ two places are the same in color.

PK: Is the kind of thing that you were learning then as a student at Chouinard?

MS: I was learning the way to approach it. I didn't have enough sense to understand how important it was.

PK: I mean I was wondering if instructors like Chamberlain, for instance, would talk about this kind of [issue] in the way you are.

MS: He would talk about them, but it was more in an excited way, and he would along, and if you were painting a still—we had a back room at Chouinard, an old barn that about ten of us just hung [out—Ed.] in, always, and were painting, so it was kind of like a club—and he would come out and just in passing he'd stop and say, "You should warm that color," or "You should raise that value," or "You should. . . ." He'd give you good criticism. He was always right. But he didn't tell you why. He didn't just take his big hammer and hit you over the head at the same time he told you so you really understood it. And it took me twenty years, when I had been very successful as a painter—far too successful for what I was doing—to realize what I just told you, that no color is ever repeated exactly the same value, same color, in any great painting, no matter whether it's modern, whether it's ancient.

PK: What about modernism, your exposure to. . . . To back up a minute, you said of course it was limited, your exposure to art was limited, because there were not a number of reproductions available, you couldn't see the objects themselves, except a few examples, but did the teachers, did you feel that the teachers, in their teaching, opened your eyes a bit, or at least made you aware of the more recent developments.

MS: Oh, yes.

PK: Did you hear about Picasso, did you hear about Cubism, and this sort of thing?

MS: Oh, yes. See, that's the advantage of having met the first man, Hinkle, when I still was not even in high school. That's the first. . . .

[Tape 1, side B]

PK: Continuing an interview with Millard Sheets on October 28, 1986, this is cassette 1, side B. Millard, when the electricity went out, we were talking about your experience as a student at Chouinard in Los Angeles and the circumstances, the learning environment in Southern California at the time, and you were talking Hinkle, I believe, as an example of an artist with experience elsewhere, in the older art centers—or the real art centers, actually—experience in Europe, familiarity with modernism, and that some of this then was conveyed to you and to the other students. I'm very interested in learning firsthand from you, from somebody who was on the scene, what it was like being an art student in Southern California in the, what we're talking about, is the 1920s, in this case. I think, more specifically, how you viewed the local art world. Did you have a sense of something beyond your classroom and your teachers? Was there any feeling of a greater local art world, or for that matter, of a greater American art world?

MS: Well, certainly, absolutely. First through the teachers that I've been speaking who had very strong feelings not only about the kind of art that they were involved with, but art that they had been associated with in New York, Philadelphia. I heard about Bellows way back when I was about twelve or thirteen years old.

PK: Really?

MS: Oh, yeah. George Bellows was my. . . . He was my saint for—still is to a degree—but for the first 35, 40 years of my life.

PK: Why was that? That's very interesting.

MS: Well, now let me go back to one step again where someone changed my whole life. When I was about ten, I found out that a lady living just down a couple of blocks on the same street I did in Pomona was painting copies in oil. I discovered it because I was walking down the sidewalk one day and I saw her in a bay window—a real artist, I thought, painting. And I kind of slipped into the bushes and saw that she was painting a pretty good sized painting. She saw me and said, "Would you like to come in?" And I said, "I certainly would." And I went in and I was so excited to see a real painter working and—even though they were copies and copies of not very good copies—but she was a painter! She was pleased about my excitement. She said, "If you'll bring a quarter every Saturday, so I can buy the materials, I'll help you paint. I'll help you learn to paint." So I did that for about a year. And of course my copies were probably worse than hers, and the whole thing was pretty bad. But the Los Angeles County fair opened up at that time, and it was one of the biggest fairs in the country—it always has been.

PK: Wasn't some relative of yours founder. . . .

MS: My uncle was the first president and started the whole thing.

PK: Right.

MS: And he had as imagination as his brother, my father, didn't have. He just was so loaded. . . . He wrote marvelous poetry. He was a very exciting man, so many ways I couldn't hardly even begin to describe him. In

fact, he told me about the fact there were going to be two art shows, an original art show and copies. So I couldn't wait to send my little copy of Lake Kilarney to the show, and couldn't believe it when I read in the newspaper that I had won first prize for landscape, a three-dollar prize. So I went out the next morning, which was Saturday morning, to see the show. Here again, I'm standing in front of my masterpiece, when a [firm] very cranky voice behind me, "Did you paint that picture?" And I said, "Yessir." And he grabbed me by the collar from in back, and dragged me across a—and this was in a tent, by the way—across a little space and into a little private office that had been built inside this tent, and I never heard anyone really take after anyone like he did after me. He stood up in front of me, that was after pushing me down in a chair, "Don't you ever make another copy as long as live. You absolutely must never do that again." And he just harangued me for about twenty minutes. Scared the hell out of me. When he finally finished, he said, "Now do you understand you don't do this kind of thing?" And I said, "Yessir." He said, "You go out and you paint, outdoors. You paint still life. You do anything except copy. And you have to draw." And again, it almost sounds like a fake story, but he said the same thing that Mr.—the man in Laguna. . . .

PK: Oh, Hinkle.

MS: . . . Hinkle said. "All right, now young man, I want you to come to my studio the first Saturday"—it was exactly the same word—this was at nine o'clock in the morning—with the paintings that you've done that are original. We'll talk about them. It turned out that he had been a student of Robert [Enright]. George Bellows was his closest friend in the class. And when he, later when I got to him and he told me about these things, he just, it just, you can't believe what an effect it had upon me. He talked about all the better painters. He knew them all. And he had been \_\_\_\_\_ murals and things like that for most of his life and finally came to near Pomona and bought a big Orange ranch to retire, and my uncle heard about and thought well, "This is the kind of guy who ought to run the art department." So all those. . . . I spent two years going to his house first just to have criticism, and then he and his wife and then he and his wife and I would go on trips, weekends and the summer, sometimes for a week or two at a time, and we'd paint together. Now he was not a great painter, but he was a marvelous stimulus and a wonderful person to get somebody excited. Boy, I really got excited. So I knew about these people, though I didn't see their work and wasn't able to. . . .

PK: But he would talk about it?

MS: He would talk about it.

PK: And what was his name again? Did we get that?

MS: No. His name was Theodore B. Modra.

PK: Modra.

MS: M-o-d-r-a. And then, the next thing that really happened along the \_\_\_\_\_ was after Mr. Hatfield told me he wanted to handle my work, which scared the hell out of me. . . . I didn't imagine good art dealer would want to handle my work. I was about 20. I realized very quickly that he not only carried some fairly good California painters, but that he had Matisse, he had Picasso, he had—oh, one of my favorites—Braque. He had paintings like that, and he began to show them to me. So I was really still in art school when I got to see some of these originals myself, though there were no galleries showing these things—I mean, no public galleries—and he had just a few that he would buy and resell. And unfortunately, most of the art students didn't even have that advantage.

PK: That's what I was going to ask you, because obviously one of the biggest disadvantages of studying art in the area at the time—frankly until not that long ago—was the scarcity of, you know, breadth of examples of works of art.

MS: But. . . .

PK: It sounds to me as if, for those of you who were lucky enough, that in a few galleries, in the hands of a few dealers, there were some examples that \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: But I think this accounts for the fact that a certain—I hate the word "school," but they call it that all the time, so I'm just repeating it, not because I really believe in it as an important school—but I think that's the reason that there was so much. . . . It was naive. It was just. . . . Everybody painted what they loved, and they weren't involved with styles. For instance, watercolor styles today, and watercolor workshops, and all this teaching, all the teaching that goes on, all they tell you is how to make a watercolor. It wants to be wet, and it wants to be once over, and then all the rest of it. And all that kind of stuff is just a great big wall between you and discovering how unlimited watercolor painting is. You can do anything in watercolor you can do in any other medium. And not a thing in the world. We grew up in an absolutely unspoiled way. And maybe we weren't too smart, but at least we just did what we were.



PK: So your instruction, to a certain extent, for those first years, was a matter of accident, in a way, or a good karma, perhaps you would say. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . until you found yourself—or maybe including when you found yourself at Chouinard. What were the other options in Southern California at that time? Were there other art schools?

MS: Yes, there were three in Los Angeles.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And they were all. . . .

PK: What were they?

MS: One was Otis Art Institute, that much, much later I became director of.

PK: Uh huh, we'll talk about that later.

MS: [A million, Many] years later. Another was a school that since has long since disappeared, and then of course there have been other schools since then have sprung it.

PK: What was the one that disappeared? It was called the. . . .

MS: It was called the California something-or-other. In Los Angeles. There was another one called the California something up in San Francisco. This was California. . . . [Los Angeles Art Institute, see later discussion—Ed.]

PK: Art Association?

MS: No.

PK: Oh well, don't worry about it.

MS: I'll think of it. In fact, I almost went there, and it shows again how a small little string of things would hang on. I went to. . . . I talked to two or three people, and Modra particularly thought I should go to this other school that disappeared later. I went in with another boy from Pomona and we had to ride the red cars to get there, and we went to the school to sign up. We had the tuition money to pay and to start school the next week. I don't know yet what it was that kept me from signing up. And my friend said he'd like to sign on, and I said, "Well, let's just wait on it." We got out of there and we walked fourteen blocks to where Chouinard School was located—which wasn't very far in big city like Los Angeles, but it was far if you. . . .

PK: Had to walk it.

MS: . . . had to take the car back in a few minutes to Pomona. And the minute I walked in Chouinard, I knew that's where I wanted to go to school. No question in the world. Just instant.

PK: Why was that?

MS: There was a totally different feeling there. In fact I think I was never more startled in my life than when I walked in, they just walked me. . . . They walked me, when they were showing me the school, into a life class. I'd never seen a nude woman before. And it wasn't that, it was just the way they talked about the school. There was an assistant to Miss Chouinard called Miss Patterson who was just marvelous. And then I met Chamberlain. And I knew before I got to the front office that's where I wanted to go to school. And then so did the other boy. And we just never regretted it because that school should be alive today as the center, it should be the art school and the Disney school, the Cal Arts [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.]. Disney got all of his. . . . All of his early animators came from Chouinard. There are some of my students and others.

PK: Well, it is. I mean, Chouinard is the, basically absorbed by Cal Arts, isn't it?

MS: No.

PK: No?

MS: That's what they planned to do, but it was. . . . I was on the board and I regret everything that happened in that whole thing.

PK: Yeah, we'll have to talk about that later, because that's. . . .

MS: Yeah. That's \_\_\_\_\_. . . .

PK: That's an important part of history.

MS: That's one of the most important parts that I can tell you what honestly happened.

PK: We will, I will make a note of that. By the way, the name of the other school that didn't have the pleasure of you as a student was the Los Angeles Art Institute, is what I've found.

MS: Oh? No, Los Angeles. . . .

PK: What it says in your book, anyway.

MS: Well, maybe it was the Los Angeles. . . . Yes, I guess it was.

PK: Let's see, where were we now? I'm beginning to get a picture, thanks to you, of what it was like being a student there at the time. I think there was more, a little more to my question, my initial question, when we started this side of the tape, to try to make it more specific. As a student, how did you view yourself? How did you see yourself within this new and exciting art world? How did you see the future for yourself? Obviously when a student chooses a course of study, whether it's an artist or anybody else, there's an idea of some goals and what it will mean, what it will be like to realize that.

MS: Well, I knew I wanted to be a painter. I didn't have any desire to do, you know, stage or costume or any of those things, or even advertising. I knew enough to know then that if you knew enough about the language of art and some of things came up where you might have to do them you could do them. Whereas a lot of people just started out as an artist, as an industrial designer or an advertising artist, costume designer, and so on. I knew that wasn't for me. I thought I wanted to be a total painter, the best I could. So I never questioned, never worried about it. And I think the general body of students, other than those who took the specific courses to [chart that] felt that way at Chouinard. It was in no. . . . And it was not a question of whether they would find a place. None of us worried about that.

PK: You mean you didn't really think ahead to employment opportunities or career, in that sense.

MS: I thought of it as a career, but I didn't think in terms of how it was going to be worked out. [Not me.]

PK: Well, yeah, that's what I mean. And so it was a commitment to an activity and maybe a way of life? Am I. . . .

MS: Yes, absolutely. And I grew up fortunately with a wonderful bunch of students, who've been my closest friends all my life, who have done extremely well on the same basis of just starting out as painters.

PK: Who were some of them? Well, you've mentioned a few names. We'll talk about them later, of course.

MS: Phil [Dyke].

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Oh, God, I could give you a list, on and on.

PK: Well, the main ones, the closest ones to you.

MS: Ben Messick. Phil Paradise. And another dozen that I went to school with, and then, see, what happened again I never dreamed would happen.

PK: Yeah.

MS: After I'd been in school exactly a year and a half, Mrs. Chouinard called me in her office one day. And I, if you could, I was so afraid of my own voice, I was very shy.

PK: I don't believe it. [said with a smile—Trans.]

MS: It's true. I really was very, very shy. She called me into her office—and the first year that I was at Chouinard, to help pay for my tuition, I built lockers. I must have built two hundred lockers for students.

PK: What do you mean, you built lockers? How do you do that?

MS: Built them out of wood. And they'd have, you know, padlocks and they'd have their own locker.

PK: You mean, you helped pay your tuition that way?

MS: Yeah. My dad, you see, at the last minute, said he wouldn't do anything about that.

PK: I thought that your uncle or somebody. . . .

MS: And I borrowed, but then I had to not only pay for tuition but I had to ride the red car every day and paint and lunches and that kind of thing. So I was just, I just barely paid the tuition money—or most of it. I had an uncle who loaned me the money. And then I got acquainted with Mrs. Chouinard very early, and I don't remember—I know the reason why. She had to go to San Francisco to some big thing at the, oh, the Palace [of, or] the Legion Museum. There was a big art exhibit, and the best schools in the country were represented. And she wanted me to drive her up to San Francisco for the exhibit, in my first year. We became very close friends. So when she called me in at just the beginning of the second semester of the second year, she said, "I have a job for you." I thought she was going to tell to build some more lockers. (chuckles) And I said, "Well, fine. How many do you want?" She said, "I don't want any lockers," she said, "I want you to teach a watercolor class." Now I was scared of my own voice; I really was.

PK: You had only been a student at that point, what? Two years?

MS: A year and one semester. And the only reason that I started painting a watercolor was one day I came in from outdoors with a great, big canvas. I used to take up as 40 by 50 inches outdoors. And I'd take easels, and rocks to hold the easel in place so the wind wouldn't blow it down. And I came in with all this heavy equipment from painting outdoors one morning, when Chamberlain saw me bring all this stuff in and I said. . . . That was a bird unfortunately.

PK: Yeah.

MS: I don't think it killed him, because he just kind of bounced a little sideways.

PK: We'll say for the sake of the transcriber that this is real-life, right now, what we're talking about. A bird crashed into a window.

MS: Yeah. (chuckles)

PK: This isn't something that happened at Chouinard.

MS: So she said, "I want you to. . . ." Oh, when I was carrying this heavy equipment in, he said, "Why do you paint in oil outdoors," he says. "Why don't you paint in watercolor?" I said, "How the hell do you paint in watercolor?" Nobody was painting in watercolor, not anybody. He told me that when he was in Rome he used to carry little tiny pads around and do architectural sketches. And he did beautiful little paintings. I hadn't even seen any of those. And there were only nine people that started the California Watercolor Society, and they started it about the first year that I was in art school. I became the thirteenth member. But when. . . . He told me about this. I said, "Well, how do you paint in it?" He says, "Well, you get paper, you get paints, you take a big bottle of water with you, and you sit and you paint."

PK: Who was this again?

MS: That was Chamberlain.

PK: This was Chamberlain.

MS: So. . . . And brushes. And so I bought these things. I just started to paint. I got so excited about, and I got Phil Dyke started, because I had a car that a friend of mine loaned me that I did other things for, and Phil and I would go painting together, and Phil Paradise. We went out to the desert two or three times. And so they all kind of—not they all, but four or five of them—started painting watercolors. And she said, "We have so many requests from students to study watercolor with you." So "I couldn't do it. It'd just scare me to death." She said, "No, you must do it." And I started in, and inside of about three weeks I had 35 students. And I. . . . Then the next year, though I was still going to school, I was teaching two classes of watercolor. And that developed that whole group all of a sudden. Students that had had pretty good training in drawing and background even in oil started painting watercolor. That's what is the nucleus of this whole thing that they call the California School.

PK: So, obviously, from what you say, there was no course in watercolor at Chouinard or any of the other schools.

MS: Hm mm.

PK: In fact I wonder if it was. . . . I don't happen to know. I wonder if it was taught elsewhere?

MS: Oh, it was taught in the east.

PK: Was it?

MS: \_\_\_\_\_ Pennsylvania Academy.

PK: Um hmm. Separate courses?

MS: Yeah, but not, they weren't heavily. . . . We developed faster out here. That's why the California painters had so much influence on the east. There's no doubt about that.

PK: Yeah, that's what I was wondering. Because if watercolor in the east at that same time had been elevated to a position where it called for a separate course of its own one would expect then that it would have been treated a little bit more independently, maybe, than it seemed to be.

MS: There were some awfully good watercolor painters, of course, at that time. Such little painters as Winslow Homer and. . . . [said tongue in cheek—Trans.]

PK: Right. (laughs)

MS: There were some marvelous painters, but they didn't teach.

PK: I don't think he ever taught, though.

MS: They never did teach. And that's I think they keep calling it the California Watercolor School. Because it grew so fast. And then this, and now this first what they called, what we called the California Watercolor Society, which was in Los Angeles—they didn't have any in San Francisco or anywhere else—the first nine or ten members who started this were all eastern painters who had moved to the west and did paint watercolors. And I think I was the second or third, maybe fourth—I don't [keep track—Ed.]—person outside of the original group invited to join that group. And then in twenty minutes my students were joining the thing. So in five, ten years, it just went so fast you couldn't believe it.

PK: Well, maybe we ought to just jump into it here, break my artfully designed biographical section—for a moment anyway, because I know we'll be coming back to it—but one of the, one of your important contributions, and one of your, I think, important activities has been in association with this so-called California School, which has very specific meaning. And since we're now referring to it, maybe you could briefly tell me just what that means to you, how you would describe this group and this activity.

MS: Well, within a very short time, certainly within. . . . From the first time we've been talking about, within ten years there were probably ten watercolor societies in different parts of California.

PK: All growing out of the \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: All growing out of the original. In fact, I was involved with almost every one of them in helping them get started. And I used to do a lot of jurying, a lot of teaching, things to stir them up. But I think the way I can explain it is that as a medium it was, I think it's the easiest medium to learn of all painting media. Now, lots of people write long books and how all kinds of \_\_\_\_\_ about how difficult it is because you can't retouch it, you can't. . . . That's all bullshit. You can do anything in the world with watercolor, including washing right down to the white paper and start over again—if you know what you're doing, and you're using the right kind of paints and paper. They make a mystery out of it. They try to make a great, big sober mystery that's very difficult to learn, very difficult. And, well, these books on watercolor technique just do all the wrong things, as far as I'm concerned. They try to teach you how to put on a wash. Well, you learn in the first five minutes, if you've got any sense, that water doesn't run uphill. That you can't put [\_\_\_\_ tin, certain] color right on top of a white wash without getting into trouble, unless that's an effect you want, and lots of times you want that. But I feel guilty as hell that for the first ten years that I taught painting—watercolor, watercolor painting—I did all the wrong things, that I'm describing. I taught what I knew about painting, not realizing that what you have to teach is that it's your mind that's involved, not your eye.

PK: You mean you were teaching technique?

MS: Teaching technique, which I didn't learn from anybody else, but I was teaching what I thought I knew. And I kind of feel sick to my stomach when I think of ever doing that even for ten years. But that's \_\_\_\_\_ so it's done today.

PK: Well, on the other hand, if they were taking, such students were taking watercolor from you, at least they were getting apparently a new technique, and these other sort of loftier things that you felt you were neglecting, presumably they were getting elsewhere from their other teachers.

MS: Yeah.

PK: And if they can't somehow carry it from one place to another, I think they're in trouble. So I don't think you need to [feel too bad].

MS: Well, that's the way it was, and. . . . But there was so much enthusiasm. Because watercolor is fresh and it is a medium that can be absolutely magical if you, if you've got an idea or a spirit that's important rather than handling the medium. And I think that it. . . . It certainly didn't grow up as an amateur thing. It was done by damn good artists—oh, there's at least a hundred artists that fit into that first group. Some of them lived in. . . . Some of them had been painting for a long time in oil and just gave it up and took watercolor as the serious medium. And some of them had moved here from other parts and become involved with the fact that there was so much going on: exhibits, lectures, and all kinds of things.

PK: Let's, if we may, stop now. I have to change the tape, and then we'll pick that up.

[Tape 2, side A]

PK: Continuation of an interview with Millard Sheets on October 28, 1986. This is tape 2, side A. Millard, we were talking about. . . . We had jumped in already to one of our main subjects in this interview, which of course has to do with the California School, specifically the important role of watercolor within that school, within that movement, if you will, and you were favoring us with a description of how the school came about, talking a little bit about the origins of the California Watercolor Society and how it grew and spread. Let me ask you, just to get back into our subject, why—if there is a why—watercolor, why did it catch on in southern California, why California. Strictly by chance? Did it have something to do. . . .

MS: No, I think it goes back to that same idea that it was all new to California. There were no watercolor exhibits. There were no watercolor collections. And when a lot of people started to do it, it became an incestuous kind of thing. It just grew. And I began to send things back to the big exhibits at Pennsylvania and Chicago Art Institute. I won the second prize in the International Watercolor Show in Chicago. I think I was, oh, I don't remember exactly, but maybe 30. No, not that old, 28. And so a lot of these friends of mine and other watercolor painters who I didn't even know realized how important it was to send east, and it's when, and that's when the impact of this group was made on the east coast. And the critics were really more than lenient about the way they talked about the [Californian as] always something very new and fresh, and that kind of thing. Because it is true that there's more light out here and less atmosphere, except with a week like this week.

PK: Or an afternoon like this where the electricity's gone out. (chuckles) [Are you using a battery-operated tape recorder?—Trans.]

MS: Yeah. And I noticed that it was very hard for eastern watercolor painters to come to California and really paint what they see here. They use the same [code] and the same [chords] of color and value schemes, which again goes back to the idea that they were taught to see with their eye and not with their head.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: The eye cannot think. And you have to understand how to pitch a painting, just like on the keyboard of a piano. You've got the highest note way up here, and the lowest note down here. Now, on most music, you don't go from the bottom note to the top note. Well, the same thing in painting: You've got to find out how far you are from black up this way, and how far down you are from white here, and once you've set that range, you've got to be able to stay within it. And the same thing not in terms of values, but in terms of brilliance of color or intense or gray or whatever it is. You've got to learn to do that, know that, before you start, and that means looking, and looking and looking, and thinking what it is that makes up this particular problem. Once you make it up. . . . And then you've got to set those two ends and then not be careless and just start sticking something in and that color doesn't belong. A watercolor painting is very good at [dissuading, disallowing] you to do that, because the idea is that you don't work over, and it isn't a bad idea in the right sense, because you do think more about each value that you, before you paint on the paper. Oil painting you can scramble around and lower it or raise it without much trouble. But watercolor is a good discipline, is good discipline as a painting medium—if you don't abuse it, by just saying I'll just paint nice little washes that are colorful. But you have every single advantage in watercolor that you have in oil for getting depth and solidity or anything else. There's no difference.

PK: Let me try out an idea. Is it possible that because watercolor was basically a secondary—or has been considered a secondary medium—that in California where maybe the stakes weren't so high—after all, there weren't as many. . . . I mean, the National Academy wasn't here, there weren't the same major exhibitions. You [did, didn't], as far as I know, have the same pressure to produce major exhibition pieces for prizes. That in an environment such as that, it would be more possible to turn to a secondary medium; it didn't make that much difference.

MS: Right. In fact, the sales gallery never considered watercolor in any part of the world on the same level that

they would oil or—of course there wasn't acrylic in those days. The fact that now a Winslow Homer will sell for a million dollars, which not painters in oil can command—there are many who do—but it's no longer considered a secondary medium. And the people out here who had got involved in it weren't thinking about whether it was secondary or primary; they just got their feet wet and started to go.

PK: [Did, Didn't] it also have something to do with an interesting in recording the landscape? You said earlier, and of course we hear this all the time, but certain artists came out from the east, came from elsewhere, were taken with the environment, with the seashore, with the mountains, with the chaparral, I suppose—you name it. But that watercolor [was—Ed.] basically faster for painting on the spot and, although it's certainly possible to haul around your oil paints—I mean, that doesn't make much difference—but that that was a little bit more—doing an oil sketch was a little bit more of an investment in time. Was that at all part of it? In other words, a more portable, perhaps a more portable medium.

MS: Absolutely, there's no doubt about that. And not only that, but to build up an oil painting in a day or half-day, except in a superficial way, is much more difficult than to achieve full, rich [volume, body] of tone and arrive more quickly at design and all the rest of it. It's a better medium for that. But that doesn't mean that I, in my mind, limit watercolor painting to that side of it, those sides of it. Those sides are important, but painting a watercolor in my studio, I'll spend as long as I would on a good oil painting. Now. But I'm working from a totally different point of view.

PK: In the old days, though, were most of you producing watercolors in the studio. . . .

MS: No.

PK: . . . or were they en plein air They were out in the. . . .

MS: Primarily outdoors.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: They were direct statements about what you could see [in society; inside]. And you could create almost any mood, easily. It's a good medium, and it's a medium that I think gives great help to any artist who wants to work seriously in oil or acrylic—or any other painting medium. I think an artist should be able to work in both, not just one or the other.

PK: Were you familiar with the. . . . We were just talking about Winslow Homer, I guess, when we were changing the tape. I was wondering if you and your colleagues at that time knew Homer's work, were familiar with him and perhaps a few other[s], maybe John Marin, you know, [Charles Ephraim—Ed.] Burchfield, a few others.

MS: Well, of course John Marin was a Johnny-come-lately as compared to Homer. That somebody here? [speaking about a sound he heard—Trans.]

PK: [whispers:] It's your grandson.

MS: Oh. Mary.

PK: It's. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

MS: Well, you see, it all happened so fast, in that I started school in 1925, art school. By about 1930 and to '35, these marvelous new things that were developing primarily in Europe began to, just began to show. [Back] in my gallery's—my dealer—the museum began to show. . . . Even things like Diego Rivera were pretty way out in those days, and he won the big prize in. . . . [phone rings] Oh, I'm sorry about that. He won the major prize in the big national show that they had at the L.A. museum, and that was a very shocking thing—what we called the Eucalyptus School, here in southern California, which I must say was the school that I grew up, but we never felt that it kept time with what was happening even with the rest of us. They had a certain thing they could do and do very well, but it was kind of a repeat performance. They had a certain late-afternoon sort of an atmosphere that they loved to [fly] on hills and mountains and eucalyptus trees—or the ocean. Oh, I was impressed, seeing this big show in Laguna a couple three weeks ago, to see how some of those things stand up.

PK: Oh right, yeah, that's. . . . I think that's worth mentioning. This is, you're talking about a show that actually still is on now; we're in 1986.

MS: Yeah, that's right.

PK: At Laguna, and what was it called?

MS: It was gathered to. . . . It was called the California Impressionists.

PK: That's right.

MS: And it was brought to celebrate the opening of the new museum in Laguna, and they did find—the woman that had charge of finding the pictures, and they have over a hundred paintings—she did find very good examples of the best of those painters.

PK: And you're talking about the so-called Eucalyptus. . . .

MS: And the early painters in Laguna. It was really to celebrate Laguna, and they had both. Most of those Eucalyptus painters, Eucalyptus School painters, belonged to the art association in Laguna and some of them even lived in Laguna. But they didn't represent the whole new verve of Hinkle, who was really a contemporary painter who had lived in Europe for five years, in Paris and in Holland. But they were very good technicians, and they did bring a certain kind of life into these early paintings. And I was pleased, and a little bit surprised, to see how good those things, some of those are.

PK: You just said, though, that you don't, you would not associate the California School, that group with which you were associated, with the earlier traditional California landscape school, the Eucalyptus School.

MS: No, no. Definitely not.

PK: Could you be more specific in explaining the important differences that you would site.

MS: I think the main difference is that all of our younger group were searching for knowledge and for more understanding of painting as a medium and as a work of art. I think some of the earlier school were primarily concerned in painting pictures that people liked, without too much worry or concern for art, but for just seeing something they liked, they were used to in a way; it was the sea and the mountains. Now, there certainly were exceptions to that, in the sense that they were much more talented and had more real aesthetic feeling than just the good technicians. There were both.

PK: But both groups were tied, in a sense, to locale, that there was, at least from what I've read, [in] both cases the flavor of place, feeling of place that distinguished both the Eucalyptus School and the California School, the mainly watercolor paintings. That much seems to be shared \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

MS: They had the in common, but I think that the younger group had much more involvement [in, than] just the place. I think they became more and more concerned with the fundamental problems of aesthetics and meaning of painting, although nobody really discussed it in that sense. In fact, I think it's something that took me a hell of a long time to know—that painting is necessary as a language in the same way that music or literature or architecture—they're all languages that they can't be exchanged one for the other. They're essential because it's only through these languages that some of the most important feelings and ideas of mankind can be communicated or formed. You know, there's no substitute for music. What it does to the human spirit is absolutely unique. It can't be supplanted by another art. Though they have similar things, similar qualities as they affect humans, they are totally different languages—painting or architecture or literature. And I don't think that we were even given an inkling to that idea when I went to school. That this is something that is important to humanity, to society. And if all arts were eliminated, there'd be about two basic languages left—[correcting to:] or two basic. . . . Sex and food would remain. . . .

PK: (chuckles)

MS: . . . if all the arts were excluded from society. And. . . .

PK: Well, those aren't bad, but that would be really. . . .

MS: They're not bad at all, and I wouldn't eliminate either one of them. [said with a smile—Ed.]

PK: (chuckles)

MS: But the idea is that instead of [seeing, thinking of] as, the arts as being something you happen to have an interest in them, or happen to have the money to support them, which was more or less the idea that I grew up on, and that was the way it was. It ain't true. The more you learn to speak these languages, the more you get out of life, the more, the greater depth and concern.

PK: You know, it's interesting; what you're saying now reminds me very much of what was said by another—now, I would have to say Los Angeles artist, British artist turned to Los Angeles—David Hockney, in an interview we were doing with him.

MS: Um hmm.

PK: And he was talking about art being trivialized and—I can't remember exactly how he led up to this—but basically saying that it can be trivialized and therefore become like jewelry.

MS: Yeah.

PK: And his point was that you can live without jewelry, but you can't live without art, and it just strikes me that this is very much. . . .

MS: Exactly. Exactly the same thing. That's exactly the way I feel about it. I think that people who really understand music, it's a richer language than those who just react to it and don't have a real knowledge of the structure of the language. But each one will appeal in a different way. I think painting is a more memorable art than music. Music just gets you right now and holds you, but it isn't something that you keep in your mind over—a piece of, a particular piece of music—oh, there are many that you do. But it's the difference between the instant reaction to music by almost anyone, or everyone, and those who really learn the real language of painting [probably meant to say "music."—Ed.]. It's a totally different kind of art. But in any case, these arts can communicate qualities and ideas that are otherwise utterly uncommunicable, which means you cut off a tremendous amount of knowledge and feeling and concern if you don't understand some one of these languages—at least to put it together, form it, and then communicate it.

PK: Do you feel then that you and your group, even from the earliest days, would have described as one of the goals, one of your goals, trying to investigate or achieve or explore the essence of art, that you were really concerned with medium, with painting—say, the essence of painting. Your subject matter then was as much, if not more than, some hills in Laguna, or something like that. The materials with which you were working, and the colors, the forms. . . .

MS: I think that slowly developed. I think that we were all really novices in the sense that we didn't know enough about great art to know these qualities, but the wider your knowledge of any one art becomes, then the more you begin to understand the purpose of it and then the meaning of it, which you don't when you're all involved with just even learning how to do the language. Some people never learn it.

PK: So you didn't sit around talking about these things, as we are now, at the earliest stages. But in retrospect, you still feel that is an attitude, perhaps, which distinguished your work from the Eucalyptus School.

MS: Yeah. Well, I think we did talk toward it, but I don't think we came to much in the way of a real philosophy.

PK: What about your relationship to modernism? Did you think of yourselves as a modern artists? Were you aware of what that meant, whatever it meant at the time.

