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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Fritz Scholder, 1995 March 3-30

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Fritz Scholder on March 3, 29, and 30, 1995. The interview took place in Scottsdale, Arizona, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

FS: Fritz Scholder
PK: Paul Karlstrom

[Session 1]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with Fritz Scholder on March 3, 1995, is the first session of a projected series that we hope to do, and the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. We're at the Remba Gallery in. . . . Is this Beverly Hills or L.A.?

FS: Actually West Hollywood.

PK: Oh, West Hollywood. Okay, Fritz. Good, I'm glad you know where we are.

This is an auspicious occasion for starting an interview and it's a somewhat unusual opportunity because you have this exhibition which opens, I think tomorrow. Tomorrow, really, isn't it?

FS: Um hmm.

PK: And everything is up and ready to go. I thought we might chat for a little while, maybe about twenty minutes or so. The works, as far as I could tell giving a fast glance as I walked by, are quite recent within the last. . . . Well, at least in the nineties. . . .

FS: Yes.

PK: Is that right?

FS: That's right, in the nineties. I've always worked in series. There are a number of different series represented in this particular show, because this is my first exhibition with Remba and I wanted to give them a good range of the recent work. So you have, for instance, a series called Martyr, which was started. . . .

PK: Which would be an example?

FS: The orange monotype there is one of the Martyrs, and that was started, I believe, in 1993. I never know when a series begins or when it ends. Some series last for years, some series only go on for a short time. Martyrs ended in '94. Started in '93, ended in '94.

PK: So just a year.

FS: Right.

PK: Are there some other examples?

FS: I did quite a few of the Martyrs. There aren't any hanging in this room. They do have some others. But I did sculptures. . . . Well, actually, the large sculpture of the Indian is actually within the Martyr series.

PK: Now, how so? How could I tell that?

FS: [laughs] Well, the first Martyr was quite a twisted life-size figure that's on the cover of the new sculpture book, if you might remember, which I sent to you.

PK: Um hmm.

FS: The second one was a small figure coming out from a T-shape crucified attitude, and it was actually something to hang on a wall. The third one was a horizontal life-sized woman on her back, splayed out. And then the fourth Martyr, which is this one, was of the American Indian, because I last year went back to the subject. . . .

PK: [Fascinating. Yes.]

FS: . . . and it just was natural to do. It was just right at the end of the Martyr series, and so it somewhat flowed into my coming back to the American Indian to make a new set of paintings. In fact, this large painting is one. The series of the new Indians is actually called Red. Of course, the Red race. In Europe they're known as the Red Indians.

PK: As opposed to the East Indians.

FS: Yes, exactly. And, in fact, in about a month a major book is coming out. It's my first book in German as well as English, and it has every one of the Red series. There are twenty-one, and each one is pictured in full color and across from it will be a [full-bleed] one—equals—one closeup of each painting. In this case, you would see only this, which forces the viewer to really look at the brush strokes and so forth. And this is the only one of the Red series that does not have a figure in it.

PK: Well, I was going to ask about that.

FS: Yes, and which, to me. . . .

PK: There's a dog silhouette.

FS: Exactly. So it's the interior, of course, of a longhouse in which you have an altar of a certain type. I wanted to not be literal, and so there's indications of, conceivably, shields hanging, medicine bundles. But some of the objects you're not quite sure what it is, but in the center is the dog, which, of course. . . . A lot of dogs, Indians love dogs, but it is a bit different.

PK: Is there any symbolism to the dog beyond what you just mentioned, that it fits?

FS: Well, I think any painting could be seen on many different levels, depending on one's frame of reference. And so it just depends. Each tribe. . . . It's hard to generalize on American Indians. Every single tribe was a nation onto itself. In fact, a lot of people don't even realize, not even the plains Indians could communicate between themselves. And they were so nationalistic. Everyone hated each other and [laughs] there was continual warfare, so it's hard to make generalizations. Even the beadwork, for instance. They would trade beadwork, and so if you get an object that has, let's say, Santee Sioux beadwork, this doesn't mean that the object is Santee Sioux, because they would trade with, let's say, the Crows. So it gets confusing but. . . .

PK: Multicultural even back then, I guess.

FS: But what I've always tried to do, especially with this particular series, is knock down this. . . . It's a loaded subject in this country, because it's still a relatively new historical area, which has great national guilt. But I'm always doing research to get beyond the stereotype, of course. For instance, over here are several of the new paintings of the Indian. . . .

PK: Now this is not part of the Red series?

FS: No, it's not part of the Reds. The Red were all large pieces.

PK: It could be.

FS: This, in fact, the same size, this size. But these are works on paper that are recent. And, again, putting down an image that has many different layers. And it's mainly, in this case, *Wrestling in the Kiva*, is, of course, the underground "church," if you will.

PK: Is this Hopi?

FS: This is probably Hopi or Pueblo. And then the Navajo blanket in the foreground. Because, here again, they trade. So the one on the left, conceivably you could interpret that as blood.

PK: Now this one, we should probably say what it is. It's *Mean Indian with Tomahawk No. 2*, and it's acrylic on paper, forty-one by thirty-one, from 1995.

FS: So here is, in a way, a stereotype consciously put down. But I'm still very much interested in underpainting and what the paint would do. Scraping the lines in the body, for instance. I love paper because you can scrub and rub, and part of, I think, the painting process is really transcending the subject.

PK: Well, what about the. . . . You mentioned that there is red paint that appears to be that this figure, this warrior, is bleeding, is wounded. Does that fit in at all with the Martyr theme, or is this something quite

different?

FS: Well, in a way it's different, in that even the title indicates—calling it *Mean Indian*—locks into, conceivably, all of the kind of myth that we have grown up with. And I include myself in that because I really had no identity, even though I am part Indian and proud of it, to the subject until I as an adult realized that some part of my heritage was Luiseno, which is Southern California Mission Indian, located in San Diego County.

PK: We talked about that at lunch.

FS: Right.

PK: We'll talk more, I think, later.

FS: So, anyway, this is in a way a stereotype, and yet, of course, it transcends it. Because I'm very much always interested in the process of painting, and so this is handmade paper made especially for me with my signature in the watermark. And they are the same size, and I do a good deal of my paintings on paper on that. At any rate, as I say, I've always worked in series. This is a little older piece that I wanted to show some of the sculpture. This is from the Shaman series . . .

PK: This is '90. . . . No, '84. This goes back to '84.

FS: This is the earliest piece. But I did a lot in the Shaman series, again, in paintings and monotypes as well as sculpture.

PK: So this is part of an edition, as well as being part of a series. These are cast, presumably in [edition, addition].

FS: Small editions. I think this is. . . .

PK: This is fourteen, sixteen.

FS: Sixteen, and most of the time they're about four or five. Once in a while just a unique image will happen like this one, *Fire Eater*. This is "a." I think I might have done a ghost image that's a monotype. There may be a "b" in existence. But simply it was just. . . . It was not a series but just something that I wanted to put down. One of the new series is Fallen Angels and this is one of the new Fallen Angels. . . .

PK: So this is one of those, yeah. *Number nine*.

FS: And I've always been intrigued, I've been doing a lot of research on the medieval, and so the *Fallen Angel* is one of the new series. Again, lots of "push around the paint on the paper." This paper is very, very heavy and takes. . . . You can do a great deal with it. But the large one also is a *Fallen Angel*. Even though there are very few female Fallen Angels, this is a female one.

PK: Not terribly gender-specific.

FS: [laughs]

PK: I mean, it's true this is slender and soft contours, but . . .

FS: There's always an androgynous feeling I like to put forth.

PK: This is one of the works on the announcement.

FS: Yes, on the cover of the announcement. And, of course, the snake wrapped around—the snake of Adam and Eve. And the guise of. . . . Conceivably, the first female fallen angel was Lilith, and Lilith was the first wife of Adam, before Eve. And one of the guises that she took was of the bat, and here are purple bat wings. But in this case the fallen angel is looking up conceivably at the last remnants of Heaven, where she came from, and now she's descending into the dark pits.

PK: Now do you do this. . . . You say you're interested in, of course, the Biblical sources for this, but by way of Milton, at all, in literary connections?

FS: Of course. Milton, Dante, all of those guys. But mainly not even so much religious as the medieval thought intrigues me a great deal.

PK: So it's of the world view, really, that they. . . .

FS: Yes.

PK: Ideas of evil and. . . . Is there a flip side to this? Any indication of redemption, any hope held out? [chuckles]

PK: My interest seems to lie more in the dark side. It seems to be, in a way, a little more interesting, although I'm sure that things could be done in the other way, too.

This sculpture is from a series also. This is quite early, compared to the rest. It is 1986 also, a Dream Horse. And the Dream Horse appears in paintings and in monotypes. But I did want to give the gallery an overview. . . .

PK: A range.

FS: . . . especially of the sculpture. Now, talking about Lilith, this monotype is actually from a series of Lilith that I did, and again she's gotten into the disguise of the bat wing. So sometimes the series will kind of naturally flow into each other. From Lilith came, we went into the Fallen Angels, for instance. This is a lithograph [of, from] the Dream series, [the couples embracing, the *Couples embracing*]. And this is. . . .

PK: This is very ominous, with this. . . .

FS: It is. It's the last of the Dream series, just before the Monster Love series [chuckles], and so things are getting kind of rough here. [laughs] But again I am constantly interested in the medium, and. . . .

PK: Where was this [edition, editioned]? Where did you produce this?

FS: This was actually done in, I believe, Tempe. But I've used the combination of lithograph pencil and wash, and then the liquid, and put them all together, making an ominous kind of feeling to this. But I like lithograph a great deal. This is stone, and you can see the grain of the stone through the pencil, for instance. And it all to me is part of the process.

PK: This has for me a very un. . . . Your use of the medium and this almost evocation of, say, a waterfall. . . .

FS: Um hmm.

PK: . . . or a maelstrom, something pulling the figures down and into it. Am I reading that correctly?

FS: Yes, yes, exactly. I wanted to almost have them feel like they're right on the edge of something. The landscape is in a state of flux, for instance, and in fact again. . . .

PK: Unstable, unstable.

FS: Right. This particular [theme, thing] happens again in *Human and Nature*, in where we. . . . I thought I saw [a] *Human and Nature* somewhere. It must be up in front.

PK: Oh, we can take a look at that.

FS: We'll talk about that. Now here's another of the Fallen Angels, you see.

PK: Right. Boy, this is really a striking one!

FS: This is on canvas.

PK: This is number three.

FS: Yes.

PK:*Fallen Angel Number 3*, '94.

FS: Started last year, and again it's a subject that I find very interesting.

PK: Do you identify with these images, with these figures at all? Or do you expect the viewer to? I mean, I notice, for instance, that it's very generalized. Very strong color. I mean, very, very intense [punched-up] color. But the heads are always. . . . You know, they're not in any way articulated.

FS: No, I like to keep it—not literal—androgynous, if you will—and almost into animal/insect kind of thing. In this case, it's. . . . Again, it's the paint that counts; it's the color. And I think many artists use subjects as a springboard—even though the subject *is* important, and I do a lot of research on whatever subjects. . . .

PK: Do you?

FS: Yes. Because it seems to me that whatever you're going to paint, in a way the artist should be an expert to

a certain degree on that subject, because so why do it and what validity is there, if you aren't? But again, on many different levels, you can read into it more than I even might, because I try. . . . At times, I almost work in a trance. . . .

PK: Really?

FS: . . . I have to confess. I have music going loud, and you have to walk into the studio, it seems to me, and push everything you know back to the back of your brain and be as open and intuitive as possible. Because today, of course, I think in contemporary painting, the concept of course counts, but it's also a celebration of the paint as it drips and smears, and I have a rag in one hand and as you put on you have to take off, it seems to me. You have to cover your tracks. Just to put down a brushstroke oftentimes isn't that interesting. It's playing with it and seeing what you can get out of it. Discovering it for yourself, because really for the artist it's the doing that is important, and when it defies you to go any further then, conceivably, it's done. Either it's a big mess, or it might be something that you feel is worth saving. [chuckles]

PK: Now does this. . . . I think there's a conception, and clearly it's a misconception, that all of your subjects are somehow connected to the Southwest or to the American Indian, and clearly that isn't the case.

FS: No. I think that an artist finds himself always fighting against what he became famous for. And of course that is partly due to our own society and the fact that we live on the media, what the media feeds to us. And in most cases the media takes facts and makes factoids out of them. And so I know that many people think of me as a Southwestern painter, and I'm not at all. It happens that I like living there, simply for the climate. But I don't have much identification at all. I traveled a great deal. I've had studios in New York City and Venice, California, and many other places, and most of my subjects, when you look at the overall years, have been everything *else* but the Indian. [chuckles] I have done series on women, and cats and dogs and butterflies, and down the line, and, simply, it's whatever is of current interest to me is what I paint. I've never had a problem of being blocked with any kind of subject matter, simply because I'm constantly just observing and doing and traveling, and I go to concerts, I love going to films, and it all, I think, is part of then coming and putting down something of yours.

PK: Well, let me ask you this. Do you find that. . . . It seems to me from what you said that you're interested in formal considerations—you're interested in the paint, the material itself. These are of course considerations that we associate with abstraction or with Modernism, in a sense. But you also choose very powerful and intriguing, sometimes almost frightening, images, and do you ever find that this creates. . . . Do you think of this as creating a tension? Is there a chance that these images that you choose would overpower what is apparently your primary consideration?

FS: Well, I've always been interested in putting down strong images, because one thing I don't like is what I call "weak" painting or a weak subject, and in all subjects it just depends on how you approach it, of course. The first thing, it seems to me, that makes painting, apart from anything else, is color. And color's very personal, but I consider myself a colorist, even in dark paintings like this, because then there are many decisions one must make and [under-painting, underpainting] is very important. But the essence of paint is color, and this is a painting. In a way one, I think, has to transcend the subject simply because every subject today is a cliché. We have seen everything on television and billboards, and so we've been bombarded, and so it's a great challenge for the artist, it seems to me, to come up with *anything* that's going to—whatever subject—which is going to be interesting enough to look at more than a couple minutes.

PK: Is there another. . . . We've looked at, well, most of the works in this room, but is there any other work that would stimulate some particular observation?

FS: Let's walk into this other area, and I'll show you.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: Now we've moved into another room.

FS: This is actually the first of the Fallen Angels, and it's two angels, actually.

PK: It's very abstract compared to the other.

FS: Well, I started out as a complete nonobjective painter, and I wouldn't think of doing subject matter. And this was in Northern California. My teacher was Wayne Thiebaud, and he had just started his pop era of painting pies and cakes, which I loved, but there were so many students of his, I was one of them, who. . . .

PK: Where was this?

FS: In Sacramento. . . . and who became immediate Thiebauds, and I am such an individual that I immediately

felt compelled to not get into that, and I started large abstract paintings that were very dark. I was having a hard time. I had a young family, didn't know where the rent was coming from. And in a way painting is autobiographical, and yet I always deny making statements or being literal about it. But it is of course the interest that is current. So at that time I was getting a reputation—showed at the Palace of the Legion of Honor and other places—for dark, big abstract paintings.

PK: I didn't know that.

FS: So often I will kind of slip back into right on the edge of figurative and abstraction, and this is an example. And actually it's interesting because it was just done last year.

PK: So it's like revisiting an earlier. . . .

FS: Well, I never _____. It depends on many things. And now of course the Remba Gallery. . . . The Rembas were the ones who invented [Mexicofea, Mexicathea, Mixographia]], and it's an interesting story. Many years ago in Mexico, Tamayo. . . .

PK: Let's see, we're looking at this, an example—excuse me—but an example is this mystery woman undressing. It's a monoprint, [*Mixographia*].

FS: It's actually a combination of monoprint and etching, and again they have their own approach. They're very inventive and they did this very [texual, textual, textural] thing for Tamayo, and so this was actually done a couple of years ago, in which we did a series of four different images of the mystery woman. And they made their own paper. They have machines that make the paper. Everything is from scratch. And they take their time. This was a two-year project, and this is one of the other mystery women sitting, and then at the end I decided. . . . I was doing some work again with the Devil [chuckles], so we did some devils at the workshop. . . .

PK: Oh, boy, look at that.

FS: . . . and here's also one of them here. So, again, I never know. . . . I don't like to be limited even. . . . I usually work on more than one series at a time, because I just like to be able to be free to do whatever is. . . . Like I was waiting for, I think, one of these things to dry, and this was the actual project, and in the interim times I would mess around and I'd have other plates at the ready.

PK: Um hmm, don't waste any time.

FS: Yeah, you know, why not? I'm there. They have a beautiful big place downtown, a huge workshop.

PK: Ah hah. Yeah, I don't think I've visited, but I've heard about it.

FS: It's just a great place.

PK: Maybe I'll arrange that. Let me ask you one more question and then we have to go. But you introduced the figure quite a bit. Do you work from models? Do you draw from the. . . .

FS: These are actual models, and I usually do.

PK: I mean, clearly the Devil's not from _____.

FS: No, it wasn't there. [laughs] Okay, maybe we. . . . I think our reservation is _____.

PK: We better, right. Thanks a lot, Fritz. This is great!

[Session 2]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with the artist Fritz Scholder at his home studio in Scottsdale, Arizona. The date is March 29, 1995. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom.

Well, Fritz, this is really not a first session. It's in fact a second session, because we have that about half hour of taping recently, before the opening of your exhibition in West Hollywood at the. . . . What's the name of the gallery?

FS: Remba.

PK: Ah, Remba, that's right. And these were recent works. So we have that as a point of departure, and what we're doing now is, with a little more time, we're really going to lay in the, I suppose, in some ways the background of what led up to those works that are on display. At any rate, on the basis of visiting the exhibition

with you and our talking about it, and then looking at your recent wonderful sculpture catalog—a show that was at the University of Arizona, is that right?

FS: Actually, it was the Arizona State University, ASU.

PK: Um hmm. At any rate, I was looking through that as I was flying over here to join you today, and there were a couple of observations that these reflections led to. It occurred to me that the work—paintings, prints, sculpture, using apparently assemblages—are very much characterized by variety. For me, variety was the key impression I got—not just in the media but in the subjects and the themes. No sooner do we think we have you conveniently placed than a new Fritz Scholder appears, which confounds the picture. In this respect I think especially of the shamanistic and ritualistic mixed-media constructions which, frankly, were new to me. Among them Forgotten Altar, that series, Ritual Boxes, the Eagle Fetishes. Visually and emotionally I find them so different from the bronze sculptures, for instance, and the other works represented in this catalog, and then much of the painting. There is, again, for me, an impression of restless wandering among media and subjects in an effort to perhaps find a voice. And it's as if Fritz Scholder has to sample it all.

FS: [chuckles] Now inevitably you seem to return to a culture of specific source—Native American—and a region, which is where we are now, in the Southwest. From our earlier conversations, I know you may not agree with this critical approach to you and your work—especially the obvious effort to link you with a particular region and culture. Nonetheless, I would—with your permission—like to use this idea of a quest, of a search, perhaps for identity as a point of departure for our discussion today, our discussion of your life and art.

So, that by way of introduction, describing a project, and in such a project it's always a good idea to start at the beginning. So let's go back to the beginning now. What about your family background? What were the circumstances of your early life? Just to kick it off, you were born in 1937, I believe, in Breckenridge, Minnesota.

FS: That's right. I never lived in Breckenridge. It just happened to be little twin towns, and the hospital was on the Minnesota side. I grew up in North Dakota, and then I went to South Dakota. My parents were employed by the government and were transferred to different locations.

After South Dakota we went to several points in Wisconsin. So I'm thoroughly a Midwestern person, who grew up in the forties, the last of the innocent times. And like all kids sat by the radio and listened to *Tom Mix* and all of the radio programs, sent away for the premiums and collected stamps and coins. My father had been a stamp and coin collector, and probably that's where I got that idea.

But I was a pretty serious little kid in many ways, in that I was very shy and was not interested really in socializing that much. So I kept to myself and just liked to stay in my room and draw. And it all just was very natural. I never even thought about what I was going to be, because early on I realized that I had no choice. The only thing that I could do was to draw and to paint. So I also had realized that I was very much of an individual, early on. That in fact if anything I'm a rebel. Whenever someone would tell me to do something I usually did the opposite if I thought I could get away with it. And to this day I have problems at times just filling out forms, for instance. Anything where. . . .

PK: [Is that] so. Why is that?

FS: Well, whenever I feel pressured to do something a certain way, I just stop, and it's mainly, of course, always questioning—from early on—why someone should ask someone else to do something. I would even question my teachers because I felt that I had to find out for myself. Or I wondered if these rules were ones that really should be broken. And of course at an early age this makes it, I think, maybe more difficult. And I had enough difficulties early on anyway, but. . . .

PK: Like what? What kind of. . . .

FS: Well, physical difficulties. But more than that, I think, just felt that I was in the wrong place being in the Midwest. In fact, years later I had to give a speech in front of the governor of North Dakota on an occasion honoring me, and I realized that all that I could say was that North Dakota made me tough. And it did [chuckles], which was good, but at the time it was difficult. It was like surviving, when you are in blizzards and there's ropes between the buildings or houses and you can just freeze to death a foot away.

PK: What are the ropes for? You mean you would. . . .

FS: To hold on to. Because. . . .

PK: So you could pull yourself from one. . . .

FS: Yes. You couldn't see even a foot in front of you. And it was very difficult. I didn't much like the cold, and this

is probably why I live where I do now.

And it's interesting to look back on what one . . . the impressions in the beginning, of course. My folks had met in Arizona and so I remember early on one of the first magazines that I, as a little kid, would be looking at on the floor was *Arizona Highways*, and I saw these beautiful places that looked very exotic and warm especially, and I thought, "Gee, someday I'd like to live there maybe." But at any rate I am a Midwesterner, if you. . . . I don't like labels. Most artists don't like labels, because. . . .

PK: Well, you have to come from somewhere.