MS: I think to a degree, but it didn't, it hadn't hit hard enough as a . . . We hadn't seen enough of it or knew enough about it to either accept it fully or reject it. I think that in my own case I realized that, very quickly that what was behind the part that I liked was the search toward abstraction. Which I discovered early in my thinking that all art, all painting that's representational must first have a fundamentally abstract concept to make it a painting. Just to reproduce something \_\_\_\_ on one side of the canvas and stop when you run out of canvas was not painting. It was \_\_\_\_ craftsmanship and then had, nice to be able to do it, but to be able to design something within a space was primarily an abstract concept—both in color, design, shapes, everything. And that's why I liked so much the work of, oh, a painter like—the one I mentioned a little while ago that was a still-life figure painter. Braque.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And to me, he is almost a perfect example of tying two things together. Not realism in the same sense that a guy with a special lens of the camera would think of realism, but everything he's based on—all of ideas, all of his paintings are based primarily upon some kind of representation. But he has the freedom and the ability to design his subjects in a completely abstract sense. And I don't think that's true of Picasso. I don't think that's true of a lot more of the post-Impressionists. I think Picasso's best work, not because I, just because it was realistic, but I think he was a deeper, [so] more of an important painter, when he was doing things that were half way and half way. I think. . . . I wouldn't give you a nickel for the last 35 or 40 years of his work, personally.

PK: Well, I don't think you're necessarily alone in that; there are others that feel that way, too.

MS: I don't mean that in any highfalutin way, or think I know more than Picasso. (chuckles) I don't suggest anything like that. I think he sold out. I love Matisse in the sense that when he had that big show in Philadelphia—which was a retrospective, about four years or five years before he died—the museum said, "We would like to have two hundred of your greatest paintings, selected by you, from any part of the world, and we will show them



as your choice of your lifetime work.” And they said, “We don’t care how much it costs.” And he at first was very excited and said, “Oh, that’d be wonderful.” And they added one other thing. They said, “We’re going to do what is virtually a book on this exhibit, and we want you to write the foreword.” And he agreed to that. They spent [a million, six hundred thousand dollars; Or \$1,600,000] on that show—in borrowing the pictures and insuring them and all the things that went into it. And of course, moving them. And down toward the very end, when it was just practically ready to open, they still hadn’t received a foreword to the catalogue. And they called him up, and they said, “Mr. Matisse, we need this now, because it has to, the press is all ready to run practically, and all the reproductions and everything else is finished, but we don’t have this introduction.” You probably already know this story, or heard it.

PK: I don’t.

MS: Have you?

PK: [shakes head no]

MS: All right, he said, “Okay, I’ll write to you.” In about a week, they got a letter, and he started out by saying, “I so deeply appreciate the honor of this exhibition, and particularly being a Frenchman knowing that it cost a million, six hundred thousand dollars,” said, “I just can’t believe that anyone would spend that kind of money on my paintings.” But he said, “In spite of all these good feelings, I think you and I have made a dreadful mistake to have this exhibition.” He said, “I have worked all of my life to make my work look childishly simple. I have sweat like a dog to do this, and it’s not going to be understood by young American painters. It’s going to try to. . . . We will be imposing an attempt at shorthand.” He said, “If I have my way, as I look at young French painters and European painters growing in the last thirty years, if I had my way, I wouldn’t allow one of them to use color for the first twenty years, till they understood nature.” Now there’s more truth in that than most of the things that have been written about modern art as far as I’m concerned. I think he’s a terrific painter. Who was it said—I think it was Picasso—said, “He swallowed the sun.” But I think there’s so much truth to that, that that style has become more important than anything else about painting. And most collectors today, who collect very modern art, they either choose names that are very well known, or they get trapped into some of these stylistic methods that they think are going to become famous and very valuable with time, no matter how, what the painting is. It’s just the reverse of what I think should happen to young people in their learning process.

PK: Good moment.

[Tape 2, side B]

PK: Having an interview with Millard Sheets, on October 28, 1986. This is tape 2, side B.

MS: Well, having taught in an art school, and gotten slightly over being tongue-tied, but still \_\_\_\_\_ I was in my world, I was asked to come out to Scripps College in Claremont to talk to the president and two or three members of the board about doing a mural in one of the main dining rooms. And I was excited because I was doing murals and a lot of designing by that time, and I had a very happy interview, and about two weeks later, the president called me and said, “We’re going to stand by as far as a mural for a short time, but we want you to come to Scripps and teach in September. I said, “I have never taught in college. I don’t know how to go about it.” And he said, “Well, we are convinced that. . . .

Female voice: Are you in the midst. . . .

[Interruption in taping, of course]

MS: And he said, “We’ll postpone the mural temporarily, but we want you to come out here in the fall and teach. I said, “My goodness, I wouldn’t know how to go about it.” And he said, “Well, we’re satisfied that you can do a good job, and we want you to come. The man that’s now the head of the department is going on a year’s sabbatical leave, to go get married and live in France this year.” And I said, “Well, I haven’t got, I’m so involved with all kinds of small murals and other things that I was doing, and painting, but I’d think about it, talk to my wife about it.” And finally she talked me into saying I would do it. Well, the first semester was—how they ever put up with me, God knows. I didn’t know anything about academic procedures. I knew nothing about all of the responsibilities of an advisor and all these things. But I thoroughly enjoyed the teaching part of it. And I kept hearing about a man called Hartley Alexander.

PK: Hardy Alexander.

MS: Hartley.

PK: Hartley Alexander.

MS: And finally I heard so much about him from faculty and from students and the president, I finally said, “Well, who in the hell is this guy? Where is he?” “Well, he’s on a sabbatical.” “Well, what’s he doing on a sabbatical?”

“He’s back in New York with Bertram Goodhue, the architect, who’s in charge of Radio City, Radio Center, and he’s telling the artist and the architects where they should have decoration, and what kind of decoration it should have, and what kind of artist should do it.” I said, “Well, how the hell would a philosopher be doing that?” And they said, “Well, if you knew Hartley, you’d understand.” But I felt in this childish mind a kind of aggravation about this guy, that he was going to tell artists—this philosopher—everything they should do in the way of decoration. But I only heard good things about him, nothing else. And finally, first faculty meeting in the second semester, I was sitting there listening to this same kind of what I felt stupid talk because it was so often taking (chuckles) the major part of the faculty meeting. And then, suddenly a little man that looked like an Iowa farmer to me, sitting across the way, started to talk. And I knew (chuckles) without being introduced that that was Hartley Alexander. It was the most un. . . . It was the most fantastic impact. He said in a matter of three or four minutes everything that these guys had been arguing about, only he gave the answers—affected the school a great deal. And I got to know him and he knew more about art than anybody I’ve ever known in the art world—by two to one. There wasn’t anything about art that he didn’t have the deepest sense of and feeling about. Without worrying himself about the technical side of it, he had a feeling of complete understanding about anything I’ve ever known, by anybody.

And we had no place to live when we went to Claremont, so I built a house, and we moved into it just about the time the second semester started. I started in early summer and went through January, building it. And one of the first things that happened, about two weeks after we’d moved in—we had practically no furniture; we just had enough to build the house—and one night the doorbell rang about eight o’clock and went to the door, and here was Hartley Alexander and his wife and three other full professors and their wives, with very lovely little housewarming things for a new house. Purely wonderful, sweet gesture on their part. Here was a not even a permanent professor, thinking I was going to be there one year. And we were so taken aback by this marvelous warmth that they just exuded that we made an agreement that the first party, dinner party, in that house was going to have that same group for dinner. So about three weeks later, we set up a night. Well, then they accepted to come. And then the French professor called me, and said (chuckles), “Millard, where’re you going to get your wine?” Now this was during Prohibition. And I said, “Well, Doctor, I don’t know where we’re going to get the wine. Where would I get it. Where do you get wine?” You couldn’t go and buy it at an ordinary—there were no wine shops around. “Well,” he said, “I was afraid you might not know, so,” he said, “one night after school, I’ll drive my car and you follow me, and we’ll find it.” So we drove all over hell’s half acre, out in that area, and finally came to this underground (laughs) place where they made wine—and it was pretty good wine—and made out in the middle of the Italian vineyards. So we got the wine. And the only reason I bring that up is that the party came, and according to my wine professor, we should have three kinds of wine for dinner. (laughs) Well, we’d never had anything like that in our life, and we had three different glasses in front of everybody for the three different wines. So we had wine and I became very talkative [said ruefully—Ed.] [which is] something I had never been in my life. And I thought it was a great time to explain to these top professors of the school all the things that were wrong with college education, and particularly the way art education was handled in college. I thought the art students should have about nine-tenths of their time in art, and some of these things like language and philosophy and the humanities, you know, what the hell, why should they spend all the amount of time. And they were very polite: Everybody listened to this tirade for probably thirty minutes, and I ran out of gas, and there was a dead silence, and then, in a very quiet voice, Hartley Alexander said, “Millard, the trouble with the artists is that you’re not educated.” No, nobody could have hit anybody harder right between the eyes with a sledgehammer than that. I knew he was right, but I also took offense at the fact that I didn’t see where the opportunity was for an artist to get a good education in a college, the way it was set up. But before I could even answer, any of my feeling, his wonderful wife, who had the greatest sense of timing, said, “Hartley, don’t you realize that you have an eight o’clock lecture tomorrow morning? We’ve got to go home.” Well, it took all the tension right out of the scene, and everybody left. Well, I didn’t sleep hardly all that night, and I thought, “Well, I know his habit; he’ll be at his office about twenty minutes of eight, and would pick up his notes.” And it just happened that I shared, just happened that I had the office next to his, in a special area in the college. So I figured I’d be there when he arrived. And I got into my office and I waited to hear him pattering down the hall just like I thought he would, about twenty minutes of eight. And I jumped out like a tiger and I said, “Dr. Alexander, you said something last night that cut my right to the quick. But I know you’re right, and I’m not here to defend my position. I know I’m not educated. But how does an artist get an education when the art schools don’t offer courses in the humanities or the kind of thing that the colleges offer? Can’t afford it or they don’t, whichever. And most college art is just, is ladylike lace work; they don’t, there’s no real basic training in it. So how does an artist get an education?” He had his key in the door, (laughs) and two great big tears came down that man’s cheeks, and in a broken voice, he said, “Come in, please.” I followed him, and he walked right to his desk, and said, “Please sit down.” Called the, oh, the office downstairs, and said, “Please dismiss my class. I am not lecturing this morning.” He talked to me until five o’clock in the afternoon. Neither of us knew noon arrived. This was at twenty minutes of eight. I learned more about the purpose and meaning of art, and everything connected with art—it was obvious only \_\_\_\_\_ very [semi-artificial, somewhat deficient] because I didn’t have enough background for it. But I never was so overwhelmed and excited in my life. And we became extremely good friends, and I said, the last thing I said that night, “Could I ever have another time to talk to you?” “Yes,” he said, “I think we’ll set aside Tuesday night for you to come to the house, and we’ll talk art.” I never missed a Tuesday night, except in summer, for eight years, until he died. He gave an informal seminar that took me about

three months to get up enough courage to ask him if I could invite people that I knew needed what I was getting—and I thought that I was very selfish to be alone. And it eventually turned out that people drove from San Francisco down to those meetings. Nobody ever \_\_\_\_\_ went out and invited anybody, but it just got known that this was going on and what it was. I never heard him repeat himself in eight or nine years.

PK: [My god.]

MS: The most incredible mind I've ever met. And he had a way of making it so—to not repeat yourself in all those meetings, and to make everybody that came there feel like they were just talking to him. Every individual got that feeling. I remember one night [Jock, Jack Snear, Snare], who's a sculptor in San Francisco. . . .

PK: Yeah!

MS: You know Jock?

PK: Sure.

MS: He brought a great, big stone piece down, drove all the way down—and they spent a day and a half getting down there in those days—and when he got there, he told me he had this piece of sculpture in the back of his car. And people would bring paintings sometimes, and sculpture and stuff. So we went out, and it took six of us to carry this damn big stone piece in the house, and I was afraid it was going to make the termites go right to the bottom of the hill. And we formed a circle around this great big piece—and there were about fourteen people there that night. Hartley never took his eyes off of that piece. Never took his eyes off the piece. Except once in a while for a second. He kept looking at it, and he gave the most fabulous talk that night, but he never mentioned the piece. I was so embarrassed—and Jock and I were very good friends in those days. See, I taught at Cal, Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley] for two summers, and that's when I met Jock and we became very good friends. And so when the meeting was over, finally as usual about nine thirty, \_\_\_\_\_ when his wife would say, "Well, let's, we'll all have some hot chocolate," and then we'd go home. And we had the hot chocolate, and I sat there just being so concerned about the fact that he'd never mentioned this piece, thinking that Jock would surely think we were a bunch of nuts down there. So when it was all over and we had the chocolate, the same six guys helped load this thing into his car, and then as soon as they finished, I turned to Jock and I said, "Jock, I'm shocked. I've never heard Dr. Alexander ignore a piece of art, and I know he's crazy about sculpture, and I'm just sorry that you had the trouble of bringing this thing clear down here, because it isn't like him at all. He said, "What the hell are you talking about?" He said, "I've never had a criticism as good in my life." (laughs) See, he was listening to what was back of everything that he was talking about, and not what, not thinking and not worrying. I didn't probably hear a lot of it, because I was so shocked that he never mentioned it. That's the kind of a guy he was.

PK: This is amazing. So this. . . . He was in the philosophy department.

MS: He was the head of it.

PK: I understand you met. . . .

MS: He was the man who. . . . Scripps was the first college in the United States to set up a real required humanities program. Two courses out of five, for four years. And he was the man that originated the plan. \_\_\_\_\_, they [hadn't, had] been teaching humanities, but they didn't have a course called humanities [that, it] represented two-fifths of the college work. And so he was not only head of the philosophy department—[he, it] was the philosophy department—but he was so in touch with everything that was going on, his influence was absolutely beyond measure.

PK: Where did he get all the, all this training, or. . . . Well, no, that's not what I mean exactly. Where did he learn so much about art and aesthetics, or how \_\_\_\_\_. . . .

MS: Well, he was a great scholar on ancient art and on every facet of the Renaissance, and he was absolutely nuts about primitive art, which is such an opposite to most people who are interested in Greek or Roman or the classical arts. And he became head of the philosophy department at University of Nebraska, and with his knowledge of art, he made the arts such a big part of philosophy and all of the other courses. And he was very important in the top level of administration. And when they built the new Nebraska state capitol, and Bertram Goodhue was the architect, they became very good friends, and from then on he developed this intense feeling about architecture. And he never limited any field as far as art is concerned. He did a lot of work up [for, with] the Indians in digging archaeological sites. He had the most all-around kind of mind of almost anyone I've ever known.

PK: You must have met him then in. . . .

MS: '32.

PK: 1932, right, because that's when, I believe that's when you went to Scripps.

MS: Yeah. Actually, it was in the second month of '33 when he came back from the \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

PK: And so then he, you say that these seminars went on for eight years.

MS: And those were at night, privately given without any compensation of any kind; he wouldn't take anything.

PK: And why did they stop? Because he went to Nebraska?

MS: He died. Died.

PK: Oh.

MS: After eight years.

PK: Well, I'm mixed up. See, he was at Nebraska before. . . .

MS: Before Scripps.

PK: Okay, sorry. I had that \_\_\_\_.

MS: But he'd been involved with many architects on very big projects in the interim time between, while he was still at Nebraska.

PK: Did this contribute to your own interest and then ultimate involvement in design and planning buildings?

MS: Absolutely. I never took a design to any plan that I didn't take to him first.

PK: Um hmm. Really?

MS: And he was the toughest critic. You just can't believe how tough he was. (chuckles) He'd make you feel like a worm and, at the same time, when you left, you always felt that hand on your shoulder that communicated that he thought you could do it. (laughs) He had an incredible effect on all of our lives, but certainly it was the biggest single wallop I ever received.

PK: I think that's a great story. We have you now at Scripps. And it's a little bit hard to follow—your career—at this point not so much—but already, you have been now—you're still at really a tender age—already been now to Europe and returned.

MS: Yeah. Yes, I think I was 24 when I went to Scripps.

PK: Which is pretty damn young, especially when you consider that you stepped directly into the head of the department, is that right?

MS: Yeah. I was the head of the department by 1934, [when, and] the man whose place I took [\_\_\_\_—Ed.] while he went on his honeymoon came back. His father-in-law turned out to be head of, well, chief officer and president of Technicolor. So, [Billy, but he, Billy] was a very close friend of mine, and he decided that he'd do better financially if he went with Technicolor, and he did. And then. . . .

PK: The seduction of the Hollywood, say.

MS: Yeah. And then they made me head of the department, and inside of I think it was by six, five or six years, I had fifteen people on my staff, and we had a very big graduate program, during which time I designed seventeen army air schools.

PK: (chuckles) Which we'll have to talk about later also. See what I mean; there's [six ways]. . . .

MS: They all came up fast and, as I said, I never solicited one of them in my life.

PK: That's right. Earlier you were saying that you never solicited any job.

MS: Never did.

PK: Which I find strains my credibility a bit, but. . . .

MS: Well, these peculiar things like. . . [thoughtful pause] A man that I knew socially in [the height of, A-high-] Los Angeles and his wife—we were fairly close friends—called me up one day and said, “Do you have a really honest contractor—building contractor—in your area to do a very special job in the Bay area?” I said, “I know a man who’s competent to do anything, and he’s absolutely honest, and very bright.” He said, “Could you make a date for me with him for tomorrow morning at ten o’clock?” Tell him that I have a big project. It’s a million dollars and it’s got to be finished in three months.” I said, “I can’t tell you that he can do that, but I can certainly make a date for you.” So this man came out to see this contractor, and they had a very good meeting, and finally the man said, “Well, I can do it, but I got to see your, let me see your set of plans.” It was an air school. Held 600 cadets, for ground school as well as flying with all the things that go with flying. Hangars, control towers, everything. And, you know, you have to take care of everything, everything: food, the works. So my friend said, “Let me see your set of plans.” The guy reached inside his coat pocket and handed him an envelope that he’d scribbled on the back some little rough dots and shapes for buildings. Not a thing in the way of a design. And he said, “Well, Mr. [Moseley], I can’t, there’s no way I can build without any plan.” He said, “I realize how technical a lot of this stuff is, too, and you have nothing in the way of a plan. If you can get the plan drawn, I’ll do my best to do it.” So he told me—the contractor did—that afternoon, what had happened, what a [blip, blimp] it had turned out to be when he had nothing to work from. That night, the other man, Moseley, called me and he said, “Millard, I’ve got a job for you.” “What kind of a job?” We’d never done any business together of any kind. He said, “You’ve got to do the plans for these buildings.” And he said, “You’ve got to do them, and we’ve got to finish this school, and it’s gotta be all done together in three months.” I said, “I don’t know anything about air schools.” He said, “I can tell you what we need, and I know you can do it.” Boy, I was never so shaken up in my life. I had no staff, I had no engineers, I had nothing. I’d never, I had done two or three pretty darn interesting homes for people, but just friends of mine. So I flew back to Washington. Talked to the head of the whole. . . . There are going to be seventeen—there are going to be nineteen schools. And I got all the necessary requirements, but they had no way of knowing how to face the site or anything. [Priority, Primarily, Property] had [bought, balked]. So I came back, and I started the plans, put together an organization, got a couple of engineers, and I hired two architects and about four draftsmen. And I did all the designing of every inch of that thing, from stem to stern. And we finished it in three months. Well, the next thing that happened was that the chief of the air force—oh, god, what was his name?—wonderful—Hap Arnold—flew out to the opening of this school. And he said, “My god, this isn’t an ordinary school! This is a”—what’d he say?—“this is a country club.” He was so excited about it. The next thing I knew, I started getting calls from Florida and from all over the country saying, “We understand you know more about an air school than anybody in the country” (chuckles) “and “we’re flying out and we’ll see you tomorrow or the next day.” And I did seventeen of them. I never solicited one of them.

But Hap Arnold was so excited with this thing that he kept telling all these. . . . See, the way, what happened was that to go from about 600 cadets a year to 90,000, which they anticipated in this program, they couldn’t go through army engineers to design anything. They couldn’t because first of all it would take months and months and months just to learn how to put snow loads in Arizona on the roof. And secondly, you couldn’t get the money to do something until the engineers got through, which would take maybe ten months. So they hired private people all over the country, that were involved in airlines and various things in aeronautical work, to compete for a contract to provide all of the facilities for the government, and bring a staff together in a way of not only teachers to fly but teachers for all the ground work and all of, everything that. . . . It was about a thousand people. What they would do, they would give them the contract to do the school, and they would pay for the school. The minute it was finished, they would pay it off clear, so it was owned then by the Army Air, I mean Air Force. And in that way he had complete control of what he really wanted, and what he wanted was something like we had done in this first school. And they got better all the time. But it was an exciting experience, and (chuckles) one [last, left] was about—and of course these were done before the war started.

PK: Um hmm, ‘39 and ‘40.

MS: Right. Then about ‘42 the FBI came on the scene and froze my bank account, which is very disastrous in a little town where everybody knows everything that goes on. And wanted to know how I got all these jobs, and why we had done these luxurious schools and so forth. Just, they really just like [claps hands?—Ed.] like I’d been a criminal. And they came down on the contractor, too, because he built all those schools, but one. And by the time they got through investigating everything, they discovered that our schools cost per man less than 40percent what the regular engineering schools cost. I did murals in the dining rooms and all kinds of things.

PK: That’s what I was going to ask. Was there artwork? It’s sort of your trademark to incorporate artwork [and, in] visual designs.

MS: Um hmm, yeah. There was a lot.

PK: And do feel then that this serves as one of a number of examples of almost falling into \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

MS: Hundred percent. Hundred percent, because, as I told you, it was not solicited. When they finally got through this investigation, and found out how little they had cost, they still wanted to try to prove something,

and then they couldn't, when they found out it was Hap Arnold that had done all the soliciting (laughing), and I'd had nothing to do with that, they came in to see me in my office at Scripps. Never forget it. They said, "Well, after our intense investigation, we have found nothing. Nothing wrong."

PK: And that was it.

MS: And I said, "Well, in other words, now, you're saying it's finished and there's no more to happen in this thing?" And this guy said, "Never!" The FBI never closes a case.

PK: So you be careful. (chuckles)

MS: And I said, "I'll give you just ten seconds to get out of this room or I'll kick your ass through that door." And boy, they got out of there so fast you can't believe it. I never felt so insulted in my life.

PK: Right. You see, that's what you get when you do somebody a favor.

MS: Yeah. (chuckles)

[Tape 3, side A]

PK: What I thought, Millard, that we would do. . . .

[Interruption in taping to provide interview identification information]

PK: Millard, we taped about two hours yesterday, and managed to get up chronologically to about, I think, around 1929. We moved a little bit ahead then, and we moved a little bit back. One of the problems, frankly, in interviewing you is that you've done so many things. Your career had multifaceted. The title of this book, recent book that came out on you, Millard Sheets: One-Man Renaissance, I think suggests the problem that we have in trying to track the many, many things you've done. We're not going to be able to do that in a very systematic way, and so, as a reminder, I want to state again that for our purposes here today, we're viewing you as sort of a link to a very interesting period in the art of Southern California. And I'll try to keep coming to this thing. There were a few loose ends, I think, from yesterday's session—probably more than just one or two—but one that definitely comes to mind, to me, is your very early experience as a teacher. I mean, you've had a long and I think very distinguished teaching career. For one thing, you, I gather, repaired or sort of recreated the program at Otis, something that at least should be a part of the record and I hope that we'll have a chance about. You served for many years as the chairman of the art department at Scripps College. Yesterday we talked about you began that. And then you've been involved in teaching in a number of different ways, some informal, some formal. What interests me very much is how you feel you were, let's say, privileged, or had the opportunity, were in a position, to change the situation in Southern California in terms of what was available to students for studying art, especially in a college course. Maybe you could go back and pick up a bit. You were talking a very important contact with Alexander, and you told that anecdote where there was a dinner party and you were, as a first-year professor there, complaining about how poor art students had to study the humanities, and I was sort of blushing for you as you were telling the study. (both chuckle) And then Alexander called you on that, saying that the problem with artists is they're simply not well-enough educated. And the next day then you got together and that was beginning, I gather, of a very, very important and, for you, certainly stimulating. . . .

MS: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

PK: . . . relationship and experience, all centered, I would think, the idea of education. How did this experience then affect what you did in setting up the art department at Scripps.

MS: Let me go just a little bit before that and say that, when I went to Scripps, I already said, I think I explained, I expected to be there one year, and when I was asked to stay on indefinitely, I said, "Well, I can't possibly teach art with the kind of facilities we have here at the college. It was a new college, wonderful buildings, but absolutely no studio design. As studios, we used classrooms, where light came from every direction; it was just impossible. And remember that this was 1933 when the Depression was at its height, and I went to the president, I said, "Well, I'll stay if I can get money to build a big barn. I want a barn 50 feet long. I want a barn 20 feet high and 30 feet wide, and a couple of lavatories for men and women, and I can build that for \$3800. I had designed it and I already had a figure from a contractor—which is hard to believe that in '33 you could do that, but for \$3800 I could build what was the basis of the beginning of our art department. And the president said—in these words—he said, "Millard, I can give you the money from a discretionary fund I have." I didn't expect that he would say that in those days. And he said, "I will, if you insist. But I think you'd be making the worst mistake that it's possible to make, to take this money and build what you call a temporary art department. It would be permanent." He said, "Don't do it." I'll still give you the \$3800, but," he said, "I think we should start a foundation, called Scripps College Foundation of Art, and let it grow and take the money and get the best exhibitions you can put on. Even though we have to put them on in what are not regular gallery spaces, we have

some very nice places that we could have a good gallery for these exhibitions." He said, "I think you should have the money to get fine speakers and some marvelous exhibitions, and then let people have memberships for as low as \$10, and," he said, "in a matter of a short time, you will find the answer to all the problems that you have." Well, it seemed so far away to me to think in those terms and to think I had the money in hand on one side (laughs), but at the same time his very careful advice not to do it and do this other thing. Well, to cut a long story short, I knew he was wiser than I was, we did just that thing. And after a great deal of thought, we put out this invitation for people to join this foundation that lived in the area, just local people.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And I think 25 or 30 people joined for the first meeting. And I wanted to get a good lecturer, and they booked, by Irving Stone, his first book had just been published and had been out for about three months. And I heard by chance—it was *Lust for Life*, the van Gogh book—I heard just by chance that he had moved to Los Angeles in a matter of a few weeks before, so I thought like why not start with a top guy. So I got him on the telephone, and told him that I wanted him to be the first speaker at this foundation, how much I enjoyed the book, and how excited I was, and I knew they would be excited to have him say anything he wanted to talk about. And then we talked for thirty minutes, each one, I think, being afraid that we were going to. . . . With he thinking that he might be, that he might charge us too much, and I worrying that we couldn't pay too much. So after a nonsensical bunch of time, I finally, "Now, Mr. Stone, let me be honest with you. We have rather limited funds, but we want you to come, you know that. Tell me you normally charge, and I'll tell you whether we can afford it or not." And he started in by hemming around with the thing, and he said, "Well, I'd have to drive out there, and," he said, "I think I'd probably have to have \$10 for making the trip out there, with my car." And he said, "Would \$40 be all right (chuckling), plus the \$10 for the traveling?" I assured him quickly as fast as I could that it would be perfect. Of course, he gets \$5,000 a lecture now. And it turned out to be the most wonderful choice, because he was absolutely marvelous. He excited everybody, and we had about, oh, twenty of the staff at Scripps came to the lecture, and we wound up with 25 or 30 new members. And one of the members—and they were so enthusiastic and excited about the idea of having this: an exhibit changing every month, and the first day of the opening exhibit as a preview, the foundation members would come and have a lecture and a preview.

PK: And the lectures presumably were always about some art subject.

MS: Always art, oh yes. I had some of the finest speaker; over the thirty years, you can't believe the people that we had.

PK: Oh, how long? You mean the program then continued?

MS: That's right.

PK: It started out as device, kind of a fundraiser to build a circle of supporters.

MS: That's right. So what happened was that a woman that had bought any number of my paintings came as member for the first lecture. She came from Pasadena. She had a magnificent gallery in her home, and music, two or three—well, she had two grand pianos—and we used to have wonderful musical evenings and whatnot. And at the end of the lecture, she said, "Millard, I want you to do something. Let me have the next lecture at my home. And I can invite 50 of my friends that are not members to come, and I want you to get an exhibition of your work together, and I want you to speak." Well, I was still tongue-tied in those days. Scared the hell out of me. But then, she said, "I know we'll get some members that way." So I did get an exhibition together, and I went in and she had at least 50 or 60 of her friends there, plus the 25 or 30 that came from out and around Claremont. And I gave the lecture, and I talked about what we hoped to do eventually at Scripps, was to serve not only Scripps but Pomona College, in the same way the music department at Pomona served both colleges. And that, it was a real plan, and we meant business. We're going to do it. And but of course we've got to build buildings, we've got to do all kinds of things. And when I finished a very funny little lady came up to me. She had a pink silk dress on, and she was a little, well, almost five by five. She was a charming, little elegant lady. She had a funny little hat that had a big white feather stuck straight up in the air from this hat. And she said, "Mr. Sheets, I'm interested in what you talk about as the first stages in this building out there at Scripps." She said, "Do you have any idea of cost of this building?" And I said, "No, I haven't. But I think you could possibly come to Scripps and we could talk about it. I would love to do it. I'd like to have you meet the president." I said I was over my depth when she started talking about money. So, to my surprise, the next afternoon, I was in my class, and I looked up and here she was standing in the doorway of my class, shaking her head. She said, "You can't teach in a \_\_\_\_\_ building like this. You can't teach art. You've got no light. It's just impossible." "How much is this. . . ." She repeated the question, "How much is this first unit going to cost?" And, boy, I grabbed her hand and took her down to the president, and the poor president didn't know anything about anything. He didn't know about the lecture the day before, and he didn't know that I was going to bring someone in that had asked about the first unit. (laughs) Because we hadn't even had any designs for the building or any. . . . This was the second

month of the foundation. So I took her down and introduced her, and he looked a little puzzled, and we had talked just for about three or minutes back and forth, pleasantries, and she turned to the president, and she said, "Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, how much is this first unit going to cost?" And I knew that he didn't know what the hell to say to that, because he didn't know what she was talking about. So, I thought if I could build a barn for \$3800, I could do a lot more building for \$38,000. So I said, "I think about \$38,000." Well, he looked so startled and shocked, and she just looked out the window for about three or four minutes. Didn't say a word. Turned back and she said, "I think we should do it. I'll send you the money. Let's start." Well, I couldn't believe it, and it was just like a miracle. And she said, "Now, would you take me back to my car, because my driver's waiting, and I'm leaving to go home tomorrow, back to New Jersey." Didn't even live in California.

PK: This is the same lady then that, I gather, came forward a couple more times.

MS: Three more times.

PK: Three more times, and basically underwrote a large part of the art department.

MS: Well, she came. . . . The first three parts, she gave all the money. And then, she came out—and these trips would be about two or three years apart, she'd come out. The next, after the first time, I think the next one was something like \$350,000.

PK: Wow.

MS: And then the next one was about \$450,000. And she came out and we were. . . . Well, by this time I had a very big graduate school established. We had fifty people taking their degrees in the graduate school. And we, it was just, I had fifteen people on my staff—some of the best painters and designers in the country. I got them to come out and teach at Scripps, they'd never taught a class. They became some of the best lecturers we had, in the humanities. And it was just a marvelous development. So she came out the last time and said, "Now, what's it going to cost to do this big gallery and the [last little thing? OR: Glasswell thing?] And I told her. I think it was around \$800,000. See, in the years, building costs went up that fast. Plus the fact that the whole thing kept growing. We had a master plan, but it just kept getting expanded. So she said, "Well now, Millard. . . ." In all this time, she would never, wouldn't allow us to use her name—ever. And it was always a unanimous—I mean, a. . . .

PK: Anonymous donor.

MS: . . . anonymous. (laughs) Unanimous! It was an anonymous gift, and the president and I were the only ones that knew who it was that was doing it.

PK: How remarkable.

MS: So the last she came and I told her something like \$900,000, she says, "Well, we'll do this one a little different." She said, "I will match the money that is raised locally, up to half of that money, and I think they should be part of it." So I decided the thing to do was to. . . . It just happened that the very next day we were having a—no, two or three days later—we were having another regular monthly meeting. I called the man that I had asked to give the lecture if he would mind terribly doing it the following month. So I thought the best thing to do was to go on and lecture about how this thing had developed—couldn't use her name at all—and told the whole story just the way it happened, just as I've told you, a great deal more detail. And what it had meant to us and to the college and the graduate school and everything, and that she had come up with this final thought of equalling the money we raised locally. And at no time did I ever ask anyone for five cents. Ever. I told the facts. I said, "I can't tell you her name. She \_\_\_\_\_ because she wants to do it anonymously." And I related the whole, which took a little time because it was a lot bigger story than I've told you.

PK: Yeah.

MS: And never asked them to, anybody to give a dime. And in three weeks we had matching money. (laughs)

PK: People just spontaneously responded.

MS: Came out of the, just came out of the weeds. And it taught me a real lesson, because all the other things that I've been connected with where we've had to raise a lot of money for various things, I've never asked anybody to give anything. I've simply gotten excited.

PK: Well, I think that's probably the most effective means of fundraising.

MS: Well, I do too, but. . . .

PK: What was the name of the New Jersey lady?



MS: Mrs. Lang.

PK: Lang.

MS: She and her husband built the beautiful museum in. . . . God, I know that name so well. They gave the money for that [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.]. They gave several buildings at. . . . Oh, one of the biggest colleges. . . . Dartmouth.

PK: Dartmouth.

MS: They built a whole, oh, I don't know, I think thirty houses up in Maine that they let artists who were serious artists use the year around—three months, six months, or a year sometimes—and just gave it to them rent-free, they were that interested in art and all. He was, I think, a lawyer. But they're marvelous people. And it was in the last building that, when she finally, after great insistence, let us put her name just on the gallery at Scripps.

PK: I see.

MS: Right on the, the Lang Gallery. Well, now, going with this, was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm, not only from the people in the art department, but the whole \_\_\_\_darn colleges—Pomona College and Scripps both. And we had such enthusiasm you can't believe, how the. . . . Because they knew, I learned pretty rapidly (chuckles), after being at Scripps the first couple of years, how important the humanities program was to the artists. And we were so enthusiastic about what the humanities meant that we talked all the time to the students about it that way, and a graduate school just started to spring up out of no place. And we first started with some summer sessions for graduate work. And on the basis of people I had brought there to teach, we got over 150 people every summer to come, all over the United States. And I brought out people like. . . . Umm, one of the best painters, from New York, and then he eventually came out and moved to California, and taught at Scripps for fourteen years. [McPhee].

PK: Oh yeah!

MS: [Henry B.] McPhee.

PK: You brought him out?

MS: Sure.

PK: Now this is. . . . Excuse me for interrupting here, but this is exactly what I hoped to get at, because it's pretty obvious you started with a rather small department and program, and now within a few years, I gather there's a graduate program. This had to be exceptional, if not unique, on the west coast.

MS: I think it was. Very exceptional. And \_\_\_\_\_, it was the most unbelievable backing of the general faculties. The exhibits meant a hell of a lot to them and their wives and their kids. But they, I think they felt the support from our fifteen people on my staff for what they were doing, and it was just one of the nicest, happiest relationships. You don't always have that in a college or a university, where anybody thinks, where everybody [that, of] their own area. It was just almost miraculous how it worked and. . . . I brought out one of the finest sculptors from New York, Bert Stuart. I brought out James Chapin. We brought remarkable people, that were just wonderful teachers.

PK: How did you find them? How did you choose these. . . .

MS: Well, you see, at the same time I was going back east on juries.

PK: I see.

MS: On national juries. Everybody had one damn picture that they sent to Carnegie. (laughs) And I got to meet all these people.

PK: Did you tell us about that yesterday? Did we talk about that? I'm not so sure.

MS: I don't think we talked about yesterday. We did a little of that, of it last night.

PK: Yeah. [Dazo.] Wasn't that when Hatfield suggested you. . . .

MS: Right, I came back from Europe in December, and one of the first things he said when I got home, he said, "You ought to paint a picture for Carnegie." And he didn't tell me that it was the first year they'd ever had a jury. They'd always done everything by invitation. So I stupidly just went along and painted a painting. And I was challenged, you know, the idea was a big thing, but I painted this picture from sketches I made in South America

on my trip. And, as I told you, it was accepted as one of 25 out of 19,000—which is an incredibly funny thing to happen because they only had room for that many, plus the ones that they had invited in this international exhibition. And mine, coming from California, was the only painting accepted west of the Mississippi River. And for that crazy little reason I was given undue publicity—and I know what undue publicity is. It was just remarkable. Some of the best critics in New York and everywhere else picked my picture out just because of this, you see, and kept talking about it. Then the artists raised so much hell because more people didn't get in, that they didn't have another jury. But having been in that one show, and having had a lot of publicity, I was invited always after that.

PK: Right, then it was automatic.

MS: So every year [we, I] got an invitation, so I had to paint my Carnegie painting, and it became a very driving force.

PK: So that really was—not quite by accident—but almost by accident, the event that seemed to move you to national attention, or put you in national attention.

MS: That's exactly. . . . It was by, as I said in the very beginning when we talked, everything seems to hang on little strings—strings which you don't have anything to do with, in trying to make them happen. It was like getting a painting accepted at the salon. I didn't know that was a tough, didn't any of that mean anything. But when I was in France, I heard about this salon, and I thought, "Well, why don't I send a picture?" So I sent an oil. It was accepted.

PK: So that, then, provided you a network of contacts. . . .

MS: Exactly.

PK: . . . which you could draw upon in building the staff at. . . .

MS: Absolutely. [Augustus—Ed.] Saint-Gaudens was the head of the Carnegie International, and I became a good friend of his within a couple of years, and I even served on a Carnegie jury once after that. And everything just built up when I won the second prize in the international watercolor show in Chicago. That opened up whole new areas. An international show is a big show.

PK: When was that? Do you remember?

MS: Oh, it was about '33 or '2, '4. I don't remember exactly. We can look it up.

PK: Sure, yeah.

MS: And then being invited to juries almost immediately after both of the Carnegie and the other show in Chicago. And I had been the only one in the beginning that kept sending pictures back to exhibitions. You know, I was pretty broke, and by the time you build a box and then ship it, and then if it's turned down you had to pay its way back. And fortunately, I didn't have too many turned down, but they just opened up one area after another. And I got people like Phil Dike and a lot of my friends to start sending their pictures back, and they had the same kind of results after they got started.

PK: Would you then point to this as one of the main reasons for the prominence of the California school?

MS: Absolutely.

PK: That this then was the aspect of California art that drew the most attention.

MS: I think the paintings then, at that time in California, were, in this small group of people—there were only about 25 or 30 of us in the beginning—the fact that they were not the same monotone, or almost, color that eastern painters used, because their weather is so different—color palette's different—it had a whole kind of punch that surprised them a lot. And I think it's because we were just so damn interested in the places we loved and were not approaching it in a typical aesthetic manner that was well-established in the east made a lot of difference.

PK: But the fact that this work was being seen, it seems to me, was to a large extent the result of your initial acceptance at the Carnegie and then your becoming known outside of this area—or outside of [Sacramento].

MS: That's probably the only reason. They keep saying in these articles, that I have nothing to do with, that I'm sort of the dean. Well, now I don't want to say that.

PK: No, no. I don't think that either, but. . . .

MS: I [don't] think it's true. But I don't want to say that because I don't think of myself as one of the gang, but working, but I do think the fact that I was the first one in that area that was accepted by [all the, other] eastern critics—and artists—both. The artists were so wonderful to me. Now there was no feeling of jealousy or anything like that. I was on that big jury called the. . . .

[Tape 3, side B]

PK: Millard, you were talking a bit about the rise to prominence of on a national basis—this is sort of as a digression—but anyway, rise to prominence of the California School, and I suggested partly, at least partly as a result of your own good fortune in being accepted, having a work accepted with Carnegie, and as a result of that, becoming known.

MS: Absolutely. And I think there were two other sides to that early acceptance. Mr. Hatfield was a very fine dealer to have been involved with. As soon as I had had these experiences we've described in the east, he arranged a traveling exhibition of my paintings that went to something like 27 museums all through the country—all through the whole United States. And out of that, I don't know, something like 15 or 20 paintings were sold to museums. So I was established much sooner than I should have been, without any question. I was invited by the Metropolitan Museum to be on the jury for the big exhibition they held of American art in 1942. It was the one that was involved with winning the war, but here again I was on a jury with some of the finest American painters, and people like. . . . Carl Milles was on that sculpture jury. And that was the stature, things I'm talking about. People like Leon Kroll and Gifford Beale and—oh, the guy that lived in Philadelphia that painted [Suicide] in Costume. that won the Carnegie prize, was on the jury. There were ten of us on the jury. I could tell you some awfully funny stories about that that had nothing to do with what you want, but. . . .

PK: I don't know. Sounds interesting.

MS: Well, I'll tell you one.

PK: Okay.

MS: Well, I was so excited—I was the youngest by about 20 years, on the jury—and they were so warm and helpful in just every possible way, all these people I met on these juries. And at that time the director of the Metropolitan was. . . . God! [sighs exasperatedly—Ed.]

PK: What year was this in?

MS: '42. I'll think of it in a minute.

PK: Yeah, I should know that, and I don't offhand.

MS: [Francis, Frances] Taylor.

PK: Okay.

MS: And we took turns being chairman every two hours, because you sit there and just ask people to vote, and everybody got tired, and so. . . . We sat in two rows, I remember, and this continuous line. . . . We looked at 19,000 paintings in that exhibition from which we selected, we could only select 240 then. They took down I don't know how many galleries in the Metropolitan that had never been \_\_\_\_\_. This. . . . [Telephone rings] \_\_\_\_\_ get it.

[Interruption in taping]

MS: The second or third day—the jury meeting lasted eight days, or nine days—and that was eight hours a day—this continuous line of men carrying pictures in clear down this long hall, and it finally got up and set it on a little rostrum, or whatever it was, and then we voted with that National Academy punch-a-button thing, where if you punch a button it'll cross one up in little box, and it took something like out of the nine jury people, it took seven to put it in. And the first time through, I think about 15 pictures were accepted. (laughs) We wanted to see the whole show. And then the ones that were possible went into one set of rooms and the outs were out. And about the second or third day, when we were going to lunch across the street at that big hotel, Francis Taylor took me by the arm and kind of pulled me back—I had known him out here in California, through Hatfield, and he said, "Millard, does anything bother you about what's going on?" He said, "This is a very distinguished jury," and he said, "I could never say anything either that is critical or advisory. But does anything bother you?" I said, "Yes, it does bother me." I said, "Some of these marvelous big paintings, six by eight feet, come down the line, maybe their [fairly, purely] abstract, or they're semi-abstract, and optically they're so powerful that if some guy comes along next with a little portrait, and maybe it's a magnificent portrait, but it just looks like something that \_\_\_\_\_ [unburied] after the power of these big pictures." And I said, "I think some of these really wonderful, at least very wonderful to me, aren't given a real shake because of this difference between the power." He said, "That's

exactly what is bothering me.” He said, “What the hell can you do about it?” I said, “What could I do about it? I haven’t the, I’m the kid on the jury.” And he said, “Well, think about it.” So we had lunch, and I got to thinking about it, and finally, on the way back, I pulled him aside and I said, “Would you be willing to try an experiment?” He said, “Well, what is it?” And I said, “Well, I would like to run through the jury, just as one of the paintings, something very important that hasn’t been publicized, maybe you haven’t had it long enough to even have it known that it’s here, and just see what happens.” He said, “I know the picture.” He said, “We were just given a fabulous van Gogh, and it’s an unusual van Gogh, because instead of being brilliant color it’s fairly on the gray side. The family—the museum that was being built in Europe—the family had given this to the Metropolitan about two months before; it hadn’t even been fully catalogued.” I said, “That would be perfect.” So I said, “Run it through at exactly 2:15, after they’ve gotten over their lunch, and gotten settled to real hard work. Send ‘em down.” So I can see a few minutes after two, the thing way down—because we went down and looked at it, in the basement, and it’s a beautiful van Gogh. So as it got up to the platform—Eugene Speicher was the chairman of the jury at that moment—and he said, “Well, lady and gentlemen—we had one woman on the jury—Lady and gentlemen, will you please vote,” and I pushed my button down hard and I gave it the only vote. There were, the other guys were all null. So I let the picture be picked and started down the hall to be put in the turn-down room, and I let it get down about 150 feet—I could still see it—and I said, “Gene, I’d like to recall a picture”—we’d all agreed we could recall anything, at any time, if we felt strongly enough about it—I would like to recall the little picture, and that man with the blue shirt down the hall is the man that has the picture.” “Well, of course, Millard,” he said, “Fine.” So they sent a little guy down to tell him to come back with it. And I’ll never forget this as long as I live. Gene was sitting in the front row—there were two rows—and he never got up. I can’t do it now, I’m so weak [referring to making the motion—Ed.]. But he put his hand on his knees and he crab-legged, never stood up, and he got up within about six feet of this thing, he said, “God damn you, Millard. That’s a van Gogh!” (both laugh) I said, “I know it is.” I said, “It’s just a little joke that I wanted to play on the jury, because I feel that there have been a few pictures that have gone by that were of great importance to me, not just works of art, but because I think that the big ones knock people out.” Well, it changed the whole jury. The rest of the jury we had everyone, went through all the pictures that had been turned down. . . .

PK: Really!

MS: . . . and pulled out a lot of things. I don’t say they were accepted, but a few were. But it was a very sobering moment \_\_\_\_ the jury. And it was all fun. They got a kick out of it. Nobody got mad; it was just, it was really nice.

PK: So they could take it in good humor; they could laugh at themselves a bit.

MS: Yeah, that’s right.

PK: Well, now you started, you got on this interesting story by talking about Hatfield and some connection between Hatfield and Taylor, is that right?

MS: They knew each other quite well, and when Francis Taylor came to visit California—two or three times—they came out to our house in Padua Hills and we had a dinner party for them, and \_\_\_\_ that way, socially. [Interruption in taping to answer telephone—Ed.]

PK: So you did have visits then from Taylor?

MS: Um hmm.

PK: You were going to draw, I think, some connection—or it was your further reason for the early attention paid to the watercolor colleagues, the California School people, it seemed to me. Did Taylor have something to do with that?

MS: No, I don’t think so, because, you see, the Metropolitan had no shows—except this one show. It was called Art of. . . . Oh, I’ve forgotten the name of it. Art for. . . . Isn’t that ridiculous?

PK: Art for Peace.

MS: Something like that. It wasn’t, that wasn’t the word, but it was something like that.

PK: Something like that.

MS: And they normally did not have any exhibitions, but they did buy quite a few of the paintings of some of these friends of mine. They, I think, the Metropolitan owns three of my paintings now: a watercolor they bought way back then, and one oil done in about the middle or late fifties, and then they bought another one that—and one of the best oils I’ve ever done.

PK: Let's bounce back again, if we may then, to teaching, to your experience at Scripps and elsewhere. What do you feel distinguished your activity as a teacher? Obviously, you were very successful in building a big department, important department, at Scripps, but was there that anything in terms of philosophy of art education and art teaching that you were able to implant, whether it was at Scripps or later on at Otis?

MS: Well, those are two totally different problems. But, at Scripps, I think the fact that I didn't have the more academically trained teacher—professor with a degree or two—that I got artists that were absolutely top artists to bring the frontline right into the classroom. But who in turn respected so much what the college meant—to these students and to them—that there was no conflict. And I think that's the reason that we had such great success. Most departments are built on students that have had proper degrees in such and such university. But the fact that we were all actively continuing our own work, and we just shared that so completely with students. And everybody that I found that I wanted on the staff were people that knew the importance of thorough training and not just stylistic approaches. Now I don't think we were academic in the sense that the old schools in Paris in the nineteenth century were academic. I don't think we were anything like that. I think they were all very exciting artists, sculptors, designers. And I brought all kinds of people, and every summer we would bring a whole new set of people in—in addition to our regular staff. So it became a place that we could hardly handle the new people. And after the war, of course, when the GI thing hit we had about 60 or 70 out of that thing, quite apart from the students we'd had. For five or six years.

And, for instance, somebody like Jack Zajac. I had a call from this young man with gutteral voice and said, "Are you Mr. Sheets?" I said, "Yes." "I am Jack Zajac, and people around here tell me that if I want to paint that I should come and talk to you." (chuckles) And I said, "Well, when do you want to come?" He said, "How about tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." And I said, "That's fine. I'll meet you." So this young fellow, sixteen years old—tall, big, husky guy—arrived, and I said, "Now, if you're only sixteen, you're not even graduated of high school." "No." "Well," I said, "if you're. . . . Let me look at. . . . Did you bring any work?" I had told him to bring some work. He said, "Yeah, I brought some work." So he took me outside to a big truck and there must have been twenty canvases out there, and most of them were five by six, and four by six, and big. . . . They were big oils. And never in the world have you seen more horrible copies. Just terrible, absolutely terrible. And he had no taste in subject or anything else. But I saw that there was so much vitality. In spite of the fact that he didn't know anything about painting—to know anything to how to go about it, didn't know anything about color, didn't—he still such a vitality that it just knocked you over. So I said, "Well now, what's your time schedule." "Well," he said, "I'm on the graveyard shift at the steel mills in Montana." His father had just died—and his father was a gypsy singer—and he had to support his mother, and he was down at the graveyard shift at the Montana steel mill, and he said, "I work from midnight till eight in the morning, and then I can sleep till noon, and," he said, "I could come to school in the afternoon." I said, "Okay, you can come and take my advanced painting class." He didn't have any background for it. But there's no better experience than to get in with people who know what they are doing. It's a damn sight better than just going along with a bunch of people your own age that. . . . I've brought any number of people like that in from, and paid their tuition, never tried to get \_\_\_\_\_ even approval from the college—until I got that thing well established. (chuckles) But Dave Scott was one!

PK: Um hmm, David Scott.

MS: I brought him when he was, about two years before he finished high school. And we had some wonderful people who came in that way.

PK: I didn't know he was a painter, \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: Painter. He's a painter primarily. Though he's a real good art historian. He's had good training in that. And he's just a damn well-rounded guy. He was a good guy.

PK: Who were some others that come to mind from your years at Scripps? Other students that \_\_\_\_\_ from your \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: Oh, there's so many I don't know where to start.

PK: Well, maybe I shouldn't have asked that. (chuckles)

MS: No, now I just would like to think about it. I have to do [them, this] justice. We had some absolutely fabulous students. And I think the proof of the pudding is the fact that all of our students went on and became something in the art world. They didn't give it up for something else or do it on Sundays. They became real professionals and some few as teachers, but—and very important teachers— but most of them were on a real world side of fighting in the battle. And I think that the reason that we did have the growth and all of that, the fact that all of us who were teaching were doing it not because we had to make a living primarily. I think I could have made my way very easy, in better style if I'd just painted.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And then the designing that I did. I did that all the way, all the time, but if I had put all my time into it, I could have made a much better living. And I think that that was true of virtually all the staff.

PK: How would you compare your program at Scripps—I was going to say at the time, but of course it really covers a number of years—but with other programs in the area, or perhaps throughout the state? I mean, could you do that somewhat objectively?

MS: Well, in simple terms. . . .

Female voice (Mary Sheets?): Excuse me just one minute.  
[Interruption in taping]

MS: The first difference was that I put the best people in the freshmen and sophomore years—the best teachers. I always taught freshman drawing. And McPhee taught freshman drawing and painting. We were the two that. . . . And then I had a marvelous design lady that taught design in that freshman year. Those were requirements.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And then we continued the second year with basic training, very tough. We had a schedule worked so that most of our students, art students, could have four afternoons in art all afternoon, in addition to their heavier requirements: language and humanities and all that stuff, science. And we had studios that were, where students could work—late in the evening if they wanted to. For instance, Jack Zajac, after he'd been there a year, he was growing so fast and learning so well, that I let him have what was almost a private studio, but with, of all people, the girl that I showed you pictures of here. She was in school at the same time.

PK: Yeah, her name is. . . .

MS: [exasperated sound]

PK: Carter?

MS: No, God, my mind is just not working. It's \_\_\_\_ [Sue] Hirtell.

PK: Hirtell.

MS: Yeah.

PK: Okay.

MS: And they just \_\_\_\_.

PK: She was your assistant, by the way, wasn't she for a number of years? I'm \_\_\_\_ .

MS: Thirty-three years. That's a long time.

PK: Yes.

MS: But the feeling was that, if he wanted to really work, see, there was a place to work, and we had a marvelous ceramic department, sculpture, have everything, but the people who were teaching those things were very professional people and they were enthusiastic when they felt a student was really doing something. And I think it was more personal than most colleges or universities—particularly universities. And I think also there was so much attention paid to the department through the foundation. . . .

PK: I see.

MS: . . . that students sold lots of very beautiful things.

PK: From those exhibitions, you mean?

MS: Yeah. Well, they, not only had a big, we'd always have a couple of big student shows each, but people would just come in and look around, talk to students and buy things. It was a kind of a professional approach to the problem that was a little different. Now Otis was a totally different problem.

PK: I was going to ask you about that.

MS: I was hurt terribly by a horse and I was laid up for about three months. Cracked my skull from ear, clear up here [gestures—Ed.], broke my nose in four places.

PK: Oh, my God.

MS: And right in the middle of this, the chairman of the Board of Supervisors of L.A. County and the president of the board at Otis came to see me. And they said they came because they wanted me to suggest a new director for its art institute. And I said—and I was so tied up with bandages and everything else—I said, “I wouldn’t make a suggestion for a new director because I think it’s such a lousy school that I wouldn’t wish it on anybody. Unless you change your whole philosophy of why the school is being operated and get a staff that’s competent to carry it out, I wouldn’t make a suggestion. I wouldn’t wish it on a dog.” And that shocked them to beat hell. And they said, “Well, what’s wrong with it?” And I said, “Everything. You’ve got students that have been there for fifteen years, you’ve got an. . . . It’s just an infested bunch of professional students. And there’s no real requirement and absolutely no basic requirement to get in the school. Anybody can get in and stay as long as they want.” And they said, “Would you have time to really write what your idea of a program would be?” Well, I did have time because I was so damn. . . . I couldn’t paint, I couldn’t do anything. So I wrote a rather complete program which was about half way between a typical art school and Scripps, where they had, we had art historians, we had a lot of good humanities departments, and we hired people to do this \_\_\_\_\_ plan that’s \_\_\_\_\_. (chuckle) I wasn’t connected with it at that time. So I got a letter and they asked me if I would bring this plan in to the California Club and meet the—quote—Board of Supervisors of L.A. County and the whole board of the Otis Art Institute and present what I thought was a schedule. Everybody knew what we were doing at Scripps, and that’s why they came to me. So. . . . It was really quite a meeting, all very formal, these politicians and these other people. And I presented the program and kind of set them back a little bit because I knew they had to have new buildings, I knew they had to proper money for staff and everything else.

PK: Where were they located at that point?

MS: They were located right where it is now.

PK: Right where it is. But obviously with different buildings, different facilities.

MS: Oh yes. [telephone rings] They used the old house of the man that started the L.A. Times.

PK: Chandler.

MS: Chandler. That was not. . . . It was before Chandler. Otis! That’s why they named it Otis.

PK: Yeah, Otis, right.

MS: And anyway, I gave this, presented this program to them, and the president of the Board of Supervisors said, “Well, if the Board of Supervisors approves this plan and put up the money for the buildings and guarantee to support the whole thing as you. . . .” [breaks off—Ed.] I’m sorry. Damn throat. “Support it in the way you’ve laid it out, would you accept the position as director?” I said, “I would almost say, ‘Yes,’ because I know you won’t do it. I would love to do something like that that, but I’m very, very well established at Scripps and I’m very happy there. My home is there. But I would just because, as a challenge to you, because I know you won’t do it, ‘Yes!’” And about two weeks later the chairman the Otis and the chairman of the Board of Supervisors came out to see me. And they said, “Well, Mr. Director of Otis. . . .” (laughs) And they said they’d approved everything! And so I took a leave of absence for two years from Scripps and redesigned the buildings and built them and did all that and I had to teach the old—not teach—direct the old school with all the guff connected with it in order to get it ready for a whole new staff and everything else, and [had to] take time to get staff together. And [I, that] was very unusual that year, I’ll tell you. (chuckles) And at the end of that year, we just washed out the old school, except for a few students that were really eligible, and opened up with a new staff and a whole new program. And I stayed for six more years. Although Scripps was unhappy about it and. . . .

PK: Well, you were on leave from Scripps then that extended period of time?

MS: Yeah.

PK: You had an extension.

MS: I had a permanent appointment at Scripps, and I think I had been there about four years when they gave that to me. And they. . . . That’s flipping and the light’s \_\_\_\_\_. [referring to tape recorder—Ed.] How can it [the time—Ed.] go that fast?

PK: I guess because what we’re talking about is what you’re telling me is interesting.

MS: (chuckles)

[Tape 4, side A]

PK: Millard, you were telling some interesting stories about your stepping in sort of, actually being tricked—or much to your surprise, let’s put it that way—and stepping in as director of Otis, and then having the

responsibility and turning that program around. And I gather you had to, you felt you had to start pretty much from scratch and you were mentioning just now, as we were changing tapes, that you were able to bring in some very good professors from—well, from nearby—from UCLA and I think you said from Scripps.

MS: Scripps and USC.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Who were very excited about being a part of an art program, not to teach art, but to teach background that artists should have—the same thing, obviously, Hartley Alexander told me at our first meeting.

PK: Well, he obviously had a big influence.

MS: He sure did. No question about it.

PK: Who were some of the people that you might to coming in, some of the people that you hired at Otis?

MS: You mean the artists?

PK: Well, both, you know, anybody.

MS: Well, [a, that] marvelous painter by the name of. . . . Oh, God, my brain.

PK: Let's see. [consulting books—Ed.]

MS: Well, I hired Herbert Jackson.

PK: That's right, yeah. That's interesting. His school, then, was over.

MS: That's right, his school was over.

PK: Because he was an important teacher.

MS: Very important teacher, from Chouinard. And I'd gone to school with him. And I hired Richard [Haines, Hanes], as the head of the painting department. And [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.] Fenczi, Fencchi, Fench-ey, the Italian sculptor to be the head of the sculpture department.

PK: Lorenzo Fenczi.

MS: Lorenzo Fenczi. And all of the heads of each department were people that I felt had the capacity, though they had not been in a school where they had been asked to relate to the background that I was trying to create for the artist. They immediately fell so completely into it that it was wonderful. And we had another marvelous designer from Pasadena. . . . God.

PK: Well, one of the familiar names here is Leonard Edmondson.

MS: That's the one I was trying to think of. Leonard Edmondson was the head of design. And I had Arthur Ames as an equal partner in the head of design. They both worked together on it. And then there were probably about twenty other people besides those heads. And then I had at least six people from the universities doing \_\_\_\_\_ things. And this was, these were all required things from the students. We had night classes, we had afternoon, two afternoon classes—one from 1:00 to 4:00 and then from 4:00 to 6:00. So we could work these lectures in and. . . . It was an exciting program. Unfortunately, when I left—I think unfortunately—when I left the chairman of the board had resigned because of illness and—maybe I shouldn't use the name, but. . . .

PK: Well, this is history.

MS: The woman that became the chairman of the board was the wife of the editor of the Times, and she was only interested in the most far-out avant-garde—just not even close in, but way out.

PK: Who was that?

MS: It was the wife of the man who is still the editor and owner.

PK: You mean not Dorothy [Jenkins]?

MS: Yeah. Well, no, Dorothy was the mother of the man who runs the Times.

PK: Right.



MS: This was the wife of the son, that is now. . . .

PK: I forget her name right now.

MS: [Sissy, Cissy] [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.]. She had a [nice] [name, named] Sissy, that was well known all over the country. And she was, she wanted to do for Los Angeles what her mother-in-law had done for music. And so she didn't want to do anything, of the things that had been done before. And she hired a man who was the director of your San Francisco Art Institute, of Art [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.]. And he came down, and he got rid of practically all the staff within two years, who did not have permanent appointments.

PK: That was. . . .

MS: He just literally bankrupted the school, not only financially but the support of the supervisors. They just said, "To hell with it. We'll close the school." That all happened within two years.

PK: In retrospect, one of the more interesting appointments you made at Otis was Peter Voulkos.

MS: Oh, that's an interesting story.

PK: Could you tell me about that?

MS: Sure can. I think when I inveigled him into coming to Otis, he came from Montana or someplace like that. I don't think anyone ever did a better job of teaching for two years. Any subject. He taught ceramics in a way that was so vital and so exciting. Everybody just loved him, and, god, he made the most wonderful pots those days; I think I must have twenty that I bought, something like that. And he was a marvelous teacher, everything you could ask for. Enthusiasm, worked day and night. Just seemed to love it. In the beginning of his third year, a lot of the students came to see me and they said, "We don't know what's happened, but he won't let us use glazes. He makes us use housepaint, after we fired the thing from beige, first firing. And we came to study ceramics, and he won't let us do anything but use housepaint. Decorate them in any number of funny-looking designs, but absolutely nothing but housepaint." So I called him in and I said, "Peter, what's going on? Why are you doing this?" "Well," he said, "because I'm just tired of working with glazes." "Well, the fact that you're tired working with glazes doesn't mean that these students don't need, to understand glazes as much as \_\_\_\_\_ before." "Well," he said, "I'm the teacher and they're going to do what I say." I said, "Peter, I'm trying to tell you that you aren't going to be the teacher if you continue to say they're going to do what you say, because we have a department that's well known all over as one of the best, and in two years you've done this. Now you can't do this. If you want to do it yourself, fine, that's great. Nobody. . . . That's perfect. You can do anything you want. But you can't teach here if you're going to do that." Well, he called me a pretty rough name and said that he didn't think that his reputation was weak enough that I could rid of him. I said, "Well, it isn't a matter of your reputation; it's just a matter of you're not going to do it." So he got a job at Berkeley with about twice the salary in twenty minutes. Just about double the salary. And that's when he began to do the big sculptural things. But he gave up the housepainting part of it. And very interesting story because I think at least ten years after he left Otis, he wrote me a letter and he said, "I want to buy all the pots that you've bought from me." And very insolent terms, just really insolent as hell. And I tried to telephone him, and I couldn't reach him, so I wrote him a letter, and I said, "Peter, as far as I'm concerned, you can have every one of the pots to show, if that's what you want them for, indefinitely. You can have any or all of them. But I don't want to sell them. I love them and they're not only things that I think a great deal of, but they're part of our life." And he wrote back. . . . And I said, "If you want to do that, just let me know and I'll send them to you immediately." He wrote back the nastiest letter. He said, "I don't want to show them. I want to break them up. I want to destroy them." And I wrote him an equally terse letter, in which I said he, I had gotten, I was in a position to reach them, and that he obviously wouldn't." [PK clarify? Don't understand what he said—Trans.] But I noticed that when he had the big, great big show, retrospective show in New York that they wanted all twenty of my pots for that show.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: And they paid a terrific price for the insurance that they had to pay up in his new. . . .

PK: They borrowed all twenty?

MS: Maybe nineteen. There may have been one that. . . .

PK: Yeah. But most of them.

MS: Yeah, they borrowed almost every one of them.

PK: How did Voulkos fit in with the faculty that you were building there?

MS: In the beginning it was just great. Just great. He was very quiet. He was strong and very excited about the

program.

PK: How did you find him?

MS: Well, I had seen his pots at a couple or three exhibitions, and also I'd read a couple of articles, and he was a friend of a very good friend of mine. And that's where I found out where he lived and got in touch with him. I brought him out to talk with him about the job, and he got very excited, and said he'd love to do it. And it was just started out on exactly the right foot.

PK: That's an interesting story.

MS: And I can't tell you how much I admire those pots. I'll show them to you if you want to look at them.

PK: So you think that's the reason then that he left Otis, where already he had established some reputation.

MS: Completely established.

PK: And then moved up to Berkeley.

MS: Yeah.

PK: Interesting, interesting.

MS: He was so well established, and everybody knew about that program, and he got this job at Berkeley just instantly.

PK: Yeah, I know about that. Let's, if we may, move back again. We've talked. . . . No, let me ask you one more question, before we do that, about your involvement with the schools and your observations on the schools and teaching of art in Southern California. You said yesterday that you had some things to say about Chouinard and its role and then the fate of Chouinard, I gather in connection with the whole Cal Arts business. Is that right?