FS: Well, yes, I suppose, and even that, let's face it, is an accident. I didn't ask to grow up in North Dakota, but it does influence you. Even my manner of speaking. Many people say, "Well, you must be from the Midwest." And I never think about it, of course. Well, from there—and again by accident—I did take my first year in college up at the University of Wisconsin in Superior. But my second year my family was transferred to Sacramento, California. And that was a happy accident because I was able to get into a much more sophisticated area and had the good fortune of having Wayne Thiebaud as my instructor at the City College in Sacramento. And that opened up what I needed to become a professional artist, if you will. Thiebaud gave me my first one-man show on the campus of the art museum there, and then gave me actually my first professional show at a cooperative gallery that he and Greg Kondos and Mel Ramos and a few others had gotten together on. And that was the beginning of all kinds of things that I hadn't really had before.

PK: Of course, that was the beginning of what then became a professional career, and we're going to need to hear much more about that. But before we leave the Midwest—I realize you're in hurry to get away from it [laughter] but I do have a couple questions. One has to do with your family background going back to forebears. Your name is Scholder, as your father's name presumably was Scholder, which I gather was German or Germanic.

FS: Yes, I'm Fritz the fifth actually, and Scholders were an old pioneer family of San Diego County, and early on my grandfather—or actually my great-grandfather had come over with two brothers from the [Wurtenburg] area of Germany and got to America. Two of them decided to stay in the East. They didn't know English or anything else and one of them decided to discover the country and literally walked across the country. He ended up at Fort Apache for a while in fact, and was mustered into the army there because they were trying to catch Geronimo.

PK: Where is Fort Apache?

FS: Fort Apache is the eastern part of Arizona and the New Mexico border. So then he left that place, and he'd sustained some kind of injury in his leg but he continued to walk toward California. And by the time he got to San Diego County he was just about dead and laid down under a big oak tree to die. And there was a drought going on there and nobody had food or water. But he woke up in an Indian village. And there was nothing over there at that time, and the only women were Indian women, and so he married this one Indian woman and took a whole lot of land, as far as he could see, and found gold mines on it and tourmaline mines, and became the old patriarch of that area. And in fact if any kind of legal disputes came about, they would come to Fritz Scholder because he was the most educated person living there.

PK: This is your grandfather?

FS: Great-grandfather. And so there are great stories that come down from the family. For instance. . . . Of course, the non-Indians mingled with the Indian people of that area, and they were people that were basket makers. And their names had been changed by the Spaniards who had come up there. And the tribe that I'm affiliated with is called Luiseno, after King Luis of Spain.

PK: So have we. . . . L. . . .

FS: L-u-i-s-e-n-o [or Luiseñ o?—Ed.]. And there were also [Pepeñ os], [Degeñ os], and down the line. And they were the Indians that were forced to help build the missions. They were chained to the pillars at night so they wouldn't run away. It was, of course, another chapter in the particular history of the West, if you will, and these are people that had their own traditions. In fact, my tribe had an interesting tradition of sand painting. But it was nonobjective images, not figurative. And they also had a gambling game called [peone], and this is where two lines of men face each other sitting, and in front of them they have a big blanket that they hold in their teeth to cover themselves and they have sticks which. . . . It's kind of a complicated game, but at the right time you put out so many sticks from the blanket and the other side challenges you in certain ways and standing behind the men would be the women chanting and, somewhat like cheerleaders, egging the other side on and so forth.

PK: How did you learn about these details of this tribe?

FS: When I was about eleven was my first trip "down home," as they call it, to see my grandmother, who was still living in a little house with a wood stove and I saw some of the last of the [peone] games at that time.

PK: Was this on a reservation?

FS: There's still a reservation, the La Jolla Indian Reservation at the foot of Mt. Palomar. And so there's great stories. For instance, supposedly, when Los Angeles just started—and you have to realize that Los Angeles is much younger than San Diego—the first rule that the mayor enacted, or proclaimed, was a law against playing [peone], because the Indians brought it over there and they started playing on the streets with the white men and getting in fights and shootings and killings and all of that. And I don't know if it is true, but it's a good story: That was the first law of Los Angeles. But there are so many stories, of course, of the West. The Indian people, at that time their main thing was acorns, and it was called [weewish], and you literally had acorn cereal in the morning, and then you'd make lots of it, and it's quite a complicated way of getting it. . . . You had to get the tannin out of it and go through a number of different steps to get it to a stage of being edible. But you'd have cereal in the morning, and then what was left you would fry up in kind of like potato pancakes for lunch. And then anything left from there, there's a good dessert out of weewish, a very sweet thing. So these are people that of course really used everything that they could think of, in an area that was still very open. There was no boundaries, of course, from Mexico. My folks got into cattle raising and would every year take their herd down to Monterey to sell.

PK: Monterey, Mexico?

FS: Yeah. There were no borders. And supposedly my Dad saw Pancho Villa once, riding around. My father has great stories of all kinds. He shared the stage with Will Rogers, Jr. when he graduated from Haskel in Oklahoma, the only junior college for Indian people. And my father. . . .

PK: That's where your Dad graduated?

FS: Yes, the Indian is on my father's side, and he's half Indian, and growing up in the twenties Indian people could not go to a regular college. My father's a very bright man, still is, and he was thwarted by this, I believe. And so he took a trip on the train all by himself. He had skipped a lot of grades, so he was very young when he arrived in Lawrence, Kansas, for Haskell. He was the valedictorian when he graduated, and it happened that year that the commencement speaker was Will Rogers. So my father's speech teacher literally took him down to the creek beforehand to put pebbles in his mouth to teach him how to project his voice like the ancient Greeks. Indian schools at that time, you have to realize, were actually quite good as far as a classical approach to teaching. It was very formal, and my father throughout his life I believe you could say he was a formal man. Always wore a suit and tie to work. And I remember the first time that he came in contact with Oliver LaFarge, the writer famous for *As Long as the Grass Shall Grow*, and from a very big family in the East who came out to the Hopi Reservation when my father was an administrator at King's Canyon. And the second day that LaFarge was there he showed up in all-Indian garb, and my father was outraged. Because here was a graduate of Yale, who certainly knew the English language, dressing like an Indian. Literally sitting cross-legged on his desk. [chuckles] And so it was always a bizarre acculturation, especially from the stories I heard from my father who, of course being half-and-half, had a very distinct kind of frame of reference. But on the other hand, and maybe because of his experiences, we grew up as very regular kids that went to public schools and who never even thought of being part Indian. And of course if you're one-quarter Indian or anything you really can't be much of that. I never even gave it a thought until many years later, in college. [laughs]

PK: Is that right?

FS: No, there was no. . . . I hung out with just, you know, the kids.

PK: So in your own experience in growing up in the Midwest, you don't recall suffering any kind of discrimination that much?

FS: Oh, no. No.

PK: Even though we hear _____. . . .

FS: I never identified, first of all, and I really didn't look that much Indian. I may now, with long hair and so forth but, no, it wasn't even. . . .

PK: It wasn't an issue.

FS: No, not at all. So, I knew that my father was part Indian and that he was Administrator of Indian Schools. At those times, everything was very strict. You could not fraternize with Indians—students, for instance—and so even though we lived on the campus of an Indian school in the different places. . . .

PK: What was it called?

FS: It was in Wahpeton, North Dakota, and was simply called Wahpeton Indian School. And then we went to the Pierre Indian School, where he had administrative duties. But, again, I never had any connection with the American Indian. Well, it actually was in Pierre, and I was in high school—and, again, an accidental kind of thing. The Indian element seems to parallel my life in very interesting accidental ways. It just so happened that a full-blooded Sioux Indian had just come back from the war and was teaching high school at Pierre High School. His name was Oscar Howe, and he became quite known as one of the top flat-style Indian artists, because he had been a student of the old Santa Fe Indian School under Dorothy Dunn, who was a non-Indian who had very definite ideas of how Indians painters should paint. They should paint in a flat style with no shadows. And she taught not only Oscar Howe but all kinds of people from Tsinajinnie to Alan Houser, and they all. . . . [Anyway, Mary], she would hit their hands with a pencil if they. . . .

PK: No modeling?

FS: Yeah, no modeling. So Howe started to win the grand prizes at Philbrook, in Tulsa, and started to get a name. But more than that for me he was one of my first impressions of a professional artist. He had the most handsome hands I've ever seen on a man. He had a beautiful complexion, of course—this coffee-and-cream color. He cut his fingernails straight across and worked in casein and red sable brushes, which he made sure to wash out—because he told us all how expensive they were. And I didn't get any of that from Howe, unfortunately. I'm terrible with brushes, and always have been. But I did see the seriousness of being an artist. And of course at that time very few people lived off their work. In fact, it was a great exception. People like . . . only [Georgia—Ed.] O'Keeffe and a few of the regionalists—Thomas Hart and a few—could do that. Most artists had to teach, and if you happened to be good enough you might end up as artist-in-residence at a decent university. And so I put my aim at what that would be and got all my degrees to teach. Which was not that easy for me because of my shyness, but I took English and debate and all this so that I could do that.

PK: Excuse me for interrupting, but Mr. Howe, what was his name again?

FS: Oscar.

PK: Oscar Howe. Sioux?

FS: Full-blood Sioux.

PK: Couple of questions. One, you were attending high school at that point in. . . .

FS: Pierre.

PK: Right. And this was not an Indian school.

FS: No.

PK: But this full-blooded Sioux Indian had no problem getting a faculty appointment. So, presumably, then in the hiring within the school district there wasn't that kind of racism that. . . .

FS: No. I think that he already had quite a good reputation as a painter. He actually spoke good English but he had a very interesting Indian—how shall I say?—way of speaking. Kind of a sing-song way, which was I think difficult for many students to understand him. And many times I thought I was the only one that really. . . . We always had a strange rapport, and I heard later that before his death he mentioned me several times, as being proud that he had been my teacher, even though we really never communicated after. . . .

PK: This was after you had established a reputation.

FS: Yes, right. But he was very traditional in many ways. And, no, in fact, he was the classic look of the old chiefs. I mean, his profile was fantastic and he dressed, again, in a suit and tie. He was the product, you see, of the old Indian school. And so he had learned the non-Indian ways very well and was probably more intelligent than many of the non-Indian faculty, I would suppose. [chuckles] So that, but it just happened by accident, you see.

PK: In terms of his art, in terms of the instruction. . . . Well, you've already said that through the Indian schools, very much trained in a Western approach. This applied to his notions of art and perhaps even art history. Do you think he saw himself as an artist participating in this Western, this European tradition, rather than perhaps incorporating some of the more tribal. . . .

FS: He I think was probably a good example of so many Indian artists at that time who truly were frustrated and confused about their place. In fact, I remember lectures. He would lecture to us—and again it went over most of

the students' heads. But he had been in Europe in the War. Had leave to go to Paris and look at the museums. And he would, for instance, talk about surrealism and seeing Dali, and he, in most cases, damned it, saying this is just, you know, terrible things that artists are doing nowadays in this world. And yet. . . .

PK: Excuse me.

FS: Um hmm.

[Break in taping]

PK: Scholder, Session 2, Tape 1, Side 2, continuing. Fritz, you were talking about your teacher. . . .

FS: Oscar Howe. And the interesting thing was that he had been exposed to so-called modern art. He didn't know what to do with it really, and was against it, generally speaking. And yet he emerged as one of the first Indian artists to put it into his own work, in the form of cubism. And Oscar Howe is the only flat-style painter who used a cubist style and became known for that.

PK: Really!

FS: I did run into a professional artist before Howe, and that was in 1955. It was my first trip away from home. In the summer, I'd gotten a full scholarship to the. . . . There had been a long-going art camp at the University of Kansas, and so, again, a strange parallel of how I ended up in Lawrence, Kansas, years after my father had gone there alone for the first time being away. Because Haskell happens to be in the same town as KU. And KU was already a big university, a large art department, and had carried on this music and art camp with very good instructors from all over the country. But I met there a Robert B. Green—Robert Beverly Green, who had his own studio on campus. He was somewhat the artist-in-residence, and so here I saw my first professional studio with literally piles of drawings. He especially liked a [collage-drawing, collage/drawing] type of work that really we. . . . In fact, it was one of my first trades. We traded work and I have it to this day, an exquisite drawing. In fact, we still communicate. He's still alive—and the nicest man, and very serious. And here was, of course, much more classical with all of the different plaster casts around in the studio. I'm not sure if he came from the Art Students League but it was that kind of feeling.

PK: What year was this?

FS: 1955.

PK: And that was in Lawrence at. . . .

FS: So he was really the first "professional artist," in quotations, that I had run into. And then after that was Howe. But then I moved on to Wisconsin and there was really nobody. There was a little group up in Superior, and that I found was interesting because, again by accident, I was in Ashland, not far from—at the top of Wisconsin there—from Superior and had gotten a full scholarship to go there.

PK: Was this as an art student?

FS: Yeah, um hmm, right. I didn't have any money, but it was real close so I chose that just for the convenience. But I found myself in a Bauhaus art department that was truly dynamic. Because the Bauhaus had fled, of course, and come [mainly] to the Chicago area and then from there had fanned out through the Midwest. And so our main book was *Vision in Motion* by Moholy-Nagy, which is the Bible of the Bauhaus, and it really gave me a great foundation—which later helped me when I got to California in the laissez-faire situation there. Because it was very strict and yet showed all the possibilities of art and industry and how art was part of the human existence. And I truly had an inspired teacher—that in fact I visited just last year. I found out. . . . Well, that's another story I'll get into.

What happened was that on my first day in college, and the first class. . . . It was design, a large class, and of course, like all design classes, it's where everyone puts everyone that they don't know what to do with. And we had heard that there was a radical instructor for this class. And immediately Gorski comes to the door. . . .

PK: What's his name? This teacher?

FS: Richard Gorski, G-o-r-s-k-i. And he did look different for that time, the fifties. He had a crew-cut and a bushy mustache and a bow tie—dotted—and a striped shirt and then a corduroy suit. And he rushed right in and went right to a large blackboard. He had a piece of chalk in his hand. In front of the blackboard was a large table, and in front of the table a chair. He jumped on the chair, jumped on the table, drew a large circle on the blackboard, and turned around, and, pointing to the circle and looking at us, he starts to shout, "Sphere, sphere, sphere, sphere!" and continues until his face gets red. And then all of a sudden, "Porthole, porthole, porthole, porthole!" [laughs] And this went on and, and then all of a sudden he jumps off the table on the chair and down on the floor

and says, "The president of this university tells me that you will not be able to comprehend this," and walked out. So that was the first class, the first. . . . And immediately I thought of Paul Klee and his first class at the Bauhaus when he walked in and went to the corner and put his head down and started to whisper and the students had to, of course, gather around.

So it was a very interesting time and I got a great deal out of it. Learned how to stretch my first canvas there. So years later I was contacted by the university. They were celebrating their hundredth anniversary and they had never given out an honorary doctorate and asked me if I would come up and receive one. It was at that time I found that Gorski had moved on to Michigan, and last year I contacted him and it was interesting because he didn't remember me as a student. He knew of me as the artist. And so he was very surprised, and the college there at Marquette, asked me to do a show in homage to Gorski, which I flew up and it was. . . .

PK: He was teaching at Marquette then?

FS: Yes. He had just retired, actually. And we became reacquainted and are good friends to this day. He's the *nicest* man. He's really into . . . he's a colorist. A color theorist, I should say. And works at the computer and is very much active in. . . .

PK: Works with the computer?

FS: Yeah, he's just really a wild man.

PK: He's _____ .

FS: Oh, sure. So, you know, along I've had some interesting experiences, because, from there, I then went to California.

PK: One last question on that period. What is it that you recall specifically that you got from Gorski? Obviously, that exposure—or that experience—taught you something, gave you some further ideas of perhaps where you wanted to go, what you wanted to do, and, maybe even beyond that, to some ideas about what is this crazy business of art.

FS: Well, I learned a great deal that first, freshman year, I must confess, because Gorski was the first person, artist that was so passionate. And I realized that this was very serious business. And every class you never knew what was going to happen. But it was all through the Bauhaus method. And that in itself was exciting. But it was very strange indeed. Half way through that first year I was there—now, Gorski had actually been there several years—I realized that the president of the University was a military man. And the department that he had no understanding of was, of course, the art department. And so immediately I sensed this battle, and in the middle of the year, all of a sudden there was an assembly, unscheduled assembly, in which all students had to go to. And I walked in and could not believe but on the stage sitting by himself in a chair was Gorski. And the military president in front of everyone fired him. Because, you see, Gorski was too good. You see, Gorski made everybody too nervous.

PK: At an assembly!? Fired him?

FS: At an assembly.

PK: That's extraordinary.

FS: And that's where I realized nothing is fair. I realized, in fact, that the good guys really get it. Because I often compare the movie *Dead Poet's Society* . . . Robin Williams' character was Gorski.

PK: Wonderful movie.

FS: And unfortunately education, even today, has the same problems. And I find that especially prevalent in art departments where anyone that achieves something or truly has passion, immediately everyone else is intimidated by that person, and, in a faculty situation, can't last.

PK: Was the Bauhaus—in your experience, this Bauhaus method—strongly directed to design? I mean, would you describe it that way? That the basic design problems. . . .

FS: Actually, what it was was concept. If you read through *Vision in Motion*, they quote so many of the great thinkers, and put it into the areas of not only design but painting and sculpture and everything else—architecture. It truly was—and is—a well-rounded overview of the role of the artist. And, as I say, it was great grounding for me because the next year here I was in California.

PK: Well, what about that? We've now waited long enough to get you out of the Midwest.

FS: [chuckles]

PK: Your family, if I understand this, your father was still with the Indians?

FS: Bureau of Indian Affairs, and they had just started a terrible program called relocation, and he was sent to San Francisco to be head of the relocation place there. So he actually commuted. I'm not sure. . . . Well, the area office was Sacramento, and he first went there but found most of the time he had to work in San Francisco, because relocation was taking Indians and putting them into jobs in the cities, and San Francisco was the big city in the area to try this new program out.

PK: What year was that?

FS: This was 1957. Well, it was like a whole new world, of course, to find myself in college in California, and immediately got in with a bunch of starving artists over there, with Thiebaud and Kondos being kind of the head guys, being the teachers. But it was a very nice feeling because Thiebaud would have parties for everyone, and we'd go out to the . . . probably the first shopping malls, at that time. But there was always an art festival thing or something and we'd all bring card tables, put them up, put our drawings or paintings on, and all sit around in the weekends and sell stuff and then have a party afterwards. Often I was next to Wayne, and I was selling my drawings for five dollars at the time, and he was selling his for fifteen to thirty-five.

PK: Don't tell me about that. [sounds rueful]

FS: [laughs]

FS: But then I was there exactly at the time when Thiebaud all of a sudden. . . . He was painting kind of impressionistic landscapes and very nice technique and different, but all of a sudden he switched subjects and I heard "Thiebaud's painting cereal boxes and pies and cakes. He's really flipped out." [chuckles] Well, it was the beginning, of course, of the subjects that would make him known and it was only a couple years later that he showed up in a. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

PK: We were saying. . . .

FS: Well, it was an interesting time in Sacramento, because many different people had come on the scene—like Mel Ramos and Peter Vandenberg—all kinds of people, and Wayne Thiebaud was pretty much the head honcho, and a couple of years later he was to have his first show at Allan Stone. It was a sellout and *Life* and *Time* immediately jumped on him and he became very well known. And the rest is history, as they say.

But it was an interesting time. Many of the students of Thiebaud's were becoming, I felt, junior Thiebauds. Mel Ramos started to do Batman and other crazy things. But again I've always been so individual, I decided that I would not in any way be influenced by Wayne. He was a great teacher and taught me a lot, but I certainly did not want to look like a junior Thiebaud. So I started to become known for large, dark, abstract, completely nonobjective paintings. And was entering the competitions as well as, along with everyone, and in fact winning many. My favorite one is the one that Elmer Bischoff juried, in which I got the top prize over Thiebaud. [chuckles] But we were all just, you know, just getting [artwork, our work] out there. My large abstractions were shown at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, and I was getting quite a nice reputation for that kind of work.

PK: This was a master. . . .

FS: This was during . . . I was still at college.

PK: [Junior] college.

FS: Well, I had then gone to Sacramento State College to finish off a B.A. A B. . . . Yeah, it was just a regular B.A. But we were locally kind of a Sacramento group, because also the Crocker Gallery there had started a picture-rental deal that became the largest in the country, and we all truly lived off our rentals. It was unbelievable. I at one point must have had sixty different paintings out every month, because when I got my degree and graduated, I found that there were just no jobs around, and I had, by then, a young family, and so I substitute taught in Sacramento for a year, which was probably the worst year of my life. And that is just the pits, you know.

PK: Were you teaching, what? In high school?

FS: High school and junior college. But it was just terrible, and. . . .

PK: Why was that? It just didn't suit you personally? [Or] advanced students?

FS: Well, again, you get a call in the morning before the sun comes up, and you've got to get to a school that you have absolutely no idea where it is. And in the winter the fog rolls in there; you can't see your hand in front of your face. And often I wouldn't get to the place until noon. But of course they were still so happy to see you, because the kids by then were rioting, and so you had to come into a room that was ballistic. I mean, the worst thing is to substitute teach. And I was at a wit's end. Actually, I was selling, but not at prices that meant much. It kept us going, but then I got in the mail an announcement that said that the Rockefeller Foundation was setting up a program to test different educational procedures at the University of Arizona for young Indian artists. They'd gotten my name because my father had put me on the rolls of the tribe in San Diego County, Luiseno—and being one quarter Indian, according to the government that is an official Indian. Don't ask me why, but that's just what the government did—and still does. So here I was just having the worst time of my life and no money for paints or anything else, and here's an announcement that says they would provide that summer transportation there, a free studio space, free materials, free room and board, on and on and on. And so I decided to go, just to see what it was all about and to, you know, have at least that.

PK: Was it a competitive thing? Did you have to. . . .

FS: No, I was simply invited, because some way they had seen that I was on the rolls and that I was an artist. I still to this day don't know how this came about.

PK: Yeah, let's speculate a minute. Do you think that this was, that you were advantaged then, in a sense now, in terms of this opportunity? I'm trying to get a sense of how many other Indian artists—one-quarter, one-half, three-quarters, or full—were operating at that time. It must have been a pretty—what shall we say?—[shallow bench].