MS: Absolutely. I think Chouinard had the finest program for just a straight art school. They didn't have money to support the things that we had, like at Scripps or at Otis. And I think that the proof of the pudding is the fact that all the students that were at school at the time I was there, who were serious—and that was most of them—have been very respectable artists ever since. Except so many of them are dead now. But Chouinard was a very wonderful school. They really taught you drawing. They made you learn it. Made you learn figure drawing and basic painting. And they try to put on any thin glazes, they just taught basic things. And I've told you already about people like Chamberlain and Hinkle and others that taught. [We, They] made a great impression. And when Walt Disney started Disney studios and needed animators, he found most of them in school at Chouinard—because they knew the figure, they knew exactly what he needed, and it was very hard to find. So he began to hire the best students regularly as they finished. In fact his first group of animators were all—I think virtually all from Chouinard. He hired Phil Dike, who was my close friend and we had worked together every. . . . We had our first studio together, we had everything in common. He hired him as the head of all color for Disney's, and he read, he did all the color on Fantasia and all the new things that \_\_\_\_\_ Disney did at that time. And it was so close to Chouinard that he became very interested in supporting Chouinard. And in that period after the post-war period, when there was so many students there and the school built up big, as our school at Scripps did, there was a sudden. . . . The program had been like a four-year program and it had just quit—like that [snaps fingers? gestures?—Ed.]. And Chouinard suffered terribly financially because they had no, there was, you know, it was run strictly by Mrs. Chouinard. It had no foundation or support of any kind. And he, for several years, really gave Chouinard a hell of a boost financially. I imagine he [spent, put] close to \$100,000 a year for seven or eight years. And when Walt began to think about this Cal Arts thing, where all the arts were going to be together under one roof, as he expressed, he felt that they'd rub off on each other. That being a head of a big motion-picture industry, he felt, though he had the best kind of people for music, the best people for dance, for drama, and cinematography, that each of these areas didn't understand or have any real interest in the other area, in any other areas. And he felt that if they had an opportunity to grow up under one roof together that it would be a different kind of industry in a very short time. [And that was during this art school.]

He called me up one day and said he wanted to talk to me, and would I come in and have lunch with him. I went in and he told me this whole—because he had the most beautifully related set of ideas about this school. And I said, "I want you to be one of my advisors and be on the board when we form the board." And it was a wonderful meeting, and I had lunch with him about four times after that. And that suddenly, he died. I didn't know until a matter of two or three weeks before he died that he had cancer, and even then I didn't know that he was that ill. Now the tragedy of his death, coming when it did. . . . They had bought the land [for, from] the school—out there in the valley where it is—and he had talked a great deal about this school to his brother, who was ten years older, and his business partner. Really the financial man of the, that ran the Disney thing.

PK: It's Roy, isn't it?

MS: Roy. And when Walt died, it was such a shock to Roy, who was ten years older, that he thought, "We've got to do this immediately. If something happened to me, then it'll never happen." And he called me and said he wanted me to talk to him about some of the ideas that he had about members of the board. And of course his idea was primarily they'd base it on his experience with people in the motion picture business who'd been very successful. And there wasn't anyone else on the board besides me that ever had been involved with an arts, the art side of this thing. They were people that were very good and marvelous in cinematography and music and dance and so on. And I pleaded to add two or three people that really knew something about an art school, because the plan had always been to take Chouinard bodily right over there, and have it be the art staff, because they had all these different staffs, departments. And Roy said, "Well, I don't know enough about that, but we'll have to let the board decide this." So now we suddenly are in meeting, and they were blockbuster meetings. Walt left \$20 million to start this school. And Roy was in such a hurry to get this thing going, and so obstinate about one thing, and that was he wanted the whole plant built. Now any normal thing grows the other way. You build what you need to start, what you think you should start with. Then you add as necessary. He insisted, and we spent over strong objection from many people on the board, \$18 [million] out of the \$20 million for capital expense—which is outrageous. Then he thought that we should spend money to get heads of the different phases of the art department, give them a year to play around and talk to each other—and, as far as I'm concerned, mental masturbation, most of it. It was absolutely ridiculous. And we hired people that never should have been hired. The director, the president of the school, and the fellow that he hired as assistant, were two absolutely people without any capacity.

PK: Let's see. Who was that? That was [\_\_\_\_\_]—Ed.]. . . .

MS: Oh, I know. I just have to. . . .

PK: Block?

MS: Block was the assistant.

PK: Was the assistant.

MS: Both of them had been in drama teaching.

PK: Right, right.

MS: And now they're \_\_\_ing what we should do in art.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And it was ridiculous. I remember the embarrassment of going down with those two men to Chouinard and having a meeting with a good part of the Chouinard faculty. And this is when they were hiring faculty. And they'd been encouraged, totally by Walt, that they were going to be the staff. I knew them all, they were all competent people. And dedicated to not only the idea, but to Walt. Ended up they didn't hire one single one. Not one single person. And they hired the stinkingest staff. Just absolutely terrible, in art. And they did extremely well in drama, cinematography, music, and dance. They were very successful. The art staff never was worth a damn, and they've never done anything. I have no sympathy with what they're doing today, and it just isn't what Walt dreamed of at all.

PK: Hmm.

MS: And of course then Roy died, about the time that we were all spent out of money. And a few of us hung on the board for a long after we should have, trying to get some sense into it, but there were people that just didn't understand the problem. And then they hired another director [\_\_\_\_\_]—Ed.] that—I say "they" because I didn't vote for him. I interviewed him. I didn't think he was the kind of person we needed, wanted at all as the head. And he became very difficult. Well, God, how difficult.

PK: Yes, I've read some of the accounts of that, those episodes and the problems. Oh, do you feel, though, that. . . I gather from what you say you don't feel that they've ironed out many of these problems.

MS: No. I think in those departments I've mentioned as being good are still good. But they haven't ironed out. . . . Now why do I say that? Because you don't hear of people coming out there that are doing things in art.

PK: Well, there are a few, like some of the younger kids that have gone back to New York, and of course that raises a whole different question of maybe fashions in art and so forth, but they. . . . Oh, like I guess David Sally is one of the new darlings of the. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . New York art world, and I think he went through the Cal Arts program. Eric Fischel, I believe was there. These are some of the new imagists, and so forth.

MS: Um hmm.

PK: So, in a way, at least from the standpoint of what seems to be popular in a New York gallery world, that some of the Cal Arts students have enjoyed a certain amount of success that way. That's not a value judgment on my part, but they've gone on to other things. I can't tell, of course, what that has to do with their program; I'm just of mentioning it because. . . . But you really feel then. . . . I gather that quite early on with your involvement with Cal Arts you became somewhat frustrated with the way things were going?

MS: Well, I wasn't worried about my own frustration. I was worried about the fact that I didn't think they were going to do what Walt intended the school to do.

PK: Yeah, right \_\_\_\_.

MS: And the second director. . . . [said with a smile in his voice—Trans.] This has nothing to do with art at all. One of the most dedicated members of the board is a great friend of mine—and I met him on board; that's when we became friends. . . . After thinking one day on it, this was own idea, he said, "By God, we don't even have a flagpole in this school. We ought to have a flagpole and a flag." So he went to see the director, the second director, and he explained the problem to him. And the director said, "I don't want a flagpole. I don't want a flag." This is how arbitrary he was. Now even if he didn't feel like a flag was necessary, it seemed like he would have had enough respect for this man who was deeply behind the school to accept it meant something to him to want to give the flagpole. He wouldn't accept it.

PK: How would you characterize briefly, and you've certainly suggested this already, but how would you characterize the personality or character or Cal Arts, what it became?

MS: I'm not a fair one probably to give a good answer, because since I left I have never been back even to visit it.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: I have had no grievance or anything like that. I just felt that, my background, felt that we weren't going in the right direction, and that we had a part of the total project that Walt had in mind that wasn't doing that job, and that's the way I still feel.

PK: Well, was it too free-form, is that one of the things you saw as a problem? Too—what shall we say—experimental. . . .

MS: Yes, I don't think you can experiment till you know something about the business.

PK: Uh huh.

MS: I don't care whether you're talking about science. I don't care whether you're talking about writing. I don't care whether you're talking about music. You become free to do experimenting when you have some background. You can't start doing something new in engineering if you don't have a sound knowledge of the basic principles of engineering. And I don't think there's any difference between that and art. And I always probably sound, when I talk this way, that I am advocating some kind of an outdated type of academic training. Well, I am not. I know better than that. I know it's hard to explain but that I think something comes first. And the first is to really be able to read, before you can write. Be able to spell before you can do a lot of things. And to me the language is just as vital and just as important in art and painting—in this case we're talking primarily about painting—and \_\_\_\_ in good architecture, did \_\_\_\_ a lot of the graphic arts—but they made it into a kind of "You're going to be a genius, and you don't need a lot of this stuff. Just go to it. Express your feelings." How the hell can you express your feelings until you know how to express your feelings?

PK: You can't in any way that's worth bothering about.

MS: Well, that's what, that's the point I have.

PK: I mean that is probably. . . . The situation you're describing is not at all unusual I think during a certain time as well, which was the sixties.

MS: I don't think it's changed much. I'm not talking about Cal Arts now; I'm talking about general. . . .

PK: In general.

MS: . . . general art education. I was so disgusted with the kind of things that my grandson [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.] was getting back in New York. Now, the Art Students League is a reactionary school, so I complain just as much about that side as I would the other side. They taught him some of the worst habits, just. . . . For instance, in \_\_\_\_\_.

PK: Hey, Millard, let's. . . . Would you hold that thought, and I'll turn over the tape?

MS: Yeah.

[Tape 4, side B]

PK: Millard, you were talking before, when you were so rudely interrupted, about the programs in some of the art schools and some of very real problems you've seen. I think we dispatched Cal Arts, your experience there basically, but you were mentioning something more recent.

MS: I [feel] to a degree toward Scripps, where I enjoyed thirty years of my life, and I'm still a member of the Scripps College board of directors. I feel that the same thing has happened to these other schools, that people who have been taught in the kind of theory and the kind of attitude toward basic training, they pooh-pooh the whole idea of it and think that you just have to express yourself and experiment.

PK: What were you going to say about the Art Students League, or the situation in New York that your grandson I guess has experienced.

MS: Well, it's just the opposite. It's more of a reactionary attitude that I disagree with. There are some people that are associated with the Art Institute—or with the Art Students League. But I don't think that a lot of the work that I've seen on exhibit there—and I've seen that recently, two or three times in the last two or three years. . . . I think the way everything is taught, it's taught in a very mediocre fashion where they try to teach your eye to think, and I don't think you can do that. I don't think they have the quality of teachers that they had at one time. The San Francisco school that we spoke of, I'm quite familiar with.

PK: [I think] the Art Institute?

MS: Yeah, and I'm quite familiar with it now because I've had two nephews that are there.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that.

MS: Or have been there. And they're both interesting young fellows. But I think what they're doing is nonsense. One of them's back in New York now, after finishing at the San Francisco school. And as far as I can see nothing has changed in the fifty or sixty years I've been involved with teaching. They've had the same kind of a, "Let's go really way out on the whole fashion of art and just be ahead." Well, I don't think you get ahead by doing it in any other way that your grinding out your own background, and then if you've got something to say, you'll say it. But I don't think you start out by following some style that some teacher likes and grabbing that as a shorthand to learning whatever it is—painting or sculpture. And that's what they're doing. In fact, one of the worst problems I have today—[my age has]—that I'm constantly being asked—by parents, by individuals—"Where should I go to school?" or "Where should I send my son? my daughter?" I don't know a school. That's lousy. And I feel that way. I hate feeling that way more than anything I can say, because nothing I'd rather do than be so happy to tell them that I think this would be a great place to go. But I don't know, I. . . .

PK: What about the San Francisco Art Institute, or California School of Fine Arts? I mean, they've changed its name—we're talking about the same place? What about it back in the, looking back to the twenties and thirties, because you just mentioned that you were, had some, well, you were familiar with the school and its program going way back. How did you view it then? Or how was it viewed say in Los Angeles, considering it was a sort of established art school?

MS: Well, I think I happened to. Because I taught at University of Berkeley, Cal at Berkeley, I knew most of those people then, and many of them today. I felt that probably in the thirties, in on the twenties, the school was a little more on the kind of track that I like. They had a lot of people there that were good painters, good sculptors, people that really cared. But about the beginning of the thirties, everything seemed to change, in the attitude toward art education. And everybody wanted to be more fashionable. And a whole generation of artists was raised, in the thirties, as we do in [every ten years], and those are the teachers that had everything now. They had all the schools, people went through that whole period of being fashionable, because modern art, which was such a fantastic contribution to the field of art—it came from Europe—was exciting, terribly exciting, and should be more exciting today. But if you start out with the idea that you've got to follow that particular fashion, which one out of a dozen or a hundred that were being followed, and then you reach the point where you can't make a go of it, and you have to, you end up either as an outcast, or someone gives up the whole idea of art. If you can't make a living, if you can't do things that are accepted—or worse still, you become a teacher of the same thing—I

think it's a tragedy both ways.

Now what is so fashionable in New York, and a few other places, are people who can be as strange as hell and do things that are very way out that some dealer and a critic, or a couple of artists, will get behind and will make it fashionable. And people who really don't know enough to know what real quality in their judgment, have a comparative value judgment, will get behind the young artist, and that's what's happening all over the country today. But I think most of it will last.

PK: When were you at Berkeley?

MS: In the thirties. I can't remember, I think '35. . . .

PK: Um hmm, okay, yeah, it's. . . . It doesn't appear here in the. . . .

MS: I only taught there in the summertime.

PK: . . . chronology, but at any rate, that places it in time. Now were you, among your colleagues there, you must have had some connection I presume, with people like maybe John Haley. . . .

MS: Oh!

PK: . . . [Worth] Ryder, perhaps.

MS: Very close friends of both of them, and I admire both of them very much.

PK: Could you tell me a little bit about, well, your relationship?

MS: Well, I knew them before I was asked to come to Berkeley, and of course Wirth Ryder was the head of the department at the time I was invited to come up there. And they were deadly serious people. I think they were. . . They not only had some talent, but they knew what they were doing, and Berkeley was a very different department in those days than it is today. I can't remember all the others, but there so many that I thought the world of.

PK: Did you. . . . And so there was some interchange, at least through maybe teaching one place and the other, between people in northern California and southern California, I gather?

MS: Oh yes. There was a lot of interchange. And I think that maybe at that time, I don't think you can say that southern California was one, all Berkeley was the other. But I think there was more in common. I think California, Berkeley, University of California at Berkeley, went on and became more fashionable than it had been. Certainly when I was there, it had people who were ahead of, in experimental thinking and feeling than most of the people in southern California. But I don't know that it was \_\_\_\_\_ of one off against the other at all. I think that there was wonderful feeling of mutual respect.

PK: Well, for instance, did you. . . . I know that John Haley, and I presume Worth Ryder, were very interested in fresco work, mural painting, and actually had set up at one point, I think, on the campus at Berkeley a special lab. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . for working with the materials and all and reintroducing, I guess, true fresco. Did you, were you aware of that? Did you have any collaboration with them on that?

MS: I didn't have any collaboration with them, but I did fresco painting for the first ten years of my professional life. I did a lot of fresco. In fact, I brought Siqueiros to Chouinard to teach. It was the first time anybody got him in the United States. He'd been called a Communist and they wouldn't let him in. And I and two or three others, got the thing together where we got him to come up and teach a class. And he is not what I would call a top fresco painter—only technically speaking. Creatively, I think he's one of the most exciting men from Mexico. But he didn't really care too much how he did it, and some of his work faded because he used an airbrush a lot and he did a lot of things that were not very. . . . Where Diego Rivera was such a fabulous technician. Whatever you think of his art, he was a magnificent technician.

PK: I like his art. (chuckles)

MS: I do too. I do too. Very much.

PK: Well, this is very interesting, and of course it opens up. . . . I apologize for jumping around with you this way, but this opens up another area that at some point we're going to have to really get into. Don't know if this is the moment or not, but you mentioned, talking about fresco and mural painting, and of course I'm aware of your

early activity in that field, and I had forgotten that you were instrumental in bringing Siqueiros.

MS: Yeah.

PK: How did that come about?

MS: Well, I wanted to, I had started experiments with fresco myself, and I thought it would be great, I had such wonderful students at Chouinard at that time—because I was still teaching at Chouinard even after I went to Scripps.

PK: Oh, I see.

MS: I'd teach some, maybe two classes a week. And I had some young people then like. . . . Oh, God. [trying to remember—Ed.] And I wanted to get them interested in fresco painting, and I had heard that Siqueiros had been trying to get into this country for a long time, and I thought if we could get in touch with him and find out if he would be interested, we could make an effort to get him in. I had the help of Arthur [Meniere] and two or three others that had some newspapers that helped. (chuckles) And we put up a pretty good case for him to come up for a summer, and he was very exciting. We painted a big fresco on [a] Chouinard wall. Unfortunately it was painted right outdoors with no protection of any kind, and time and then the school going down, they couldn't protect them as they should have, and it disappeared. But it was very exciting to have him up here. And then I saw him in Mexico quite a few times after that.

PK: So you kept up some connection with him?

MS: Yeah. Yes, till he died. And Orozco did one of the most beautiful murals of all the things that he ever did at Pomona College, which was the sister college of Scripps. And that's a magnificent. . . .

PK: Did you have anything to do with that project? That's the what, the Prometheus?

MS: The Prometheus? It was done the year before I went to Scripps.

PK: I see.

MS: And it was done because there was a professor who was Spanish descent, who wrote several books on art history, and he was just crazy about Orozco's work, and he went down to Mexico and told him that Pomona had just built this huge dining room, men's dining room. And that he was sure that he could get the commission to paint all of the walls—now this dining room had walls that were probably, above a wainscot of wood about ten feet, \_\_\_\_\_ stood at least twenty feet above that, and the room must have been 150 feet long [meant wide?—Ed.] and about 175 or 200 feet long. So there were four walls to be considered: the two sides walls, and the entrance would be divided by a door that could pull up into it. And then the arch at the other end, which was the entrance to a stage, just a small raised platform so they could have speakers and that kind of thing, and have at least a thousand people seated in the room. It was a big room. He went down to Mexico and told Orozco (chuckles) that he was absolutely sure he could get the commission for him to paint all of these walls, and it made it like a Sistine Chapel. And of course Orozco got excited as hell.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: And the only wrong with the scheme was that he never discussed it, that is the friendly Spaniard never discussed it with anyone. And Orozco arrived on the scene to start painting, and all he got was the loan of materials from the contractor who later built all my airfields. He gave the money to buy the materials, and the promise of the commission was always going to come next week. And he went ahead and painted this magnificent Prometheus, just a fabulous work, and he never really got paid for it properly. My contractor friend bugged some of his friends, and they him—I don't know what the amount was, but it was nothing that what it should have been. Maybe it was two or three thousand dollars.

PK: I didn't know that.

MS: Of course money was money then, but. . . .

PK: Well, it isn't any longer, that's for sure.

MS: It meant a lot more than it would be today. It would have been an equivalent of probably of \$15,000, or something like that. And he was a, he was just so excited about the building. The building was a beautiful building; it was done by [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.] Spaulding, a good architect down south.

PK: I have to see that; I never have.

MS: Oh, you'll have to go.

PK: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

MS: Someday I'll take you there.

PK: Good. Now, did you have any, did you have occasion to meet Orozco?

MS: Yes. I met him in Mexico.

PK: Okay.

MS: In his studio.

PK: This was after he had been in Los Angeles?

MS: After he'd done it. I went to see him, and he was just marvelous. He couldn't speak very much English and I couldn't speak very much Spanish, but we had a \_\_\_\_ other. It was great.

PK: Well, the subsequent project in that very same place was the Rico Lebrun project. . . .

MS: Yes!

PK: . . . of the Genesis. . . .

MS: I was just thinking of him as, before you spoke his name. Because he did the mural right there on the outer corridor of the same building.

PK: And of course by then you were next door at Scripps.

MS: Oh yeah, sure.

PK: And of course this was at Pomona. Did you. . . . Well, presumably you knew him.

MS: Oh, yes! We taught together at Chouinard.

PK: Well, uh huh.

MS: And I was crazy about his work, and we were very close friends.

PK: Did you have any contact or connection with him at the time of his painting the Pomona murals? I mean, how was it set up there, those Claremont [colleges]?

MS: Well, he did it while I was on leave to go to Otis, but I knew about it and went out to see it several \_\_\_\_\_. See, that's the kind of person that I would hire if I want a good teacher in an art school.

PK: Really?

MS: Rico was a master craftsman.

PK: Right.

MS: But he didn't stop there. He was a hell of a designer. He had, I think, great power. I think his work has never been appreciated to the extent that it will be. I'm sure that fifty years from now he'd be much more important than he ever was during his lifetime.

PK: Oh, I think so.

MS: But he was certainly. . . . That's the kind of person that should teach. They knew what they were doing. Not to teach the way he paints. No! But to teach the fundamental things that everybody has to know. And they're not easy to find. Particularly any more, because no one's been taught.

PK: What about people like Rico, looking at the community or communities of artists at that time? How would you describe the different communities? We mentioned a number of names as we've been talking the last two days, and we of course concentrated the most part on your colleagues associated with the California School. No one would say that Rico Lebrun and his group were part of that California School, and yet you obviously have enormous respect for their work.



MS: Any of \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

PK: How do you [express] that?

MS: He had great influence as a teacher—and as an artist. As an artist, I've never known anyone that didn't respect Rico Lebrun very highly, if not way beyond the average. I think that last series that he did, the big paintings of the religious themes, were absolutely marvelous. I don't know really what ever happened to those. I know a few of them are in museums, but I think someone either bought the whole thing. . . . I don't remember the details. Have you ever seen them?

PK: Yeah.

MS: Well, I just think he's the kind of an artist that should be an influence.

PK: Well, I think that he and the type of expression that he represents are indeed being given a second look.

MS: Yeah.

PK: [Becoming, They're coming] back. We live in a time now of post-modernist revisionism, where. . . .

MS: Well.

PK: . . . the new interest I think in the California School shows that there's an eagerness now to look around and consider all of the different forms of expression on their own merits, rather than feeling obliged to deal with only one line of development. And I think Rico has benefitted, Rico's reputation in art will benefit from that as well. I mean, certainly as we look back to earlier art in southern California. And, again, what would interest me from you is trying to get an idea of how these different artists at work in southern California at the time interrelated. What were the communities? Can you describe that? Is that something you can. . . .

MS: Well, I don't think there was the kind of division that existed in many places. There were artists that didn't want to be a part of a local scene at all, and they were very verbal about it. They had their own special interests. And I think it's tragic when either side becomes unfriendly and [so] critical that they don't understand each other. God knows, the worst, or the people who call themselves the savior's of the truth \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ to do those styles all over again, and they just abominate the expressionist and the other kind of artists that are so vital. And I think it's the other way around, but probably not to the same degree of insanity, that so many of the more avant-garde artists just hate anything that has any representation. I've suffered all of my life from that, but it doesn't bother me a bit. I mean, the fact that some of the people think I'm dead but unburied, that's my problem, not theirs.

PK: Well, it might be their problem as well. But this is one of the things that I'd like to explore a moment if we can. In southern California—and I think it's true of any place, perhaps of any time—there were different groups. Now the California School, as you yourself say, because it's primarily involved [in, with] representation, figurative style, certainly came to be viewed as conservative—not anti-modernist necessarily, but certainly more conservative. Rico Lebrun and his group, as a matter of fact, came to represent a conservative, a more conservative tendency, when compared to later developments. I certainly don't think it's all that clear and all that simple. But what were the dynamics in southern California regarding this issue at the time? I mean, can you chart that? I mean, clearly, in the early years that we were talking about, you and your group, the California School, were something in the ascendancy. There were other groups or other artists working in different directions, which is perfectly okay, which I'm not sure, but I doubt were receiving the same kind of attention. I think of. . . . Well, I was going to mention Lorser Feitelson, and I don't think that's a very good example. But, you know, the Peter Krasnow and I'm sure you knew some of these: Nick Brigante these so-called avant-gardists. How do you remember the situation? Are these false issues raised after the fact, or was there a sense that there were the modernists and then there were the more conservatives.

MS: Well, there were two or three groups like that that were working in totally different styles, but a person like Feitelson, that was a very good example of a person that stood on [not all] the platforms. He was a good teacher. He had his own way of working, but he was an extremely good teacher. He had a radio—yes—no, a television program, and he. . . .

PK: Boy, listen to that rain. That tape recorder's going to get all of it on tape. [Thanks! I was wondering whether your tape recorder was about to go out!—Trans.] Excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt.

MS: Oh no. Feitelson had a marvelous Sunday-afternoon. . . . I think it was television. Sure, it had to be a television program.

PK: I think he had both, maybe.

MS: Yeah, he started out with radio and then he ended up with. . . . Because I know I was on a couple of his programs with him. He used me as a guinea pig, \_\_\_\_\_ my paintings and so forth. But he was so interested in the fact that I was not only trying to be a painter, but that I was also designing buildings and doing big murals and things like that. He was, he never was tainted by any sense of competition or any of that kind of thing. And he had enthusiasm for what anyone, whatever someone wanted to do to satisfy themselves. But he was a damn good teacher. And I think he was a real bridge, and there weren't enough bridges, I believe. I think some of us tried awfully hard in our way to bridge the people that thought they were so much smarter than all the rest of us, but it didn't affect us to the point [that, until we] became enemies. There was very little of that in southern California at that time.

PK: Well, \_\_\_\_\_. . . . Excuse me.

MS: I think another reason is that there was some very much older painting, painters who were not really California painters, who came to California in the latter years of their life. There was a San Diego painter—marvelous landscape painter. He wasn't a true Impressionist, but he came closer to being a very good Impressionist than anything that is close to Impressionism. Those people had a very broad view, and they were not terribly involved with the rests of the artists because they came with an established reputation and sold well in New York and became very well known in southern California as \_\_\_\_\_ painters, very important painters. And I think that made a difference. I remember when, the first time I ever met Leon Kroll was in the Opera House in San Francisco, when I was teaching at Berkeley one summer. And we \_\_\_\_\_ meeting each other, just at intermission, and he was teaching at Mills College that summer. And Ed, he had a great sense of humor, funniest guy you ever met. And he says, "You know, I've never been in a town where everybody loves art, but," he said, "the trouble is that it's [sounds like: plutonic. Platonic?]. They don't buy it."

PK: (laughs)

MS: And San Francisco has never been, had the market that Los Angeles has had.

PK: That's absolutely right.

MS: There's no comparison. And that just sort of summed up the whole thing. He enjoyed being at Mills. He enjoyed—it was the old guy. . . . Oh. Marvelous old half-Jewish, half-Irish man that did so much for Mills College and for the museums and. . . . Albert Bender.

PK: Bender, sure.

MS: Now, Ed Bender [meant Kroll?—Ed.] brought him out, paid his whole thing for him and his wife to come out and teach, because he wasn't on the board at Mills, but he gave Mills a lot of money. And so he got to know through Albert Bender practically all the artists of any account in San Francisco, and knew what problems they were having in selling their art. Albert was an amazing guy. God, he was wonderful.

[Tape 5, side A]

PK: Before we had to change cassettes here, we were continuing this odyssey, and moving you back and forth, up and down the coast and to different schools and all over the place, and you were talking about being in Bay area, in San Francisco, and meeting Leon Kroll, and then mentioned, sort of in passing, Albert Bender, which of course is of considerable interest; Bender is a major patron of the arts. And I wonder if you could expand on that a bit, tell me a little bit about your contact with Bender. If you would like, could even mention that rather amusing anecdote of the wake.

MS: Well, I met Albert at my first exhibition in San Francisco—[at that] one-man exhibit—and he was so charming to my wife and to me, and was so enthusiastic about introducing me and my wife to so many of the really good San Francisco artists. And, in fact, I met probably most of my friends in San Francisco through Albert Bender long before I taught up here, although I'd done a lot of other things like I did a whole series of paintings for the President's Line for their advertising and [medias] and everything like that.

PK: You did?

MS: And I did a lot of other works for different corporations up here through the. . . . Because it's a much more of a commercial art center than Los Angeles. And Albert Bender was always in the middle of it and everybody who came up, we automatically spent time with him. He was so wonderful. I don't know whether you know his history. He was in love with his cousin, and desperately in love. And the families would have none of it, as far as getting married. And it was the day before they all slept together. And it just crushed him. He came over here as an immigrant, half Jewish, half Irish, and I think he was thirteen when he arrived. He arrived just about the time of the earthquake [1906—Ed.], and became involved with insurance and became eminently successful and became such a, not only a character in San Francisco, but he was so all out for San Francisco. I don't know how

anyone in the world could be more deeply concerned about his community. He was involved with the universities and colleges, all of the things like the opera and other arts, museum. And he had a great sense of humor. He loved his friends, and we met some of the most exciting people I've ever met at his house for dinner, or go out someplace to dinner with him and friends. He opened up a whole new life for us, in San Francisco. And the funny incident about getting a telegram inviting me to the wake of Albert Bender at such-and-such hospital was just typical of his sense of humor.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: I came to San Francisco, went to the hospital at the proper time, and found out that about twelve or thirteen of his close friends, all men, were invited to this wake. We went into this beautiful room—it was a private room of course—and he had a big bar set up, and a couple of guys to serve the drinks, and some little hors d'oeuvres, and. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

MS: . . . and Albert was sitting up in bed with one of those little caps that had a kind of a tassel that hung down, and just beaming. And he kept singing the sad story of Albert Bender, he's too young to die. [sings:] "Too young to die. Albert Bender is too young to die." And of course after everybody had a drink everybody was singing that and other songs. But we had a hell of a time until they finally kicked us out of the hospital, we made so much racket. (laughs) And Albert just, he just loved every minute of it.

One of his closest friends was an artist whose name I've got to dig out [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.]. He was one of the top men in advertising art, but I think he was one of the best painters in San Francisco. Marvelous man. And later when I joined the Bohemian Club, we spent a lot of time together on The Grove, and he was a wonderful guy and he just loved Albert Bender. He and his wife were probably the most attentive people as far as Albert is concerned, and they were very strong people both in the society of San Francisco.

And you never could ever hear anything even slightly about Albert Bender that wasn't great from every side. And that simple thing that happened in the hospital was so typical of Albert Bender [without a surprise]. Somebody would arrive in California that didn't even know him, but they knew somebody that did and they would call him up, and if he was tied up too busy, he'd buy them a \$50 taxi book so they could go anywhere they wanted, and then he would advise them where to, what to see. He was the most generous guy, without being silly about it. He just, but he just took care of everybody. Never known anybody like him.

PK: Who were some of the artists that he introduced you to? You mentioned Kroll. Or at least, well, you mentioned that, I think, that Bender brought Kroll out to teach. Who were some of the other Bay area artists that you met through him?

MS: Well, the sculptor. . . .

PK: Snear?

MS: Hmm?

PK: Jock Snear?

MS: No, I met Jock Snear, and I don't think I met him through Albert Bender.

PK: Benvenuto Bufano?

MS: Huh?

PK: Was it Bufano?

MS: Oh, I met, yes, I did meet him through Albert Bender, and knew him when he was doing some of the most interesting work that he ever did. Some of the things that he did in China in ceramics. Don't know whether you've ever seen those; they're just fantastic things. He really learned the art of ceramic sculpture from living in China. And Albert supported most of his trips and everything else to China. No, the sculptor that I'm trying to think of did the most heroic, beautiful big things.

PK: [Ralph] Stackpole.

MS: Stackpole, right. And then the director of the institute, San Francisco Art Institute was a great friend of mine till he died, through Albert Bender. And then when Albert Bender brought Diego Rivera up to do the mural in the school, he invited me to come up and meet Diego Rivera. He just opened up all kinds of avenues that were not for business, just for pure pleasure.

PK: What about your meeting Diego Rivera and Rivera's time here? Was there anything special that comes to mind in connection with that?

MS: Well, I thought he was extremely nice. I was very young and he was so established. But he took, he was very generous with his time and talked to me quite a bit about fresco and about the particular design that he was painting. And Albert made everybody do that. They just automatically became extremely nice and friendly with his friends. It was not a matter of just being nice; it was very real. We, Mary and I, my own experience \_\_\_\_\_ [long, alone] with Albert was that he was an incredible man in his ability to see something exciting, to make people want to know about each other. He just had that capacity. And he took the time to do it. A lot of people maybe feel that way sometime, but they don't take the time to. . . . And he took it all the time.

PK: Did you watch Rivera work here on the \_\_\_\_\_?

MS: Um hmm, and I watched him in Mexico many times.

PK: Okay. Was that something of an event here in San Francisco, the great \_\_\_\_\_?