FS: It was quite a selective program in that there were only twenty students. And this is all of your different disciplines of painting, sculpture, jewelry, traditional arts. It was a lot of big money involved, but I think their primary thing was truly finding out new teaching techniques. And I don't know how they happened. . . . I guess they wanted a group that maybe was a little different, where they would try out things. And also, one way or the other, they had contacted a man that I had not ever heard of who was quite well known in this area, Lloyd [Kiva New]. Now Lloyd Kiva New is a good friend of mine and I respect him greatly because he is one of these people with a real charisma, but it's a very—how shall I say?—it's real. And he early on, after the war, came back to Scottsdale with a friend of his, Charles Loloma, and they were just two young Indian guys bumming around Scottsdale, and they met Frank Lloyd Wright, who took them under his wing, took them to the bank to show them how to make a loan, and said, "You two should. . . . What do you guys want to do?" And they said, "We do crafts. We'd like to maybe have a crafts center, a little shop." And Frank Lloyd Wright said, "Well, you certainly should buy some land here in Scottsdale. And I'll take you to the bank and show you how." Scottsdale was mainly fields. There was nothing in Scottsdale. So they bought a patch of Scottsdale which became Fifth Avenue. And so on the corner of [Craftsman's, Kreffman's] Court and Fifth Avenue, Lloyd Kiva put up his shop, and Charles Loloma, who became the international jeweler, did his work and Lloyd did fabrics, which the Rockefellers and all the fancy people who had started to come to Scottsdale a few years later when the resorts were built—like Casablanca over here—which was still in the middle of the desert. . . . They had to bring. . . . The planes of the movie stars would come, and they had an airstrip right out here for them to land at Casablanca. So Lloyd became the darling of that crowd, became a millionaire, and wanted to do something for young Indian artists, and some way he got with the Rockefeller project also to do this at the University of Arizona. And so it was an interesting bunch of people that I met when I went down there. And we got along very well. And these were the first Indian artists that I had known since Oscar Howe. And so the next year I was invited back as a member of the faculty.

PK: Oh! What year was that now?

FS: '60 and '61. So I also had started to know the art faculty at the University in Tucson, and they invited me to come in as one of the new graduate assistants. It was their first year of bringing in graduate assistants from different parts of the country. And I needed, I realized, to get an M.F.A. if I was going to teach, because I wasn't getting anywhere with my teaching jobs with just a B.A. And I liked Tucson. It was hot and nice and dry heat, felt great. So that's how I got to the Southwest.

Oh, and then my first professional prize happened about the same time and that made me feel good about the place. So I moved my family to Tucson, and it was two years of the greatest compromise of my life, because this was the sixties, and first of all they had made the mistake of bringing in the same number of graduate assistants as there were faculty on the art department. So a line was drawn in the sand and we hated each other. And of course, we being young and rambunctious issued manifestoes, which I wrote. . . .

PK: Really!

FS: . . . and demanded studios, better studios. They had us down in some [pasture, patch] or desert. And down

the line I became the known rebel, and the day before I was supposed to get my M.F.A.—there were a number of instructors that just really did not like me—they tried to stop it. Part of the problem, of course, was that I was very much into entering competition—national competitions—and many on the faculty also entered the same competitions. Well, so my teachers would get rejected and I'd get the first prize, and then I had to go back to class the next day. So I understood where they were coming from, but they really made it hard, and so they stopped, the day before the graduation, the wheels to get my degree. So I had to pull rank and go to the president of the university and lay out *my* credentials, which were more than theirs.

So I was a bad word for years and years down there. In fact, they made like I never had gone there. I wasn't in the collection or anything. And years later a new president called me up from Tucson and said, "I'd like to come up and apologize to you for. . . . I just realized that you are from here." And so he came up, a very intellectual person who was really serious about the history of the university. And so he asked if I would accept an honorary degree from there. And so, revenge was sweet, because some of the same faculty members. . . .

PK: Were they still there?

FS: . . . had to sit there—yes—at the ceremony.

PK: How could they be so. . . . It seems remarkable that. . . . One can understand, I suppose, their envy there, because of course they're trying for the same prizes. But they couldn't take any pleasure, apparently, in somebody from their institution, from the department—albeit a graduate student—being recognized that way.

FS: Yes, it is unfortunate. And it's also curious that almost every university art department suffers under the same syndrome. Because since then I've visited many places, and they all have the same kind of vibrations.

[Break in taping]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with Fritz Scholder. This is Session 2, Tape 2, Side A.

Fritz, you seem to have [had] not the happiest experience at Arizona State University but it turned out well.

FS: [laughs] Well, it was 1962 to 1964. Two years of complete compromise. Because I knew I had to get an M.F.A. There was one other person. . . . I think there were about twelve of us that were graduate assistants, had been brought in from different parts of the country. There was a woman, a girl at the time, who I also knew was serious. And she had to give up a lot, including her family and all kinds of things, but she has gone on to become internationally known. But the strange thing is if you go down to Tucson and ask about her very few people will even know who you're talking about. There's a provincial feeling in Tucson, I guess, that has always been there, and the person I'm speaking of is Max Cole, and a person that does beautiful minimalist paintings. She's represented by Higashi in L.A. and has shown at the Pompidou and everywhere else. So those were the two that escaped from Tucson.

PK: You and Max Cole?

FS: Me and Max Cole.

PK: [chuckles]

FS: After graduating, Lloyd Kiva New had—in fact, the year before—given me an offer to please join him at a new Indian art school that had come about because of the Rockefeller [Project, project]. And he realized that the Rockefeller Project should not just end because they had found out a great amount about Indian artists, and so he happened to know Stu Udall, who had become the Secretary of the Interior. And at that same time the Bureau of Indian Affairs decided to get rid of Indian schools. Just another of their crazy ideas. And so the Santa Fe Indian School was going to be shut down. So Udall—and, of course, I'm over-simplifying this—but, essentially, Udall stepped in, after talking to Lloyd. And Lloyd had in fact talked to me for hours on end when I was at the Rockefeller Project of his dream of having an Indian art school. This would be a private school. In looking back, that's what he should have done, but he decided to work with Udall and bring that Indian school to the campus—and take over, actually—the campus of the old Santa Fe Indian School. Well, government and art are strange bedfellows, and for about five years it was a great success and that's when I was brought in. I, after graduating, had a number of offers but that was by far the best one, and I'd never been to Santa Fe before. I really had known very few Indians and here I was to teach advanced painting and art history to Indian students. So that was a whole new adventure for me.

And, again, a strange kind of accident, because little did I know that Santa Fe, besides being the most foreign town in the country, has this strange idea about relating to anyone in regard to how much Indian blood they might have in their veins. And also the so-called Indian experts in art all converged in Santa Fe. And Santa Fe

has a long history of being, in quotations, an "art colony." Which, of course, can be an albatross around the neck of any town, and Santa Fe, especially, was a very . . . just curious place where non-Indian painters had been painting the Indian for decades as a noble savage in a very romantic way, coming up with paintings that looked like Italians squatting by the bonfire sharpening their arrows. And then also there was a great amount of Indian artists, mainly leftovers from the Dorothy Dunne studio of the old Indian School, who had been caught in a tourist-pleasing cliché, painting flat-style, colorful paintings for the tourists. And so I walked into a place that everyone was painting Indians, and I vowed I would never paint the subject because of that. Well, I got involved, of course, with my students. They were really a cool bunch of kids, because they had gotten their own identity for the very first time with the hippies. The hippies decided Indians are cool. And that made the young Indians realize they were cool, and so it was a wild time. Bob Dylan was blaring on the records day and night at the studios, which we kept open day and night. The B.I.A. knew nothing about it, but we had our own agenda. It became a real fun place and a place that was probably the only bright light in the whole history of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Because for the first time, instead of trying to make Indians white, we were taking these students, and many of them were the worst rebels who'd been kicked out of every Indian school and literally fell out of the taxi drunk in the middle of the day when they arrived at the campus. And we simply approached them as artists with very unique possibilities coming from their own tribe. Because each tribe had developed in a very aesthetic way. Unlike the Europeans who had come from a scientific realm, the American Indian had always had a mystical and aesthetic approach no matter what tribe it was. And all tribes are very different and very nationalistic. But whether it was painting your tipi or carving your utensils or whatever, it was an unselfconscious expression. Not art on a pedestal but art of just simply living. And this was, of course, a great strength that Lloyd Kiva New had utilized in *his* career—and Charles Loloma the same way, who was also on the faculty—and immediately they were great role models. And these kids came and immediately blossomed.

And I'm somewhat a cynic, generally speaking, but I was very impressed with people that looked like they were just at the end of their rope, even though they were young. In most cases, most young Indian people have seen tremendous violence. Either their mother shooting their father, or an uncle stabbing someone, or. . . . They come from, in most cases, a very different realm—especially at that time—than your mainstream student.

Well, it was open-ended, in that you could major the first day in poetry and second day decide to then major in ceramics. You could change easily. And a week later go into painting. And they were able to find themselves very quickly, and they also had a lot of exciting things around. The Institute had become a very "in" place. One day I remember Edna Ferber coming to campus and talking to the students in the morning, and Vincent Price coming in the afternoon, and that evening I introduced Allen Ginsberg on stage to everyone.

PK: Really! Where did the funding come for all this?

FS: There was great funding, because this was the pet of Udall. And we were living high. [chuckles] I had the best art supplies for my students—brushes and canvas. And there was even an official buyer from Washington who would come every month and buy the work—whether it was a painting or a ceramic—at whatever price the student put on it. Well, years later we realized we had of course created monsters, but at the time it was lots of fun [chuckles], and I am now probably the biggest critic of the Institute and of Indian artists. But we'll get. . . .

PK: We'll get to that later.

FS: We'll get to that.

PK: _____ [premise].

FS: Yeah, let me just continue my train of thought, sure. Well, there were international exhibitions organized for the students. Edinburgh Art Festival. All kinds of accolades were coming to the Institute. And I realized, after befriending my students especially. . . . And it did work kind of as the Pied Piper master/student kind of thing. Each instructor had his group of students who just. . . . It really worked, because it was probably as idealistic a situation that I've ever seen in education. And for about five years it was terribly exciting, and at that time I realized that I had gotten interested in the subject of the American Indian. I started collecting Indian artifacts, going to the Indian dances, and of course Santa Fe is very seductive. And this is what people fall in love with the whole thing of it. And so I did also. And at any rate it just naturally came about that I realized I had to paint the subject, and the minute I did I was surprised at the uproar that came about, because I had realized that the subject needed to be brought into a contemporary mode. At that time my hero was Francis Bacon. [chuckles] So it was this combination of that that immediately caught Santa Fe unawares. The so-called Indian experts didn't know what to do with me. The older Indians felt that I in some way was saying something in the canvases that was against Indians.

PK: Like what?

FS: Well, they just didn't understand the abstract qualities that all of a sudden. . . . No one had abstracted the Indian. No one had dared and my quote—I hate to quote myself—but I painted the Indian "real, not red." And simply I meant I wanted to get beyond the clichés and the preconceived ideas, and I knew for the first time Indian people. And I realized not only their uniqueness but also what was the same about everybody. And also I'm sure I realized my, more my own personal behavior, conceivably, being German and Indian is a strange combination. But I'm a Libra so there's a certain hopeful balance there.

PK: So is my wife.

FS: [laughs] And so all this kind of came about, but it was truly an accidental thing, again, becoming the leader of a new Indian art movement, which I've been called, and it's now in the history books. You know, to read back on so-called history that you've lived is a very odd thing, indeed, because it is never correct, as far as you're concerned. And as I think one person put it, history is made in the eyes of the person writing about it. It isn't objective, by any means. And so here I was becoming a role model, if you will, for a whole new resurgence of interest of young Indian painters. And at the time we felt that we were truly on the right track because Indian people have always had a hard time in the dominant culture economically, so one of the few areas is, of course, the arts. And, here all of a sudden they were getting a great amount of exposure and interest. And there were even classes on marketing, how to work with galleries. I mean. . . .

PK: Really a professional. . . .

FS: Well, Lloyd Kiva New had done it. And he felt this was important and, let's face it, it was the beginning of the art awareness in this country, and with it came an art market with many problems for the artist as well as maybe some good things. But for the Indian artist it was especially important because his job possibilities were limited, and so many Indian people seemed to have a very natural art instinct, and so it fit well and was a success story. But then the administration changed in Washington, and this is always the problem with anything federal: There's no consistency. The minute another party gets power they think that they can do better—or they have to at least make like they're doing better—by changing everything. So immediately there was no budget, all of a sudden. There were cutbacks, and of course the times are changing, too. There was more cynicism, with everyone, and all of a sudden the Institute started down the hill.

PK: For budget reasons?

FS: Well, morale reasons. For also things that we had done that really, were . . . there was a backlash, too. For instance, when our students graduated, we were so powerful we had the ability to have the Chicago Art Institute and the San Francisco Art Institute accept some of our best students. Well, if they had tried to do it on their own they would never get accepted. But because they were from the Institute, they were.

PK: They had some credibility.

FS: But they would go there and realize that paintings that the official buyer in Washington had been buying of theirs for eight hundred dollars they couldn't sell for thirty-five dollars on the streets of San Francisco. And it became a very strange thing of, again, the dream being exploded. Suicides. Some of our top students ending in terrible ways. And all of this coming back in the media. And there was in-fighting in the administration. Lloyd is not the most practical person in the world—and that's why he's a good artist—and he was constantly having to contend with tons of paperwork from Washington. He couldn't keep up on just the requests of filling out the forms. He was trying to run a very creative, a very spontaneously growing institution. There were many, many problems, and I saw the handwriting on the wall, and I resigned after five years and sent a letter to the Arts and Crafts Board and others telling what the problems were and why I felt I had to leave, hoping it might help. Of course, no one was interested because they all had their little thing by then.

PK: Excuse me, but what did that letter contain? What did you see as the problems?

FS: There were a great many problems—everything from the fact that they were bringing in people for political reasons that really were not qualified to deal with Indians. And this has always been a big problem with the B.I.A. Government, there's so much—how shall I say?—choices made in the backroom. It's a political beast. But there were also strange entities like the Arts and Crafts Board—Indian Arts and Crafts Board—that had been around for years in Washington. And I realized that they weren't doing anything. Very strange organizations in Washington that when you look at them closely. . . . And I got in behind the scenes. I saw some of the top leaders lying on the floor not moving. I guess my idealism was taken away because I realized that Washington is standing only because of the graft that is around it. It is absolutely almost nonfunctional. And the Bureau of Indian Affairs is one of the worst of them all. I found that no one really cared. It was all a big pretense.

PK: About the Institute and programs?

FS: Especially that. And unfortunately a lot of stuff, because, again, everyone in Washington makes political

decisions. They really don't care whatever it is; they're really just in it for themselves. And there's so many *strange* things that I could tell you that just . . . you can hardly believe. In the office of the Secretary of the Interior is this huge walk-in fireplace, like they have in the castles in Europe, and you know that special trees are grown in a certain part of Oregon just for that fireplace? I mean, you can go on and on. It's unbelievable where our money is going. [laughs] It's unbelievable what has happened. B.I.A., of course, has had one of the worst histories, and early on I publicly said that the B.I.A. must be abolished. And it's strange to realize that in the most sophisticated country in the world, supposedly, we still have wards. And that's what we have as long as there are reservations. It all has to go. Now, of course there'll be many casualties. And I kind of became an expert on the Indian simply because whatever subject I go into I want to know all I can about it. And I found that Indians up to this day are just treated so badly, especially if they want to retain any kind of link with their reservation. And they are people that are very loyal. It's interesting; they're very tenacious. In fact, jokingly, they should have killed off every Indian if they didn't want an Indian problem, because it's the fastest growing minority race in this country today, but more than that Indians are not interested in joining the mainstream. They never have been and they never will do it, because they hate the white man. They hate him so badly—and I never realized this until I got there—they know how to be nice to the white man but it's a very recent history. And I know the top Indian people in this country today, people who've run for vice president to the Pulitzer Prize winner to down the line, and after a couple of drinks they'll tell you what they really think, and it's unfortunate because they find themselves living in a dichotomy that, no matter how intelligent, they can't get out of because they find themselves in a dominant culture. And I was so surprised to realize that every minority group has a philosophical or intellectual homeland to go to if things get too rough—not that they would ever go there—but here the American Indian has a very curious situation. His homeland is dominated by another culture, and land and the whole nature thing was his big deal. Here, it's been taken over. And every single treaty, in regard to land, was broken. And how do you think, why would anyone think that an Indian person is going to like a non-Indian? *It just is that way*. Almost all Indians marry Indians, and if you marry a non-Indian you are ostracized in most cases from your tribe or your friends.

I learned so much by being at that Indian school, and unfortunately I came away with the sad feeling that it is a no-win situation. That here's the fastest growing minority group, but they have no political base. They still. . . . And it's interesting, of course, now the casinos. And I think that's great. There's critics of casinos saying, "Oh, this is going to bring in the Mafia or crime, whatever." Well, first of all, anyone who knows an Indian, the Mafia couldn't get in to save themselves, because Indians aren't going to . . . don't like the Mafia any better than anybody else. Anybody non-Indian, forget it. So it's an interesting thing. [chuckles] I'm happy that the Indian has finally gotten something where he can make some money on, because what happened with the people that came out of the Institute, we created monsters. And they came out and started to paint to sell. Now, that just doesn't go. A true, serious artist does not paint to sell. You paint because you have to. And selling, of course, the whole market is a very new phenomenon, not only in this country but all over the world for artists, and even the most sophisticated artists can find themselves in deep trouble. All you have to do is look at [Mark—Ed.] Rothko. People get murdered. The art world is big business.

And how do you think the unsophisticated Indian person is going to ever survive, and of course they didn't. Every single student of mine has just dissipated their talent—if they're still alive. And I can't really fault them, because it was part of their whole thing of being Indian, of having a market that is non-Indian. Indians don't buy art, let alone Indian art. And so what you get is the strangest kind of situation. And when I left I realized that I had just experienced one of the strangest [chuckles] times in art that I could ever think of, and it just boggled my mind because there were good people in there, people that were well-meaning, people with passion. And there still are, and they're still striving and there has been maybe some progress with the films that have come out in recent years that may be a little better. But still, in essence, it's the same old problem, with whether it's the National Indian Museum for the mall, and funds have just been all cut. Down the line. . . . It's now called "the museum from hell."

PK: Is that what they're calling it?

FS: I mean, it's sad. It really is, because the simple bottom line is it shouldn't matter who you are.

PK: Right. It's what you _____ _____.

FS: I mean, truly, I think there's a disservice—whenever there's an exhibition of women's art, Indian art, black art, whatever—it's a disservice. And until people realize that art is simply the highest form of human expression, that it's the work that counts. And I don't care how a person looks or who they are. If they can do something that is going to stop me in my tracks and make me really look. Something that enriches my life, something that's a new visual experience or a new concept, that's what art's all about. And it's simply a human activity. And so I realized that here was a very segregated and limited outlook, which is still being promoted mainly because of the people who make money off it. The artists are kind of at the bottom of it, because it's the dealers—especially you can look at here in the Southwest—and the collectors that make the money.

[Break in taping]

PK: Interview with Fritz Scholder continuing; this is Session 2, Tape 2, Side B. Fritz, I was very interested in what you've been saying from your experience at the Indian School, the institute. What was its proper name, again?

FS: The Institute of American Indian Arts.

PK: Okay. And you finally, after I think you said five years, resigned because you saw more problems than I guess you felt you could deal with. And it must have been. . . . Starting with an ideal, with great optimism for what could be accomplished there, apparently it didn't seem that it was working out that way. And it is real complicated, but in a very specific practical way I was wondering what approach did you—and perhaps some of the other faculty—but most to the point you—take in your teaching and then presumably trying to prepare these students who came, in most cases, from certain backgrounds—some of them disadvantaged, real difficult, and a certain culture—but to prepare them for operating in art, as artists, in this bigger world where they would be in a sense at risk, or marginalized, if they continued to operate, or perhaps draw too heavily from tribal motifs or themes, from their whole culture. On the other hand, that in some cases is something special that they could bring to the art. So how did you, to the extent you saw this as a problem or a conflict, how did you try to deal with that in preparing them? How did you teach them to be artists?

FS: Immediately when I joined the faculty I realized that each instructor had been chosen for a very different and unique position. We had, for instance, people that taught traditional techniques—within all of the different tribes. They were experts on the American Indian—which is saying quite a bit, when you realize that there are hundreds of different groups in this country, all very nationalistic. In fact, they hate each other. And they all have *very* different ways. So whenever you read a book that tries to lump. . . . There's so much pseudo-information now through the New Age and so forth about the now-called Native American it's laughable, because in most cases they don't know what they're talking about. But I understood my role immediately. I was the most contemporary faculty member, and I taught advanced painting and contemporary art history. And so I approached them as just regular students like I always had—because I'd taught at the University of Arizona. And very simply this worked very well, because, for instance, all my painting students were painting Indian subjects. Well, there was a lot to show to them in just technique and in formal aspects of whether a painting even worked, and it didn't matter what the subject. Because, again, my favorite word is "paradox." Painting, especially, you can use this because technique is very important. Formal elements—whether it's color or design or form or whatever—is important and yet it is not. It's something that you have to learn those rules before you can break them. And so first I dealt with each painting student individually, because of whatever level they might be on. If they needed help as far as just making a decent composition, that's what I showed them: works, of course, throughout art history. And they then could put that into Indian subjects if they wanted. But it had to be a decent painting, a painting that would work. If they were beyond that, then I did have the expertise of talking to them about the actual tribal symbols, because in many cases I found *they* knew very little and they might put a tipi next to a totem pole in the same painting. So it was an interesting kind of thing. But mainly it was simply what makes a good painting. I don't care, you can conceivably do a painting of garbage cans, and if you do it well it can be a great painting. And I get tired of people with prejudice against any subject. But here again I hadn't realized at that point in time—and I don't think anyone else did—that there would be a prejudice to that particular subject, the American Indian. Because in this country the guilt—the national guilt—is still very big. And the non-Indian has a very difficult time in relating to the Indian besides being a patron. And by this I mean it is still a romanticized thing of patronage, if you will. And part of that can't be helped since, as I mentioned, the buyers of Indian art are not Indians.