MS: I think it was a real event. He did two in San Francisco.

PK: Yeah, right, exactly.

MS: He did one in the Stock Exchange Building.

PK: Um hmm, that's right.

MS: And, yeah, he got a lot of very good, not just publicity, but really a good following by the press. And, of course, I think he had an unbelievable capacity, to do the thing that did.  
[Interruption in taping]

PK: Before we had this brief interruption, you were talking about meeting Diego Rivera here, and having the opportunity to watch him work, which you described as a fairly important event here. It must have been an important event in the artist community. And I was wondering if you weren't also then very interested in the mural developments up here associated with the PWAP and the various government in the arts projects, because I know you were of course directly involved in southern California, and thinking perhaps that the big Coit Tower project. . . . Were you in a position to be able to watch that happen?

MS: Sure.

PK: And did you come up?

MS: I wasn't involved in any way with this particular branch of the PWA, but being involved, as you said, being on the committee that was in charge of it down south, we were very interested in what was going on up here, and whenever I came north I tried to see what was going, and I saw a good part of the work in Coit Tower being done. We worked in, I think, in a wider range than they did in San Francisco.

PK: Huh?

MS: We had about ninety artists down there, and it was a great experience, because here again we had the two sides—or three sides (chuckles)—of the kind of artists that we've talking about at length, that were on this project. And Merle Armitage was the chairman of the [work] in our group, and there were four and times and sometimes five of us on that committee that was in charge, and Merle was very broad in his view of styles of art, and had no prejudice he wanted us to follow in any way. And the whole committee in southern California were friends with the man that pushed this project into becoming a project. He was a very close friend of President Roosevelt, and it was Edward Bruce. Edward Bruce prevailed upon the President to start this project as one of the answers to the great Depression.

PK: And this is the PWAP?

MS: Yeah. And we were all given an invitation by Bruce to be on this committee, so it had a very special feeling I think because we were all good friends of Bruce. Bruce lived in California, partly in San Francisco, and partly California. sometimes six months at a time. In fact he did some very interesting painting himself. And I think that whole project was exciting because it gave a real opportunity: it wasn't just the fact that they were given money to live on—which sure as hell is important—but the fact the artists felt needed and felt like the community was [doing]. . . . I think that was a wonderful period, where artists became more conscious of their place in society, that we give them fantastic jobs in colleges, public schools, and all kinds of post offices and everything else. And it was a very exciting two-and-a-half-year period that thing ran. And a lot of names came into view that had never even been heard of, because they were given this opportunity to work in public buildings. And a lot of us who were on committees like I was on gave paintings to the project, although we weren't paid anything. We gave things just to bolster up the program. I did a couple of big colored lithographs that I think like editions of 200, maybe ten-stone lithos—we used ten colors for one stone. And those \_\_\_\_\_, all over California I run into

them. (chuckles) Some of them were taken out of the school that thought they had the right to do it. You know, just one of those things, but. . . .

PK: Well now, explain to me how that would bolster the project. You mean, just to participate even though you weren't getting a stipend for having \_\_\_\_.

MS: I think it was, we weren't forced to do it in any way, but Bruce, I know when he asked me if I would give a painting, I gave him one of my best paintings. It was hung in the White House for about fifteen years.

PK: Was this, was the point then to sort of increase the level?

MS: To do everything we could to encourage people to understand that artists were living in this country and doing things.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: There were no alternative, and no other reasons to do it except that. And that painting, in fact, it's on the cover of this book. I had never, never did know why they chose that particular painting.

PK: You mean the Tenement Flats?

MS: Yeah. It belonged to the, it belongs to the Smithsonian.

PK: It's a wonderful painting.

MS: And it's a big painting, great big painting.

PK: Yeah.

MS: And it was chosen by the Roosevelts to hang from all the choices they had, you know, for that project, they took about fifteen paintings, and that just happened to be one of them. But it's. . . . It was very interesting, because, as I said, the man down south, Merle Armitage, chairman of the group. . . .

PK: Who incidentally wrote the first book on you.

MS: Right.

PK: Back in '35, maybe, something like that.

MS: Yeah. I think it was '36 or somewhere.

PK: A copy of which, a rare copy of which we have on the coffee table before us. 1935!

MS: Yeah, yeah.

PK: Anyway.

MS: Merle was interesting. As I said, he had no prejudice about styles, but he was tough as hell as who was really working and who was kind of sliding around the edge of things. And we had a couple people that had come from New York that were damn good artists, but they were a little picky and I think they were, thought of themselves as being way forward socially because they thought they were Communists. And that didn't bother Merle, or it didn't bother any of the rest of us, but they got to where they were being so critical of what they were asked to do and what other people were doing, and I remember (chuckles) Merle one day said, "Gentlemen, you know, you've heard of cancer," and he said, "When someone has a cancer, generally they cut it out." And he says, "You've just been amputated from this program." And it shocked the rest of us on the committee because we knew why he was so upset, but guts like that made that thing work. Eventually they came back on the committee, but they sure came back in different people. And one of them was one of the men that I had charge of in India, when I was out there for the art program for Life Magazine. The friendship wasn't dented.

PK: What was Stanton Macdonald-Wright's role on the program \_\_\_\_, if any?

MS: He had a whole group of artists that were just like a little wonderful batch of hens. They're not, I don't mean that, that's the wrong way to say it. They loved him, just loved Stanton Macdonald -Wright. And we found that his guidance for some of his people in doing murals was very much better than most of them that had in the \_\_\_\_ background for murals. So we got him on the committee, and he was extremely helpful, and he did an awful lot of good things. In fact, he designed some things that they worked on, which he gave his time for, like I

did.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: There were about five, I think, as I remember. They were all good painters, and they did some very big—big, big projects. Spent a year or two on one project. He was a little bit like Feitelsen. He had his very strong feeling about the kind of styles he was interested in, and he thought he was way out—way out. It seems very calm now, but. . . . But at the same time, he didn't favor those prejudices to where he was uncaring about other things.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Wonderful man. Marvelous teacher. He taught figure in a private class, right down in the main city, right down in the middle of Spring Street, I think.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And he gave an awful lot to the area, though he didn't fit into what we've been talking about as the Southern California School. He was very sympathetic and a good friend of everybody.

PK: Did you maintain—obviously you worked with him, at least when the artists were coming together on the government arts project—but did you have any, beyond that any social contact with people like Macdonald - Wright and the. . . .

MS: Oh yes. We were very good friends.

PK: \_\_\_\_ together or anything like that?

MS: We were very good friends, and we used to meet quite often for dinner. And I don't know about his wife; we never did see her. She existed, but nobody ever saw her that I know, except some very close [of hers] knew much about her.

PK: I know, that's a famous story, as a matter of fact. (chuckles) Very few people saw Mrs. Wright. I don't even know which one that would have been, actually.

MS: Oh, it's probably the last one.

PK: Oh yeah. Well, I've seen her. But that's another story.

MS: You did?

PK: Anyway, so at such gatherings what other artists might have been there? Or was it not just artists? How would you describe such gatherings and social occasions?

MS: Well, we met for so many different reasons. Partly due to this PWA, but other projects that came later that were just strictly professional things. We became advisors to the people that were hiring somebody or sometimes some people were doing [the, a] work. And we met on very happy basis on that side. There was a marvelous student of his that did, that became a very good painter. Well, he always was a good painter, but he became a hell of a good painter. And through this one man we met often. And there were good, they were happy meetings. There wasn't this dogfight thing at all. It was, everybody I think respected what other people were doing—at least the sincerity of it—and he was a real good blender.

PK: Who were some of the other people that might have been at one of these \_\_\_\_ say more social rather than professional gatherings? Would Lorser Feitelsen perhaps \_\_\_\_?

MS: Yes, Feitelsen, [\_\_\_\_—Ed.] Redmond—was one of his students—Fletcher Martin—very good painter. Good muralist, and he did some. . . . I think the last three or four years of his life he \_\_\_\_ some of the most interesting paintings [being] done in this country. He died prematurely. I think he was only sixty. But I think the biggest thing I felt—I feel now looking back, is that the artist, in the main, was not integrated into business—I'm not talking about commercial work—but like I talked to you about meeting these bank boards. You get so involved with them on a personal basis and on a common basis—a common-problem basis—that an artist is used like a ordinary person, not some freak. (chuckles) And the artist doesn't feel that the banker's a freak. It's a thing that is too lacking in our training in art. It's never suggested, in my knowledge, of most teachers to become involved to the point where you really have an equal concern on such projects. It puts an artist in a totally different position than when you think of somebody's that touted here by dealer, touted here by some critic. If you're really working together to solve problems it's a totally different thing. And it goes over into the social side, as well as in the business side.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: I think it's one of the chief weaknesses of all talking about art by critics. There are not many critics that ever bring that into part of their commentary on the place of art, the purpose of art. They just talk about style, just talk about their personal likes and dislikes. I think the only one that goes beyond, in my opinion, is the guy that writes for Time Magazine.

PK: Robert Hughes?

MS: Yeah.

PK: Yeah, I think he's very good.

MS: I think he's the best one in the country, as far as I'm concerned, and one of the only ones that I respect deeply because he'll write about anything, whether it's some seventeenth-century painter or some kid that just came up in last week. He's a man that I trust his judgment.

PK: Well, in speaking of the critical community in Los Angeles, it certainly was—or presumably was—limited at that time, the time we're talking about: the twenties, thirties, especially in the forties. On the other hand, judging from the nice Reginald Johnson scrapbook. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . which contains all these clippings from the early period, starting in the thirties, there was a fair amount of writing about art in this area. Arthur Millier, especially. How do you pronounce it? I say Mill-yay, but is it Mill-yer?

MS: No, Mill-yay is right.

PK: He was writing and sympathetically about you? Was he a friend? I mean. . . .

MS: He became a very good friend.

PK: . . . did you have a social relationship?

MS: He became a very good friend. But I think he was one of the few critics who really cared about artists being artists. He did do nice things for me, but it wasn't because we were friends, it's because it's the way he felt about you, I mean, what you were doing. And the haven't had anyone in the Times [Los Angeles?—Ed.] since that's had the slightest interest in an artist or their life. I think the present batch is the worst batch they've ever had. And I think that it's tragic. You've had one man in San Francisco for a long time—Frankenstein—who I knew very well. And I felt that he was very opinionated and extremely—well, he was so unequipped to write about a lot of things that he did write about. He just didn't know enough. Arthur Millier at least did care about an artist and what they were trying to do in society, and he did more to really push art forward, not only on the artists' side but on the side for collectors and using art in various ways. Before him Anthony Anderson was a critic was well-known, and he had reasonable background as far as knowing about different kinds of art, but he didn't have the same kind of feeling about the place of an artist. And I think that the people that are there now are just absolutely impossible.

[Tape 5, side B]

PK: We were talking about the critical, the critics and the critical community in Los Angeles at the earlier period, and we seem to be focusing pretty much around the thirties—but a little earlier, little later of course—and you were making some interesting comments about that. You mentioned Anthony Anderson, and I was wondering if there were any other names that come to mind, people who were writing on art in Los Angeles at the time that are of some note or made a difference one way or the other.

MS: Well, there was a man who wrote at times for Arthur Millier. He would write for maybe two weeks or a month. Maybe he was on vacation or just he asked him to do it. Here, I can't think of the name again, but I'll think of it. Now he was a wonderful critic. He was a good artist and he became eventually the head of the L.A. City. . . .

PK: Ross?

MS: Yeah. Kenneth Ross.

PK: Kenneth Ross.

MS: Right. Now I said I think he was interesting because he also knew the artists and did care, not just to talk about his friends, but to support what the artist was trying to do. It was a different thing than just treating it as a plaything that you could talk about according to your terms and to hell with otherwise. And there was a woman that wrote for the L.A. Examiner, who was not a very talented critic, but she was again really interested in the artists. And I think that made a big difference. I can't think of it. [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.] Parsons, I think, was her name, but I'm not sure. [PK appears to be searching through the scrapbook for names—Trans.] Now people used to read Arthur Millier every Sunday. Most of the people took the Times. It was a page of art. Now I don't think they do that today at all, in Los Angeles. They have at least three or four critics down there now.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And I think it's not only boring, it's just, it's gobbledygook most of it. You can not even understand it! And I don't think I'm that dumb that I couldn't understand. But it's just, it's so squeaky at times that \_\_\_\_\_ that I don't like what he likes. I just don't like what he writes because I can't understand it. And I think it's purposeless. There was a critic way back—you're too young to remember—by the name of [Calrence] Bulliet, who wrote for the Chicago Daily News or Tribune, one or the other. In fact I liked his writing a great deal, and I brought him out to teach in the summer session in the graduate school one summer. Everybody liked him so much, we brought him out two summers more. And he really knew what the struggle of art in the United States was all about, and he wrote in such a way that he widened the range of everybody's thinking. And he did write sometimes very critically and sometimes with a great deal of enthusiasm about the different artists. But mainly he wrote about art, and what art does and means and what it has always meant. And he could move back in space and time, and I don't think that guy at the Times can move more a quarter of an inch back of 1930 or '40.

PK: So you felt back in that earlier period that there were some good writers. I mean, that there were writers who were paying attention to the art that was being made in the area.

MS: And I'm not condemning or trying to say I thought their style was that great. I think Arthur Millier had a warmth that everybody felt, and I think that he did through and created a hell of an interest in art.

PK: He also did that interesting series of profiles of artists he did for several years in thirties, and then he picked it up again later, I think, in the forties. And you were the subject of I think maybe it was number twelve—I'm not sure—one of the early profiles.

MS: I wouldn't know. But, for instance, I was directing the County Fair art exhibit for some 27 years, and in the latter years we put on some pretty fine exhibits, and I would have him write the forewords or the purpose of the exhibit and that kind of thing. He did a fabulous job on those catalogues. I have all those catalogues. Did you ever see any of those catalogues?

PK: Um hmm, yeah, yeah.

MS: Well, I think my budget when I started the fair was about \$1,500—total. My little salary of \$300 or so—whatever it was (chuckles)—and then the rest was divided into prizes and lighting expense and things like that. My last show I put on we spent \$125,000 in my budget.

PK: You know, this is a topic that we have to get into, and now is as good a time as any. You obviously played an important role in terms of bringing art to the area to be seen. We started out this interview by your pointing out in the very early days, when you were a youngster and not even in art school, it was very difficult to see anything at all.

MS: Yeah.

PK: And I gather that that situation changed dramatically over a couple decades.

MS: Oh yeah.

PK: And it's also clear that you were in a position to play a role in all that. I was fascinated when you were earlier on telling me about, well, these rather ambitious county fair exhibitions, which maybe you can tell briefly just some of the history of that: how it came about and how you got away with doing that sort of thing.

MS: Well, I became the director because I had been the assistant director to Mr. Modra, the man burned me to the ground about painting a copy.

PK: Right.

MS: I became his assistant when I was in I think my first year in art school, 1925. And he died suddenly, maybe three or four years later, and they were probably dumb enough on the county fair board to think I having been there should go on with it. And I did it, and I became very enthusiastic about it because we had a million people



come to the fair every year. A million people. And I think that 90 percent of them saw most of this last fifteen or twenty years of exhibits. The fun of it was that after going ahead with the program as it had been set up by Mr. Modra I felt that just a regional show of the local artists every year, the same sort of thing, wasn't enough, and I felt that we should educate in a broader way by changing the purpose each year and getting new sides of art in front of the people who had, would never see it more than once a year, if that. And with a million people coming, and we had days that we know 100,000 people went through that art gallery. That's just a hell of a lot of people. It wasn't too long [but, that] I got the fair to see that we had a purpose, if they could build a building that was decent, so they built a beautiful big building. And we had three big galleries, and I had an assistant who had all the crafts and that part of it, and did a beautiful job, and that was Richard Petterson. And after first having some national shows, by invitation, and no prizes, but we bought a few of the things each year for the fair collection. We were able to borrow from the best artists in the country the things that I thought would be good representative things. One year was sculpture, one year was painting, and we went through that kind of thing. Then I \_\_\_\_\_ on things like Five Thousand Years of Art in Clay. And that was a hell of an interesting exhibit, because I borrowed wonderful things. And the big, the show that I think created the most fuss and feathers was when we did. . . . Oh. Can't even remember titles.

PK: What was it about?

MS: It was. . . . After the war there was so much feeling against the Japanese, against the Germans, and against Italians.

PK: Right.

MS: I thought, "I'm going to put on an exhibit of One World of Art, and I borrowed things from the Louvre, I borrowed things from the British Museum. . . . Can you imagine that for a county fair? I borrowed very important things. The Metropolitan gave us some fabulous things. And I had one representative for every culture and every \_\_\_\_\_ of art, and at first they were going to be real nasty and have groups of people who would try to keep people from seeing the exhibit. We were given a lot of funny publicity. And by the time the fair opened, it all died out and we had, we know we had a million people go through that exhibit. Then I associated with House Beautiful and had like twenty designs built in as separate little rooms inside of the big gallery. And we would furnish completely the rooms and had different artists do something very special for each room. Sometimes it was a whole wall of decoration, sometimes it was paintings, sometimes it was sculpture. And we did that two years and had national publicity through House Beautiful because they collaborated with us.

PK: Hm.

MS: That's when those costs went up a great deal, because we built really just more than a dozen big important rooms. And yet the public got the biggest kick out of that you can imagine, because they could see the things hung on walls as a part of a real way of living. And House Beautiful did everything in the world to support it.

PK: What kept you. . . . Now you served in that capacity for many years. I'm not sure. . . .

MS: Twenty-seven.

PK: Okay. And I suppose in a way it was a civic service to, because it was located in Pomona, right?

MS: Yeah, that part of it was fine, but to do that kind of thing took almost a year of planning, so I never had any rest.

PK: Well, yeah, I was wondering what was, specifically though, what was the motivation, the incentive to stay with it? Obviously you could have then presumably turned it over to somebody at some point. You had many other challenges. What kept you at it? What special, well, special role did you see these exhibitions playing.

MS: Well, Modra, when he started the county fair show, said "bringing art to the people." Well, I never forgot that and I thought, because of the long years of experience, I knew that we were bringing things to people that they would never ordinarily see. . . .

PK: They wouldn't go to museums.

MS: . . . by any possibility.

PK: They wouldn't go to museums.

MS: Well, once in a while one might, but it'd be once in a while, and very few people. (chuckles) And I got such a big bang out of the reactions of people when they looked at things that had been done three or four hundred years ago, great paintings, because we borrowed some fabulous things. God, you've see the list, you wouldn't believe some of the things.

PK: Well, you brought old masters in, I believe.

MS: Oh yeah.

PK: Probably that wouldn't happen again in the same circumstances.

MS: I don't think anybody could have \_\_\_\_ in the county fair.

PK: What about the other side of it? What about the more radical, more recent work?

MS: Oh, I had lots of that.

PK: Did you try keep that balance[d] as well?

MS: I wouldn't say I kept a balance of everything that was going on, no. But I had marvelous things by the best painters—American painters—many of whom I knew and was able to get their works. It wasn't easy. And I had the personal problem of seeing that nothing could happen to these things—with a million people going through. I remember— one example—in this One World of Art I had a great pre-Columbian piece I got from the Stendahl Gallery. Earl Stendahl was one of the my closest friends. I said, "I want the best piece that you can possibly get for me." So he gave me a Oaxtacan figure. And that's the, they're the people that came right after the Mayans, from eastern side of Mexico.

PK: Veracruz, or something like that?

MS: Veracruz, right. So we had a railing that stood about five feet from the wall, of solid, wonderful, a big oak railing, connected with pipes down into the concrete. Very sturdy thing. And I put all these things on the walls or on pedestals, inside of this railing. And this Oaxtacan piece the first day the show opened my assistant called me—because I was up at the college teaching—and said, "I don't even know how to tell you, but something horrible has happened." I said, "My god, what was that?" And he said, "That marvelous pre-Columbian piece"—it was a figure about, \_\_\_\_ a figure about that high, from the floor. He said, "A little girl about five or six ran, before anybody could stop her, from the middle of the room, grabbed the railing and swung under it—she was small enough to do it—swung under it, and then to get back out, she kicked this pedestal. It went forward, and the figure just dropped on the concrete, and it's in about 75 pieces."

PK: [gasps]

MS: "What should I do?" I said, "Get everyone out of the gallery, close the gallery, and you, and anybody that you can get to help you, get every tiny piece of that thing and put it in a special package, and then we'll open the art gallery tomorrow." Now my problem was how to tell Earl.

PK: (chuckles) Now that's a big problem.

MS: Who was such a close friend and, really. . . . He was terribly excited about the county fair, because of all the, the one in clay was such a great show. And I called him and said, "Earl, I've got to tell you something that I can't tell you how deeply I feel about it, but we've had a terrible accident." He said, "What's that?" So I told him. And there was dead silence—for about a minute, maybe a minute and a half—and he said, "Thank God it's one that I own and it's not something from the Louvre or the Metropolitan."

PK: That was his response.

MS: Wasn't that something?

PK: Good for him.

MS: That's the kind of a friend he was. Well, he had a wonderful staff. They put that thing together and they took photographs at all phases of it being put together, but it was so perfect when they got through with it you couldn't tell it was broken.

PK: You're kidding!

MS: And eventually they sold it to a museum, and the museum knew the whole story, knew the whole thing. It was a great, great piece. I think it sold in those days for something like \$20,000.

PK: What?

MS: Yeah. But it was a perfect job of. . . . They didn't add anything because we, they found every single piece, each little tiny thing they found. Those kind of experience made you want to get the hell out of that business in a

hurry.

PK: That's for sure! But nonetheless you stuck with it for twenty. . . .

MS: Twenty-seven years.

PK: . . . seven years, yeah.

MS: And I'll tell you the reason I quit.

PK: Why did you quit?

MS: The manager of the fair was a, had been. . . . I'd known him since my childhood. I had grown up a neighbor and he'd been very nice socially and that kind of thing. But he nothing about art. He didn't learn anything in the 27 years, at all. And he commented one day, after this big show, that had created such a wonderful feeling about it, and said, "How'd you like a year off?" I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind a year off. What do you have in mind?" "Well," he said, "I'd like. . . . There's so much interest in snapshots, photographic snapshots, that I'd like to have a competition for people taking good motion picture, good snapshots." And I said, "Well, Jack, I think it'd be fine for you to do that if you think that that's in order, but then don't call this a year's leave, just say I'm not coming back. Because this has no relation to what we. . . . I think it'd be wonderful if you'd put on a show like that—in another building, but not in the art building. Not that I don't think photography can't be an art—because it can. Snapshots don't suggest that." And he said, "Well, you don't mean that." He said, "I wouldn't let you quit." And I said "\_\_\_\_\_ if you \_\_\_\_\_ put on a show I'm not coming back." And they put on the worst damn show you ever heard of.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: So I never went back.

PK: Well, during that time, what do you feel these shows accomplished? Obviously, a great number of people saw works of art, design, crafts, and so forth. But beyond that, did you feel that it made a difference to the artists in the area?

MS: Oh, I think so. I think so, because a lot of people became collectors through that show—a lot of people. And I used the Scripps College Foundation to always come to the openings and be hosts, hostesses. And that moved right out into society. It was a very different thing than if you just let people walk through.

PK: Um hmm. So it really was an important art focus or activity. . . .

MS: Oh, I think it was.

PK: . . . on an annual basis.

MS: Yeah. Then the year after the photography, my assistant from the crafts became the director. And he started a strong program of artists working right there in the galleries in various media, and being a ceramist himself they had people throw great pots. He'd bring people from Japan, some of the top. . . . One of them was Hamada! Hamada came from Japan! And executed pottery in front of the people. And he had people doing painting, doing furniture, doing all kinds of interesting things. And it's still going on, and now the young director [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.], who's married to a Japanese woman, and they've just done a hell of an interesting, quite modern exhibit.

PK: So it's going on, it's continuing.

MS: Oh yeah. Sure.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: Moving back from Pomona and the county fair, up to San Francisco, we were talking earlier about the many artists that you've met and became friends with in that area, and one of them, I was interested to hear, was Lucien Labaudt who played, I think, a very prominent role in the Bay area art community from an early date, and I know had certain connections with southern California artists as well. And I know there's a particularly poignant aspect to your relationship with Labaudt. Perhaps you could tell me about it.

MS: He was a marvelous man, and he was one of the best-known San Francisco artists in southern California. He used to come down to exhibits, and he did have exhibits, and one time some of us got into a real mess with the city because one of his paintings had been barred—I think it was a nude—and we went to bat and raised so much hell that I don't think it would ever happen again.

PK: What exhibition was that, by the way?

MS: It was an exhibition in. . . .

PK: At the museum?

MS: At the county museum, I think, yeah. It was the old museum, not the new one.

PK: Right.

MS: But the thing that I mentioned that you asked me to talk about was back during the war. As you know, I was a correspondent for Life Magazine and I had charge of seven artists in the India-Burma-China front, who were all doing on, or working on the same program. When I say in charge, it was only in seeing that the area was covered. It was a hell of an area, \_\_\_\_\_ say China and Burma and India. It was an enormous area of space to cover, so all I had to do, as far as Life was concerned, and all I did do, being in charge, in that sense, was to see that each area and every facet could be covered as best we could. And Lucien Labaudt was on the program but the last one to arrive in India. We came on separate ships and planes and whatnot. And it was very exciting to meet him, the day he arrived—I think it was Thursday. And he was just so excited to be in India he couldn't hardly stand it, and we had lunch, and he just was hopelessly excited in the idea of going to China, and when I said, "You can't go right now because we've got two people up there." And I'd got him all settled to go down where they were training these men that were under one of the best generals, going in under Stillwell to take a certain part of Burma. And he was just like a child. Tears came into his eyes and just felt like the world had gone to hell that he couldn't go right to China. He said, "My whole life has been waiting to go to China." I said, "Well, all of the people here feel the same way. In fact, I haven't been there yet, though I'm slated to go next Monday." And I said, "I've been here [several, seven] months, and I've held back because I wanted to give everybody a chance first." And I said, "My orders have been cut, and you know in the Army when your orders are cut it's damn hard to reverse them. But if there's any way I can do it, we'll see what I can do." And I knew a general who—it was strictly a social connection. I thought I could find out if there was any way of doing it, and I told him the story, and he looked very nonplussed for a minute, and he said, "Well, if you're willing to do it, I think we can do it." But he said, "Who is this guy that you're so concerned about?" "Well, he's just a wonderful artist and wonderful friend, and he's older than the rest of us quite a bit, and I'd like to do it if you can possibly do it." He said, "I'll do it if you will take me and the artist to dinner tonight. I want to meet this guy." And so he had my orders changed to stay where I was, which was in Delhi, and set it up for him to go on my plane on Monday. And he enjoyed meeting Labaudt, and he said, "Well, I understand how much this means to him, and I'm just glad we could do it. I'm glad you asked me to do it." It wasn't his particular job to do, but he did it. He was the second in command of the whole U.S. Army thing. Well, we had a wonderful on Saturday and then Sunday, and I took him down to the plane Monday morning early, to fly to Delhi, and then the big plane to go over the hump into China, he caught that at Delhi sometime after lunch on Monday. And they, and in Delhi, the most famous fighter pilot in that whole theater was there, and when the plane was ready to take off for China, he walked up in the front, in the cockpit, and told the young lieutenant who was in charge and was going to fly the plane, he said, "Move over into the other seat, because I'm going to take this in." Well, the younger pilot knew how famous this guy was, and how everybody thought he was the best pilot in the country, worried about it, and he said, "Do you have, have you been checked out on this big plane?" "Yeah, yeah." "Well, do you have orders to make this possible?" "You know I, do I, just move over." And he did, and the man was so inexperienced with this big plane that he landed on the first landing in Burma, before the final flight over the hump, he landed about 800 feet short of the field, of where you, in the jungle. Everybody was killed. So I've just said, I've had the most awful feeling about that ever since. \_\_\_\_\_ was killed, and the realization that if he hadn't insisted so much I would have been the one. Been a very, not frightening thing, but just a very sad experience.

PK: Well, it's interesting how fate operates.

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH MILLARD SHEETS  
AT BARKING ROCKS, HIS HOME IN [WALLALLA, VALJALLA], CALIFORNIA  
JULY 14, 1988  
PAUL KARLSTROM, INTERVIEWER  
(CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW BEGUN OCTOBER 28 & 29, 1986)

MS: MILLARD SHEETS

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

[Tape 6, side A; marked Tape 1, side A, July 14, 1988—30-minute tape sides]

PK: [Archives of] American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is the conclusion of an interview with Millard Sheets,

at his home in Gualala, California. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. The date is, we think, July 15, 1988  
[Interruption in taping]

MS: . . . I'm not well but, you know, I'm going to be all right.

PK: All right, well, here we are, Millard, almost two years after we did the first two sessions, and this is our opportunity to conclude a fairly lengthy and comprehensive interview with you, for which I'm grateful and for which the Archives of American Art is grateful as well.

What I would like to do today is pull together some loose ends, basically, and we may bring up questions, discuss themes that were already addressed in the earlier interview, but I think that's perfectly okay. And I'd like to start out by looking back again to the decades of the twenties, thirties, say through the forties, and try to, if you would, identify—in retrospect now—some of the main tendencies, what you really now would think were the main currents, the main developments in California art—or specifically, I think, in Southern California art. How would describe that? And more important strengths.

MS: Well, I think that it's a comparatively simple question that you've asked me to answer, because when I grew up in the twenties I was certainly much aware of what was going on in the art world. I didn't start school until 1925. I had had these connections with some of the finest painters, who gave me not only wonderful background—whatever I should have—but they gave me a real sense of what was going on in California at the time. In fact, to a certain degree, what was going on in the world. I would have to say that we had a group of people that were well-established when I was just a child, who painted California in the most romantic sense. They painted—it's sometimes referred to— not lovingly, and it should be, really—the Eucalyptus School. They are people that painted the hills, the foothills of Pasadena, and all the eucalyptus groves and the mountains—which were very clear in those days; we had no smog.

PK: The good old days, right?

MS: And they used to paint them with beautiful light, lovely atmosphere, and they wouldn't have hurt a flea. It was a nice kind of painting that about fifteen painters were deeply involved in. Their names are very easily accessible in all the books, books written about them.

PK: Yeah, I think we know who some of them are.

MS: There's no point in spending time to go over those now. But I grew up with these people. Not with the idea that I ever wanted to paint that way, from the very beginning. It didn't particularly excite me, but I had admiration for the fact that they did things so beautifully and so simply.

There was second group of people who were largely people who had transferred from the east in their middle age or the latter part of their life, who represented everything from American Impressionism to [painters, phases] of the New York school, various kinds. And this second group wasn't organized like the first group was, almost as a simple batch, and a group of people that not only painted well but brought a great deal to the community. There's no doubt about that. And they gave something that I think meant a great deal even at that time.

Now the third group is a group that I certainly belong to. We are born here. We grew up here. We had no real museums. We had a small collection in the L.A. Museum of American Art, and it was in the old, old History I mean Science and Art Museum, and there were no exhibitions, even when I grew up. There were no magazines. There were no art books. There were no radio or television programs on art. It was simply a destitute area as far as getting any kind of basic knowledge of the meaning of art, the purpose of art, the reason for its existence. We thought of painting as being a very important thing just to do because you wanted to do it as an ego trip. But there was none of the philosophy or the kind of thing that has guided artists through thousands of years to produce for the good of society, regardless of how simple or simplistic or how primitive or how aesthetic the advance of society should be. There was none of that, absolutely none of that! So the whole group of us that ended up going, mostly going to Chouinard School just loved the country we lived in. We just loved to paint it. And we loved to paint every little aspect of it. We loved to paint the rivers, the erosions, the downtown. Everything! To me there was no limit to what people were interested in and everybody painted anything or everything. And we grew up in almost total ignorance of any kind of aesthetic history or philosophic experience, that took us some time later to learn. And our enthusiasm and our just excitement in each other, in working with each other, was very strong. It was something that is now called the California School, because they have no better name for it, I guess.

It's a group of people that I think grew up in a time when there was nothing to do but to do it. There was nothing to get any real sense of style or any kind of inspiration from except the pure fun of painting our golden hills and our green hills and our sea, and we ran around like maniacs going to the desert. Sometimes in groups of five or six at a time, we'd camp out there on the ground and paint for three or four days, till we couldn't stand it any longer and we'd go home. And we'd do the same thing going down to the places like the—well, this wonderful place in San Pedro where they had the fishing fleet.

PK: Was that Point [Fermain]?

MS: No, for the moment that's gone out of my mind. I'll think of it in a moment. But it was. . . .