So you had this paradox. I taught them straight contemporary art history and made it very interesting because the lives of van Gogh or Cezanne or anybody else is just fantastic. I made my own slides, and they really did learn about what had happened before, which, for any artist I think is terribly important. To have any understanding of oneself at this time, as an artist, you would have to know what went on before. So they got a very intense course from me in that. So I did not bend, in a way, to the "Indian-ness," if you will, that was being promoted, because I knew all the rest of the teachers were doing this. And being part Indian I was able to get away with it. They were able to, in fact, be able to identify with me, but on a very sophisticated level. I made sure to use words that they would have to look up, bring them up as much as possible from whatever level they might be. It was a challenge, and, as I say, for those five years it was tremendous, because I love turning people on to and exposing them to new ideas. That is what life is all about.

I do it to myself every day. I contend that one is a different person with every day, and one should have an adventure every day. And that truly we limit our own minds with our own idea that we can't do it. I give many commencement addresses now and lecture at times, and I simply tell any student, "It's your movie and you can do whatever you want in your movie. You can have whomever you want. You can be whatever you want." And this is what I told the Indian students. And I was fortunate. I had the most sophisticated of those students also. They were screened. They knew that, if they were bringing me in, and I had big talks with Lloyd before I even accepted the position that this would be the valuable thing I could do for the institute, and that is be myself as a

professional painter and not get into the Indian-ness. Because it was new to me, too. I was learning. But by being part Indian I was a bridge—not only of the students, but of the faculty. Because, again, they made the same mistake of the faculty of the University of Arizona. They brought in [to the—Ed.] art department, half Indian and half non-Indian. And immediately they started to fight. And I was the bridge, because I was both.

PK: You introduced your students, the advanced students, to art history, probably for the first time that they were having contact, through your slides and books, I suppose. Certainly the earlier modern masters, I don't know, perhaps old masters as well. . . .

FS: Oh, yeah.

PK: . . . but exclusively operating within a European or Western tradition. But that's the name of the game in American art of our time. And you encouraged them, I gather, to look beyond subject matter, that there were other issues at stake. What success did this have? Did they then [assay, essay] different, take on different subjects? Did they, say, see a Cezanne and think, "Well, gee, I want to try to paint like this Cezanne"—or this Picasso, whoever, or Matisse, or whoever it may be? Did you feel that they came to that point when they became more excited by these issues, these examples, than the Indian subjects, which according to you some of the other teachers seemed to keep them directed towards?

FS: Well, it was an interesting thing that happened. In most cases, my students—as well as the rest of the whole institute—kept to an Indian thing. And in a way this was promoted by the whole institute and the fact that the institute was the Institute of American Indian Arts. Now I did have painters from time to time who would venture forth into maybe abstraction.

PK: Right.

FS: And I would encourage that. I felt that I couldn't. . . . I mean, I was exposing them to all kinds of things, and once in a while there were breakthroughs, but I realized that here were students that, generally speaking, not only had a very strong heritage—even though so many of the tribes were long gone—it was this tenacity that I had not reckoned with before. And the identity of being Indian and also realizing how much they hated the non-Indian. So all that I could do was be myself. They saw how. . . . And of course by then I was doing. . . . When I first came, the first year, I was doing large, striated landscapes called *New Mexico*, because I loved the bigness of the land. But then after that I decided to do the Indian series, and of course that helped a lot in their identity for me. But it was very different, and so it did push, I'm sure, their frame of reference that even Indian subjects could be contemporary, and that's probably why I became a strong influence. On the other hand—and only in retrospect did we realize—we were still all buying into this strange kind of ethnic romanticism, if you will, in exotic . . . thing that especially Santa Fe has magnified. Many women go to Santa Fe to get an Indian lover. It's just known.

PK: And not started with Mabel Dodge either. And that started with Mabel Dodge. [chuckles]

FS: Well, of course. I mean, there's a *thing* in Santa Fe that Indians. . . . [chuckles] I mean, it's bad enough functioning as an Indian anywhere else. I saw that being an Indian in Santa Fe was just unbelievably dangerous, in regard to how one was supposed to be. And I was very empathetic to them—to my students and anyone else I saw—and yet it was frustrating because I am a natural optimist. And I always believe that there is some solution, that no matter what the problem is there's a solution. Well, I finally came to realize there was no solution with the American Indian in this country today, because the cards are stacked, and have been for so long. There's such a national guilt. Tremendous prejudice, especially in the states that have lots of Indians. And I saw it on every level, because by then I had met the top Indian people of the country. And many of them had become friends. And they had learned well how to speak, how to be non-Indian, but the minute they were away from a non-Indian the transformation was unbelievable, back to their tribal self both in their thinking as well as their actions.

And it was a very odd thing for me, because I had a unique perspective. I had never had to worry about such things. And I saw these people who I could identify with, and the situation that they were in could not be solved. I may be being harsh but I was in the thick and fray of it. I saw the attitudes of whether it was celebrities who came to the institute, politicians, regular people, whoever. There was a difference that was there with the American Indian, different from blacks, different from any other minority.

PK: You mean the way these visitors, guests, treated. . . . They way they [would] _____. . . .

FS: Responded, responded.

PK: . . . and responded. How about somebody like Ginsberg, for instance? I mean, to use an example.

FS: Well, the hippies were ga-ga for the Indians. I mean, it was like. . . .

PK: It's like Orientialism, like _____. . . .

FS: Yeah, it's just. . . .

PK: "The noble savage"?

FS: Sure. It was exactly that and it still is. And the Indians don't help it, because they promote this thing "my people" and "look at the great heritage." Well, in most cases that is so long-gone nobody knows anything about it except for your tribes—the Pueblos here, the Hopi and the Navajo still have the remnants of *anything* like that. . . . But more than that they don't like each other. They can't get together. There's no pan-Indian movement and never will be. And if there's never going to be one, they are in limbo.

PK: You know, Fritz, I can't help but thinking as you're talking; you're not painting a very cheerful picture, but I mean this is. . . .

FS: [laughs]

PK: But I can't help but thinking that the effort, as well-intentioned as it may have been—although it sort of reeks of anthropology as far as I'm concerned—but that whole concept of the school—fine intention, noble ideal, and all that—was flawed from the very beginning and naive in the extreme, but yet on the basis of what you observed. . . . Because it seems that it's just set up to perpetuate that which continues division or marginalization, and that basically these students were encouraged, it seems, to concentrate on, focus on traditional forms and images, as if these images somehow would set them free, would made them dignified, provide an answer, when in fact it sounds as if it reinforced, to a degree, the opposite: Separateness, and you say that there was hate. This certainly, as I'm hearing you, didn't contribute to breaking down this hate but maybe even reinforced it.

FS: Well, it's the old paradox.

PK: A paradox.

FS: First of all, I think that anyone who is going to express oneself as a human being must take everything from his own background. It sounds trite, but I truly believe that until you find out who you are and then fully accept it will you ever attain personal strength. And I've seen it in Georgia O'Keeffe or Jonas Salk or the people that I have been fortunate to know that I think are great. And the American Indian is the same way. Until the American Indian—and I have publicly said this—transcends his Indian-ness will he ever have a chance. And in this case he must excel and go beyond the non-Indian in whatever expertise and area of endeavor he may want to try for. In fact, in 1981, after I had ended the Indian series, I gave a challenge to all Indian artists in a speech at the University of California in which—Los Angeles, UCLA—and I simply said "Stop painting Indians." And I realized that not only was there a detriment there, [but—Ed.] that the art world, generally speaking, couldn't handle it. And although this was this localized art patronage of the Southwest, that was deadly, and that more than anything a person today living in this country who happens to be an Indian has to in some way transcend that. And it's not easy, even possible, because we realized that from the minute an Indian child is born he's brainwashed. Naturally. He's told, "Oh, those white men. Don't believe them. Be nice to them. They lie. They've killed off every treaty. They have our land. You can't ever believe them. Don't ever get close to them, don't ever marry them." And this is just part of growing up, we realized.

And there's so many aspects—for instance, drinking. It's more of a sociological phenomenon, because alcohol was outlawed on reservations, men had to sneak across, buy some, and drink it immediately. So this became the role model of macho for the Indian. You get alcohol, you drink it quickly. Where a regular person would buy, let's say, a bottle of whiskey or whatever, go home, take a couple drinks—or shots, whatever—then put it on the shelf. The Indian has no concept of that. "They don't put alcohol on the shelf. Are you nuts?" And this sounds crazy, but throughout *years* this has happened. And so here's all our kids, both boys and girls, that's how they work with alcohol. And alcohol makes them also lose . . . get freer and not think about being Indian. I mean, there's all these things. But when you have, almost to the T this kind. . . . You know, of course there's always exceptions, but unfortunately there's not even that many exceptions that I ever found. Because I pretty much knew at that time—and it hasn't changed that much. So it's a very strange acculturation that does not work. It's acculturation that is just . . . it's surface.

Now, I should say this. Let me say this, because there were many positive things that came from the institute. The seeds, for instance, were started for American Indian film-making, photographers, more Indian performances, musicians. It was interesting that the visual arts I think have suffered more, maybe, because they were the forefront and very visible products of the institute, and at the time the institute thought it was successful in these were being marketed at big prices, but they were the ones to topple—because when the students left they didn't have a market. Most regular galleries, especially outside the Southwest, were not interested. Whereas the other areas. . . . And there of course is a great oral tradition. So many writers. We had a

very strong writing and poetry program. Almost all your Indian writers you could pretty much say came from the institute, or were the descendants. So don't get me wrong. There certainly was a whole awakening, a whole experience. The institute truly has touched every aspect of any Indian art activity in this country today. But I guess that as far as I'm concerned, in the realm of painting especially, there isn't anyone that I can even name that can be taken seriously.

PK: Is it your view then that the Indians, the students culturally would have been better served by a program not concentrating on Indian art or arts but on artists who were Indians? In other words, would finally mainstreaming have served their interests better? Perhaps programs where they could be brought into other programs at universities and art schools to get them to immediately move beyond a reinforcement of identity—or *such* a focus on the Indian identity.

FS: It's hard to say, because I really, in looking over *any* art school, they all have the same problems. If you go to the San Francisco Art Institute, you come out looking a certain way. And we've known this for decades.

PK: Yeah, that's pretty well known.

FS: The Oakland Art and Crafts Institute is very different, if you come out of there. I had an opportunity of going to both and I turned them down. I have to speak as an individual in saying I am suspect of all art schools. I'm suspect of art groups. Once in a while, like the abstract expressionists, they happen to be in the same city and the same bar and the same locale. Maybe this was valid. And they all went to Long Island for the summer. Maybe this was okay. But even they. . . . I was recently looking at a big show of abstract expressionists, and they're so dated. And [Cy—Ed.] Twombly, who was the only one who didn't do that, who left early on, who couldn't take the media, and went to Italy, now comes

back and he's up to date. He's still an abstract expressionist, but after seeing the Twombly show and then seeing Franz Kline and de Kooning. . . . Franz Kline and de Kooning are fifties, man. It's right there, the fifties! Twombly is nineties.

So, you know, there's a lot of interesting aspects of what makes an artist, because there is no formula. But I truly believe that the more independent you can be as a unique person, staying away from as much. . . . You're going to be influenced. You're influenced by the times, which you should be, to a certain degree. But the bottom line is, to me, being an individual and exploring your uniqueness and truly being intuitive. The reason I am fascinated by so many subjects is not that I am in any way desperate to flit around or taste different things. It's more an education of my life, in this very short period, of finding out and being interested and almost being an expert on whatever subject you decide to paint. Now that's just one of many levels of painting. Painting, truly, [is, it's] the activity for the artist. It is truly a sensual, fantastic turn-on. And combined with an intellectual concept, which can never be shown, this walking that tightrope between accident and discipline. And one has to have both for a decent painting.

[Break in taping]

PK: . . . Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with Fritz Scholder. This is the second session, on March 29, 1995. This is Tape 3, Side 1.

Fritz, while the recorder was off actually, for a moment here you were kind of wrapping up some thoughts about that whole very important experience—in fact, historic experience, I would think—of the Indian Art Institute and what it finally came to, and interest in it now.

FS: Well, it *is* a curious and maybe sad realization that the Institute is pretty much dead—even though it continues—because the spirit of the beginning is gone. There are only two people that could write a book about it—Lloyd Kiva New and myself. Lloyd is not interested in doing a book and I'm not either. And so others who have never been there, at that time, are starting to write, and it's scary to realize that most of the books that will deal with the Institute will have material that absolutely is not correct. Because he and I were the only ones who still are existing who were there during that five years, which were the golden years, they called it, of the Institute.

PK: He resigned, isn't that right?

FS: Yes, he finally gave up fighting the bureaucracy and resigned.

And so, onwards! I, after I resigned, made a grand gesture by taking a grand tour of Europe. I had never been to Europe, and I knew that this would make everybody mad [chuckles] so I just took off and spent six months, first in North Africa and Tunisia and then up to Italy and all through Europe, ending at the Tate in London. And realizing that Bacon was just as great as I had thought. And coming back to Santa Fe completely revitalized and buying a small adobe on Canyon Road—the road of the artists, at that time, where studios were still. . . . The

door was open during the season. People could just walk into the artist's studio. It took quite some negotiating to get a loan from the bank for two hundred dollars as a down payment, since banks hate artists, but I was able to get it and bought a very nice adobe.

Resigning was the best thing I had ever done because immediately people started to realize, I guess, that I was serious and, more than that, I had realized I was serious. The paintings started to sell; I started to paint full time. And this continued at a time when Santa Fe was very active, still quite small. . . .

PK: What year was this?

FS: This was 1969.

PK: It was a good time to be in Santa Fe.

FS: It really was. Canyon Road was still a dirt road, and we'd walk down to the Three Cities of Spain, which was the coffee house and place where foreign movies were shown and where everyone on Canyon Road would gather at the end of the day. Later it was Claude's, a bar nearby. But it was very much of a feeling of a neighborhood and yet very different and strange people always there. And that continued for a number of years until Santa Fe started to become known and traffic started to increase. Too many people on Canyon Road. For someone living there, you couldn't even get out the driveway because lines of cars were blocking you. So I decided to move to a village. I looked at all the villages in northern New Mexico and decided on a little village southeast, twenty miles, Galisteo. There was only one other artist living there at the time—Agnes Martin—and so I acquired a huge hacienda across the street from Agnes. Two acres, completely walled, a two-hundred-year-old house.

The same year I decided to come to Scottsdale because I was painting for a New York show, Cordier & Eckstrom, and it had been a severe winter, the winter before, and I decided to get a little secluded studio here and do my New York show, in the winter. Well, I got here and a collector of mine had gotten a very nice hideaway. In fact, it was on the Camino de Continto, the Contented Road. And I started the New York show. Several weeks went by, and I came back one evening and found a note under the door from someone I had never met, Elaine Horwitch, who had heard I was in town and asked if—she had her phone number—would I call her, and she would like to see what I was doing. So I did. And she said, "Oh, you must show these in Scottsdale!" Well, I'd had a show at the Heard Museum the year before, a major show—in fact, all the paintings are in the first book, *Scholder Indians*—and they were all for sale and not one had sold. I said, "Scottsdale's not ready for me," and plus this is for New York. Well, Elaine was the type of person who would never take no for an answer, and so she said, "How about the weekend? Just the weekend?" So I had about maybe nine paintings, and we put them up and they all sold. Well, I had to start at square one for my New York Show. So the next morning, Monday morning, I went to the gallery, and Elaine wrote out a check and I just walked up to a little restaurant for breakfast and bought the Scottsdale paper—I had never looked at that before—and saw in the classifieds the tiniest photograph of a tiny adobe, and the amount was in the ad and it was the exact amount of the check in my pocket. And I've always. . . .

PK: How much was that check?

FS: [laughs] I've always lived intuitively and I knew that that meant that I should have a studio there. So the same year that I acquired the [Galisteo] house, I acquired the house here in Scottsdale.

PK: And that was seventy. . . .

FS: '72. And so that is how I finally got here.

PK: And this, of course, is exactly where we are now, where this interview's being conducted.

FS: Right.

PK: You've obviously added, expanded.

FS: Oh, yes. I put in studios and walkways, a swimming pool, a large room for my collection, and it's still a hideaway. It's grown up, but still very close to downtown, but you'd never know it. I really enjoy it here. I contend Scottsdale is the most nonthreatening place I've ever lived. And I've tried many places. I had a loft in New York in the eighties for five years, in Tri-Be-Ca, two blocks south of Canal on West Broadway. Great building. I've had studios in Venice, California, and have worked throughout Europe, but I'm here mainly for the climate. The climate is just so great. And, of course, it does have a number of galleries—and collectors are always collectors, and so I meet more New York collectors here during the season than in New York.

PK: Than if you were in New York?

FS: Right. So it works out well. Santa Fe—or New Mexico, I should say—slowly, unfortunately, became more and more discovered, whereas even the villages started to get crowded, but mainly the whole attitude and nature changed. It just didn't have the feeling that, of course, it had before. Which is natural; every place changes. But unfortunately by going there in 1964 the changes were just too great for me to stay, and I still have many connections to that area, but I realized that for the southwest, Scottsdale is by far the most cosmopolitan and the most sophisticated as far as the art market. And I like to travel and do that during the summer, although I don't mind the hot weather. I'm a lizard and so it's very nice.

PK: [laughs] How long has this been your main base? Because, until recently. . . . Well, I won't tell you; you tell me. You've had two places, you had _____ and here.

FS: Well, at one point I was crazy enough to have many different places simultaneously. [chuckles] New York, Taos, as well as [Galisteo] and this place. So I was mainly living in airports. But it was great activity and I realized that you can't do that for the rest of your life.

PK: Why did you do that?

FS: Well, it was just fun.

PK: Why would one choose to do that?

PK: Well, it was fun. I certainly wasn't bored. People hated to see you leave and people at the other end of the line were happy to see you coming. It was a wild time in which there was great activity and many projects. I believe that one should experience as much as possible and travel. I tell most young artists, the best thing that they can do is—don't go to an art school; I don't even know if universities are worthwhile any more—travel. Because you find out about yourself and how you function. And you find out in a real way those places that are of interest to you. And I don't like the word sophistication, but, conceivably, sophistication is when one can be at home wherever one finds oneself. And by dropping out I remember at one point in Paris, I now can enjoy Paris so much more because I *know* Paris. I know all of the good places including the best Mexican restaurant in Paris. In nineteen and. . . . Oh, when was it?

PK: What is the best Mexican restaurant in Paris? I can't let that go.

FS: [laughs] It's very simple. It's called The Studio and it's near the Pompidou in a little alley, great food. You know, you can't just have French food all the time.

But I've always lived out my fantasies. In the seventies, for instance, I decided to drop out and live out a fantasy in Paris. And I grew up with, of course, the stories of Picasso and all the people at that time. . . .

PK: [Montmarte, Wilmuth]. . . .

FS: . . . and again things just kind of came together, where I had, a number of years before, met Jonas Salk and Francoise Gilot. And Francoise called me one day and said, "I'm going to Paris to do a lithograph of Mourlot. I was wondering if you were interested. I'm sure that we could work it where you could come at the same time and work." Well, I had read where Picasso had once said some of his finest moments of his life had been spent at Mourlot doing lithographs. And here with the invitation of Francoise Gilot, it was perfect. And we met in Paris. And Mourlot, at that time was in their old big building. The large bottom area was where their famous posters were made. And then the second floor was large also, and that was for contract work, people who wanted to do lithographs. But then there was a third very small area where you had to climb up a dusty old stairs that had never been swept, and you had to be invited to that area which they called "Heaven." So, I worked in Heaven, and very small cubicles, but just the fact that Picasso and Matisse and all the boys had worked there was, of course, exciting to me.

And the first morning I arrived before Francoise, and [Jojo] the printer was there, and he looked like an Apache dancer in his striped shirt. Big muscles and his arm was just an extension—or the roller was an extension to his arm. And he couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak French, but he was very excited and was jumping around, motioning, pulling me to a cabinet which he opened to show me where the whiskey and cigars were kept—and forget, you know, the tools of lithography. But it was a grand time because in the evenings Francoise would show me where Pablo and she used to live, and then Paloma and Claude joined us often to go to the Brasserie [Leip, Leap, Elite], Picasso's favorite place, and they, of course, treated us like royalty. It didn't matter if the place was packed. They would push some poor people away so we could sit down—and without reservations—so it was truly an unbelievable time because I met so many crazy people. And, of course, La Palette is the bar that all artists, the minute they hit Paris, go to. And I was living just up the street from La Palette. So every morning I would rendezvous with whomever, and it was always a great adventure for that day. I met up with a Mexican artist, who unfortunately died a couple of years ago, who was completely out of his mind. I had met him before in the States, and he knew Paris very well and took me to places where people were

going crazy, caves that you'd never ever find. And it was a bizarre experience because Benjamin Serrano did very interesting carved sculpture, which he painted, truly his own unique style. The Museum of the City of Paris wanted to give him a show but he was completely undisciplined and could never get a show together. But, as most foreign artists in Paris, he worked at redoing the interiors of apartments. It's the only thing you can do over there. And of course he hated his job and he had a crisis every day. Would get into such trouble that I finally got one of his sculptures by buying him a one-way railway ticket out of Paris before all of his creditors were going to kill him. So what does he do? He asks to go to Amsterdam, which is even worse than Paris as far as getting into trouble. But Benjamin led a truly wild, Bohemian life that was truly self-destructive. But by being with people like that I was much more than a tourist. I was again right in the midst of it.

PK: Well, you said, either in this interview, or perhaps actually in the little bit of the interview in your sculpture catalog, that you really weren't comfortable socially when you were growing up, in your very early years, that you felt somehow socially awkward. But that certainly doesn't. . . . You seemed to outgrow that at some point, because the situation you're describing now is that you're really thriving on a very active social life, and that apparently meant a great deal to you and to your friends that you appear, and this sounds like it's part of the reason why you couldn't choose just one place, you had to be in as many places as possible. How did that come about? It seems to me that you relish this kind of comradeship and you felt, rather than taking away from your activity as an artist, that perhaps it somehow fed. . . .

FS: Well, I have always felt that one should pack it in and do as much as possible. There's still so much I want to do. But I've really always lived out my fantasies early on. As a kid I had this thing about Dracula, and so. . . .

PK: Ah-hah!