PK: Near Palos Verdes, though, wasn't it?

MS: No, it was near San Pedro.

PK: No. Oh, okay.

MS: And it was so, it was very important as a fishing village. They did, oh, tremendous, had tremendous catches. It was mostly Japanese. There were a few others, but largely Japanese. They had sumi wrestlers come over from Japan. It was very dramatic and exciting to see them, and they were very nice to us, and they accepted us as (chuckles) kind of an inevitable thing that would be down there a lot. And I practically lived down there for summertime.

PK: Hmm!

MS: I would go down and camp, and I would, and I wasn't alone. Phil Dike and Phil Paradise, the whole group of guys used to go down, and we'd paint the fish harbor, which was, it was a very exciting thing, because the boats were coming in with these great batches of fish. They were being unloaded, they were being handled in the, inside the building where the fish were either prepared for canning or prepared for market. And we saw it all. And we knew the fishermen so well that it was a very important part of our life, not because we thought it was necessary, [nothing, something] that was a great art project, but it was a great art project for us. It's just something that was so exciting and challenging, and getting up at four o'clock in the morning and watching the boats go out when it was still dark, all the lights. We made just zillions of sketches of every possibility of activity. And then having them come in and seeing them unload. It was very, a very exciting thing, and we're just lucky it existed there.

Some of the ranches were interesting to us in the early days. We used to go to [some] cattle ranches, and they had horses and we drew up—not as Western painters, really at all, but just because we loved to use these subjects in our own way.

I think I'm going to have to sum it up by simply saying we literally grew up in ignorance about the things that all the things the students in New York knew, who had museums, who had teachers who had been involved in these things.

Of course we had one or two teachers that were very well experienced and had marvelous backgrounds and they made a great difference to us. We had a man by the name of Tolles Chamberlain who. . . .

PK: Right, yeah, you talked about him. . . .

MS: . . . who taught painting and drawing. And when I, when I used to see him in his Roman toga pace up and down in front of the life class talking about [Giotto] and people I never heard of, and then things like murals—I didn't know what a mural was. It was a tremendous opening, eye-opening, to get to know those people who had been through them, but there were so few of them, and they were so wonderful to us. . . . And of course Chamberlain in particular had marvelous black-and-white reproductions of practically everything that was ever done in Egypt and in Italy and in Afr—not Africa—in Egypt. And he'd spent eight years at the academy [in Rome], and he made jillions of drawings and studies in those places. So he could talk to us about them in a different light. He was our museum!

PK: Well, you know, what you're describing is young artists working almost in a state of innocence. It's kind of a Garden of Eden.

MS: Oh yeah. (chuckles) It absolutely was.

PK: And this is. . . . On the other hand, though, you did mention that there were models in the Eucalyptus School painters, the California landscape Impressionists who were there, and also these sort of emigres from New York. So I have two questions. One is why do you suppose these New Yorkers came to an area that seemed so unpromising in terms of a career in art, and, number one, what drew them? And number two, didn't you then have some contact with these professionals from New York, whatever their style they may have been practicing.

MS: Particularly in the thirties, not in the twenties.

PK: Not in the twenties.

MS: In the twenties they arrived unseen and unheard of. I mean, they were just, they. . . . Some of them bought ranches, some of them bought little places to live, quietly. And, see, there were no exhibits to amount to anything. We had one annual exhibit at the L.A. Museum, and none of these people entered that, those

museums, as I remember now—and I think I'm correct in remembering it that way.

PK: [Um hmm.]

MS: And of course none of us did because we were too young. I guess we tried to get in and maybe finally did, but. . . . I finally did, I think, in the early thirties when the picture that's now in the museum won the prize. But in the twenties that was almost an unheard of thing to get into the show. So we really didn't see these people much until the thirties. Then they began to—eight of them, for example, started the California Watercolor Society. And there hadn't been any watercolor society. And I never painted watercolor. Nobody ever painted watercolors. I think I told you the story already about Chamberlain saying, "What the hell you carrying all that heavy load around?"

PK: Right, absolutely.

MS: So I started painting watercolors, and the next year Mrs. Chouinard had me teaching painting, teaching watercolor, and here I was only the second year in the school, and it was ridiculous. I was scared of my voice and frightened of people and everything else. But all the kids came in and all these young fellows that I went to school with were just terribly excited about learning something about watercolor. And of course I did some of the worse teaching because I taught style. I didn't teach. . . . I taught technique; I didn't teach anything about basic. . . . Didn't know enough.

PK: So there really wasn't, in your recollection, much of a fruitful contact between you and others who were really learning art, becoming artists in Southern California in that time, and professionals who had come in from other areas who did have contact with. . . .

MS: Well, toward the end of the twenties, a man like Clarence Hinkle. . . .

PK: You mentioned him, that's right.

MS: . . . who had lived in Europe for the last ten years, came back from Paris and from, well, various parts of Europe, and I think I told you, the first time I ever had a painting accepted in a professional show, I was sixteen and a half.

PK: Yes. Yeah, we have that story; it's a good one.

MS: And when I met this man, and he was so interested in the fact that I'd painted it, he said, "Do me a favor." I said, "Yessir, what is it?" He said, "Please set aside every Saturday, first Saturday of every month, come down and have lunch with me and my wife, and let's talk about art." Well, imagine what an incredible opportunity that was for me to discover the world. Because he knew the world. He was one of the most fascinating men that ever lived.

PK: So that was an eye-opener for you.

MS: Ohhh. . . .

PK: This was one of your first introductions to fine art beyond. . . .

MS: . . . beyond a few American artists, yeah.

PK: Right, and some basics and then an enthusiasm for your environment.

MS: Yeah.

PK: Would you describe your earliest efforts as something—or earliest interests, in terms of subject matter—as an attraction to what I might call local color, sort of. Sort of a variation of a regionalist approach, where you appreciate what's around you and as an artist then deal with it.

MS: Well, later on, you see, the regional painters like Grant Wood and that whole group that became famous for regional painting. . . . Because we had been isolated out here and had painted in our own way our own region, they in a sense tried to make regionalists out of us, and yet none of us had ever done it by choice. We'd just done it because we didn't have anything else to do.

PK: But do you see any similarities, even though you came to it yourself? That's what I'm saying.

MS: Yes, I do. I see a great deal of similarity. Although I think that. . . .

PK: I mean, in terms of the motivation perhaps, or what you're after, as artists.

MS: I think there is a great similarity. I think it's one reason that probably a lot of new interest in that early period now is because it is regional art.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: But it was much wider in range than the California Eucalyptus School, which was pretty definitely very nice painting, but not terribly exciting painting.

PK: You mentioned. . . . Before I move on to that, you were talking—or you alluded to, I think, the painting Angel's Flight as an early award, one of your early award-winning paintings. It was a purchase prize, if I'm not mistaken. At any rate, could you sort of fill me in on how that came about: the circumstances of doing that painting, why you were attracted to that subject, and then what happened with the painting. Because that's one of your better-known works, I think.

MS: Well, I think it was about 1929, or possibly '28—yes, it was '28. I had painted almost everything in the countryside and the hills and valleys of California. I became very interested and very excited about downtown Los Angeles. And a lot of people thought I was crazy. Because I painted down there continuously. I'd go right down and set up a big canvas right in the middle of the street. Not in the middle of the street, but right [up] in the middle of the sidewalk.

PK: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. (chuckles)

MS: And had to tie it down with bricks to keep the wind from blowing it away. And I'd paint these things. And [these days, usually, \_\_\_\_] now the people are driving me crazy \_\_\_\_ because they want them, and the only ones that I have are the ones that I gave to my, to Mary in very beginning and we [don't] want to sell them. But the thing is I'd been painting up and down Bunker Hill and all around the northern part of Spring and Broadway, when it was just really rough, colorful as the devil, interesting, to me very, very exciting. In fact, Mary was pregnant with her, with our first child, and she stood out there with me all day while I painted this picture which we call Spring Street.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And I remember \_\_\_\_ a man came up. I was painting away, and this man said, stood and looked at it a little while, and he said, "Would you rather do that sort of thing or work for a living?"

PK: What did you say?

MS: I didn't answer him.

PK: You should have said, "This is pretty hard work." (chuckles)

MS: I didn't answer him; I didn't think it was worth it. But that was done right on the spot, never touched inside at all, ever. I never worked on it after it was finished there. And I used to take forty by fifty canvases out and do that. That's a thirty by thirty-six \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. But I painted from Spring Street looking up, and I got up on top of the hill and looked down, and then when I went down to where the Angel's Flight was, used to run up and down. . . . That was a memorable thing, because that was a very, it was the only kind of lift they had in Los Angeles up this very steep grade.

PK: Yeah, I remember that.

MS: And of course I painted the other side of it. I painted the houses on it, that ran down, instead of the lift. The lift didn't interest me. But that was just one of so many that I just did automatically. It was not any I did specially.

PK: Well, didn't you finish up Angel's Flight though in your house? You were living in Hollywood at that time?

MS: Oh yes, I painted that for Carnegie, for my second painting for Carnegie, and I worked awfully hard on it, but I had made very careful sketches and I did paint it in the house.

PK: I think Mary said that you had, what, two children then, or. . . .

MS: Oh, just one.

PK: Just the one then, had arrived.

MS: One. She was just about a month old.



PK: Yep. (chuckles)

MS: But we had this little tiny house with two bedrooms, and the bedroom was. . . . It wasn't big enough hardly to stand in the room and look at this picture, but [I did it. OR: I don't know how I did it in there but anyway I did it.]

PK: Where did you live in Hollywood? You remember?

MS: Well, it was just below Sunset on one of those main streets. I've forgotten now the name of it. We just rented that house for a little while after the baby was born until I found a studio, another place.

PK: Um hmm. This of course was well before Scripps or any of that.

MS: This was 1930, way back.

PK: Yeah.

MS: Two years before Scripps.

PK: It's interesting that you were drawn to the city subjects. You know, it occurs to me that you may have been one of the first to make out of Los Angeles anyway, downtown Los Angeles, subject matter for painting, for serious painting.

MS: Oh, I just loved it. I just used to all times of day, morning, noon, and night, go into those old tenement houses and sketch and draw and paint. The big one I did, that's in the Smithsonian Institute, was another forty by fifty that I did there.

PK: Which one is that?

MS: It's called Tenement Flats, very architectural, lots of laundry and lots of [building, buildings].

PK: Right. Is that at the National Museum of American Art, I guess?

MS: Yes.

PK: Yeah.

MS: It was in the White House for about fifteen years. I gave that when I. . . . I was on the committee that had charge of the PWA project, and after that project was pretty well along, Edward Bruce, who sort of made the thing go—he got the President to do it—asked me to give something, and I didn't want to give anything I thought wasn't important, so I gave him one of the best pictures I had, which was this great big painting. And the Roosevelts selected it for the White House, where it hung for, I think, two or three presidents, and then they finally moved it to the Smithsonian.

PK: Was there any other reason that you turned from the more conventionally picturesque subjects of—oh, a fishing village you mentioned, the ranchos, and, you know, the landscape, the hills—to the urban subject. I mean, was it simply that you were excited by the energy, the picturesque aspect of the clothes hanging up, or was there something more to it?

MS: Well, I think it was that I was terribly excited about the design that I found in it. But also, by this time, everybody else was painting what I used to paint. All the kids were going around painting landscapes and gone to the same places and, you know, even same farms, and so I sort of escaped the group. . . .

PK: And nobody else had done downtown L.A.

MS: No. Oh I think they had done a little bit, but not very much.

PK: Umm. So you were really a pioneer in that genre or \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_.

MS: Oh yeah. \_\_\_\_\_. Those marvelous [sky, guy].

PK: What happened with the painting then? Meaning Angel's Flight. What happened with the painting? What was its history? You finished it, and then I believe it was purchased for [L.A.] \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: Oh, the Angel's Flight history. Well, I won the prize in the only L.A. show that they had at that time at the museum. It was called L.A. Southern California show. And Mrs. Maitland, who was a remarkable woman, the kind of woman you'd dream about for really supporting the purpose of art—not just support financially—but. . . . She had not only marvelous resources, but she had a wonderful vision and she, we were very good friends, in a very

nice casual way, and she called me up when she saw this painting and she said, "I just have to have it." And I said, "Oh good, that's no problem." And she said, "Well, I think I would like to give it to the museum," and I said, "Well, that's just great." So she bought it and gave it to the museum.

PK: And then later on—you were saying at lunch—many years later, you got wind that they were threatening to deaccession.

MS: They were going to. They were going to deaccession \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ . . . .

PK: And what did you do?

MS: Well, I was very unhappy about that and told them why, and told them that it was so unfair to her, because she had done a, some, to, really, for the museum, and it was very special in her mind, and that if they felt the picture wasn't worthwhile, that was perfectly all right: I wanted to buy it myself; I didn't want the thing just to be casually sold someplace at an auction, or pedaled off. And so I offered them about three times what she'd paid for it. And the guy blinked over the telephone two or three times, and said, "Well, we haven't really decided this."

PK: This was a director you were talking to.

MS: This was \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ director, yeah. And finally. . . . He said he'd call me back, which he never did. But the woman who had given me the information that it was going to be sold told me that he announced at the next meeting that they were not going to sell it. He did sell a lot of stuff they shouldn't have sold.

PK: What does that tell you about. . . Well, I hate to generalize and say the community, but I mean here is a painting that now is viewed as one of the key images in the history of Los Angeles, and the museum of that city actually considered disposing of the work. What does that tell you about the community's—oh, what shall we say?—sense of its own history, as a place. Or do you think it's unfair to draw any conclusions from that?

MS: Well, I think unfortunately, as has been, it's been historically true all of my life—not about my things; I'm not talking about my things at all—but I've seen the directors come and go, and every time they change directors, they change direction. And I think the Whitney Museum is the greatest example of what I'm talking about. It's been unbelievable what the president, after x number of years that it took to establish that museum, sold things that things that are not only impossible to replace, but sold them for probably a quarter of what they're worth, because his taste was completely in a different type of style. And I have to bring this up because I think this is terribly important to be understood—I mean from where, at least where I come from—my greatest concern about art today is that it, that young people, through no fault of their own, largely through the educator, wherever they. . . .

[Tape 6, side B; marked Tape 1, side B, July 14, 1988]

PK: Want to continue that thought [from the previous tape side—Ed.]?

MS: I feel that it's very tragic that the emphasis in art education for the past forty years has been on style. Not that style isn't important; it's terribly exciting. Certainly the contemporary styles are not only terribly exciting to me, but they're very important to the whole development of art. But to start out young students, whether they're going to become art critics, or they're going to become artists, whether teachers, whatever they're going to become, by primarily teaching them the style that some teacher happens to be impressed with, is exactly the wrong kind of education. Because a language—and I'm not speaking now about something that is tight or formal versus something that is free and fresh—and I'm saying that the language of painting, like the language of music, the language of literature, the language of the dance—because I think that every art is a separate language—that [it] is terribly important because it's only through each of these separate languages that it's possible to express great and important human feelings. You can't even use. . . . There's no substitution for music. There's no substitution for any one of these arts. Now to pick up on the last end and look at the end result and say, "This is something that I should educate young people to know about, and therefore they will become artists," is ridiculous. Language is a tough, tough business to learn. And I don't mean it in a very academic [tight, type] way at all, because it's purely \_\_\_\_\_. Drawing at its best is not what your eyes see; it's what your mind understands. The same thing is true of every facet of design, of color, and all the rest of it. And to be able to teach the kind of basic knowledge of these things, it's an intellectual process, largely. It can be separated from the emotional, but it can't be left hanging [on, out] by itself in the breezes as though it was unimportant. It's terribly important that the artist become free through knowledge. And free through absolutely understanding the beauty and the excitement of life, and the variety of life, and the incredible, infinite \_\_\_\_ life. And the only way you're going to learn the language is to set out to try to understand things that bother, and as you, the more you understand about it, the freer you become to be more expressive of yourself. But you can't be expressive of yourself if you start out by having learned a style.

PK: Do you. . . . Taking it back to the events in museums—talk about the Whitney or the L.A. County’s threatening to deaccession one painting or another—do you see. . . . Am I understanding it correctly that you see the museum’s responsibility then to sort of resist the tendency of the moment to shift directions and exclude one kind of style in favor of another, that it’s an obligation to keep a broad range?

Mrs. Sheets?: \_\_\_\_\_ I’ll be back. Excuse me, but I’ll be back.

MS: I certainly do, and I think that the problem is that the average museum director fits right into the pattern that I’ve been mentioning about, in which artists are trained. They’re trained so specifically and narrowly that they can’t look at anything outside of that with any dignity or with any amount of feeling. And that’s why this man in the Whitney, because he didn’t like the style of the painters of the first part of the nineteenth century, got rid of them. He just dumped them. Dumped them as fast as they could dump them.

PK: Let me ask you this, then, carrying a little bit further, or maybe to the area where it intersects or overlaps. We’re talking about museum directors, professionals, that are in a position to make choices about what’s seen. Stated very simply that’s what they can do.

MS: Right.

PK: In the university then, there are individuals who are often trained the same way as art historians. . . .

MS: Exactly.

PK: . . . who make similar decisions—not necessarily what is seen, but then what is communicated—and. . . .

MS: And what they impose upon the student.

PK: Right. And I would like to ask you on the basis of your own experience—though you taught many, many years; you were head of the department, taught many years in the Claremont system—how did you see the, how would you evaluate the impact of your colleagues, the art historians, on, well, young art historians, young academics, but also artists, who presumably needed to take some art history classes? Do you have some thoughts on that?

MS: I’ve thought so much about it you can’t believe it. (chuckles)

PK: You won’t offend me, no matter what you say.

MS: I was so fortunate because when I went to Scripps after my second year there I was asked to head the department and to develop a strong art department to serve Scripps and Pomona and the graduate school. And unlike my predecessor or unlike what’s happened since, they didn’t say, “Go out and find all these people with x number of degrees,” they said, “Develop a great art department.” I turned entirely to the professional world. I turned to people like McPhee, to Bert Stuart. I turned to Jim Chapin. I turned to people that were recognized as very good American painters, and I turned to people like the critic of the Tribune, Chicago. . . .

PK: Bulliet?

MS: Bulliet. And these I brought, I ended with fifteen of these people teaching on my staff. They became some of the best lecturers we had at Scripps in the humanities program, after they learned enough about it, because they had something to say about it. They didn’t just [talk, taught] what they were talking about in terms of their own background.

PK: Well, what was your experience with specifically—obviously, you made a choice then, in terms of what you turned to, or where you looked, for faculty.

MS: That’s right.

PK: And so what was your experience? What dealing with art historians. . . . Of course, in those earlier days there weren’t very many for one thing. . . .

MS: Well, we were very fortunate. We had better than art historian probably. We had a man like Hartley Alexander, who was a fantastic. . . .

PK: You mentioned him as your mentor. You spoke quite a bit about him.

MS: He was a marvelous philosopher, but he knew more about art than anybody I’ve ever met. In every sense of the word. He knew the reasons that it’s existed.

PK: But what. . . . I sense that you—no doubt for certain specific reasons—in your contact with either museum

professionals or academics—and maybe this is at a slightly later time—but saw certain qualities that in their approaches didn't match your idea of art education.

MS: Well, that was much later. Certainly fifteen years later. Because the same thing. . . . I hold the same reason. I don't blame those individuals; I blame the damned education that provided them this strictly stylistic approach to art, and I think it's absolutely out of. . . . It's nuts! The time that Alexander talked to me from eight-thirty in the morning until five o'clock at night was the most incredible eye-opener for me, because here I had been working very hard as a young painter, had no real academic background, [and, had] no basis for being a professor in college at all—except I love to teach. I believe in, I believed in, very quickly after I came to Scripps, in what the humanities meant, but which I had no way, I had never heard of, in terms of part of art school, because most art schools can't support humanities. And it was, it was unbelievable that they would accept, the fact that they would let me do what I wanted to do to get these kind of people. And when I met Alexander, on this one day after this one evening that I told you was very striking, I said, "You not only said 'Artists are not educated,' and I believe you and I understand you, but I want to ask you a question. How does an artist get an education? If you go to a college, you get old-maid art instruction. You don't get really art instruction at all. You get second-rate, it would be very unprofessional education. You go to an art school and you may get that, but you won't get any of the background that you keep talking about to me about the humanities." And he said, "Well, come on in," to his office, and he called the registrar, and he said, "Dismiss my class. I'm not lecturing this morning."

PK: Yes, [I know].

MS: He talked to me without a break until five o'clock that afternoon. Now how a man can open up a world that you never knew existed. . . .

PK: How was he trained?

MS: Huh?

PK: How was he trained? He was a philosopher, I think you said.

MS: His basic, he had three degrees: one in philosophy, one in archaeology, and one in anthropology.

PK: So what's the difference? What distinguishes. . . . See, that's an academic background.

MS: No, but the thing that distinguished Alexander was that he had a love of art that was so intense, and he had used it ever since he was born—and by this time he was sixty-five—and a style he accepted just as a part of inevitable fact, but not as thing that you took apart and then threw out all the rest of it, said, "This is what I'm. . . ." He didn't ever take that attitude at all. And the result was that for the first time in my life I heard a man say "the purpose of art." I always thought the purpose of art was just to paint—or to do whatever you do. And he made it very clear that that could end up being an ego trip. The purpose of art is to serve society in areas that are otherwise untouchable, unreachable. Because what music can do for the human spirit is something that can't be replaced. It's a language that does something to the human spirit that is irreplaceable; there's no other way to do it. The same thing can be said of architecture; the same thing can be said of literature. It can be said of the dance. It can be said of every art. Each art has been created through necessity. And these are the things he started to talk to me about that day, and it was just like somebody talking about Greek in the beginning. I suddenly saw art as something that had a different kind of responsibility in it, that there was an obligation.

PK: Do you think that that appreciation, though, is not underlying [the] most recent art historical discourse or investigation or teaching? I mean, do you think that's the element that too often is missing?

MS: Yes.

PK: Okay. What about your experience at—again being specific—at the Claremont colleges? Did you have much contact with the art historians that worked there and so forth?

MS: Oh, yes, \_\_\_\_\_ that was all marvelous. We had good ones at Pomona, and we had good ones in the graduate school, and at Scripps. And let me tell you something. Today, Scripps is doing everything [without] one little tiny bit left that is bad. They're doing everything that I absolutely. . . . Now it isn't because I'm not there. It's because they don't care about any of the things that we cared about. They do everything from the point of view of style. And they have excellent. . . .

PK: You mean, now are you, are you talking about the art history and/or. . . .

MS: Everything. All of it.

PK: . . . the studio?

MS: Art history and all of the applied, and I'm thinking primarily about the applied. But the art history is such an important part of the applied that you can't separate 'em. I went back for the twenty-fifth something-or-other—I can't remember what it was—and they were trying to, in a sense, remember some of us that were there in the twenties and the thirties and the forties, and felt as though. . . . I was really. . . . I didn't belong at all. And I had, I literally fought with four presidents, being on the board, during the time I was at Scripps and since, for the principles that I believe in, and the presidents don't understand, and so they get the kind of people that are worthless. They got people teaching there that I. . . . I just am ashamed. Now the fact that people say, "Shouldn't my daughter go to Scripps?" Now, I don't like to be in a position to say, "No, don't send your daughter to Scripps." I have no choice. And the problem is, it isn't just Scripps. Let me put it another way. If somebody walked in here right now and said, "Here is \$25 million. You go out, start a new faculty, just the way you'd like to start the kind of school you're talking about." And if I were say twenty years younger at least, maybe thirty years younger, and I had the strength to do it, I couldn't hire the teachers. Because we've had forty years of this other kind of education. Forty years of teaching style. And there are so few people that really can, in the fullest sense, understand the language. Now there's no excuse for a painter the one we were talking about that was written up in New York, in my opinion. . . .

PK: Oh, Fischel? Eric Fischel.

MS: . . . there's no excuse possible—I don't blame him at all—there's no excuse for society letting a young man get to where his feelings are way out ahead of his ability to paint. Ridiculous.

PK: And you're referring to that review we all read in Time Magazine.

MS: Yes.

PK: Robert Hughes review.

MS: Right. I think that a. . . . There have been some bad cases of people who learned to paint very well that had nothing to say. Those are sad. But it's a lot sadder when you've got lots of young people that are just dying to do it, and aren't taught how to do it. Tragic.

PK: What about. . . . Over the years. . . . You were at Scripps how long?

MS: Uhh, thirty years.

PK: Thirty years. Obviously it changed a great deal. We don't need to dwell too long on higher education and art, but I think some of these issues are important. Over that period of time, you must have seen a number of changes, and it seems to me that sometime—maybe in the, perhaps in the fifties—the Claremont Schools, not just Scripps, brought in some pretty well known artists and art historians. And I can think of a few people like Peter Selz and Seymour Slive and so forth.

[Interruption in taping to answer telephone]

PK: We were interrupted for a moment there, but you were about to make some observations, I think, on the, perhaps, shift in faculty, and some of the individuals that came in, and, you know, what perceptions or what perspectives they brought to the teaching of art in the Claremont colleges, which may or may not have matched your views.

MS: Well, some of them were quite—particularly. . . . You see, Pomona decided, when we began to get a strong art department at Scripps, that though they had agreed earlier that we would develop art and they would develop music, they wanted an art department also. And they restrained their students from coming to Scripps until at least their third year. And unfortunately, they had the kind of art department that we weren't very excited over the student after they got there in the third year. And that includes this man, as you mentioned just a moment ago, [as] the art historian, who was a nice guy, and we go along fine. . . .

PK: Who was that? Peter, you mean, Seltz?

MS: Yeah, but he had a totally different attitude than say Alexander toward the place of art in life. It was a totally different thing. I don't say that he shouldn't enjoy that difference, but I think in terms of our type of education, it wasn't the best thing.

PK: You feel then that he would represent the more, a certain kind of art historical training and emphasis which was too constraining. Is this what I understand?

MS: His emphasis [is, was] primarily on style. . . .

PK: Okay, okay.

MS: . . . whether it's ancient or modern, but mostly modern.

PK: So it's just like one approach to the \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: That's right. But the thing that, [this proves, disproves] that to me, after that is, that no matter what one thinks of what Picasso did in his later years, Picasso has to be certainly one of the finest draftsmen and trained artists of the twentieth century, without any question.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: The same thing goes for people like, like. . . . Oh, my god, any of the Expressionists that came right after the Impressionists. Umm. . . .

PK: Van Gogh?

MS: Well, they were just superhuman guys, but I was thinking more like, oh, the guy that painted the wonderful still life and abstract. . . .

PK: Braque?

MS: One of my. . . . What?

PK: You spoke the last time of Braque.

MS: Braque, yeah.

PK: \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: Now, Braque to me, there couldn't be a better example than the guy who was thoroughly trained, but who became a modern abstract artist because that's the way he felt, not because he couldn't do anything else. Certainly nobody. . . . I don't know if you've ever seen any drawing made by Rouault. Rouault, in the late nineteenth century, was tighter than David. And he was an amazingly well-trained artist who became a very. . . . Now it doesn't seem very stylistic today by comparison, but he was a pretty wild guy in his day. And all these men—and women—were people who didn't let knowledge get in the way; they just became freer as they became more personally expressive. And I think that the sad part of it is that this has infected not just the painter alone or the sculptor alone; it's affected architecture, it's affected the teacher, it's affected the critic, it's affected the historian.

PK: What. . . . Well, obviously, then, your point of view, your perspective is that style is in a way secondary. This is not the first thing you look to in art, and so I would presume then that this would make you interested in some of the other expressions, some of the other tendencies shall we say, in American art or in Southern California, beyond the California School. You mentioned, I remember last time, you mentioned Norsfer Feinelsen as an important, very important person working in the area, and you—I quote you—you described him as "a bridge between different tendencies." Would you explain what you mean by that?

MS: Yes, Feinelsen was a thoroughly trained contemporary artist, though he worked primarily in the more abstract style, he had fantastic, solid background. He's a very good example of what I'm talking about. He's a person that. . . . And don't misunderstand me. I love style. Style is terribly important to me. But it isn't the way you start kids out.

PK: Right.

MS: It isn't the way you start a critic out. You start 'em out giving the whole damn idea of art, the whole idea of the whole philosophy of art and the whole spectrum of art. And then their style develops when they know enough. But you don't start 'em out that way. And we had a few people around like [Norsfer Feinelsen, OR: Lerser, Feinelsen], who not only was a good teacher, but had the special kind of training, background, and experience to know what he was doing.

PK: His post-Surrealism phase, which I guess is what he's really most famous for now, at least in terms of art historical reviews.

MS: Who?

PK: Feinelsen's post-Surrealist work. . . .

MS: Oh.

PK: . . . of the, basically of the thirties. Like his Genesis picture and so forth. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . or several, actually it's several versions. And then and Helen Lundeberg—Mrs. Feinelsen eventually—and Egnude Merrold, and a few others put this group together, which would have been just about the same time you had already. . . . Well, you were already established by then.

MS: Yeah, that's right.

PK: Umm. . . .

MS: And they were doing wonderful things, because they had the background to do things.

PK: What did you. . . . Do you remember, though, that new work being introduced?

MS: Oh, sure.

PK: What did you think of that? Did they have exhibitions that you saw, and were you aware of their work?

MS: Yes. I saw their work, and I think I was in. . . . I think I was very influenced by a lot of people, not in terms of their particular style, but in terms of the abstract being the only way to organize realism. A painting. . . . A representational painting that doesn't have an abstract organization is nothing. If you just take a painting and start at one edge and then move to the other edge, or from top to bottom, if it isn't organized in the same way that a completely abstract painting is organized, the fact that it represents something beyond and apart from abstraction alone, shouldn't be a reason for one second that you can escape the abstract problem. The abstract problem is the problem of which all art has been hung together from the beginning.

PK: Do you think that that's what Feinelsen's group's work was about? Certainly the imagery was mystical and mysterious, kind of growing out of European Surrealism. Do you remember what struck you, and maybe some of your friends at the time, about the work? I mean, could it have been just stylistic considerations? Or was it the subject matter so strange that it was. . . . Or unusual?

MS: No, I was thought it was great. It was Feinelsen. But I'm not Feinelsen, and nobody else can be Feinelsen. And any more than if he should like something I did—which he did; happened to have liked quite a few things I did. That's no reason for him to paint like me. Everybody's got to find out who they are.

PK: Right.

MS: Find out their, and dig out their own kind of escape hatch. Because you can take ten people with the same background, and if it's good they're going to work very, they're going to work in ten different ways.

PK: Well, you had. . . .

MS: We were all very close friends. I can't tell you how close friends we were.

PK: Did you see one another pretty regularly?

MS: Oh, regularly. And not only on juries—we very often met on, served together on—but socially we met. And we had wonderful times together.

PK: Would you say that Feinelsen—if one had to create categories in terms of the different developments of the art of the area of the time—was Feinelsen viewed as part of a sort of radical element, avant garde, or much more mainstream?

MS: Mainstream. \_\_\_\_.

PK: Yeah.

MS: Yes, definitely. He was not radical at all. He was a very. . . . He knew too much about art to be radical. He had a great reverence for great art. He knew and understood it. He'd been to the greatest museums in the world. This is what I'm talking about as knowledge and love. The whole damn thing is really primarily a question of love. And to love. . . . The reason to produce art should be love. And the reason to look at great art is to discover love. And certainly nobody could have discovered it more than he did.

PK: What about. . . . If Feinelsen didn't represent then, oh, one—what shall we say?—advanced art expression of the time—or I used the term radical and that's what you responded to—was there anybody in the area that you

remember that was considered or viewed as really working in the avant-garde? Or was that a concept that really wasn't current then? Wasn't an issue? What about Stanton McDonald Wright

MS: Well, Stanton McDonald Wright was another case of Feinelsen. Stanton McDonald Wright was a man that. . . . (chuckles) He loved great art. He wouldn't [put up]. . . .

[Tape 7, side A; marked Tape 2, July 14, 1988]

PK: Millard Sheets, July 15, tape 2. [later corrected to July 14—Ed.]

As the last tape was ending we were talking Norsfer Feinelsen, Stanton McDonald Wright, a few of the other very prominent artists. . . .

MS: Right, right.

PK: . . . along with you and, in that earlier period in what we call Southern California Modernism, to give it an umbrella term. And you were making an interesting observation, I thought, that despite the categories that seemed to be imposed upon various individuals there very well may be a more important unifying approach—or attitude—towards art. And this is what you felt was the case with people like McDonald Wright, Feinelsen, and yourself. And I want to make sure I understand this: that you feel in a sense your similarities were greater than any differences based upon expression or style.