FS: [laughs] . . . I found myself. . . . It was after the Smithsonian show. They asked to send the show to the capitols of Europe, and me along with it. That was interesting because the first stop was Bucharest. And, again, I was naive. I met with the embassy ambassador there. It's a different name, they don't call it ambassador, but that's essentially what he was. And [he] lived in a palatial place. And I remember sitting in the waiting room to meet him and realizing that no one really was very interested—or really wished I hadn't come—because I was spoiling their tennis matches. But there I was and there was a big beautiful book sitting on the coffee table in front of me called *America*. Beautifully done and lots of color. And I was thumbing through that and here I see a picture of me and my students at the Institute in Santa Fe. And so then I was called in to meet the ambassador and after a few niceties I said, "I see that there's a book out in the waiting room that has a photograph of me. Would it be possible for me to have a copy?" And he looked at me as if I had said the worst thing possible. He said, "It is impossible for you to have one. It is illegal to bring that book into the United States." And I realized that this was propaganda.

PK: This was at Bucharest, did you say?

FS: In Bucharest. That all embassies have budgets to do beautiful things which are illegal to bring in. And so as I was leaving I of course took it. That evening they had a beautiful big dinner in my honor at his residence, and I was picked up by a limousine that had an American flag on the front of one fender and the Romanian flag, a driver. And I was never so scared in my life because we drove through the heart of Bucharest a hundred miles an hour with the driver leaning on the horn. And people literally had to jump out or get killed. And here's the flag of the United States.

PK: Great impression. . . .

FS: Great. So my idealism was certainly. . . .

PK: Further demolished.

FS: [laughs] The next day I ran off with my guide because I said, "I don't want to be here. I want to go to Transylvania." And she, a very intelligent gal, and we just went to Transylvania. And I'd done my homework, because for the tourists there are a number of in quotations, "official" castles of the historic Vlad the Impaler who was, of course, [Drakul], which became Dracula in the novel. But I knew where Drakul's real castle was, and it was in ruins on the top of a mountain, which you had to climb all these steps. And we got there at twilight and climbed and climbed and got to the top just as a great sunset and the wind was blowing and the storm clouds were gathering on one side and the Carpathians—they look like white jagged teeth; they don't look real—the mountains were on the other. And there I was; I was living out my fantasy, you see, of being in Transylvania. Which is a beautiful place.

PK: We may as well mention at this point that in your library, this fabulous, wonderful library you have, there's a whole section with vampiric literature, Dracula books.

FS: [laughs]

PK: And I certainly see a pattern developing here and a connection between the resources that you gather through your travels, and many of which you—at one time or another—brought back here. And let's see, where is it anyway? In there, in that room right behind me, all these treasures from your, well, from your travels—or at least representing the interests that you developed, either through reading or on these trips—then brought together and now maintained, well, all around you here in this studio/home. But representing. . . . Well, I mean, I'd have to say they're very strange things, Fritz. Very strange things indeed. Skeletons, skulls, mummies, things that I didn't even know one could have. Maybe we better have _____ _____. [both laugh]

FS: No, they're all legit.

PK: They're all legit. Unusual. "Unusual" is the term.

FS: They're simply things that are of interest to me and which I believe enrich my life every day when I walk through these rooms. Wherever my eye lights there's something that is not usual. And I have always been fascinated with the bizarre and the occult. I have a real voodoo doll.

PK: Yeah, you showed me that.

FS: I have a real shrunken head. I've gone to Egypt a number of times, because as a kid I wanted to be an Egyptologist. Later I realized it was too much work. In fact, I have a good friend, an Egyptologist, who says that he spends most of his time sitting in waiting rooms in Cairo waiting for somebody to come back from lunch to stamp a piece of paper that will give him the opportunity to dig a site. And it's not very much fun, because they don't want to even dig sites now in Egypt. But, Egypt, the first time I went I literally sat in front of the Sphinx and painted it at noon with acrylics and the sand blowing. A real challenge. And slowly a group started to gather around me of Arabs and after each small painting they would clap. And I truly tell everyone that they must go to Egypt and stand next to the Sphinx and the Pyramids, because it truly is the only wonders of the world that you're able to do that, be there. And there is some kind of unbelievable feeling, and I really believe it, that you must go there. It's just one of those things that, as a human being, one must experience. But, of course, you have to realize, I think an artist is always painting. Even doing this interview, in a way, is just part of it. My life and my work are now inseparable. I am who I am simply because of art, and, again, it may sound dramatic but I've seen art change people’s lives. I've seen people buy new homes, or add on, or do all kinds of things because of art.

[Break in taping]

PK: . . . Scholder, Session 2, Tape 3, Side B. Fritz, sorry to cut you off. You were talking, I think, about the power of art to transform. . . .

FS: The power of art in anyone's life, it seems to me, is a must. Every society has had, of course, some form of religion and some form of art. It is, it seems to me, a basic activity of putting down one's marks that you were here. And whether it's paint or typewriter and paper, at least for me, I've always felt that I should try to in some way communicate—and painting is simply another way of communicating. And it's, again, the paradox. You're communicating, hopefully, to someone who will look at this thing or read this or whatever, but in actuality you are painting and writing for yourself, to mirror yourself, to find out more about oneself. And that is the activity. The actual result is the tip of the iceberg, because it's the concept simply of being your own boss, of deciding what problem you are interested in trying to solve, and then going about solving it in, hopefully, a way that is different than how anyone else would solved it. And this is, of course, the activity in the studio. And no one is there behind you whispering to you on what you should do next, what color to use, what brush. And this is good. I could not function, really, if I had an eight-to-five job. I truly would be out in the streets killing people because my intensity is too great to just function in a prescribed way. I've learned to take my craziness and make it work for me. And I'm truly crazy because I realize the limitations that are put upon one the minute one is born. And we didn't ask to be born and we had no choice of our parents. We didn't know what country we might end up in. The whole thing is such a curious kind of accident that I guess one can only try to make some sense out of the reality that one finds oneself [in—Ed.]. But, of course, the paradox, again, is that you in a way have to create your own reality, especially today. The world is, I think, in a great flux, in a great depression. Not financially as much as emotionally. It is a time of the negative. And, again, I maintain that I'm an optimist, so for me to function it means to create my own world, to decide what is important to me to spend time doing, and, of course, going to a movie in the middle of the afternoon is just as important in many ways as reading a book or going to a concert or sitting in the middle of the floor doing nothing. I have been doing music, for instance, in the last seven years and hope to do, in fact, a CD by the end of this year.

PK: What kind of music is it?

FS: Well, here again, I have great limitations. Simply because, although I was in band and orchestra and chorus and all kinds of things growing up, I really can't sing, so I growl or whisper. I do my own lyrics, which are bizarre, along with. . . . I've been doing, of course, a lot of voice and rhythm, and now things are being published, which

is nice. When you get to a certain point, you can, of course, do almost anything you want to do.

PK: Um hmm.

FS: And there are people who seem to be interested in whatever that might be.

PK: Because you're who you are?

FS: Yes. So the music has taken me this long to get to a point where I think I can produce a group of. . . . I don't know if you can call them songs; I guess they must be. But in a way a. . . . One of my friends and a fellow that I admire as a musician and songwriter—John Stewart—recently said to me, "One thing you have to say about your music, it's not derivative." Which is a great compliment.

PK: [laughs]

[Interruption in taping]

PK: . . . interrupted briefly here but, following on this line of thought, or discussion, I was mentioning earlier, trying to describe—which I couldn't possibly do unless I had a very long tape and we walked around and we looked at all these individual pieces—but I was trying to give some idea of this environment in which you live and work. And I would characterize it as dense—dense—crowded with images that, for you, must have. . . . Each one of them must have special associations. Eclectic in your collecting I think is fair enough, but everything must have a kind of story—or, to put it another way, a potential for a kind of story. And I can't help but think that by seeing you in your home surrounded by your things I understand much better what your art is about. Is that a fair appraisal, or am I being too simplistic here?

FS: Well, in my case, I think it's right on because, simply, this is the way that I've always functioned. As I mentioned before, whatever subject—and I've always worked in series because it seems to me that you really can't say much about any subject with just one painting. So early on I decided to work in series, regarding a subject and I've done paintings and monotypes and sculpture and prints—lithographs and etchings—on many subjects, ranging from women to men and women and men, dogs and cats and butterflies, landscapes, and it's simply whatever is my interest at that particular time. I've never worried about not having ideas. I have more ideas than I can work with. And it's simply my interests, and it's all really autobiographical. You can look back. I get a new dog, he appears often in the work. I get a new model, she appears. Or a new object. I've painted the sarcophagus over there, done monotypes also of it.

PK: I think that we need to make this very clear. Feel free to refer to any of these specific things that you have here, because I don't think most people listening to this tape or reading the transcript are going to fully appreciate the range. I don't think I've ever been anywhere—and certainly in a home—where there are so many intriguing and in some ways, well, slightly disturbing objects.

FS: Well, the collection is certainly varied and unusual, and it's almost gotten eccentric as far as crowding it all in here because of the years of constantly looking and being. . . . I love to be surprised by, especially, something that I have no frame of reference on. And then finding out about it. And for me the value of collecting is whatever piece you find, seeing what all you can do in regard to research.

I have always loved books, but in the past years they have become almost an obsession—not only in collecting them—and I'm proud of the library. Supposedly a library cannot be considered serious until it has at least a piece of incunabula. This is printing before 1500. And I have a number of pieces now, and it's probably the most esoteric thing one can collect. Here's a book that you can't read, that has no pictures, and it is very expensive and very rare. [chuckling] But it thrills me to acquire these things, and inspires me, because now. . . .

I recently did a limited edition book. The artist's book has really had a long tradition and has recently even gotten stronger. This is a book where the whole concept is from the artist. And I now have my own letterpress. But this is a book that I have been doing a lot of research on the medieval. And the most popular book of the late medieval period was called [Cordials] Four, and this was the last four things: death, the last judgment, hell, and heaven. So I did some etchings on [Chincoulet, chincoulet, Shincollet], did some writing on each subject, and got together with a binder, and came out with a book that there's only twelve in existence, signed and numbered. But it's, more than that, a beautiful object. It is bound in soft black leather that has such a good feeling, and in a clamshell box, which I designed.

To me, in this age of cybernetics, there's a backlash of even a greater interest in the book. And last year I had a nice experience—again, living out my fantasies. One of my early heroes was Leonard Baskin. This was in the fifties, and Leonard Baskin was truly one of the few in America that was doing very far out images. Most of the people—this is before abstract expression—were pretty much regionalists, and the painting was pretty dull. So I remember acquiring a book of Baskin's images early on in college and realized that he had started, early on, a

press, a private press that he called the Gehenna Press, literally City of Hell, and had been doing beautiful printed books. Well, the Library of Congress last year just honored Baskin. Now fifty years of fine book printing and he truly has still a great style and look. So only a couple of years ago I met Baskin. I was told that either we would hate each other or love each other, and we hit it off great. We're the same, peas in a pod. Because he loves the bizarre, he loves beautiful books, and his library is like a medieval library in Massachusetts where you could just get lost forever. He has books that aren't even documented, they're so rare. It's just unbelievable. So he asked me if I would like to collaborate with him on a book on the Plains Indians because last year I decided to go back to the subject. After that many years I wanted to see what the differences would be. I contend you're a different person with every day. So I would certainly be a different person doing these paintings of the American Indian. And then Baskin had also returned to the same subject after doing some work in the seventies of the American Indian. So it was a perfect combination and the book is just, I must say, fantastic. People who know the work of Gehenna Press say it's one of the most beautiful books they've ever produced. The advance sale was faster than any book that had ever been produced. It just is a jewel, with seven monotypes of mine in it and seven of Baskin's in each volume. There's only twenty-six in the edition.

Well, to me it's these kinds of things that are so important for the artist and for everyone to. . . . In some way I guess I believe in the basics. Painting is the most direct activity I know. You simply go into the studio. . . . And, of course, I like ritual. I turn on loud music, either rock or classical, it doesn't really matter. It's more my mood. Because I need to set up an artificial energy field. And then I walk around the studio as if I've never been in the studio before and I touch some of the brushes and I kind of look around. Am I going to do a drawing? Am I going to. . . . Pull out a canvas. Maybe I'll do a monotype. And I try to not have any preconceived ideas. When you walk in the studio, you must take all your knowledge and push it to the back of your brain, because you can't be self-conscious. You've got to be as open as possible in almost a childlike way. Because today the role of the painter, it seems to me, is one who celebrates paint. Paint drips, it smears, it smudges, it has great color, it flows in many different ways depending on its canvas or paper that you're painting on. And you kind of, in the beginning, the first underpaintings are completely abstract. [Now, And] I just have to get something onto that paper to show that I am the master, that I'm dominating, and that you have to immediately have that kind of confidence. Because in teaching I realized—and saw—that most students it was the first strokes that were the hardest. In fact, they almost went catatonic in trying to just put that first piece of paint onto the canvas. And so the thing to do is just attack it. And that, of course, comes from my background of growing up with abstract expressionism. And in the beginning, as I mentioned, I was a complete nonobjective painter. And so I still approach most works that way.

After I've gotten on several layers of paint it also starts the dialogue in which I can start to see what kind of feeling or direction. . . . This isn't to say that I don't maybe have an idea, because at whatever particular time I've walked into that studio, I'm working on several different subjects. So the series, often there's several simultaneously going, and often different papers or canvases because of drying time. I fluctuate between oil and acrylic. Both are very different. And, again, partly mood, partly a practical thing of, if the oil isn't dry I might as well start acrylic.

It's a matter almost of a catharsis. It's really an exorcism on my part of getting out my frustrations. Let's face it, today and every day, no matter who you are you have, by the end of the day, great frustrations. You've had to cope through all kinds of things. Or it might be in the beginning of the day. I am a completely undisciplined disciplined person. Again, the paradox. I go into the studio maybe an average of three times a week. I never want it to be work. Georgia O'Keeffe once told me, very proudly, she would go in at 8:30 every morning. Now, to me that would just be unbearable.

PK: Like a job.

FS: Right. But I can go in at any time of the day—or night—and do something. It's not that. And I feel proud that I *can* do that. And I know many painters who just, for one reason or another, could not just simply go in. They would have to work up to it some way, or maybe they have special times or whatever. But in doing so, having that discipline, you walk in and you almost have to have no discipline. Because if that putting on of paint isn't exciting, and in a way of a first experience, then you're going to have a hard time in really getting down something that is going to be exciting to yourself. And so I literally almost go into a trance. The music is going loud. The paint is juicy, the brushes are flexible, the canvas moves when you touch it. And the color is luscious, the paint is buttery. It's a sensual thing—especially a big canvas that's a little larger than you in all ways—and you just throw yourself into it. You forget about what time of day it is. The minute you put down one stroke you're thinking about the next one at a different part of the canvas, because in a strange way there has to be a certain balance, and yet you don't want to be obvious with that balance. In fact, you've got to cover your tracks. And so in one hand I have a brush and in the other a rag. Because almost every stroke I make I take part of it away. And in that way you can play and be spontaneous and it kind of just happens in front of you. And the more you put on and take off you start to see the possibilities of all kinds of things. And, again, on many different levels you're working with wash against an opaque area or the canvas itself. Or the shape of a mass or a line against a shape or whatever it is. It gets into an area that really is hard to talk about, because it is kind of

automatic. You go into automatic. And it's also the same area that you can't talk about in viewing the work—any work—because there are a lot of works, a lot of painters.

There's a lot of competent paintings. But competent doesn't count. Skills can be learned. [Palmer] has a skill. I can teach anyone to paint. The process and method of painting is very simple. If you have eyes and hands and a decent—or halfway decent—mind, you can paint. [chuckles] And you can paint exactly what you see in front of you—in a very realistic way, if that's what you want.

But that's not art. Art is truly, in a way, going beyond the subject, of course, and going beyond even the medium. Going beyond the fact that it's a painting. It is part passion, it is part intellect, it is truly conceptual today, because all of contemporary art is conceptual. After the role of the artist changed from being a storyteller, from being a person who would be a reporter or tell people who couldn't read the story by pictures. When the camera came, the painter's role changed into an interpreter. And an interpreter in a much more personal way of trying to constantly give more life to everyone's existence. Because we usually function—visually, for instance—about 25 percent. Because we've learned how to use clues. The painter, if he can put something down that will make you stop and look again. . . . We are so sophisticated and so bombarded by visuals that everything is a visual cliché today. And so the challenge of the painter is even greater. We've all seen thousands of images of women, or flowers, dogs. So, very simply, it is audacious and in a way completely nuts to try to put down another image. And yet that's what the painter does because, if he can make it work. . . . And it's that area you can't talk about because, I believe, a good painting, you can sense it a mile away. The minute you walk in across the room, it either grabs you and knocks you down and kills you, or forget it. Whenever I walk into a gallery and see a Diebenkorn I just can't believe the. . . . First of all, I hate the guy because I didn't do it. And then I hate him more because he's a dirty rat. He was able to put down layers of underpainting—and we're talking about dozens of layers—and make it work where that first underpainting you can still see along with the last. I mean, the guy was just great.

Francis Bacon was great, in a different way, because he was able to take the raw, pure paint. And when you look close at his work it's so raw. But at a distance, it just kills you, the combinations that he uses. And the same for Goya. When I was in the Prado, many of the paintings were unfinished for one reason or the other. And the unfinished parts were even greater than the finished parts. Because a painting should be just as great from the very few first strokes as the last.

PK: What about in. . . . I see our light's beginning to blink but we have a few moments. In describing your method or the process of working with the paint and discovering an image, it reminds me of what Nathan Oliveira has said or described, in somewhat similar terms, how painting for him is discovering an image somewhere in there on the canvas and in the pigment, in the material—often a figure, and that's why they often look like they're emerging. You know Nate and you have actually a piece of sculpture by him and so forth. Do you feel that your approach, your methodology, is similar? Do you feel an affinity with that attitude towards painting and towards. . . .

FS: Well, everyone works differently and the value, of course, of art is that each artist is unique. All artists will on the other hand—the paradox—be influenced by each other. Picasso took many of his heroes and redid them—actually, the exact painting. And so the nice thing is, for the first time in the history of art, any style is viable. This has never been before. And with it are problems as well as good things. But today [is, it's] completely free and more than ever it's not even. . . . You can't talk about style, you can't talk about technique, you can't really talk about anything except concept and passion. Concept is the idea, of course, of what you want to. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with Fritz Scholder. This is Session 3, beginning session three, tape one, side one. The location is the artist's home, Scottsdale, Arizona. And the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom.

Well, Fritz, we had something of a marathon yesterday, a successful one. We touched on many topics and we ended up with you not having the opportunity, really, to expand upon what seems to be an important idea, and that is the notion of concept and passion as fundamental to the making of art—to art itself, in your view—and so here is your opportunity to kind of wrap that up, specifically what you mean.

FS: Yes. Passion, especially, I think is one of the main keys to any type of human expression. In fact, if you stop and think about someone like Bob Dylan, here's a guy that really doesn't have a good singing voice. He's great on making lyrics that are interesting and has been, in fact, called a poet of this century. But I've been to many of Dylan's concerts and realized that what *really* counts is his delivery. It is so filled with passion that you can't deny the guy. And the people I've met throughout the years, especially artists of all kinds, it seems that this is what sets them apart often. I remember once Ralph Lauren—a collector, a long-time collector of mine—I remember in his office turning to me and saying, "You know, you're the only painter I collect, and I collect you

because of your passion." It was a nice compliment, I felt, because if someone has passion then what can you say except to admire the fact that they have been able to open themselves up and do what they had to do. I finish most of my speeches with the subject of passion. In fact, this morning I dug up the first commencement address that I was ever asked to give—I've given many since—and let me just read you the last paragraph, which deals with this. Simply, I say, " . . .and do all these things with passion. Yes, passion and love are the most important of all. These take on many forms and are the most difficult to sustain. Love and passion make up the creative energy for the artist. Love is essential. To love and to be loved brings meaning to one's existence and one's work."

PK: That's beautifully said. But let me ask you about. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

PK: What I wanted to ask you, you mentioned Ralph Lauren was a collector of yours, did not collect other artists, and said that what he responded to in your work was the passion. Was he more specific than that? Because the question that comes to mind then is, how does this passion manifest itself in the work of art? Did he get any more specific about that? Do you have any idea of the form it might take within your work?

FS: Well, in regard to Lauren, I realized early on, after meeting with him and actually socializing with him, here is a man that truly one has to admire for taking the American dream all of the way. A person that is an entrepreneur that was not just. . . . His first victory was getting his ties into Bloomingdale's. Now, he could have stopped there with his little boutique but he continued on into not only into all kind of women and men's fashion but into everything from home beds and linens to a tremendous variety of things that all had his mark on it, because one of the keys, I realize, also for anyone's success is to stay on top of everything that you might be doing. I've tried business managers, I've tried agents and accountants, and they all have their place, but one time I let a particular person take care of a large part of my business, and they got into big trouble because you just have to. . . . And Ralph, actually, every single thing. . . . I've seen him do huge benefits. I've seen him in action in many different ways, and he's a perfectionist at absolutely checking everything himself. And this is, I think, one of the reasons for his success.

It's interesting. Every year there's a highlight in my life and something that I'm very pleased to be part of. Back in 1985 I received a call out of the clear blue from the American Academy of Achievement. I had not known this organization, and they told me that every year in a different location, a different city, they honor forty people in different areas of endeavor and give them the Golden Plate Award. And it sounded like I'd been eating well, or something. [chuckles] I said, "Well, now, I've never heard of this." They said, "It's a three-day gathering of all of the honorees and all of the top high school students from America, and they come together to meet their heroes and role models. And each person that's honored does an eight-minute presentation. But in your case we recently saw you paint a painting on PBS. Could you paint in front of the audience?" Well, actually, I had done that before. I'm the only American painter I know that's crazy enough to paint in front of someone. And I found that, of course, very few people had ever had the opportunity of seeing someone actually paint a painting. And I can paint fast and furious. They said, "We'll give you an hour if you would do this." So I did. And it was such a hit that I've been asked back every year and I am so pleased because I can't think of a greater organization as far as how well each year is done, and how different each year is. The head of it is very creative and brings in the Nobel Prize winners, some of the Academy Award winners, people who within that year had done great achievements, whether it's Susan [Butcher] of the [Iditarod] dog racing or the couple that flew in the plane around the world that year [Dick Rutan and Jeana Jaeger, pilots of the *Voyager*—Ed.]. So on this call I said, "Well, who else is going to be honored?" And they said, "Well, Mary Lou Retton, [________—Ed.] DeVries, the heart guy, [Henry—Ed.] Heimlich, the guy that squeezes you, the head of FBI, the head of NATO, Ray Charles. They went down the line, and I said, "And these people will all be there, all three days." [This is tailor], and they just. . . . I realized that it was going to be quite an event. Well, every year it is. And it is a time. . . . I've never seen any other organization—there are organizations for artists or for writers—but never one that brings all these people together. And so I nominated Ralph Lauren one year, and he was presented with it. And he was so humble because he, in fact, almost felt intimidated. He said, "You know, I'm usually the head guy, and look around. There's Jim Henson. Here is the man who is the only human being alive that discovered a planet [________—Ed.]." And on and on. He says, "I'm nothing." And I had to laugh because they also honor entrepreneurs. I said, "Ralph, you have been the top entrepreneur and you shouldn't feel any way about it."

But this is an organization that. . . . I guess the reason I bring it up, I truly am an optimist and this is still the greatest country one can live in. And although it has its problems like everywhere else, the American dream is still obtainable. And by that I mean there still is the possibility for anyone to live out their fantasies, to do their movie, and it's just a matter of hard work, of having that concept and, more importantly, having the passion.

PK: Well, I think I get the connection; I can understand this. How did you meet Ralph Lauren? How did you get acquainted?

FS: Ralph came to one of my shows in Santa Fe. He had just discovered Santa Fe. [laughs] In fact, that's another. . . . But he just fell in love with the work and we hit it off very well. He and Ricki [________—Ed.] are such a nice couple, and I'm invited to all the fashion shows, which are very hard to get into, and I have a runway seat right there.

PK: So do you go?

FS: Oh, yes, as much as I can because I'm always interested in going into what I call different realities. You learn from them, I mean. And the fashion world is certainly a world unto itself. But the nice thing is Ralph is so real. And, of course, I find that most people who have attained a certain status, and if they have some intelligence, they truly are so open. They don't have anything to prove, as the person that is trying to climb that ladder, who may play games. But the first time I met him in New York, at the Four Seasons, for lunch, he told me the nicest story of how he started off with ties and he just had a little workshop and had gone to Bloomingdale's hoping to get a break. And he had brought these wide ties, and the person he met with was very nice but he said, "We need more narrow ties. Could you just make your ties a bit more narrow and we'd be happy to take you on." And Ralph realized that here was a moment that we all have, in which in our lives in a split second we have to decide if we want to. . . . Here was a great chance. Not everyone gets to even have that chance of getting into Bloomingdale's with whatever product they have. Was he going to say, "Sure, I can make the ties narrower," or was he going to stick to his guns and say, "These are my ties. This is how I feel a tie should be." And he said it was just one of those unbelievable moments. And he barely could get the words out. He said, "I'm sorry but these are the ties that I've done and I just can't make them narrow." And the man was very nice. "Well, thank you, Mr. Lauren." And he left and went back home and thought, "Oh, I've just really done it now. I'll never become anything." The next day he gets a call from Bloomingdale's and they said, "We've decided to take your ties." And that was the beginning. So, again, you see, self-integrity is one of the main things of any person—especially the artist—because without self-integrity it's nothing. You are just fooling yourself and fooling everyone else. And there are times when it's very tempting to do something else, to do what somebody else wants you to do. But, in fact, the whole reason of being an artist is being able to do exactly what you want to do, when you want to do it, and how you want to do it. And, of course, it takes great audacity. It's something that I tell people. Everyone has that right to ask for that. However, what you're asking for is the greatest luxury, and how dare, in fact, someone should ask to, or think that they could do exactly what they want, when they want to do it, and live off it. I mean, the odds are worse than Reno. But this is what the artist, the first question he has to face. And when people come up and ask, "Should I be an artist?" I simply say, "Only if you have to. If you have to you don't have to ask me."

PK: So you see—in certain ways, at any rate—even though Ralph Lauren is in business and there are limitations if you're really going to function within the business world, it isn't quite the same as the freedom that an artist can enjoy. But you do see him, you relate to him in terms of some element of art, or the position of being an artist, whether it's your activity or his activity?

FS: I relate to him simply in that he has self-integrity and really is very creative because, as you well know, in fashion every season you have to come up with some new ideas. In fact, I remember at that same lunch, he was so open, he said, "You know, Fritz, the next . . ."—I don't know if it's the summer show or whatever's coming up, and of course they go way in advance—he says, "The summer show is coming up and I don't have one idea." [laughs] And I thought it was so fun, because here's one of the big guys in fashion and he was so open. "I don't have one idea." But, you see, again, this is an interesting sign; the true artist often likes that kind of edge, likes to put himself there. And I have literally made crises for myself at different times in my life just to stir things up. And here, I understood exactly what he meant. He was waiting because that would make it even more intense.

And I work very well under pressure. Pressure of myself. I don't let anyone else give me pressure. In fact, I won't give. . . . When I commit to a show, for instance, I never tell them how many. They know I'm a professional. And they will get a great show, the best show that I can do. And I would be crazy not to. But I'm not going to tell them anything other than, you know, "It'll be a great show." Because I don't know between now and then what I will be doing. I like to work right up to the last minute on a show so that it can be as current as possible. But, again, there cannot be pressure, which is easier said than done because the artist finds he is pressured overtly or subtly by everyone from his girl friend, his wife, his family, his dealer, of course, or collectors, entrepreneurs, publishers.

With the advent of the marketplace, the artist has had to now live in a dichotomy. Simply, when you walk into that studio you *must* be your own person. You must forget about any pressure or anyone. But then to protect the work after it's done, unless you want to destroy it, you must contend with the outside world, which now art is big business. And so the artist has had to become a businessman. For years he was able to get around it. And artists are not that pragmatic, but now you can't escape it.

PK: Before leaving Ralph, I think he provides a very interesting example of some of these qualities that you're talking about in your work, in you. But it leads me to want to ask you about, first of all, does he ever visit you

here? And then the second part of the question is, while we're on this, who are some of the other interesting people that you've hooked up with and do they actually come and visit you here, and do they maintain that kind of _____ _____?

FS: Well, I guess in a way I'm just as eclectic with my friends and collectors as anything else, because I have enjoyed the friendship of many people. Ralph, of course, is one of the busiest people I know, because he runs this unbelievable super industry and with different homes and so forth. Even to get to the academy was something. But throughout one's life there are so many people that really are very special, whether you see them for a day or for years.

I remember early on Vincent Price was another of my very enthusiastic collectors and put me in one of the first art history books and, whenever he came to town, we'd get together and close down a bar somewhere. And here was a man that had stories that. . . . Talk about stories! He had done and knew everyone. And the way he talked was so great and he was truly one of the last great men, I think. Because we spanned twenty years at least, I saw him just before he died. And here was truly another person that. . . . He loved cooking, he loved the arts, he was into so many things, and a huge man but really one of the teddy bears of all time. He was so gentle. I learned a lot, early on, from Vincent Price.

Another person. . . . When I first came to New Mexico, I wrote a fan letter to Georgia O'Keeffe.

PK: I was going to ask you about Georgia. Tell me anything you can think of about Georgia.

FS: [laughs] Ah, I have many stories. Because, here again, in my speeches I tell students especially, "You must make your gesture. You must present yourself and you can only come half way. You can't go any further or that would be intruding." But I knew I had to just write this letter saying I was a young painter who had just arrived in New Mexico, could I come see her? Now I'd heard the horror story: She never saw anyone, turned away *Life* magazine, she doesn't answer her mail, on and on. But I had to make my gesture, and if nothing happened that would be it. By return mail I received a hand-scrawled, terse letter saying, "Dear Mr. Scholder, I don't know why you'd want to see me. You can come Thursday afternoon." [laughs] So there I was in [Abique], standing at the famous gate and. . . .

PK: What year was this?

FS: This was nineteen-sixty. . . . It probably was 1965, the first time.

PK: So there you were.

FS: And it's always dangerous to meet one's heroes, because you can, of course, be very disappointed. O'Keeffe especially had developed such a persona, and when she opened the gate I first was struck by just realizing that she looked like her pictures, which is odd because people say the same about me now. But after you've seen the image of a person for many years, to see them actually standing in front of you can be shocking. And she truly spoke in poetry, she truly floated instead of walked. She had developed a persona that I've never seen in anyone else. And as we crossed the patio with the other famous black door, she said something to me which I'll never forget. She said, "There are times when one must spend an afternoon with one whom one will never see again." [laughs] And I knew what she meant. I'd caught her at the right time. She was lonely. This is before Juan. . . .

PK: Does that mean she would never see you again?

FS: I spent many afternoons with Georgia. [laughs] But that first afternoon I literally sat at her feet, and she sat in a chair and it was like a soliloquy. Often her eyes were closed but she would talk about Frankie—and if you didn't realize that that was Frank Lloyd Wright—or Jimmy—which was James Johnson Sweeney—you would, of course, be lost. Well, I was just taking it all in. [laughs]

PK: Did she talk about Alfie

FS: She didn't talk about Alfie. [both laugh] But it was unbelievable, because there's a whole range of things from the fact you can't get decent wine in Santa Fe [laughs] and how she had just finished stretching one of the large canvasses of the clouds but that her fingers now were getting to the point where she would have to have someone else stretch her canvasses and she was lamenting that fact. And turned to me and said, "You realize, you know, that there is such a great difference." And which, of course, I did. That just to stretch is just part of the process of creating something that is yours right from the beginning. But she. . . . Actually, it was interesting because she would talk *around* her art but never really about it. And many artists do that. She talked about many subjects.

But she had this aura that was unbelievable and that first afternoon I was looking up at her and the sun was

changing and I thought I was almost hallucinating at one point, because her face started to change with the sun and shadows from man to woman, woman to man. And I realized that, truly, the great people I've known have been very androgynous. Because, simply, they have found that all of their personal strength has to be taken from every bit of their own self, which is, of course, both. And with O'Keeffe it was amazing to look up and see this change back and forth. Her hair was severely pulled back. She had the [Alexander—Ed.] Calder pin at her throat and dressed in black, of course. So at one point she was talking, her eyes were closed, and she stopped mid-sentence. And I looked up and it was quiet and I waited. Nothing. And I thought, "Oh, my God, Georgia O'Keeffe has died on me. She just was sitting there [laughs] and it seemed like eternity. But all of a sudden she started right where she left off. She had been waiting for the precise word, and if it meant I had to wait and she had to wait, that was fine. And here was self-integrity that just wouldn't stop.

One other O'Keeffe story. One afternoon the shadows were getting longer and I made my motion to take my leave. And she said, "Would you like to stay for supper? We're having a number of people over." Todd Webb, a photographer who was a friend of hers, was moving to France, and she was having a small dinner. I said, "Well, I'd certainly like that." So she disappeared and said they'll be coming soon. And all of a sudden people started to arrive, and she reappeared and we went into the dining room. And I hadn't realized how formal this woman was, because it was a large rectangular table, beautifully set, and she was at the head with the little bell, because she would ring for the maid to come and present each course.

PK: She had a maid, huh?

FS: Yes, a Spanish maid. And you realized immediately that you would have to eat everything on your plate, because she kept eyeing everything and she was eating also very well. The wine was delicious. Everything was just small amounts but gourmet. But when every course ended she would ring the bell, the maid would come, take away. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: . . . Scholder, session three, tape one, side B. Fritz, you were having dinner with Georgia O'Keeffe.

FS: Yes, and great food—one course after another—and great conversation. It was truly one of those memorable feasts that one never forgets. But after a while we realized we were getting full and the courses were still coming. Finally, she rings the bell and the maid comes out with a salad which was, of course, being served at the last, in this humungous bowl. And the salad bowls, individually, were also huge, and she did the serving of each one and had it passed down. She was truly acting as the mother. And I noticed a number of people looking at each other in somewhat surprise because we realized here was this huge salad that would have to be eaten and we were already pretty full. But I took the first taste of the salad and almost fell off my chair, because she had put every garlic in the world in this salad. This salad could have walked off by itself. It was incredible! And I knew I had to eat it.

PK: _____ _____ [almost] sick!

FS: I mean, I just couldn't believe. And so slowly, slowly, everyone ate their salad until their bowls were empty. At that point, Georgia looks up at all of us with a little smile on the corner of her mouth, and she said, "Well, how did you like the salad?" And, almost in unison—it was so funny—like schoolkids we all said, "Great, Georgia!" [laughs] So she said, "Well, that is nice because we have enough for seconds." And she rings the bell and the maid comes. [laughs] And I don't know to this day if this was some little joke of hers or what, because when I got back to Santa Fe that evening I was green, I was told. And I felt green, too. And I couldn't look garlic in the face for five years.

PK: During these years that you knew Georgia O'Keeffe and had occasion to visit her, you said you talked about art but, I gather, in somewhat general terms, if I understood you correctly. Did she ever see your work? Did she ever comment on your work?

FS: That's an interesting question. And, no, she never asked about my work. Now, other artists had the same kind of tunnel vision. That was interesting to me because, for instance, I'm a collector as well as an artist, and even to this day I will acquire a painting or drawing from mainly young artists but I'll do trades for all kinds of. . . . [I have a] Picasso drawing and I have a gamut of all kinds of things. I really love to see other people's works, but I've known many artists who have this just simply a personality where they are only into their own work. O'Keeffe, once in a while would talk or mention something about her painting or what she was doing and the problems, mainly of old age, and she told me how she got up early and her routine, for instance.

PK: Didn't you say she told you that. . . . Was she the one that said you needed to get up every day and. . . .

FS: Well, she said she got into the studio at 8:30 every morning. And she had this kind of precisionist feeling to her which, you know, was part of her whole persona. I remember one time walking around the house with her,

and she stopped real quickly when she saw that the well had a well-cover on it, and on the well-cover was a rock. Now she loved smooth river rocks that she would collect. In fact, that first afternoon right next to her chair she had a whole bunch of smooth rocks and she often would just touch them at times. A very mystical kind of thing. Well, she saw this rock on the well-cover, and I looked at her face and it was just like she became furious. And she said, "Someone has been using my rocks in nefarious ways."

PK: What did that mean?

FS: [laughs] I don't know. I saw that I better not ask. Then we just went on, walked on. But she had a kind of concise way in everything. The minute you walked in, here was adobe that was the traditional very uneven but swept beautifully smooth. The floor, of course, was a mixture of ox-blood, which is the traditional way to put an adobe floor to make it hard, and so it had this red hue. But then the adobe literally undulated up to the bancos around the wall, the benches, which became white, and the fireplace was waist-high, up on the wall, and it was simply a square space that had been cut in to the adobe wall. It was flush and just a small one, but it was interesting. It was at a height that really, as you sat by it, you had a much more intimate feeling, because the wood in it was placed Indian-style in a tipi form, beautifully done here again. Everything was exquisite, and yet I knew she used it. It wasn't just there for looks. But then you would walk around in other areas of the house and find, for instance, a banco that was not one that could be used because it had been carved inside with a glass over, a covering, and inside would be just a skeleton of a snake. But minimal, only a few things here or there. I mean, not like my place at all where there are things all over.

PK: I was going to say. [chuckling]

FS: She was a minimalist in her personality.

PK: Well, that's what's known as a perfect segue. That's a very leading. . . . It points us in the direction to the next question I have: This difference in terms of environment of Georgia O'Keeffe and Fritz Scholder, here, where we're sitting, and possible then broader connections. What that might manifest, what that might mean. What about an aesthetic, perhaps, a self-conception, so forth and so on. This precisionism of Georgia O'Keeffe is very apt.

FS: Well, my environment, I guess, can be seen on many different levels also. In a way it's a [pharonic] kind of syndrome in which you feel you must bring all of your goodies around you and live with it and die with it. I have so many interests and it shows. There are some things are simply. . . . I identify in a certain way with the buffalo, and I have quite a collection of buffalo images, from very small to large, including a large stuffed buffalo head over the fireplace.

PK: You [had, have] a whole buffalo in your bedroom.

FS: Yes, a whole calf behind the bed. [laughs] So, again, I don't think it's eccentric but, of course, I'm used to it. For me it's just natural. I do a great deal of traveling. I love to have memories, and also it's a matter of placing things around you and creating an environment that, for me, should be interesting. And each room I go about simply as a painting. There are I don't know how many objects in every room. But they're, hopefully, put there in a way where you can pretty much see each one and it doesn't have a cluttered effect, but as you can see I use every space, and I love the juxtaposition of simply an old painting over there of the last Indian and the last white man chasing the last buffalo next to an art nouveau lithograph of the siren. And then the across from that is a Franz von Stuck, which I acquired at auction. A bizarre painter who lived in Munich at the end of the eighteen hundreds. And for me it all goes together, whether it's the portraits that Warhol did of me on the purple wall here, or a photograph of the old Egyptian monuments that I love so much. But I guess the collection. . . . I don't even think about it as a collection. It's a source, in many ways, a resource source. I painted, for instance, the sarcophagus, a number of paintings, monotypes of that. And whatever I have around me really is in some way tied to not only *my* interest of the actual object, and that, of course, brings for me an opening to research it, and then I become somewhat of an expert on what I own, whether it's incunabula—the old books—or the kachinas that most people don't even know about, for instance—the tubular ones from the pueblos. I mean, it wasn't just the Hopis that did kachinas. To esoteric artists that you usually don't see. And it all goes together because if it has a certain quality it really just glows, and yet each room is quite different in nature and character, which I like also. And, of course, it kind of . . . it's matured a lot from when I. . . . I've been here 22 years—or 24 years or something—and so there have been gradual changes. When I look at older photographs of the interior here, it is becoming a little, probably a little stranger.

PK: Well, it seems to me that . . . I mean, it's so tempting to try to list, which we can't do here, the range of objects in your collection. It's very striking. Obviously, I'm very taken with it and tend to want to read a great deal into it. But at any rate it ranges from—for the sake of this interview and this transcript—from going back to early Egyptian items. . . . You actually have probably one of the few sarcophagi in a private collection, certainly in this area. It's the only one I've ever seen. You have mummies—I think a mummified child. You have objects

that ranging, oh, in ritualistic, funerary—this seems to be the emphasis—shamanistic things, objects which within certain cultures hold a power. A power that, if you are inclined to believe, like a voodoo doll has consequences, provides some kind of a contact with spiritual forces, with preternatural forces. If I were to describe your collection and your environment, I would say it's just singing with this kind of power, to the extent that one believes this. And in some way, for some reason, you're attracted—judging from the collection—to the rare—but not in the usual sense of collectors, traditional collectors who look for the rare, valuable, the beautiful. It's always an aesthetic thing. It's not to say that there's not an aesthetic quality here. But the collection for me bespeaks eclectic attraction to the unusual, to the exotic, even to the bizarre, as you acknowledged. And as I said last night as we were talking about your cabinet of curiosities. . . .

FS: [chuckles]

PK: . . . that it can be, for visitors, unsettling, disorienting, if you will. It interferes with, let's say, a comfortable, late-twentieth-century American probably suburban experience. I don't mean to make this question too long but it's by way of trying to move a little further into the meaning here. I myself feel in this collection, taken in its entirety, an erotic, or obsessive force, and I use those words in a considered way. If pressed, I'm not sure I could *exactly* tell you why. But I'd be interested in your response on that.

But another part of the question, and then I'll be quiet and let you answer, is that, to a degree, and as I get to know you better, the collection seems to take on an identity that is indeed you—or equivalent to you. Kind of a Scholder persona, if you know what I mean. Like Georgia had her persona in that environment. Anyway, to what extent do you identify, maybe in a sort of mystical way, with this collection? And, finally, I guess implicit in the question is your own self-perception. You're surrounded by oddities and curiosities. You're an unusual and unconventional person. You've felt like an outsider at certain times of your life, for various reasons. Is any of this close to the mark?

FS: [laughs] There are a lot of questions there, but. . . .

PK: I'm sorry.

FS: No, you're right. And I think it's very important for any individual, the environment that he may live [in]. I sometimes go into homes and get very nervous if I see blank walls, for instance. For me, one's house or studio, whatever, you should be able to tell a lot about a person. And in my case, simply, it is a different sensation for many people, simply because I, for one reason or another, have so many interests. In fact, almost everything is of interest to me, and I have very different collections that no one even sees. . . .

PK: Like what?

FS: Oh, old buttons. I'm a stamp collector, a coin collector. And I mean serious. And have been for years and years. And it started early on. When I was eleven, for instance, I'd gotten into covers, which are of course envelopes with stamps on them, with the postmark. And here you get much more information than a single stamp. Well, they often would do commemorative covers in which first-day issues, for instance, or other pictures could be printed or painted on the cover. So I started to paint my own covers—envelopes—and send them to famous people throughout the world requesting that they sign the front of the envelope, and I had mint stamps of that country already on it, and all they had to do was throw it into a mailbox and I would have then the postmark of the town, the country, and the date. And I would receive it back in South Dakota.

Well, it was just lots of fun because I sent one over to Einstein with his . . . I had put on the front of the cover his formula and a design with the American scientist series of stamps, and he signed on the front, threw it into the mailbox. He lived in Princeton, so here was the date and everything and an instant collector’s item. I would do research on, especially, new leaders because I felt that they might be more receptive, just coming into power. So when Naghib, a strong man in Egypt, overthrew Farouk—who, in fact, was one of the world's greatest stamp collectors—I sent one of my covers to him with stamps of the pyramids so that he could do the same and with a picture of the pyramids on the cover. [But, Well] he didn't quite understand what I wanted, so instead of signing my envelope, he put it into another envelope—just a manila envelope—and put his own stamps on it. And at the time he had just overthrown Farouk and Farouk had fled into exile, but Farouk had had all Egyptian stamps with his face on it, being the egomaniac he was. So Nagib had to put stamps on his envelope of Farouk, but they had black bars across the face, and he signed the front of that—which was much better, because here the guy who overthrew him put on the stamps that had . . . and had had all the stamps made . . . or black bars put over them.

I happened to send a letter, one of my covers, to [Prince—FS] Feisal, the boy king of Iraq. And he also wasn't sure what I wanted, and he signed my envelope, but then put it into his envelope, which had a beautiful incised inscription in the corner which said "The Palace of the Flowers." And he signed it a few days before he was assassinated.