MS: Oh, absolutely.

PK: Could you expand upon that a little?

MS: Absolutely. Both Feinelsen and McDonald Wright, just for example, were the kind of people that not only were involved deeply in the PWA project, but were strong influences. They, not only because of former students that they had had, but they actually worked on designs that they and their students carried out. It was a very real educational experience the way they did it. But they also in their lectures—and they were both excellent lecturers. They both gave a great many lectures. Feinelsen ran a Sunday morning lecture at the museum for—maybe it was Sunday afternoon; I don't remember which. . . .

PK: He also had a radio show, I think.

MS: It was a radio show, and then became a television show. For years. And no one could have been more catholic in taste, in their excitement about all kinds of art, not just one art, and their knowledge of art was very apparent when they did these things. I think, if you had to compare the two, McDonald Wright perhaps was a little more of a showman, a little more of an egotist, and he didn't mind taking real strong pokes at somebody now and then. But I never thought he was mean about it at all; I thought he was. . . . I liked him very much, and I liked that whole group of people that he had that he had trained, who were as far out as he was.

PK: Can you think of anybody offhand that. . . .

MS: [whispers:] [Gosh], my brain.

PK: I mean, I can't offhand, but. . . .

MS: I'll try to think of them later, but. . . .

PK: I mean, there were though a group of younger artists that were. . . .

MS: Oh, yes, there were fifteen or twenty. . . .

PK: Jan [Stucey, Stoo-sey], of course is one of them. Did you know Jan at UCLA? He's, was on the faculty at UCLA.

MS: Oh yes.

PK: He of course was like the adopted son practically of Stanton McDonald.

MS: Well, he went to Chouinard first.

PK: [Hmm, Right, Oh].

MS: And he grew up like the rest of us, except younger. Anyway, I don't think that what I would call the way-out cookie thing came until at least the late sixties and early seventies, when people began to pile more [cardboard, carpetwork, carpenterwork] on top of painting than they paintings. That kind of thing has nothing to do with painting as far as I'm concerned. I have a nephew that makes these huge things in New York. He's married to a



marvelous photographer that supports him. And he does three or four of these a year, doesn't ever sell them, doesn't ever. . . . He keeps making them. I mean, a wonderful kid!

PK: What's his name?

MS: Umm. . . .

PK: We'll plug it in later.

MS: I'll tell you, just a second. He's my wife's sister's daughter's son. [a great nephew!—Ed.]

PK: Hmm.

MS: And he went to the University of. . . . No, he went to California School of Fine Arts.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Got all the wrong indoctrination as far as I'm concerned. Every bit that he could get he got. Hundred percent. A good example of what I'm talking about. He couldn't possibly really [hit the, get to the] head, what I'd call the [fire, firing] line as an artist. And I think an artist should be trained enough to work in life, to face the facts that you're presented with. That's one of the reasons I think I was so excited about getting involved with all those boards and people that were way outside of my normal life and life experience. And discovering that there was a tremendous thing that could be done to get people excited about the place of art in their lives. And these kind of guys that have that kind of training can't do that.

PK: Well, I gather from what you say then that you feel—in the Southern California art community up to, you said, about the sixties; at any rate up to about that time, sometime somewhat past mid-century—that for all the perceived differences in approach and style, that there really was much more of a kinship. Really. . . .

MS: Oh, I think so.

PK: A unity, shall we say, in the art community?

MS: And I think there are a lot of reasons for that. When I grew up as a kid, when I look back on how well I was treated by artists who really amounted to something—and they weren't just being nice to me. They were not. . . . I don't think they were just being nice. I think they were encouraging, not in one way, except that art was important [to, in] life, and they were happy to see young people coming along doing it. And I think that that thing held over, for years and years and years, and all who became a part of it, did the same thing for other young people coming along. I think that's one of the things that, the reason I knew I was a good teacher, is that I really cared about these kids. That nothing could ever equal what happened with the post-war period of the G.I. period, when we had all these guys and gals come back and studying art, it was the most exciting damn period that ever existed in education. They were so utterly devoted to the idea, and a lot of them. . . . I don't know whether you know this, but 32 percent of the people that took any kind of education on the G.I. Bill took one art or another, one of the many arts. And many of them didn't do it with the thought of ever becoming an artist. It was an antidote for what they'd been through. And some of those people who only approached it that way became real artists.

PK: Of course remember that same group, a good number of them, went to the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. . . .

MS: I'm sure of it.

PK: . . . studied with—and of course others—but the most \_\_\_\_\_, the most famous, I think, would be Clifford Still. Those were the Clifford Still-Rothko years, which may mark the beginning of a certain direction. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . at that [place, post].

MS: Yep.

PK: So I guess it happened in different ways at different places.

MS: Yeah, he, they changed direction about time, that's true.

PK: But nonetheless, the point's well taken that there was this big influx of mature students, I guess you'd have to call them, anyway.

MS: And they really. . . . They didn't know the meaning of time. There was no such thing as midnight; they just worked.

PK: Well, what happened then? I gather as we talk that you looked at the late fifties, or around 1960 or so, as watershed period, where there really was a big change. How would you appraise. . . . We've been talking about the earlier period in Southern California developments. Then. . . . There's no question there were some apparent changes. How would you describe them? I mean, how would you explain what went on?

MS: I think there are very simple reasons. Suddenly exhibits just existed right out of nowhere. Boom. Everywhere exhibits, exhibits, exhibits. All of the modern French, all of the things that had so much power packed in them. Books, magazines, lectures. It came out of the woodwork, and there was a new kind of influence entirely that hadn't existed before then. And of course unfortunately a lot of people were very excited and very emotional about that, about those things, and that's why I again feel that the teacher's at fault. Because think of the hundreds of young people, thousands—in the United States alone, not counting other countries—that have started out in art and ended up in a fizzle after six years of graduate work even, five years of graduate work, four years of graduate work, being unable to make a living, so then they do one of two things: they either give it up, which is terrible, or worse still, they become teachers of the same kind of crap. And I don't see there's any difference in one or the other. It's a crime that young people are not prepared to go and do what they're capable of doing when the time comes. But that time doesn't come the day they start. It doesn't come the first six months they've been painting. You can't pick up where Picasso left off in twenty minutes.

PK: Let's talk about a transition figure, if indeed he was a transition figure. What about, what was the role of Rico Lebrun, who of course, without laying in the history, \_\_\_\_\_.

MS: The role of who?

PK: Rico Lebrun.

MS: Oh. Absolutely fabulous. He was a marvelous teacher. He just was one of the most wonderful guys as a person to know, and certainly as an artist he was. . . . He could do anything he wanted to do. Some people didn't like what he did, but that doesn't make a damn bit of difference. He did what he, what he was, was Rico Lebrun. And no one could ever, ever have found a better teacher. And a rare. . . . Well, he knew—what I'm talking about—in the way of basic language.

PK: Yeah, true. Certainly he was thoroughly grounded as a draftsman and in working with the figure, and quite a humanist in his philosophy. What did you. . . . Speaking of that, I know your own considerable experience with mural work, how did you feel about his work, or how do you feel about his work at Pomona, the Genesis. . . .

MS: I liked it. It wasn't one of my favorites of his things, but I think probably one of the reasons was that, it wasn't my favorite was that it was pretty hard to stand still and look at it beside the Orozco. The Orozco was done with such a verve and such a personal. . . . I don't know whether you know the story about that, but. . . .

PK: Um hmm.

MS: . . . Orozco was promised by Pijoan, the professor of art at Pomona, that he could do the entire walls, all the walls of that great big building, that huge building, the dining room.

PK: Right.

MS: And Orozco pulled himself out of Mexico and started to work, in that one little niche behind this little arch. And it was a tragedy, I think of highest order that he was not given the opportunity to go ahead and do the whole thing, and I think it's tragic that. . . . Oh, I know for instance, that the builder of the building, who didn't choose, didn't select anything of that kind, paid what little Orozco got out of it. The college didn't do it. Pijoan was a very interesting guy, with all this enthusiasm, and he felt that he was sure he could get. . . .

PK: Excuse me, what was his name?

MS: Pijoan, P-i-j-o-a-n, Pijoan. And he was an art historian, and there are many stranger things to say about him. One is that he did three or four documents in art history, but that he got everything that he had in art history out of books that he tore pages out of.

PK: So that the students couldn't catch him.

MS: Well, he, this was his own, these were his own writings, supposedly, and they were actually torn out of previous books. They used to say he graded a paper by just standing at the top of the stairs, sliding them down, and whichever one stayed up near the top he'd give the highest grade. But he'd nevertheless, with all of that, which is just rumor, as far as I know. . . .

PK: Um hmm.

MS: . . . he was a man of great excitement, and of course he preceeded me at Claremont by several years, and he's the man that actually went down to Mexico and got Orozco to come up and do it. And promised him all kinds of things, but. . . .

PK: He promised more than he could deliver, is that it?

MS: Yeah, and of course Orozco just took a look at these great walls that were 200 feet long and 30 feet high, and looked at this little thing in the, behind that arch in the auditorium and just did that kind of as a little warming-up exercise, because he was going to do a Sistine Chapel, there was no doubt about it.

PK: While we're on murals, I wanted to ask you what you meant when you said, "the scope of mural activity in Los Angeles was broader than in San Francisco." I'm taking it out of context, but do you have an idea what you might have meant?

MS: I don't know that I said the scope.

PK: Hmm.

MS: I think that there was, there are more murals done down [South, in San Francisco].

PK: I see, um hmm.

MS: I don't think as far as. . . . I think probably the scope was less. After all, they did have Rivera, and they did have some absolutely marvelous people come to San Francisco to do murals. Frank Branguin did some beauties.

PK: That's right, in the Herbst Theater, [in, and] the Memorial Opera \_\_\_\_.

MS: Yeah. And most people don't even know who Frank Branguin is, but. . . .

PK: I'm actually having some slides taken of. . . .

MS: . . . I grew up on him. Well. . . .

PK: Well, certainly with Orozco, though, there was a great lost opportunity there, and then I guess Rico Lebrun was brought in or invited in, well, in a sense, I suppose, as a compromise, or just an effort to get, to continue the project \_\_\_\_ they'd lost Orozco.

MS: Yeah, and I like what he did. Don't misunderstand me. I just think. . . . It's just hard for me to get my heat worked up to the same degree.

PK: What about Lebrun then aside from the murals? He represented what in the sixties came to be viewed as the more conservative strain in Southern California art. I mean, he represented that certainly to these younger artists like the famous Venice group, in the, group that developed up around the Ferris Gallery, and there was all, you remember all that activity which attracted a great deal of attention at a particular moment. And as far as I can recall, Rico then and his progeny, his group, became sort of the whipping boys, those that were being rejected. They represented the old guard. Do you remember any of this going on?

MS: I don't remember that so much. I know what you're saying is true, but I don't know very much about it. Because all of us who knew Rico thought so much of him we could, we never could have thought of putting him in any category like that.

PK: Well, in a sense what happened, what we've been talking about, is the emergence of, for a number of reasons, an entirely, well, a brand-new generation with what appeared to be very different, very avant-garde ideas, and of course it's, by definition avant-garde tends to reject or appear to reject whatever went on before. To put it a different way then, who are the younger artists. . . . Who carried on the thread of the Southern California tradition? Assuming that this new group was really breaking with it, [with this kind of thing].

MS: I think virtually all the students that were at Scripps during those days were the ones that have done it.

PK: Now can you think of any that would be particularly prominent, that enjoyed a reputation, I mean, a reputation say on the level of. . . . Or notoriety, if you will in some cases, of say a Kienholz or some of those more famous ones. Ed Ruscha, and the group that came out of Chouinard. Ken Price. The Venice and Ferris [group].

MS: Well, I think Chouinard and Scripps; I wouldn't separate one from the other in that sense. Although Chouinard fell apart after the death of Mrs. Chouinard, and even before that, to the point where it became a very

undistinguished school. Except for Disney's support for animators, it became just a kind of an ordinary school, for some years before it finally closed. Well, there were a lot of painters. Gee, I should get my head together and sit down and write a list of these things. But. . . .

PK: Well, I mean, let's look at it very, from an historical standpoint. Fact of the matter is, the artists that received the most attention—and that's not a value judgement at all; it's just a description of fact—were—in the so-called L.A. School—were people from the late fifties and through the sixties, a younger generation, people like Ed Kienholz, Robert Irwin, Ed Ruscha, Craig Kauffman, Billy Al Bengston. . . . There was a whole group of what came to be known as the Venice crowd, because that's what they were.

MS: Yeah.

PK: Ed Moses.

MS: Right.

PK: And it's interesting that. . . . And most of them went to school, in L.A. In one of the. . . . Chouinard of course is one, and some went to Otis, I guess. But they are the ones that certainly, if one is talking about Los Angeles art of that period, these are the names that come forward. And my question is this: how did this come about? What happened? Because these were not the only artists at work. There were the students, for instance, of Rico Lebrun, the disciples of people like Bryce, for instance, Bill Bryce, who I'm sure you know. People working more in a figurative mode. You know, I'm sure you were aware of these changes going on in the early sixties, late fifties. How do you view 'em, how do explain that? Or can we?

MS: I think the change of art critics, in the Los Angeles Times and in two or three other of the magazines, had a lot to do with it. I think that the new critics supported the kind of work that they were doing, lot of the people that you have mentioned were doing, and the [paper, papers] simply blocked off from any support of any others. And that's just as clear as hell, if you understand, if you understand the period, and I think ever since [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.] Wilson become the critic of the Times, it's been a closed corporation.

PK: Do you think they have that kind of power, though? Do you think Wilson and the L.A. Times has that kind of power?

MS: Unbelievable, unbelievable.

PK: Because the attention is, with some of these artists has been international. I mean, of course reputations aren't necessarily always [holden, holding] to everyone.

MS: Well, yes, but they had to start somewhere.

PK: Umm, I see.

MS: They didn't \_\_\_\_\_ become international overnight. Wilson, who I can't even be nice talking about Wilson, from what I know he's done—not only to me personally, but to all kinds of people. . . . He still delights, if I have an exhibit like I had last year down in—down near San Diego—Lajolla. I had a combination of my, part of my collection and some of, and a few paintings. And he sent a woman down there who seemingly, when she was there—I wasn't there; I didn't talk to her—but when she talked to the woman, \_\_\_\_\_ woman in charge of the museum, seemed to like what she was doing, and by the time she wrote the article it was, it was. . . . It was just as disaster an article as you could ever find. And exactly the same thing was true, oh, a few years back; I can't even remember the time or place. The same thing. Wilson is a czar. And he's a man that accepts no interference at all from what he thinks and what he cares about. And I've never read anything of his that I thought was either exciting as a way of understanding art, but it's just that style thing, and it's a closed corporation.

PK: How do you see yourself in light of all that, in light of the recent developments, the shifts? And I suppose the expansion of directions, possibilities?

MS: See myself?

PK: Yeah, how do you see yourself then within the context of recent California art? Because one thing's for sure: it's gotten, it's expanded enormously, and there are many different expressions and they keep shifting around. But you came out of a school, [on] sort of an indigenous movement, much earlier on, and you're still very much at work. And I'm just curious, how do you see yourself as a California artist, recognizing this broader, expanded arts context? Do you have any thoughts about that?

MS: Well, there are various ways of evaluating answers to your question. If I start out with, "how do I feel about what I'm doing? How do I feel about what I have been doing for sixty years, \_\_\_\_\_ sixty-five years?" I've been learning steadily for sixty-five years how to paint. I have done some things I'm very proud of, I've done some

things that I wish I could have done better, I've done not only murals and architecture and painting, all of which I think have been exciting for me as a person, as a contribution to our way of life down here. And I am still saying "down here" as though we're Southern California.

PK: Good point. (chuckles)

MS: Now. . . . Is that thing starting to act up? [referring to the tape recorder—Ed.]

[Tape 7, side B; marked Tape 2, July 14, 1988]

MS: . . . not only have I been working on the things that I wanted to work on, the way I wanted to work on them. . . . As I said, I wish I could have been better on many occasions, but I've done the best I could. But let me say something I think very people can say. I've never made a painting, I've never made a mural, I've never designed a building, or anything else for money. I've done it because I wanted to do it the best I could do it. There was others I've never thought about money. There has always been more than an ample supply of it from the work that I have done, but I've never solicited a job in my life, not one. I have never painted any picture changing it thinking that I might sell it better if it was this way or that way. I've painted strictly who I am and what I am for—and what little I [am]. Now I've had more than my share of notoriety and wonderful criticism, all that kind of thing. As you know from those early things that you got on the stuff from New York from the very beginning, going way back to nineteen . . . in the early thirties, I have had all the support in the world. I've never been [mislead, upset] by it. I've never tried to take any kind of, make any [bows, vows] for it; I've just gone ahead because I've done the best I can. Now on a basis that I don't even like to suggest—but I'm going to do it to make a point—as far as I'm concerned, I was shocked when my paintings went from \$1500 to \$2000, way back in the dark ages. I've been equally shocked every time paintings have gone up. And I nearly flipped here last week when two of my small oils of downtown Los Angeles, about so square [gesturing, about \_\_\_ inches—Ed.], were sold to a fellow that just couldn't live without 'em for \$35,000 apiece. Now I didn't do this for money. In fact they belonged to Mary's collection. I had to get permission from her to sell them. Because I'm not interested in the money. If I had felt that, if that was, if I was trying to be famous, or I was trying to make money, or trying to make headlines and that kind of thing only, I would have had a different kind of a life. I haven't done any of those things. I've never had a time when I didn't have much more than I could do, in the way of work. And it all came from something I'd already done, and some people already knew. Now I can say absolutely, honestly, without any question, I've never, never have ever solicited a job in my life. Now when I hear of artists having such a terrible struggle, I don't think they want to give enough. I think it's. . . . More than anything else, they haven't recognized that there's so much to give, and there's so much responsibility in being an artist. Quite apart from your own ego trip. And all this thing in New York, where you've got these dealers that are pushing these, some of these very way-out things today, and they do it because of their connections and not because of their great knowledge. That kind of thing is so [averse, reverse] of anything that I feel or think, because it is, it isn't necessary.

PK: Let me ask the question a slightly different way, because it's, the way I asked the question was, allowed for many possible responses. Do you feel any longer a real connection with California art?

MS: I sure do. I don't feel that California particularly is involved in my connections, but I think California is living in another world a good part of the time, but I feel very strongly that what I've done could only have been done here, and it isn't because I'm that, I'm down on my knees to California. [PK: Could you listen to the first clause of the previous sentence. I think I'm not hearing it right, and it sounds as though the concept might be important—TR] It's just that I only do what I know, which is where I live and how I live. And where I live. I love to travel, and I'm very proud of one other thing, that you might be surprised at. In this travel all over the world that I've done so much in the last few—well, not the last three or four years, but the last fifteen years—I've taken workshops all over the world. And I've been able to do that because they asked me where I'd like to go next, and I tell them, and then that's where we go. And I was very proud of my last exhibit, when a woman from India, who was the wife of a very well known, very brilliant Stanford professor. . . . I would say she's in her late thirties or early forties, handsome Indian woman, East Indian, came to the exhibit, and. . . . It's the first time I'd. . . . I'd been sick so long, and I came out for the, I could crawl out of being sick to go to the exhibit, and there was a, I had so many friends there, that there was long, there were long lines of people I had to talk to and sign books for and all that kind of stuff. And she waited in this long line, finally got up to where she could, where I could talk to her, and she said—and tears on both cheeks—she said, "Do you have any idea how much good you've done for the Third World group?" And I had to do a lot of thinking about that, to understand what she really meant. She said. . . . She explained it me when I asked her to explain it to me a little bit, and she said, "You've gone to these places, like India and Africa," and so on and so on, and she said, "You paint the people as though they're important, as though they're, what they're doing is important, not just as a spectator looking at them from a balcony.

PK: Hmm.

MS: I do think that's true. I think that that's the way I feel about people. I am absolutely crazy about India. I love Africa. I love all these countries we've been to. Not because I'm slumming; because I love the people.

PK: Let me ask you [a, the] question that I think will be provocative. I think it has to be asked. We acknowledge that there's been, over the recent years, a proliferation of styles, as you would say, and that many art observers make the style into the substance, as if that's everything, and then sort of set up different, conflicting movements. And there's a common perception, I think, or a perception—I don't know if it's common; I won't even say that—that the California School, the traditional landscape school, beyond perhaps even Millard Sheets and his colleagues, has basically stood in opposition to what are considered the forward-looking modernist trends. For instance, Cubism, abstraction, Surrealism, and this kind of thing. And I wonder if you feel that that's true, or is that a pretty simplistic. . . .

MS: I think that's utterly simplistic. I think it's ridiculous. Because the best of those artists—and I know them all—are artists that are just as excited about anything that's been, \_\_\_\_\_ the things that have been really contemporary and in the best sense imaginative and expressive of modern concepts. But that's no reason you have to paint that way! That doesn't mean you hate somebody because you don't paint that way.

PK: Right.

MS: This is the part that I can't trust for ten seconds in their judgment when they say things like that. I think it's just ignorance. If I were going around saying, "Nobody should ever paint the way Braque does or the way somebody else did," that would be different. But I don't say that; I never have said that. I've said the opposite. And as far as I'm concerned, a lot of the things that some of my contemporaries, which have been more abstract than I've done, have grown out of not trying to copy, not doing anything like that, but have just grown out of a feeling that they have. I am so excited about life, and every aspect of it, and yet I think I'm as, I think I'm as informed, in great detail, about the meaning of abstract art, and I think you could take my paintings and study them, from the point of view of whether they're abstractly organized or not, that you'll find that they are. And to me that is a terribly important reason for all the modern experiment in abstraction, is to bring back what the late nineteenth century artists lost completely. They gave it up! And I don't mean the very, all the late art \_\_\_\_\_, because some of these people \_\_\_\_\_, but what I mean, but mostly late nineteenth other than the Impressionists and a few of the abstract painters. The kind of realism of Corot and a whole group of these people were marvelous painters, but they became less and less able to control space or shape or anything else.

PK: So you feel really an important part of your work—what's important to you, regardless of how your work is perceived—has to do with fundamental principles of organization, which by extension has to do with abstract qualities?

MS: It's probably old-fashioned, but that's the way it is.

PK: Well, that's not old-fashioned, but it's interesting that that is, in terms—when you approach your work—that is one of the most important considerations, that that is something you [are, were] seeking as an artist, as you continue to work with this vocabulary that has to do with notions of abstraction. . . .

MS: I've just done fourteen paintings, for the first time since I've been painting again. There are no two even a little bit alike. So I can't be completely in some kind of a pipeline.

PK: Uh huh.

MS: They are subjects that aren't that varied, but certainly the paintings are that different. I've got several from Africa, I've got one from [Tahiti, Ahalia], I have one, well, they're from all over. But to me a painting is something you must love enough, or wanted to make, you must love the subject enough to want to make a painting of it. And the first question I ask myself is "why." "Why do I want to paint this?" And I find myself making maybe a ten-minute drawing, or twenty-minute pencil drawing or pen drawing, in which I answer these questions. And I don't care whether it's eight years later or fifteen years later, to three years later, if I want to paint it, it's just as fresh to me as it was the day I was, that I got excited. And that's not painting from memory at all.

PK: Hmm.

MS: It's painting from what you know. There's a big difference between painting from what you know from [painting from—Ed.] what you can remember. Or your eye. Your eye can't think.

PK: You've talked about this before—and you'll have to forgive me for asking again, but I think it's extremely important to make sure that we understand what you really see as the goal of the activity of painting. You know, the purpose, the meaning, of painting. Because you've used that term throughout the interview, [in our, your] last interview: that above and beyond style or anything else, there's a meaning inherent in painting and in the

act. Now could you clarify that? You also mentioned language and communication. Could you sort of review that for me? What is the, what are you as an artist after? [apparently Sheets is mulling over the questions—Trans.]

MS: Every day I am so thrilled and so moved by life around me—maybe it's the way a horse walks, maybe it's the way clouds flow in here over this island, maybe. . . . It can be anything. It can be the way a piece of grass grows. It doesn't have to be a big thing.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: Now I think an artist's job is to find out enough about the problem to express that love, to express that particular excitement that you feel. Now it happens that I am more excited about the real world than the purely abstract world. It isn't that I think I'm even more capable in it. I think that if I had been trained with enough background in working in the more abstract field, more expressionistic field, that I could have done that. But I have not wanted to do it only for one reason: It isn't because I don't like it. It's because I love life. I love everything about life. I not only like the way light works, I not only like the way things look under certain light, but I like the way things grow, I like the way things move, I like animals, in every capacity, because of the marvelous way they move naturally and beautifully. And I've raised horses all of my life, because it's a disease. I love. . . . I love the beauty of them. And I don't think that's a matter of having all the technical information about a few muscles and stuff; it's seeing beyond that into what makes it feel like life.

PK: Do you identify with your subjects? In a real way? It's obvious that you, you're attracted to the subjects. As you say you love. . . .

MS: I sure do. [meaning, identify with his subjects—Ed.]

PK: Or do you. . . . But do you. . . . You do feel a personal identification. . . .

MS: [Um hmm. OR: I do.]

PK: . . . a union with. . . .

MS: I do. I just. . . .

PK: I don't mean to put words in your mouth.

MS: I would never paint anything I didn't feel that way about.

PK: Um hmm. Is there anything philosophical about that, for you? In terms of a world view perhaps? Animals, nature, people. Is it something you've thought about, or is it just something you feel \_\_\_\_?

MS: Well, I think there is. I. . . . I don't think there's any question about it. I think that my ability to go from one part of the world to another, as I have done all my life, and paint and feel that I was really expressing what's there, I think it is part of a philosophy. It's the philosophy of really learning to understand what it is, not just looking at it. But to understand it. Your eye is just an undependable] thing. We've got to take the time to understand.

PK: Carrying that a little bit further, what's the goal beyond that though, to. . . . Is it to understand the goal in itself, or does that then provide for something else.

MS: Well, I think it's. . . .

PK: Knowledge of course is a worthy goal.

MS: A big part of your problem always is to take the essence, not the trivial, of anything and to build on that. To accentuate, I suppose, the thing that is important to you as a living expression. A tree isn't something that just has a stick that comes out of the ground and then has a bunch of fuzz at the top. It starts way down deep in the earth, and you've got to know that, and you've got to feel it. And the way it comes out of the earth and the way it develops into lesser stems and limbs, and last of all in terms of foliage, even though the foliage covers up two-thirds of the stemwork. If you don't understand that back of it, to understand the movement in it, and the actual vitality of the thing, it's not going to be much. And the same thing is true of many things. Structure of. . . . I think that's the word that is not used in teaching drawing. They teach drawing as though it's something that you do with your eyes. Instead of saying, "Don't draw anything. Visualize with your mind how this thing is made." If you understand how it's made after an hour of really study, turn your back on it and draw it. Then you're drawing what you know, not what you see. That's a totally different kind of drawing. Then to make, say, "Oh, look at that nice looped line there, that balanced line over there," you've got all these lines making a drawing. What is the structure of something? I don't care whether it's a figure, whether it's a weed. . . . The structure of clouds, or anything but just puffs that people paint up in sky to represent little spaces. Fantastic structure in everything.

PK: You're at a stage in your career now where—now unfortunately for. . . . I guess you said almost two years you were unable to work, but happily you're working now again, and being quite productive. Obviously, you know do exactly what you want to do. You pick and choose very carefully projects, and certainly that would extend, I suppose, to subjects. So what you're doing now, I would suspect, would represent what really has meaning for you. You've gone through a long career. And what are the subjects you're turning to, in your current work? What, what's the work you're doing now?

MS: Landscape. Figures. I've been doing lots of big figure things. I've been doing things from Africa, that combine landscape and figures and all sorts of. . . . I don't have any particular specialization. I've got hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of drawings. In fact, since you were here, I've had 325 of them framed in nice little frames about like that, and then they're sticking in edgewise in a big thing that's built in my studio. And if I ever did, which I never have, if I ran out of something to do [worth] . . . . I've never run out of an idea for a minute, ever, but if I did I could go and pull out a drawing and I could do a painting, because I've got all the studies in the world. From all over the world. And that, all those drawings represent to me not drawings that I would think about as things that I own or would sell; they're experiences where I learned something that I didn't know before I made the drawing. I put something away in the way of a depository, that whether I use it in five or ten or fifteen years—well, that isn't true today, because I won't be doing [what we're] talking about fifteen years from now, but it's been this way all my life. That's the reason I made drawings. I've always said, when I was a teacher way back in the ancient days, if you don't make a drawing every day to learn something you didn't know yesterday, you're not an artist. You need the richness, you need the background, you need the breadth of that experience. If you're just making drawings occasionally for the sake of a drawing, that's bullshit. You've got to, you've got to pack, deposit this breadth and depth of knowledge, so when you, if you want to use it, you don't have to figure out how it's made; it's automatic. You know.

PK: That's right. So you're basically working the same subjects and [learning the same way; OR: really in the same way] that you had developed over the years. I mean, you found, you found a direction. You found a way for yourself. . . .

MS: That's right.

PK: . . . and now at this point, you find it most satisfactory; it's the way. . . .

MS: It's all I could do. I. . . .

PK: I mean, you're pleased with the way it's developed, I mean the direction your art has taken.

MS: If I had to look around for something to do or something to express, [it'd be a; OR: I'd be in a] hell of a state, because I could never begin to express one one-thousandth of what I feel.

PK: Do you have any regrets? These all sound like very final questions, but it's not intended to. But I sense that you, you're actually very grateful for the way your career as an artist—and as a person, for that matter, your life—has developed.

MS: How could I be more grateful. I've done only the things I've wanted to do all my life. I've never done anything I didn't want to do.

PK: Right. (chuckles) That's. . . .

MS: Now, how could you be more grateful. And I am so grateful beyond my limited way of expressing my gratitude. I express it, I do try to express it in every way I can to my family, to my friends. But I am deeply grateful.

PK: Well, what about just specifically as an artist, or rather, in terms of your art career? Because I think that you're quite content, and I think you should be, about the choices you've made as an artist, about your work itself, the results. But thinking of art as career—which it is—can you think of any juncture, any opportunity, that maybe now looking back you would have taken advantage of, or maybe done something differently. Perhaps a connection with a gallery, or a certain exhibition, or anything like that.

MS: Not one, because I've had so many wonderful continuous opportunities. I've never really had to make too many choices; they've just been so good all of my life.

PK: You're a lucky man. (chuckles)

MS: Well, as I say, you may find this very hard to believe. Lots of people would not believe it ever. I have never done anything for money.

PK: Well, you say that, and that's, it is hard to believe, but I have to.



MS: When I've done all these huge jobs, I did the. . . . You know, the big thing at Notre Dame. Now that took five years. I didn't do that for money. I gave them a figure. When we really got down to business, it was probably one tenth of what I should have asked, just even for labor. But I wouldn't take anything for having done that mural.

PK: Well, I think this is a perfect place to break. We've just about used up our tape, so let's. . . .

MS: Yeah, we got some \_\_\_\_ there.

PK: Yeah. We can resume. . . .

[Tape 8, side A; marked Tape 3, July 15, 1988]

PK: This is an interview with Millard Sheets, a concluding interview. It's July 15, second day of taping. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom, and of course it's for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Well, I think we should just go right into it, Millard. We spent a couple hours wrapping up some loose ends yesterday, for which I am, I'm grateful to have this opportunity. And there are just a few more things I think that we'd like to talk about today. We have covered a lot of ground.

One of the really important, distinguishing features, I think, of your very rich career has been your involvement with architecture and design. And when I say that, I think it should be made clear that it seems you approached, your approach to architecture and to spaces, to structures, has been one in which the different arts. . . . You see the activity as an opportunity for the different arts to interact. Is that a fair appraisal?

MS: Yeah.

PK: And you've been fortunate enough to have a number of very important commissions. We're obviously not going to be able to go into all of them right now, but what I would like to ask you is to sort of review how this came about. Well, how this came about and, really, what you were trying to do in these projects.

MS: Very good. I think that. . . . Am I near enough [to the microphone—Ed.]?

PK: Yeah.

[Interruption in taping to check recording level]

MS: I think I should go back even to the time when I was only seventeen or eighteen and I was teaching an etching class to architects. I loved etching and got a big kick out of doing it and discovered there was a large number of younger architects, particularly in Los Angeles, that were tremendously interested in studying architecture, study etching, and they came up to my studio about three nights a week, and we had more than a group meeting. It became a very close-knit group of people. I made some of the closest friendships in those days. And I became so interested in architecture by knowing these men, and knowing what they were involved with, and then I quickly discovered that I had the ability to do delineations for them, of future work, that they could show how it would look after it was built, so. . . .

PK: You mean architectural renderings, basically.

MS: Yes. The architectural renderings, that became very helpful to me as a living, way to paying my living, but also it was a great way to get acquainted with these people on a high level, and to. . . . Because I worked directly with each of the architects. And I must have done a hundred big architectural renderings ever, before I ever went to Europe. And one of the young men in the group, had worked for [Goodhue] in. . . . No, not Goodhue. Had worked for one of the major architects in New York, and he insisted that when I went through New York that I should go and see this man, and he said, "I'm sending him a letter, as well as I'll give you a letter, but, and I expect you to go there." Well, I was so damn timid in those days that I arrived in New York, and I was to be there five days before I went to Europe, and I waited till the fourth day because I didn't have the old pizzazz to go and meet him. And finally called this man on the phone, and he says, "Where the hell have you been for three days?" (laughs) He knew my timing and everything. So he said, "Get up here now." So I went up and he took me to lunch to the, I remember, to the. . . . Oh, that marvelous club. . . .

PK: Four Seasons?

MS: No. The marvelous sailing club, yacht club. And they had a. . . . He couldn't have been more charming, and all that, but he sent me down after lunch, he said, "Now look, you're going to Europe. Have you ever been there before?" I said, "No, this is my first trip." "All right," he said, "you're going to see a lot of things that you're not going to specifically paint, but you're going to get terribly excited about the great architecture of the world." He said, "You get involved with some of these, whether it's in a big city or a little city, some of the things that are great jewels," and he said, "Have you ever drawn these things?" I said, "Well, not really ever. I never, [I just] sketched that kind of thing." And he said, "I want you to go about it in a totally different way. I want you to

really, really get your ass so cold on the curb. And you sit there, and I want you to make absolutely beautiful drawings of these buildings.” Well, he so challenged me that when I got to Europe—of course I was dumbfounded by the early small Gothic churches and a lot of other things—and I did get very good paper and very good pencils, and I usually used sometimes two or three pencils in each drawing, keeping them so sharp, and I never made before or since such finished drawing, and I should have shown you some of those things. As a matter of fact we’ve got, I’ve got at least twenty-five of them left. I made seventy-five while I was in Europe that year.

PK: What buildings did you, do you remember being particularly interested in? Which were some that you drew?

MS: I was interested in all kinds of buildings, but I did lots of churches and lots of, well, cathedrals and so forth and so forth. But I pretty well covered the waterfront as far as. . . . And I drew, of course, incessantly in addition to the architectural things. I got the habit right then and there of doing things I’ve never done as accurately and as carefully as I did. So when. . . . And I painted, of course, during that whole year, and when I came back I went to see him—and he had insisted that I stop and see him on my way back. And he got terribly excited about the drawings, and just to show how your life can hang on a thread and change without any intent on your part, we had lunch, and he came back and called someone. He said, “Get your ass over here. I want you here in fifteen minutes. I’ve got something to show you.” It was the editor of [Pencil Points]. I didn’t know who he was talking to. (chuckles) And the guy came and got terribly excited about the drawings, and he [the architect fellow, I think—Ed.] said, “All right.” “How soon are you going to run an article?” I think in three months he had a five-page article with all these drawings. And as soon as he got rid of him, he called, he had Architectural Record, and he did the same thing. So I had two big tremendous magazine articles come out, all within four or five months after I got home from Europe, with drawings and watercolors I made in Europe. And it was like an introduction to the architects of the United States. (laughing) I still meet men today that say, “God, I remember that 1931 article”—or 1930 article—“and I’ve always wanted to know you just because of that article.” Well, it’s been fascinating all my life to know that it was a tremendous thing that happened to me. Of course I couldn’t have gotten that kind of publicity. If you worked for it, you couldn’t get it. It just came about in that way. The result was that by the time I came back to California again, I went on and I did some more delineations, and then began to do a lot of designing for architects. They would give me certain projects and certain parts of a building, or a whole building, and I did an awful lot of designing for other, for architects, for the \_\_\_\_\_, because I was not an architect.

PK: What kind of projects, do you remember? Were they residences, private homes, are they big commercial buildings?

MS: [There, They] were residences, sometimes they were banks, sometimes they were commercial buildings. They would turn over important areas to me, sometimes an exterior, sometimes a whole interior.

PK: What do you think they were looking for? I mean, after all, you were an artist, trained in that way, and you had not had specifically architectural training. I presume they were looking for a special look.

MS: Yes they were, and [then] very often they would ask if I would do a mural in the building, which, because of their particular interest, they would get excited about it. So that ran along until about nineteen. . . . I did a lot, all during the thirties, and then, by the end of the thirties, which was just before the war, I don’t know whether I told you the story about how I happened to design air schools?

PK: Yep. Yeah, we got all that.

MS: Well, the air school thing happened just out of a clear sky, and I did seventeen air schools all over the United States. And those were, you know, tremendous projects for me, and of course they were projects that I had never been in my mind prepared for or anything else, but anyway I did ‘em. Those turned out well. And then after the war, because I was gone [see] to Asia for a year, and after the war was over, I did start to design individual houses for just friends of mine. I didn’t do it even as a job. They were just friends of mine, and they wanted me to do it, so I did it.

PK: Because you designed your own home, of course.

MS: Oh yes.

PK: But that was back quite earlier.

MS: Oh yeah, I did several of those way back. And they were some real [terrific] little houses. \_\_\_\_\_ . And it was a lot of fun, and it gave me a lot of satisfaction to work that closely with friends of mine. And then one day I got a call from the Pacific Clay Pipe, which is a very big clay pipe company, and they asked me if I would design an administration building for them. The administration would, \_\_\_\_\_ be built in downtown Los Angeles, not down, not where the factory was. So I designed—I think—a very imaginative building for them, using a lot of

material, a lot of ceramic material and things that nobody had ever done before, and. . . .

PK: You mean on the facade, on the exterior. . . .

MS: Yes.

PK: . . . or are you talking about the interior?

MS: Mostly exterior, but some interior. And then it was about six months after that that I got this strange letter from Howard Ahmanson, who I had met socially two or three times, but didn't really know him, and he said, "Have traveled Wilshire Boulevard for twenty-five years. Know name of architect and year every building was built. Bored." He sounded like a telegram. It was just short statements.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: "Have two valuable pieces of property Wilshire Boulevard. Need buildings designed. I want buildings that will be exciting seventy-five years from now. If interested call this number." (chuckles) I was not an architect, and I had never had an architectural office. I had, you know, I had been doing, I'd played with this stuff all these years, but I had not ever had a big office. So I went in to see this man, and we. . . . Oh, I met him in the worst office I had ever been in in my life. It was miserable. It was sherbet-colored plaster walls with the holes in the walls, and I sat down on something that had a big spring loose and stuck me in the ass.

PK: (chuckles)

MS: It was a real strange. . . . I thought, of all the people in the world who want something nice, how can he stand to be in a thing like this? Well, we went to lunch at the Beverly Hills Club, and I've never had had as nice a conversation in my life. We talked till five o'clock that afternoon, and never mentioned at any time anything about these buildings. There was never the slightest, never, either of us ever approached the problem. We just talked about things that were exciting. And he was a great conversationalist. We get in the car, and we drive back downtown to Los Angeles on Spring Street where his office was, and as we passed this first place in Beverly Hills, he just didn't even turn, he just said, "That's one." And just had his finger like that, and ["Well, what do you mean that's one?"] "Well," he said, "that's one of those pieces of property." It was a whole block on Beverly Hills \_\_\_\_\_. And we got down, about halfway to town, and he said, "That's the other one." And so, when we got down to the office, go down to his parking lot, and his chauffeur was letting us out, and he said, "Well, then it's all settled you're going to do them." "Well," I said, "Mr. Ahmanson, we've never discussed even what it is you want done. How could I say I say I can, I, it's all settled? Because I don't even know how many bodies you have to take care of. I don't know anything." He said, "Look I have people that can give you that information, but," he said, "I don't want you to ever talk to one of them about design. They know absolutely nothing about it. I know nothing about it. I want you to design this a hundred percent as though it was for you, and the way that you would want every piece of furniture and every. . . . Everything would, had to be exactly like you were doing it for you." He said, "I know it's crazy, but," he said, "I'm doing it because that's the way I'd like to do it." Well, he scared me to death. I didn't even know how to charge. I didn't know any of those things. So eventually we \_\_\_\_\_. . . . I didn't have one other conference with him. And he laid down emphatically, "Now don't call me. I don't want to hear from you. I don't want to talk to you. I don't want anybody in my office to talk to you." And he had a thousand people working for him. He said, "I want this thing to be absolutely the best you can do."

PK: He gave you no guidelines about. . . .

MS: No guidelines whatsoever.

PK: . . . style and image that he wanted?

MS: No. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And I said, "Well, I can't do that. I would like to make a sketch of some kind or another and see if what I have in mind would have any appeal to you." He said, "All right. I accept that." So I made a sketch. I included a lot of sculpture and a big mosaic over the main entrance. The first building I did was an insurance building. And I took the sketch on his office, and he was talking on the telephone, and I set it down on the floor, and he never took his eyes off it all the time he was talking, and he never looked up to me at all. He didn't say anything; he just went on talking. He finally finished his conversation about ten minutes. He paced up and down the room about fifteen minutes, and I couldn't tell whether he liked it or hated it. In fact, I kind of thought he disliked it. He went over to the telephone, picked it up, called his wife, and he said, (chuckles), he said, "How are you? I'm looking at the goddamndest sketch, the most beautiful building." He just went in and he just got into rapture about this thing, and talked to her for thirty minutes about the building. He never once even said, "Piss off," to me. He just didn't say a thing. He said, just told her about it, and when he got through, he said, "Could I take it home and show it to her tonight? You can have it in the morning." (chuckling) Said, "Of course." "All right," he said, "now remember, this is it. Anything you want to do along this line, if you're not stuck with it." He said, "Do it. But don't call me."

PK: It sounds ideal.

MS: Well, I went out. . . . Well, except I was young and it scared me to death. And I went to the, started an office job, and got a contractor, and we had the building about half done, and I thought, "Well now, I've reached the point where I should go over the cost of the art with him," because I always, I thought of that always as an extra, like I've always kind of thought art was an extra.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And I had all this sculpture, and I got the figures of what it was going to cost for the sculpture, and what it was going to cost for. . . .

PK: This was sculpture of your own design?

MS: Well, I designed it pretty much, except I had a very wonderful sculptor do the work, and gave him a lot of latitude, but it was, still had the same feeling that I wanted.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: So I called him [Ahmanson—Ed.] up. And I said, "Now when you saw the sketch, there was some sculpture indicated, and the big mosaic, and there are some murals inside that you are, you didn't know anything about." And I said, "I have the figures for all these things now and I'd like to give you the figures and get your approval before we do anything." And I thought we were cut off, so I called back, and his secretary said, "You weren't cut off. He hung up on you." You know, "Why the hell did he hang up?" "Because he told you it was your problem." (chuckles) So I just decided that it was my problem, and I really from then on finished the building and never talked to him until the day we, that we were taking the big guardian walls down on Wilshire Boulevard, the outside walls.

PK: Which building was this? This is. . . .

MS: National American Insurance.

PK: And that's at Wilshire and. . . . Do you remember?

MS: Well, unfortunately that building has been replaced by the Ahmanson Center, but it was on. . . .

PK: Um hmm. Near Western.

MS: It was near Western on Wilshire. And so I was in the job office getting everything cleaned up, and the telephone rang, and it was Howard, and he said, "Why didn't you tell me you were taking the walls down on Wilshire?" And I said, "I was going to call you a little bit later this afternoon and invite you to come tomorrow so I could show you the building without any interruption as long as you want to spend on Saturday." He said, "I'll be there in eight minutes." And he was there in eight minutes. And I spent a hell of a lot of money on the garden. I had moved trees that were fifty years old. I did things that were just not natural to be done for a new building.

PK: It was an empty lot, you mean?

MS: Oh, it absolutely an empty lot when I started in. But it was a big area and I figured that at, this big north light for the main room of the office looked out onto a garden, it should be a beautiful garden and that people should be able to go out there and have lunch and, you know, make use of it, the people that worked there. So he arrived and he parked his car in exactly the place that I had marked for him, although it didn't have any sign on it yet. It was a place where his car was, would be, because his office was going to be in this building. He didn't say a word, he said, "Where do we start?" And I took him through the garden, and I couldn't tell whether he thought it was nice, lousy, or miserable. And then he said, "Where do we go next?" So I took him through the executive offices, the boardrooms, and all that kind of stuff, and finally into the business offices and all the front area. It took three hours. And when we got to his desk, he sat down and immediately put his feet up on the desk, as he had always done in his own office. And he had a hole on top of his desk, in his old desk, and he stuck his feet right up on top of this new granite. And I had designed every piece of furniture in the thing. I designed everything. Every, every single thing about the office I did. Inside and out.

PK: You yourself? Or did you have associates. . . ?

MS: I did it myself. I did on all the buildings I did. I had architects working for me and I had engineers working for me, but I did all the designing. And they simply worked off the working drawings to carry it out.

PK: I see.

MS: So he sat down in that office, and he looked around, and I'd had special [pieces, cases] that I designed and built as part of the architecture, where I had marvelous models of fire engines that I spent three or four thousand dollars on apiece, that actually worked. Everything worked. I thought he ought to have it. \_\_\_\_\_ the fire insurance building ought to have the best goddamn thing in his office. He looked at these things. He never said a word. We go out into the front office, same thing. Not a word. Not a smile, not a sneer, nothing. Just nothing. I was so damn mad by this time, about three hours. Well, we finally got to the front door, and he walked out, and he pressed the button and we walked across Wilshire Boulevard, and he leaned up against the lamppost and started to laugh. And I was so angry at him, the way he laughed, and I said, "Well, you know, you're just a hell of a tough guy to deal with, and I don't want anything more to do with you. I've busted my ass on that building, and I haven't had even a, haven't even had a frown out of you, let alone a good word." And he said, "Well, forgive me for laughing, but," he said, "one thing I didn't count on." He said, "I wanted this kind of a building, and I got what I wanted, but," he said, "I didn't expect it to bring in business." He said, "I never dreamed it would be a matter of making business." He said, "We got the best goddamned business sitting here in the world." And I said, "Well, I'm glad you feel that way." And then he told me how much he loved it. "Start the other one tomorrow."

PK: What did he mean by bringing in business? I don't. . . .

MS: He thought it would increase business. Tremendously. And it did. And I started. . . .

PK: Because it was noticeable.

MS: Oh, absolutely.

PK: It was different.

MS: And he said, "Start Home Savings tomorrow." So I started it the next day.

PK: What year was this, Millard?

MS: [long pause to think—Ed.]

PK: Was it '60?

MS: It must have been. . . . No. It must have been '50.

PK: Fifties.

MS: Because I worked for him for thirty-three years.

PK: Oh, okay, it's earlier than I thought.

MS: And I started Home Savings, and to give you some example of Home Savings, in the first ten days that that building was open, in Beverly Wilshire, they stood in line—now, you aren't going to believe what I'm going to tell you—they stood in line on Wilshire Boulevard a block and a half long waiting to put money in, in the savings and loan. It paid for itself in the first ten days. It paid for the land, it paid for the building, it paid for the furnishings, landscaping. Everything. The use of that money paid for the entire project. I did a total of about forty of those buildings. And the longest any of them ever took was six months to pay for itself.

PK: How many did you do?

MS: Forty.

PK: Forty?

MS: Yeah.

PK: And you designed each one?

MS: Sure. Every damn one of 'em.

PK: You must have been working though with a huge staff. You must have. . . .

MS: Well, I had about fifteen to eighteen people working for me most of the time. But we had. . . . You know, thirty-three years is a long time.

PK: Right.

MS: I did all the murals, I did. . . . I did everything. And when you stop and think that the longest that any of them, any of the forty ever took to pay for itself was six months, that's an extraordinary, that's an extraordinary fact. Now, I know better than anybody else how good the design is and how bad the design is. The reason that they were so successful is because we combined the art. It's because people loved to be associated, and in fact.

. . .  
This [the tape side—Ed.] has just now ended.

[Tape 8, side B; marked Tape 3, July 15, 1988]

[Note: This tape side is a little noisier than the rest and the transcriber's confidence in the accuracy of the transcript is therefore correspondingly less—TR]

PK: Millard Sheets, July 15, tape 3, side B. Millard, you were talking about your experience with Amundsen and the many, many buildings you did for him and the importance of art in your designs.

MS: They sent out questionnaires. They couldn't believe that people'd be standing in line to put in money in a new building. They [had] sent out questionnaires: "Why did you choose Home Savings?" "We like to be associated with something beautiful." That happened over and over and over. That's the kind of answers that they got. And it was so extraordinary. And of course he would never let anybody on the staff ever, ever criticize or tell me anything. (chuckles) And he never would. I would take a sketch in for a new building and he'd just be excited as hell, and that was all there was to it. And then we just went ahead and did it.

PK: I've seen a number of your Home Savings buildings, certainly not all by any means, and as far as. . . . From the basis of those I've seen, there is very much of a personality. They have a personality. There's a unity of conception and design. What, how would you describe your basic aesthetic, your own work, your own buildings and what you were after, what you were trying to achieve in these buildings?

MS: Of course you had to, they had to design function at first, in terms of space and all that, which every architect, every designer has to think about. Well, I was concerned about good materials, using fine everything from travertine to marble to granite. I was concerned about doing as many beautiful exterior mosaics and sculptured things as we could do with the building without making it look like it was, you know, overdone, in order for people to get some sense that there was a pride and a symbolism involved in Home Savings' approach. And we used the locale of the building we were building pretty much as part of the symbolism. Forget the. . . . Whether it, sometimes it was historical, sometimes it was current.

PK: This would be in the murals or in the mosaics, I presume.

MS: Yes, and. . . .

PK: Like beach scenes, maybe, if it was, if the office was located on a beach, and so on.

MS: Yeah, yeah. Some of the very best buildings I'm sure you've never seen. San Diego and all the little towns south of Los Angeles.

PK: I know the one, for instance, on Wilshire Boulevard in Santa Monica. I used to live right nearby. That's I think at 25th or around there.

MS: I think that's one of the poorer buildings.

PK: Yeah?

MS: Now that's my feeling. I always felt that I. . . . I didn't like the way that one's \_\_\_\_ was done. Anyway, without trying to get critical or, it was an opportunity that I don't think anyone's ever had in the United States.

PK: To work with that kind of freedom.

MS: To work with that kind of freedom, and to work with that kind of real backing, because it was just. . . . The man had all the money in the world, and he didn't question ever. Ever. And of course I used to break my ass to save the money. In every place I could, I did. [But] to use good materials and do the kind of things I wanted to do, and I would press some of the contractors pretty hard to get some of these things done, because I wanted them done and I wanted them to be. . . . And I [knew, know] it would probably not made any difference if I hadn't, but I did work terribly hard to save money. And then the thing I think is extraordinary about these buildings is that when people then started to come from other states and other parts of the country here, they would call me and say, "We want you to do a building." And so I was doing buildings all over the United States.

PK: Including in Hawaii.

MS: Yes.

PK: I know there's big tall one. . . .

MS: And it, so it was unlimited. I keep telling you, it wasn't anything I could have planned. It wasn't anything that I did plan or would have tried to plan. But I was involved in so much, and it all turned out the same way. There were one of these buildings in practically every part of Texas, the Southeast, every part of Texas. And it made no difference where we did it, the same results came about.

PK: You're first and foremost a painter, I believe—or at least you started out. . . .

MS: Yeah.

PK: . . . with that kind of training. Not. . . . You were not trained as an architect.

MS: That's right.

PK: That wasn't the route that you took. Did you bring, do you feel you brought a painter's sensibility or eye to your architectural work? In other words, do you feel that there is perhaps a stronger than ordinary pictorialism to the surfaces of your buildings?

MS: Sure. Absolutely. And I think the, by far the most satisfactory part of this whole thing is that for all those years we had so many people that were excited about what they were getting and what we were doing. It was not a matter of just getting a job. These people were so wonderful in their acknowledgement of what they had. And in every case the finance just rolled in as a result. Every one of them made money. Not one of 'em, not one single one of them, ever fell flat.

PK: It interests me that you use the word symbolism as an important concept within the design of your buildings, because that's the term that's now used so often by the post-Modernists, the theoreticians of post-Modernism and the architects themselves, the importance of image and symbol, architecture as a symbolic statement, which they feel was pretty much lost during the Modern movement with the International style holding sway. And it strikes me that back at the time when you were working, when really International style was almost exclusively what was being done [by other firms], that you already had focused on the symbolic role of architecture. Now, if you can, could you tell me how you came to. . . . I mean, how did you develop that particular value? How did you see that as an important part of the design of buildings? Did it have something to do with your sketching in Europe, your looking at old buildings, and. . . .

MS: No, I think it was just a matter of logic. I think that whenever I tried to figure out why we should have murals, mosaics, sculpture, and stained glass and so forth, what it should represent, and I immediately thought in terms of it representing the actual project's own nature, or its own history. Sometimes its history is important. We built a building on the corner of Sunset and Vine that was where the first motion picture company ever lot was placed, and used the motion picture as the subject matter from the beginning to the end in that. And I think that's one of the best buildings that we have done, that I ever did, because it's the. . . . Well, it's very symbolic.

PK: Was your symbolism pretty well limited to the imagery in the murals or the sculpture, [and, in] this kind of thing—that's the visual—or did you find ways, were you interested in trying to incorporate symbolism into the use of forms, perhaps forms referring to something else? The shapes themselves, the spaces?

MS: No, I think it was mostly in terms of the decoration, because the forms that I dealt with were very simple forms. And I found that people responded to those simple forms. And they. . . . [In, And] that they were repetition was in that sense, that I didn't try to get from the simplicity of very simple architecture.

PK: How were your works received by other architects? How were you viewed by the other architectural firms, like maybe Martin and. . . .

MS: Well, it was very interesting, because the people I knew were always excited about it. People that I felt were friends of mine were very enthusiastic. Some of the other people would, did everything they could to knock it in every way.

PK: On what grounds, though. I'd be curious to know what might they find disturbing?

MS: Well, in San Diego, for example—one of the best buildings I ever did—they gave it what they called the Lemon Award of the year. And their reason for giving it was very unusual. They said it was because it was too good for the area it was done in, that I had no business designing that kind of a building in that area that was a. . . .

PK: Didn't fit in?

MS: Of course that building improved the area. As time went on, they built new buildings all around it; it became better buildings. But at the time we built it, we bought a piece of property that we knew was a marvelous property to build a savings and loan on, because of the actual traffic flow. And they gave me the Lemon Award and made a big headline out of it, because of the fact that it was far too important for the place.

PK: Did you, were you aware at the time that your work, your building design was perhaps a bit out of synch with the prevalent. . . .

MS: Oh yeah. Sure.

PK: Indeed that the glass box was pretty much what was the official style.

MS: Sure. Sure, because no glass box could possibly reflect the kind of thing I was trying to say in these buildings, which were warm, rich material, and the chance for decorations, interior and out, exterior, both. It wouldn't have worked. Just wouldn't have worked at all.

PK: Does it strike you, now looking back, as perhaps ironic that the very values you're describing, that you brought to your design of buildings, what you were looking for, are those that now have recently been revived in the guise or what they call post-Modernism?

MS: Well, I'm delighted, because I think it's a step in the right direction.

PK: But I'm sure you have noticed this direction.

MS: Oh sure. Sure. I feel very itchy not doing architecture right now. When I decided to close my office and just come up here and paint twelve years ago, it was one of the toughest decisions I ever made, because we could have gone on indefinitely.

PK: So your architectural design activity was out of the office. . . . Was it in Pomona?

MS: Claremont.

PK: Claremont, okay.

MS: Yeah. I had a beautiful architectural office, and I had a big mural studio. And see we cut the mosaics the mosaics ourselves. And we made, we made most of the decorations ourselves. I used to Europe for the first ones and have them done in Italy, and they looked like they were all designed in Italy. They didn't ever feel like they were ours. So I had to teach people to do all the cutting. And fortunately had marvelous students that had good background, and with some extra training they became very good at it. They're still running [the, a] mosaic studio in Claremont.

PK: I see. But you're disassociated with it, or is it still your. . . .

MS: I'm disassociated with it.

PK: Hmm. How would you. . . . If you were forced to assign a place for yourself in architectural, in the development of architectural form in history, what would you feel that your work identified with, you know, what aspect of architectural history or of building? Could you draw any connections between your own work and your own interests and some other period or some other architects?

MS: No other architect and no other particular period, but I think it would have to be related to the simpler buildings of all time, rather than the more complex. I wasn't interested in putting a lot of rococo decoration on a building when I wanted to use sculpture and I wanted to use mosaic as an integral part of the building. And decided to start out with very simple forms and work my architecture, my sculpture, mosaic, and painting, and so forth into it. [architecture was a slip of the tongue—TR]

PK: Well, what about the buildings in some other civilization, perhaps an ancient civilization? Were there any at least elements that you drew from those examples? That you consciously drew, I guess I would have to ask you, because you, if it was unconscious, you can't know.

MS: Well, it had to be unconscious, because I didn't really turn to anything for direction.

PK: You mean you hadn't, then, made a study of architecture of the past at any point, other than your sketching trip in. . . .

MS: Yes, I [knew] it romantically as an exciting part of life, and I certainly worked with lots of architectural books and so forth, but I don't, I can't \_\_\_\_\_ for the first buildings. They just, were just as natural as breathing to be



done the way they were.

PK: So you didn't feel an affinity, a personal affinity, to any other specific architectural expression. . . .

MS: No.

PK: . . . time, style, or anything like that?

MS: No, no.

PK: I mean most of us have, oh, a certain architecture with which we feel comfortable. I mean, maybe it's the adobe home. A lot of us enjoy that. This is why I'm asking if you personally feel attracted to or more comfortable with a certain kind of building.

MS: Well, of course I love an adobe. I love lots of things. But in the buildings I did, it grew pretty much out of where they were and then choice of material—that had an awful lot to do with the design.

PK: So you continued your building activity, designing of buildings, until when? When did you say?

MS: I did it for thirty-three years altogether, and I stopped about eleven years ago.

PK: Okay. So that'd be, what, '77?

MS: Um hmm.

PK: Well, so that means you must have started then, in about '57, with, in the mid-fifties, working with Amundsen, is that right? That'd be about thirty years. No, no, no! If you stopped in '77, and you were working with Amundsen, that would be then '47 you had already started working.

MS: It was right after the end of the war.

PK: Do you have anything else you would want to say about that kind of activity?

MS: Well, I could just say one other thing, and that is I had to work like hell along with all this activity and guiding all these people to try to keep up my painting, and it was a hell of a job.

PK: So you really were, had to develop good skills as an administrator.

MS: Yeah, sure.

PK: As a manager.

MS: It was a payroll of probably. . . . I don't remember what it was now, but probably \$25,000 a month or. . . .

PK: Did you ever feel that you were losing touch with. . . . Now, again, you're a painter, an artist, you worked directly eye to hand to the object or the surface, and with such a large operation did you ever feel any kind of frustration perhaps in having to do a great deal of administration and \_\_\_\_\_ not perhaps being as intimately involved with some aspects of the project as you might?

MS: No, I never felt that. I felt that I might have been recognized more as a painter if I had just continued to only paint. And I think that of course some of the people—like my dealer (chuckles)—they've put up with me. They, you know, they were pretty, shocking to them for me to be as involved as I was in all these other things. When they first thought they had control of a pretty lively painter. And there were some times when I couldn't paint for two months, you know, but I always managed to paint and keep doing the best I could.

PK: You were essentially operating at the design office then for a good number of years there, in addition to your painting, as you've been describing. Did you ever have any contact with that other famous designer, Charles Ames?

MS: Oh, yes. We're very good friends.

PK: Really?

MS: Very good friends.

PK: Was there any sort of communication on design matters. . . .

MS: Not really.

PK: . . . or was your relationship social pretty much?

MS: Very. . . . Well, we were good friends and, though we worked in totally different ways and in different materials, I not only respected him tremendously, but I think he respected me. And his wife was a good designer, and she was. . . . She was extremely nice.

PK: You never collaborated on anything though? So you're, professionally your operations were quite separate.

MS: Were separate.

PK: Did you ever talk about design matters? Do you remember?

MS: Once or twice I think we were involved in either some kind of a, one of those talks that you get into when you're invited to do things together. And I got on one or two of those things. And we always got along fine, but I never really sat down with him and. . . . Although I used to talk about his work to him a great deal. Wonderful guy.

PK: Who else in the community that you had contact with was involved in design, in building? We've talked about the painters quite a bit; how about the designers? L.A. has had some very distinguished, imaginative designers.

MS: Well, I knew most of them, and we, I was friends with most of them. The names go. . . .

PK: I just wondered if there was somebody in particular.

MS: I was not disassociated from them; I can that without any question. I was always very close to all these people. And I use to do an awful lot of lecturing for them, to groups they belonged to. They would ask me to lecture, talk to people. And I did a lot of lecturing, for example, that you'd probably laugh at. For Rotary Clubs and for some of the biggest organizations like that in California, both in Los Angeles and San Francisco. I'd be invited by them to talk on some of these things, and I always found it interesting because I liked their reaction.

PK: Let me ask you I think a related question, one more question perhaps. You mention doing a building at Sunset and Vine and incorporating the film industry [in, and] the cinema motif, because I guess this was the site of one of the first studios.

MS: Yes.

PK: Which of course brings. . . . That's a very important question of the effect of the film industry on the arts, and particularly the visual arts, in Southern California over the years. Obviously the movies, film industry, was the big thing, from quite early on. I mean, I would suppose from the time that you really started working, back in the late twenties.

MS: Well, I worked a lot in the studios.

PK: Yeah, what did you do? What was your. . . .

MS: I started in in the beginning primarily as a delineator, again. I would do, I worked with designers, and I would do the sketches that they would present, and then I became a designer, and became a full art editor. \_\_\_\_\_ I had a, I was registered as an art editor.

PK: What studios? Did you actually work for a studio?

MS: MGM. . . .

PK: MGM.

MS: . . . Columbia, oh, Universal.

PK: So you obviously then were not on an exclusive contract to any one of them, but you. . . .

MS: No, I worked, I worked on. . . . I refused any kind of an exclusive contract because I didn't, I couldn't be tied up.

PK: Right.

MS: And I used to work on special pictures with special directors, special producers. And I went to Europe—went once to Israel for three months to do a, well it turned out be a kind of a bum story. When I went to Egypt to do what would have a great story, it was Joseph and His Brethren, and they made so much money that year that

they—and then the director died, couple of other things happened, so they postponed the picture and then they didn't do it. But I spent three months in Egypt, getting all the material together, designing everything.

PK: For the sets.

MS: Yeah.

PK: Um hmm.

MS: And then of course I had charge of costumes; I had charge of everything.

PK: Do you think that this had any influence on your particular sensibility as it then was applied in your later designing? Was that possible? You were working as a set designer looking at sometimes a romantic or exotic pictorial. . . .

MS: Well, that was mostly later, you see, after I was pretty well established in the architectural \_\_\_\_\_. That was the most. . . .

PK: Oh! Oh, really.

MS: That was the mostly in the seventies. . . .

PK: Oh, the film involvement came later then; it wasn't in the very early years.

MS: Late sixties and seventies.

PK: Okay, I see.

MS: And I enjoyed it. That's one thing I must say, that it was a terrible choice to be making all the time, because I, at MGM they wanted me to be a full-time art director, and they offered me about ten times what I was making, and it was a terrible choice. But I knew I couldn't be a painter. . . .

PK: Um hmm, and do that. . . .

MS: . . . and I knew I couldn't do the things that I was, that I wanted to do, and do that at the same time. Although I wanted to do both. Well, I just decided I couldn't.

PK: Very quickly, what effect do you feel the presence of Hollywood and the film industry on the artist?

MS: I think it had an influence on a lot of the artists. I don't think it had any on me. I think a lot of artists were caught in sort of the magic of it, but it's. . . . And I loved \_\_\_\_\_ working in the pictures. I don't want to say I didn't, because I did. And I was, I really, I could draw anything, so I was able to do a lot of delineations that they never could have got anybody else to do.

Female voice: Pardon me, I have to ask. . . .

MS: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *August 30, 2004*