So I've always . . . the collections, for me, in one level is finding out new information—always. But there's also . . . an aesthetic is very important. I won't acquire another buffalo image if it's not something that I really want to look at. Just to see another buffalo is not that interesting to me. So aesthetically I like to surround myself with things from many cultures. But then another important ingredient of many of the objects is power and magic—and which I truly believe in. I have from time to time made the statement that one must believe in everything because the odds are too great not to. We know so little. And so magic and power—the occult—is, I think, just as real as anything else. For instance, the first time I went to New Orleans I knew immediately what I had to get, and that was a real voodoo doll. And they'll show you all kinds of things, and I hadn't done any research because I like to be spontaneous, but immediately when I got there I started to ask around and found that I had to find a voodoo queen, black voodoo queen, Maria. And I got the address and ended up at noon in an alleyway in a section of town that I later heard nobody would dare go into if you were not black. But I went in and I remember doors on both sides of this alley. Many of them were open and it was dark interiors. I found the number, walked in, and when my eyes adjusted here was a tall white guy in a torn t-shirt, and I don't know if you ever saw the movie *Deliverance* but then he looked just like that.

PK: Oooh, scary.

FS: Later I realized there are many white people that are very much into voodoo there. So I asked for Queen Maria and he said, "Well, she's in the hospital going nuts right now. She does that after Mardi Gras every year." So, well, then. . . . Sometimes I like to look down on myself like a movie, and this was one of those weird times when what I was going to say I knew would usually sound pretty weird but I didn't feel it was weird. I said, "Well, I am looking for a voodoo doll." And without hesitating he turns around and goes to a display case in the corner and brings out, in tin foil, this object and gives it to me, and immediately when I saw it I knew that it was the real deal. And I later realized that voodoo dolls are made of different materials in Africa than in Haiti. In America it's mainly made of Spanish moss. And here was just a tubular piece of Spanish moss with two black little seeds for eyes in old trade cloth wrapped around it and *it was potent*.

Well, I didn't stop there. I saw that in the back of the room they had their own personal voodoo altar. And above it was a banner, an old one, of the [Drumballa] wrapped around the egg of the universe, the black snake. And so I made like I was stupid and said, "Oh, how much is that banner?" And the guy looked at me and said, "Well, I don't know if that's for sale. I'd have to ask my master." I said, "Well, where is your master?" And he says, "In the next room." [chuckles] And so I said, "Well, I'm really interested in it. Could you, you know, ask him?" So he disappears, and I thought, "God, I wonder if I get it and what would it cost and how much could I afford." I had all these thoughts. And he comes back in with his . . . with another white guy, his master, and he starts showing me old yellowed clippings of how this banner had been in a voodoo camp in North Carolina and on and on. I thought, "Boy, they're going to really have a big price for this." But, I was happy that at least they were thinking of selling it. And so I said, "Well, how much? I have to get going." He said, "Well, I guess I could let you have it for $100." [laughs] I couldn't believe it. I mean. . . .

PK: You thought that was a high price?

FS: No! That was like a steal. I was ready to pay thousands of dollars. [laughs]

PK: But what did he think? I mean [what did he make of that?]

FS: Well see, you never know but in a way it was proof it was real, you see. It wasn't that this guy was a wheeler-dealer trying to get a big price. It was something that they lived with, but, you know, maybe they just needed a hundred dollars, who knows. The voodoo doll was next to nothing. And again I knew it was the real thing. Oftentimes in my collecting I've realized that if it's a *big* price, especially in things like Egyptian, it could be fake, because there's a market and so they try to put a big price on it. So it's this kind of adventure and finding the real thing that for me is what collecting is all about.

Along with . . . there's so many factors. I have a great postcard collection, and people sometimes say, "Oh, you're so hard to buy for" for a birthday present or something, and I simply tell them, "Hey, I'm easy. I love bizarre postcards, and there are many subjects in my postcard collection. Everything from buffaloes to devils and images of skulls to, you know, down the line. Old Halloween cards are lots of fun, and, of course, whenever I go to a museum I pick up some postcards from my favorite things I just saw in their collection. So I have a great collection of postcards of paintings and sculpture. And a postcard collection is not expensive to put together, but I have very rare ones and of course they are getting more valuable. But it's one of those areas that most people overlook. And there should be *no* area that one overlooks, because I can find great pleasure in so many different objects, whether it's a Roman miniature tear vase, where they literally collected their tears, to voodoo objects, like the double-horned goat on my desk, or the two-headed calf in my kitchen.

PK: Is that a voodoo object as well?

FS: No, the two-headed calf is just an anomaly.

PK: It's an anomaly, yeah.

FS: But it is a real one.

PK: But see, everything—not everything, but so much of what you're attracted to falls into that category.

FS: Yes, it does. But, after doing reading and so forth, researching, I. . . . One of the many concepts that I've somewhat used in my own mode of operation is that anomalies and things that are different—and even humans that are different—are often the most interesting. And in fact studies have been recently done that show that almost all achievers throughout the centuries have had very difficult early years, and had many things that they had to in some way solve, and often coming from being different, one way or the other. Let's face it, I think the *hardest* type of situation is someone who's born normal in a regular environment and class, wherever it might be, that just is average in their IQ or in their mentality or whatever influences them early on. Another area I think is when one. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: [Continuing] the interview with Fritz Scholder, this is session three, March 30, 1995, tape two, side one. Fritz, sorry to interrupt you [at an] interesting moment.

FS: Oh, that's all right.

PK: But please continue.

FS: I truly believe in paying one's dues. And, in that way, as you slowly succeed in whatever it is that you are hoping for, it just feels so good. And to have it immediately I think in certain ways is harder. I early on really had no idea where the rent was coming from, from month to month. I had a young family. I had just graduated from college. Because in growing up at that time in America, you could not live off your work as an artist. Most serious artists had to teach. And if you got lucky enough you might even be able to become an artist in residence at a decent university. So I got all my degrees for teaching. I took speech classes and debate and learned how to talk. My talk is all artificial because there were operations on my tongue and everything else, early on, because I couldn't talk.

PK: Why not?

FS: Well, I was just messed up when I was born in a number of ways just physically. And I just couldn't talk. I think it wasn't until four years of age that I said my first words. And they were all scrambled up also. So it was a matter. . . .

PK: You were dyslexic?

FS: It must have been something like that because they were so happy that then I could talk, but then they couldn't understand. [laughs] Once I started learning the words I had them all confused. But all of this, I think, helps in a way to, if you can get through it, you realize that almost everything you can solve, one way or the other. So early on I went out early in the morning to the lumber company where they burn a lot of wood that for one reason they don't want and would grab strips of wood, and then I'd go to the carpet company where they were undoing the new carpets coming in and they gave me the burlap, and I would literally learn how to be a good scrounger to take it back to the studio and make stretchers out of the wood and put the burlap on and gesso it, and so forth and so on. And when you have to do things like that you're more in touch with your material. You have this appreciation of all of it. And so then later on I feel. . . . I don't feel badly that nowadays I have the finest papers made specially for me with my signature in the watermark. I don't feel badly to have canvases stretched waiting for me in whatever size I might want. Because I paid my dues, and I found that in a way it is much better. . . . If you have access to fine materials, you don't have to worry about getting those. By the time I had finished stretching the burlap I was too tired to paint by then often. So there is a downside to that but it's something you have to get through. And I don't feel spoiled because I know what all this means and I delight in every single piece of paper that I might put on the wall to work on.

And yet, here again, the paradox. It's not the paper or any of the materials that really count. Lautrec would go out into the alleyways and pick up cardboard for his next painting. And, true, French cardboard is a little more interesting than American cardboard [chuckles], but some great paintings of his are on just cardboard. And so when people talk about. . . . So many people get all involved with materials, and they miss the whole point. Or maybe they're trying to miss the point, because then they can get around the actual thing of making art, which . . . there are so many traps.

But for some reason, early on—and if you believe, I don't know, past lives or what—I knew a lot of the answers of simply how I wanted to live and I had a great advantage in immediately knowing what I wanted to be. In this

commencement address I start off by telling of standing in line at the University of Arizona waiting to get my MFA degree, and the fellow in front of me was talking to the fellow in back of me, and at one point he said, "What are you going to do after you receive your degree?" And the fellow in back of me said, "I don't know." And I was shocked. Because I had known from the beginning, and I realize that one of the problems today with young people is not only an identity problem but the problem of "What am I going to be?" I never had that. It was simply a calling. I *knew* what I had to do. And it was doing. . . . And again, you know, I was too young to really intellectualize, but now I realize simply by expressing oneself in whatever medium is simply a channel to develop one's self-integrity, to not compromise, and to do exactly what you want to do in a world full of rules. And, of course, one must learn the rules to know which ones to break. But, for the artist. . . . The artist is a natural rebel, and I always was. I would not accept what teachers said. In most cases, I knew what they were saying was wrong. Long before the. . . . Now, you know, everyone is reconstructing history and so forth. Well, I just *knew* that there was much more to it.

[Interruption in taping]

FS: Oh, okay, we're on?

PK: Carry on.

FS: And I think every artist has that kind of nature of questioning everything, having to find out for himself. And that is another level of why one paints. It's a matter of starting from the basic theory and seeing where it goes. I'm interested in many different philosophies. I'm interested in history and what happened there. But there are so many different versions of any history. Early on I had the most interesting fellow—this was, in fact, at the University of Wisconsin my freshman year—a guest instructor, Stuart Holbrook, who had written books like *The American Dream* and was truly the first revisionist historian that, I think, had come down the pike because he immediately started to tell us why what we had read and learned was completely incorrect. He had done his research, and according to him the father of the country was certainly not George Washington. It was Ethan Allen. And he went from there and told all the ins and outs of what *really* happened. And it just opened my eyes. And it in a way confirmed my deepest sense of those questions early on—that we spend almost half our lives learning factoids. And if we are lucky we then realize the problem and start looking for facts. And of course in this culture we're being fed daily factoids through the media, especially. We're not told what really is happening, and all you have to do is go to Europe and look at a newspaper and compare it to the *New York Times* and realize that the exact same event that day, whether it's in Bosnia or Spain—wherever—is different. And it's unfortunate that we are bombarded now through television and everything else with such negativism and with such factoids, and it's more imperative today than ever to find out truly what's happening and what's, you know, at least, so-called "real."

PK: This raises for me another interesting possibility. Not to keep going back to your collection, but I wonder in a way if these things that you've surrounded yourself with, which are drawn from all periods and all civilizations, and basically touch on *the* basic themes of human experience, I would say—well, certainly life and death very much so is the way I would describe the meaning of the collection if it has one. And also belief or superstition, if you prefer. But are these like a talisman for you, reminders of the importance of going beyond received authority?

FS: Very much so. Because, you see, it all adds to my frame of reference in just simply the reality that I find myself. And when you realize that most people function on things that really are myths, it's nice to find out whether it's. . . . I have in the bedroom, for instance, a stone stele that I haven't even shown to you that I found in an antique shop and started to do some research. I was told it was Greek and I knew it wasn't Greek, and after the research found that it was in fact from Carthage. And Carthage was a very different city-state at that time. In fact, it left Greece and was partly Phoenician, but it had its own whole culture and it was a very strange one indeed, where Baal was the god that they worshipped, along with [Thanet, Tanette], which was the woman goddess. And if things got too difficult the first thing that would happen is that the wealthy people, the most powerful people, were asked to sacrifice their most beloved child. This could be from a baby on up to about four years old. And there were ceremonies where they would put these babies in the hands of a stone statue of Baal with the fire going and would sacrifice them and then would put the ashes in urns, the remains, and bury them deep, way deep, into almost like catacombs, but they were called [toffets, tophits].

PK: Toffets?

FS: Yes, and this was outside Tunis. No, outside Carthage, I should say. Because they were warring with the Romans and they were afraid that if the Romans took over . . . they didn't want the Romans to find these, and so it was a tremendous network underground of thousands of large ceramic vases filled with the remains of these sacrifices of these children throughout the years. And when Rome, in fact, burned Carthage to the ground they never found the toffets. And it was only in 1924 that they were found. And along with the vases were stele inscribed with the symbol of Baal and Thanet, and I have one, which is very rare.

Now this is one of my precious items—simply because it gave me new information. It gave me more insight on how humans can be so inhuman. And this is something. . . . We all have a dark side and I've always been fascinated with it simply because I think if you know about it maybe that will help you not do some things. It has, of course, again many connotations of the human species and what they have done. And this fascinates me. I just love it when discoveries are made—whether it's finding out the Sphinx is older, which throws everybody into a wonderment, or finding a new cave with paintings that are even greater than what was found before. This is part of finding out about the human experience. And I think it's probably more fascinating, generally speaking, the dark side often are those areas that had gotten to one extreme or the other.

PK: Let me then ask you, you talk about understanding, an interest in human experience, exploring human experience, and part of the dark side—or at least an important part of this experience, as evidenced in ritual and myth and so forth—is sexuality. And I mentioned earlier, without explaining myself, how I sensed a kind of erotic quality within the collection. And it wasn't so much an individual piece or anything like that. I really can't explain it. But in these terms, in terms of what you've been describing, what about this aspect? To what extent does sexuality and eroticism play a role in your own work?

FS: Well, very simply, I think that the sexual element of human history is one of the great driving forces. Simply. And in both men and women. And of course in the history of cultures and tribes and everything else you find great variations, which is natural. But simply that is the driving force for the artist, especially. Because if you are to make a statement about, conceivably, the human experience it can't be left out. And it is a force that is so great that it can be scary. It can be, of course, worked in many different ways. And I've found that it is—whether you call it love, and like the Bible saying, "the greatest of all"—or simply call it sex. . . .

PK: What about lust?

FS: Lust, certainly. All of these are the *main* drive—or motor—for the whole activity. And it's strange how people have tried to hide it or tried to in some way change it. It's very simple. And I think everyone should just go for it [laughs], within the limits that they might want. And again generalizations are not good, but I think the artist . . . it's evident that this is known, and the artist seems to be more open to exploring all of this, because it is one of the great taboos. And it's strange that we are so self-conscious about it. And yet the paradox. . . . I truly believe that there is a lot of loss happening in the world in general because of taking the sexuality and making it a negative. And although there's all kind of levels to this, I believe that there should be a certain type of—how should I say?—of decor, of being civilized. I think it's sad that the English language on television is so screwed up that even commentators will not use—or can't use—the right terms. The newspapers even. The *New York Times* used to be one of the few and even now they have gone into clichés and all kinds of really mediocre language.

PK: Are you talking about euphemisms for. . . . I mean, you're talking in a broader sense now than sort of prudery about sexual terms or is that. . . .

FS: Well, that also. I don't consider myself a prude, and yet I'm shocked. I was shocked the other evening, in watching television and hearing some of the words. Now it's cool to say certain words. And not only on television, just in public, or in the magazines, whatever.

PK: Is this a kind of Puritanism, like almost a juvenile fascination then with. . . .

FS: Yes, it's terribly self-conscious. Now, it's not that I'm trying to judge but I am observing the general decline of morals and especially etiquette. And especially ethics. Now morals is something that is different with cultures, but I think that when ethics goes down the drain we're in big trouble. And greed, of course, became the key word of the eighties, and art was the last to receive it but it got into art also. And at a think-tank at Sundance several years ago Robert Redford brought together seventy-five artists from all over the world. An international gathering, in which we simply talked about. . . .

PK: You were obviously invited.

FS: I was one of them. Redford has been a collector of mine for many years.

PK: Oh, you didn't even mention him earlier.

PK: At any rate it was a very interesting gathering because everyone had their own agenda, and at that time I think Russia was taking over certain areas and we had people from "Aberzhevani" or whatever that country was that was very much wanting us to make a manifesto in regard to what was happening there [probably Azerbaijan or Azerbaidzhan—Ed.]. We had all of these different people together. And I was asked to be the head of writing the manifesto for the arts. I was pleased to do it and chose Scott Momaday to help me with it, because we've been mutual fans for many years. He's the only American Indian who's received a Pulitzer Prize. . . .

PK: What's his name?

FS: [N.—FS] Scott Momaday. And Scott and I go way back from Dartmouth days when I was artist-in-residence there. Anyway, I said to Scott, "I want the first sentence to be a knockout." Because it was a high-powered group and there was going to be a lot of really interesting manifestos, and of course we wanted ours to be right in there. And so our first statement was, simply, "Art lay down and spread her legs and greed entered." And of course we got everybody's attention. But it was the truth. Because by then everyone realized that New York had played so many games in the eighties—and New York truly does dominate the art world in this country and at that time in the world. It since has lost it's lead, of course, but it played so many games and greed did come in, and so even the arts are fighting to in any way keep their integrity. Bad art in fact came in at the end of the eighties and, even though there was some redeeming features to that, just the fact that it was called "Bad Art," it was of course a reaction against what people thought was . . . that abstraction had gone too formal, if you will. But since then it's been a downhill thing of "the Emperor's New Clothes," because, as I mentioned before, any style now is viable but with that comes tremendous dangers. Every wannabe comes out of the woodwork. Every entrepreneur and dealer thinks that they can sell anything and in some way fool the public, and often the public is fooled because of hype and it is so easy to manipulate our whole publicity and culture nowadays. And there are. . . .

PK: Was this an issue then. . . . Was this specifically the issue—as it took that form in the arts, of course—that was being dealt with? Was the subject of this conference that subject?

FS: Actually, the symposium was very open-ended, and I give Redford. . . . Redford's a real thinker and he's done so much good for so many people in the arts. But it was open-ended. All he did was, you see, provide a fantastic place to bring all of these people together and see what *they* wanted to talk about, see what would come out of everything, and it was a very interesting experience. And it was. . . . I must tell you one story. There are many, many stories about this gathering. When we all arrived, I realized, when we walked into the large meeting area—and it was a beautiful setting, of course, Sundance—that the chairs were all in rows and that there was a microphone in front. Well, as a natural rebel, I started to get nervous. And I could sense everyone else was getting nervous. You don't bring in top artists from all over the world and put them in rows. Now this may sound strange but it's [part of the, partly] psychological. And everyone was on their good behavior, and they sat down. Redford wasn't there the first day because he was flying in from a movie shoot and they had a "facilitator" (quotations), and the minute I heard that I got *real* nervous. Because whoever had organized this thing had immediately made some very grave mistakes. You don't bring in two hundred creative—very creative —people from *all* of the arts and have a facilitator stand in front of them. We're talking about rebels. We're talking about people. . . . I maintain if you put three artists in the same room at a party, you're asking for it. Because it's just not the nature of the beast. We sat down and this fellow comes out—of course this kind of pseudo personality—plus—and starts to tell us to be free and not have any preconceived ideas of what's going to happen and just go with him on everything.

PK: Go with him?

FS: Yeah, with him.

PK: Who was this person?

FS: Now we had no idea who this was. I mean, he was nobody. And at that point I just felt the negative vibrations. "Were we brought here to be told by a facilitator to 'get free'? We, who for years and years fought for freedom—to be told by somebody we don't even know?" Well, he then passed a hat—I kid you not—passed a hat down the rows filled with playing cards that had been cut in half.

[Break in taping]

PK: Interviewing Fritz Scholder, session three, tape two, side B. Back to Sundance.

FS: Yes. The facilitator had just produced a hat full of cards that had been cut in half—playing cards—and the hat was passed along the rows and we each was to take one. We weren't told why. Just take half a card. And I felt that this just was not going to work, and it actually in fact did not work except for this first thing. After we all got half a card they asked us to take the chairs away and all stand in front of . . . in the middle of this big space. And there was a huge solid door, double door, at one end of the room. And the facilitator went to that door and said, "I would like for you to find the other half of your card." And all of this was like, you know, games, and, I'm sorry, I really don't like games too much. He opens the double doors and here were a hundred little kids that they'd brought in from schools throughout the area. Each little kid had half a card. And they came in and we found our partners, and the facilitator said, "When you find your partner stand right in front of him and look at him. Start with the head, look down, see what he's wearing, or she. Visually, find out all you can." Which was fine. "And then say your name, introduce yourself."

Then we were asked to go out [of] the room into the woods with our partner and talk for an hour, finding out as much as we could about each other. And then when we came back in, the kids were asked to tell about their new

friend, the adult that they had met. This gave a perspective, of course, to each adult for himself for the rest of the conference. Which wasn't bad.

PK: Sounds interesting.

FS: That, I thought, "Okay, okay, I'll go along with that." And everyone did because, you know, kids are great. And what the kids said just was so neat. My partner was a most bright little girl. She already was the president of her ecology class in school. She knew where she was going to go to college. We still write to each other, and so that was nice. Because I love kids, and certainly kids are the future and I often will take time to go to a nearby school just to do something with them. So, here, that was fine.

But that was unfortunately the only good idea the facilitator had. We went back to the rows, which I knew could not exist, because, you see, the true way of working with any group, if you're going to have any dialogue, is the circle. And in olden times you sat around the bonfire. For the Native American, for instance, many of the Plains Indians would gather for a conference or meeting around the bonfire because it was all oral tradition of the spoken word, and the leader would start by being quiet. And for a long time he would be quiet, and then finally he would speak. There are ways of really doing a dynamic gathering. And this facilitator had no idea how to handle creative people. And so a revolution immediately happened. He was thrown out, literally, and we took the chairs and put them in a circle, and each one of us then stood up to give what we felt would be important for the next few days in our manifestos.

So I guess I'm telling this story to show that artists have an innate sense, generally speaking, of how to go about things, getting through all of the junk and all the baggage that we get ourselves hooked up with just in regular living, and getting down to, hopefully, some essentials, which are often and always surprising to everyone else including ourselves. Because it became . . . it was unstructured, this particular conference, and in the evenings artists, if they wanted, could gather in the main room and put on presentations for everyone, no order or anything if somebody. . . . And it was some of the finest and most interesting moments. When a poet, for instance, I remember from New York City came in front, sat down at a table with a glass of water and a pencil, and. . . .

PK: Do you remember who it was?

FS: Yes. I'm bad with names. Pucci. He's a visual artist but also a poet. And with a pencil anda glass of water. . . . And he had, in fact, brought . . . he had gotten copies of a number of his poems, and I could see from the writing that it was going to be very interesting because it was very strange writing. Well, the performance was even stranger because just with a glass of water and a pencil he started with a low moan, as if he was dying, and then started to [Scholder strikes a glass object with a pencil or pen, duplicating the sound the poet made—Ed.] do this with the glass, moaning, and then slowly reaching up into an octave that was incredible, high, and the words slithered out of his mouth and almost in a staccato, and he got into a delivery—a deliverance—that I had never seen before. It was incredible. It was taking the basics of speech and a pencil and a water glass, and he mesmerized the whole place and went on and on with variations of just this along with the words that he had put down on paper. And it was moments like this at Sundance where again I realized that if the world could in some way be run by artists it would certainly be a more fascinating world. And it certainly would not be a destructive world.

PK: Well, it's evident that you believe in the power of art to transform but that it can also operate—some people of course question this—but it can operate in the political and social realm. That, of course, opens up a whole other philosophical question, but judging from what you've said you seem to think that this is true. Let's return to your own work then with that notion. You've described the Sundance conference and what it was emblematic of. We've touched on a number of themes or issues, and I have to ask you then specifically how you see them emerging or working out in your own art, in your own painting. Do you see your art as embodying these themes and do you see it as, in some circumstances, having the potential to contribute to change?

FS: I think that there is a great power in art which can change people's lives. I've seen it happen with collectors of mine. I've seen it happen with myself. And simply, I guess, it's a matter of continuing to enrich one's existence with new information, and some of the most accessible can be visual. It can be music or drama. Because these are the highest forms of human expression, very simply. And it's a very serious business. As I mentioned yesterday, every culture has had some form of religion and some form of art.

As far as my own work, in a way it's very simple in that I work with subjects that are of interest to me at the moment, and I never worry about what's going to come next. I've always worked in series. A series may start at any time, it may end at any time. And it may be short, it may be long. It depends on what I want to say about it, and how it fascinates me also as a subject. I early on realized I did not want to be bored. And I have made it a point through the work to. . . . And this is why I work in many mediums because I want to explore it all and see what I can do. And if a medium is hard, then that's even more interesting to me. My first lithographs were a

complete disaster in college. Every sheet was black. Because lithography, if you don't work it just right with the chemicals, you get nothing but black instead of an image. Well, it was ironic that years later I became very known for my lithographs. These are the kinds of paradoxes, also, that I love and also the fact that life is—and should be—a surprise, always. And although change is hard for all human beings, the artist early on realizes that that is what is going to be motivating, is going to be interesting. And I in a way believe that everything . . . there's no [meeting, meaning] by accident, that in a way we're dealt a certain hand, but there are different ways to play that. We have free will within a very limited second. And so either we do it or we don't. I don't believe in excuses because there *are* no excuses. Excuses satisfy only those who make them, as they say. You simply do it. You don't complain, you don't whine, you don't cry. You just do it or don't do it. And that's, very simply, the way that I have approached, I guess, my life.

And in a way I guess I feel that people tend to make traps for themselves and make life difficult. And it is difficult in a certain level, but it can be very simple once you decide what your priorities are and decide that that's what you want to do. Whether it's getting up at a certain time, or not getting up at a certain time. For instance, I answer my phone between ten and twelve, and I tell everyone that because I'm not going to have the phone be the master. The phone is there for *my* use. And yet people, if they want to contact me, I usually answer at that time. I think that once you look at every element and make a decent, intelligent decision about how you are going to work with that element it makes things quite easy. If you don't want to see people you shouldn't have to see people.

PK: Let me interrupt you, because you're in a way. . . . Of course, I may be interrupting you too soon and you were on your way to something. In a sense it's evading my exact question, because what I find happening is that you come back to talking about how art enriches *your* life, benefits your life—what the making of art and the life of an artist means for you—which is great because you are the subject. But the question here was following up this notion that art can . . . that the effect, then, can be shared with others, and so my question would be this, once again: how do you see your own art and perhaps activity as an artist then spreading out? And I mean this specifically. Let's take a subject. The Martyrs, for instance. And I understand, you know, I'm not simplistic. I realize it's not just the subject that we're talking about. It's much more than that. But just to focus on a specific, and then try to reach out to an audience, to the viewers of your work. How do you, Fritz Scholder, through your art impact, ideally or hopefully, these viewers? And how then can some sort of transformation be brought about?

FS: Well, very. . . . Yes, yes. Let's take the Martyrs. Every subject that I decide to paint—and sometimes it's just a single painting but in most cases it becomes a series—is simply a natural interest and feeling that I have at that particular time. It's all autobiographical. The Martyr series, very simply, came about. . . . And here again I didn't even really think about it. I like to just . . . it almost surprises *me*. But slowly I realized the world was getting very strange indeed. Borders were changing, for instance, rapidly. And, in fact, before the Martyrs was a short series called Borders. And one of the strangest series that I've ever done, but I was very much aware of the world changing. And also ethics changing. All kinds of things for. . . . About five years ago, maybe, was when I was really feeling all kinds of strange differences. And the artist, of course, I think is dictated by his times, but in some way must make those things personal. The Martyr thing . . . I started to feel like a martyr. Because also I had gotten to that point in my life where I was appearing in art history books, things that I had no idea were being done about me because I had become public domain. And people were saying things, writing things, somewhat continually about me. Even more than before. For some reason I've always seemed to have gotten a lot of publicity. I've never sought it out. People come to me. But it had gotten to be a bit vicious, because I realized that gossip had become a big thing at the end of the eighties, and there was this kind of voyeuristic and negative nineties thing along with paranoia of AIDS and everything else. And I have always had a certain reputation, I guess—and again I'm always surprised—of being. . . . Many people have, I guess, a feeling that I don't live an orthodox life. And when I'm asked questions. . . . I truly am a sexual person, for instance, and I have never lived necessarily within the confines of that, and all that. . . .

PK: You mean in terms of conventional domestic relationships?

FS: Conventional relationships, yes. I mentioned that I had many realities at one time and had, you know, friends all over in different parts of the country or the world.

PK: You mean lovers?

FS: Lovers, yes. Because this is the energy of the artist. I mean, it's. . . .

PK: Well, that's that sexuality that we were. . . .

FS: Yes, of course. This is a main thrust, if you will, because it just is, especially. . . . Well, I don't know, I mean I hate to make generalizations, but all I know is that all of that. . . . People were just focusing in on me a little more than I wanted because of this voyeuristic. . . . And you can see the television programs and all. Even the newspaper here in town has a gossip column, of all things, and my name appears even if I go to a concert of—

who's these crazy guys—Teller and. . . . Well, there are some funny guys. . . . It doesn't matter. Wherever I appear then I see "Fritz Scholder was seen in the audience." Well, you do become somewhat paranoid, because what does that. . . . You know, who cares? I just like to. . . . I don't mind the celebrity as long as it doesn't get into personal realms.

PK: Well, just as an example, specifically what are you talking about? Do you mean that there were news items locally, perhaps impugning your morality, digging into your personal life, making assumptions, and then judgments? You were being judged in the press?

FS: Well, yes, it was, of course a subtle innuendoes type of. . . . A number of years ago—just a *couple* of years ago—I was pictured on the cover of *Phoenix* magazine with several other people. . . . What was it? Something like "Legends in their own minds," or some weird thing. [laughs] But then, inside, it tells that I am this sexual person, or known as a wild sexual person or something. Well, again, I think that some things really shouldn't be printed. I think there should be a certain privacy. And yet today there's no privacy. We know about the President's operations or anything else. . . .

PK: Right, right.

FS: . . . but the artist has become a celebrity. And in a way this might be good or bad. Every small town now has an art center. Even my little town of Wahpeton, North Dakota, has an art center, believe it or not. And, so, the times have changed; some of the elements are good, some are bad. But here I found myself in a context that was getting very personal. And just recently there was something about . . . that was really just not, I thought, fair at all. Talking about. . . . In fact, using the word "concubine," which is absolutely not only an antiquated word but it really had nothing to do with anything. But here it is in the paper.

PK: This was recently?

FS: Yes, it was just recently.

PK: So this must be talking about. . . .

FS: [laughs] And, you know, this really. . . . I don't really mind what people say but when they start talking about other people in reference to me, you know it can be hurtful or it can be difficult. But nowadays there is very little ethics. And, so the Martyr series. . . . And I didn't walk in the studio and think, "Oh God, I feel like a martyr. I'm going to do martyrs." I was reading and doing research on medieval times. I've always been interested in torture—the implements as well as the concepts behind it. And of martyrdom. It all just came together in the most natural way, and I started to do the Martyr series. When you do any subject, as I mentioned before, it's kind of a cliché simply because we are much more sophisticated now than ever. But with that is a great challenge to . . . you must do. . . . Every painting is. . . . You paint for yourself, and you have to be excited about not only the subject but how the painting comes out. The colors, I'm constantly trying different colors because one color by itself isn't very interesting. It's that dialogue of adding more colors to that one color that things start to happen. And I've always been a colorist. To me, color is what makes painting. But you work with all of the elements. You push yourself as far as keeping open. Hopefully, getting more abstract, in my case, because I think most artists tend to tighten up and maybe get too literal. I believe that a good painting must have mystery. And because, again, my ideas of life is such a mystery. So all of that, you see, can be put into it. Once it's done then. . . . The artist can only come half way, again, and then the viewer has to come the other half.

PK: What would you hope—again, specifically in connection with the Martyrs—what would you hope might be a response?

FS: Well, I don't hope for anything, to tell you the truth. I put it out there. I make it for myself, and then either I destroy it or I put it out in the public. Now, the public can do whatever they want with it and you can never control any of that. You can't control who acquires it, for instance. Some galleries have tried; in fact, some galleries do. To me that is just very bad. It goes out, and, hopefully, if it has any value, some people will respond. I guess the main thing is, hopefully they will respond even if they hate it. That's a response that people have come up and said to me, in fact, introduced themselves and said, "You know I really don't like your work." And I always say, "Thank you." Because I made them respond, I don't care. And really truly if it will shake somebody up or make someone even think for one minute a little more about the subject, or wonder, "Well, who is Lilith?" Another series. It was surprising to realize that most people had no idea that Lilith was Adam's first wife before Eve.

So there's all these different levels that I'm very interested in as doing the painting. I put it out there and it is often very, very touching how people respond and come up to me years later, or maybe the very next day or the moment they see it, and they have tears in their eyes. Now that's when the power of art becomes a reality. People, I've always contended, to acquire a piece of art should be a love affair. It must be something you see that you immediately fall in love with, you know you must possess, you must own it, you must live with it for the

rest of your life.

PK: Fritz, now I think we're into interesting territory here. And of course it's the kind of discussion that could go on and on. [both chuckle] But with the time we have left on this side of the tape I'm interested in the notion of

audience response—not because you're obliged to think about it, but because of things that you've said about the possible role of art and the artist. And it's pretty slippery stuff because, you're right, you just have to do what you do and put it out there. And there's no question that there can be a response to a work of art strictly within the aesthetic realm which requires absolutely no familiarity with the circumstances of its creation or, [let's say], the martyr. I didn't know anything about this aspect. I find it very interesting. Frankly, I will look at the Martyr series now quite differently. But it raises a very fundamental problem because. . . . And the question is this: To what extent does a narrative, or personalism, or autobiography, or the intention—artistic intent—play a role in response to the work of art? The, shall we say, life of the work of art once it goes out there? Well, that's a big question, but do you have some thoughts?

FS: Well, here again, I have to go back to, I guess, the paradox. I often have made the statement that I don't make statements. I don't ever state that my work is narrative. I try to transcend the subject—which in itself is an oxymoron. But on the other hand, of course, I fully understand that the minute I choose a brush or a tube of paint in whatever color, I'm making a statement. I'm making a statement how I position the, if it's a figure, the human figure, on to the canvas. And the mood of the painting is going to depend greatly on what colors I decide to use. I play God, truly. If I put down a purple sky and I don't like it I can make it orange. Again, so many levels of the creative process, and that is what the artist is interested in. It is the activity and the process of challenging oneself to in some way make a statement—or an object, or whatever you want to call it—that will hopefully be yours as far as some kind of uniqueness, that will conceivably put a message—it may be very abstract, and that's fine. You do all that you can within each individual work, and in a way you just throw it out there and. . . . But, of course, the response from others can be very interesting indeed, and, again, I have to go back. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: A continuing interview with Fritz Scholder, this is session three, tape three, side one. Fritz, please pick up where you were.

FS: As I was saying, I don't worry or even consider the reaction of the viewer, when all is said and done, because I have to be excited for whatever result happens. If I'm not, it *is* destroyed. And I destroy many works, even years later, if I happen to find them around. But on the other hand it's always surprising to me the different reactions that can come about. In the seventies, when I started the Indian series, the gallery literally had to have armed guards at the door because of the reaction of the militant Indian group AIM [American Indian Movement], and for a number of years in Santa Fe there were armed guards at my openings. Art is very powerful. And you can manipulate many different things. I remember one large Indian portrait that I once did. . . . And with the Indian thing, here again, I was intent on going past the cliches and pushing people's idea about the subject. I once did an Indian standing in front of an Eiffel Tower, and people might have thought that I was using my imagination. I wasn't. There are old photographs of the Indian chiefs being photographed around the Eiffel Tower when Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show arrived in Paris. But this particular portrait was of an Indian chief, and one eye is clouded over and it was simply titled "Indian with Glaucoma." It was a beautiful painting—great luscious colors—and no one would buy it. And I had titled it very consciously, because this is part of Indians and some of their problems, just as I had done a painting of an Indian and a cat. And this sounds terribly trivial, and it probably is but I'm probably the first person in all of art history to do a painting of an Indian with a cat. Now there have been many paintings of Indians with dogs. But no one, no non-Indian realized that Indians love cats. And that caused a stir, believe it or not. I was the first one to do an Indian wrapped in the American flag. That caused a stir. I was the first one to do Indians holding an umbrella. And of course there since have been hundreds of paintings by many different people on all of these subjects, but I was the first one. And I think that art is the vehicle for putting forth and fighting clichés, which we all fall into. And here was a beautiful portrait of an Indian chief, but because of that title it took five years before it was sold. And it to me was an inside joke, in a way, because, so what, you can have any title on. At times I think one shouldn't have a title, and yet you have to have it for classification. And I think that if you're going to have a title you could help the viewer a little, give him a little clue. I know of artists who put titles that actually do the opposite for the viewer. It confuses them even more, and sometimes artists want that. And here again it's up to the individual; it's his work. I came back to the Indian. When I did, I simply titled all the paintings *Red*. Of course, the Europeans have always considered [it] the "red race," opposed to the Indians of India. It, I felt, was simply all that I needed to say. I don't particularly like the term "Native American." I don't like the term "American Indian," which is. . . . American from a second-rate explorer, Vespucci, and Indian, of course a mistake completely, thinking it was India.

PK: Right.

FS: So, you see, words—just as paint—are very powerful, and there's a lot you can do with them. And I am very aware of my titles. I try not to say much. They're often terse, and yet I do feel a certain responsibility also in not leading the viewer astray. So even though I will say that I am not interested in the reaction of the viewer, the paradox is that *of course* I'm interested. I'm interested. . . . I often when friends appear at the openings—and mainly because what can you say?—I will ask, "Well, look around and tell me which one you like the best." You know, [that] kind of thing. This includes them immediately. The artist is requesting that. And it's not even that. . . . Well, I'm interested and yet I'm not. But sometimes you come back with very interesting reactions. Everything. . . . I've had many people start crying on the spot when they come up to certain paintings. I've had people get mad—literally. I've had people truly verbally accost me in public at openings. And all of this I think is fine, because it shows to me that I got to them.

PK: Let's talk about this a bit. It's difficult to understand, necessarily, the source of an emotional response, and it could be tied to aesthetics and so forth. That's one level. But something you can deal with more directly within a historical sense is a political response that arouses emotion. I think it's important that you tell me—or tell us—about this aspect of the reception of your art. Specifically, the Indian subjects, and I guess specifically one exhibition—at least that started it—where AIM. . . . Well, you tell me. There was obviously a strong response.

FS: Well, very simply, I knew when I started the Indian series that it was a loaded subject. It was a no-win subject and it was a national guilt. And so it was a subject that had tremendous baggage with it. And then for me to abstract the subject. . . . Truly, I was so surprised at the outrage—immediate outrage—especially in Santa Fe, and. . . .

PK: That's where the exhibition was?

FS: That was one of the first exhibitions, yes. But reaction was all over the country, actually. It soon spread that I was doing ugly—quotations—"ugly" paintings of Indians. I was demeaning the Indian. I was doing this and that. I remember one of the top collectors here in Scottsdale whom I had never met—I knew the name—but word gets through, and at a cocktail party he said, "Scholder is just destroying a subject that is so dear to my heart." And he was one of the top collectors of the traditional Indian painting. And so about a year later I happened to be in Scottsdale at a party and met him. And of course he was cordial, and he didn't know that I had heard what he had said. But to make a long story short he did a complete about-face and is now one of my most ardent collectors. He has written about me in *Arizona Highways* as the painter that changed everything for the good in the subject. He's my attorney now.

And this is what I like. Where people—this has happened so often—at first when they see the work don't think they like it. But they can't get it out of their minds. They'll go back to it. Finally, they'll do a complete turnabout and become *ardent* collectors and *friends*. People that truly were put off by the subject. And I contend that politics and art don't mix. And ironically I'm in Mondale's book, *Art and Politics*, and in many other books about that. But, here again, it's the paradox: Of course it's political and yet I'm really an apolitical person. I don't do anything, as far as voting, until they abolish the electoral college. To me it just makes no sense and no one's going to do it, because everyone comes in on it. On the other hand, I have been known to give a edition of lithographs to Bruce Babbitt, simply because I think he's a bright guy who happens to be in politics. I don't even care what, he's Republican or Democrat. And I've helped other politicians if I feel that they're good men. Just as I've benefited, I benefit so many organizations from the Santa Fe Opera to the National AIDS, national Alzheimers. I can go down the list. I mean, I do believe an artist has that responsibility. But on the other hand I really say that I don't make any statements. I'm not political because, you see, this would then put pressure, it seems to me, on my role and position, which I have fought so desperately for for so many years, of being free.

PK: But, Fritz, fact of the matter is, you're a creature of your time.

FS: Of course.

PK: And you're living in an era where art is nothing if not political. And we can bemoan that situation but that's our culture. That _____ [police, with] us.

FS: Generally, I am against, I am actually against most political art today.

PK: [You aren't alone.]

FS: And for the reason in that it is heavy-handed. What happens is, if you're going to do something political. . . . And there's so many great works—I think of Goya's [*Capriccios, Caprichos*] and so forth. It's not that it's a bad subject at all. But the problem, especially in today's art, [is] there's so much political art that just knocks you over the head, is absolutely no mystery, no nothing. And of course now artists just put words, which to me is a cop-out, to put words on a canvas. I mean, okay write it on the page, but I don't want to see words on a painting. I'm sorry. That to me is complete stupidity. And you have top artists doing this, whether in words in neon or whatever. And I really have no patience for almost ninety-nine percent of the political art, which makes up a

great amount of the art.

PK: Nonetheless this inevitably conditions or frames at least one response to your work, and it's effective then. . . . Well, it has an effect *on* you. What's the situation now in terms of your own relationship to Indian groups? Is this something that's sort of past now, this anger that I gather was. . . .

FS: Well, there is still a militant movement, and I have publicly said that it does more disservice and harm than anything else, for the American Indian does not need that. And as I told you last night about the building of the Department of the Interior is still locked—locked to the public. Which is very curious indeed because of the Indian takeover in Washington many, many years ago—almost twenty years ago now. It is still a sad situation, because I think that no one really knows what's happening. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is not even functioning, hardly, and have given the powers now to the tribal councils of the different existing tribes. . . .

PK: It sounds like the Republican agenda!

PK: . . . well, it's the biggest mistake in the world because they just fight among themselves, and they don't have the expertise to govern themselves unfortunately. And, as I mentioned, all of the tribes hate each other anyway, so there's no pan-Indian thing—not that there should be. And I have always had a perspective and position away from the American Indian, simply because I've never been one. I am not an Indian in any sense of the word. You're probably more Indian than I am. Simply because, you see. . . .

PK: I thought you were one-quarter.

FS: [chuckles] I grew up as a non-Indian.

PK: Yes, I understand.

FS: And this is what counts. . . .

PK: Is your experience.

FS: . . . because every Indian person has a very particular upbringing, and this upbringing has to do with their idea about the non-Indian, and I don't have any of that baggage because I identify completely with the non-Indian. I have a German name, I am three-quarters non-Indian, and so I happened in a very peculiar way to get involved with the Indian, and I'm proud of my one-quarter heritage but it really means nothing, because how can you be anything if you're one-quarter? And I've found. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

FS: . . . still a major critic of the so-called Indian Art Movement, and I don't even know what that is. I guess simply it is art done by Indians, but even they don't seem to know what is an Indian. And there's been legislation in New Mexico on "what is an Indian." Every state and tribe differs. It truly is a mess more than ever because nobody knows what to do. But I don't socialize with Indian people. There's been, I think, a backlash. The Institute really was the beginning of a whole new resurgence, and now, however, the writing is that the Institute did very little and that the young Indian artists today put down the Institute and the faculty—and myself especially—as not being important to it, which is, you know, who cares? At this point, I have my own agenda—always have, actually. And here again it is a strange paradox because I am listed in all kinds of references to the American Indian and probably still am a role model, and I have benefited. . . . Just a couple of years ago, the Phoenix Indian Center—the largest in the Southwest—honored me at a black tie affair. In fact, it was interesting. They had been doing dinners honoring different top Indian people, and when they came to me, I had known about what they did and it was okay but it wasn't very. . . . It was okay. And so I made a few demands. I said, "Well, I would be open to that, but first of all it would have to be black tie." And they just about fainted. Well, I did that because, here again, I believe that the American Indian has to become dignified and in a way be even better or just as good as anyone else. And before they were selling trinkets beforehand to raise some money as the people came in to this dinner. It was any kind of dress you wanted, and this was supposed to be one of the big honored dinners, annually, anywhere in the country. And they accepted that. They said, "Okay," you know, "what else would you like?" I said, "Get rid of all that stuff that you sell in the beginning. I will be happy to give you a number of different Indian-image posters which you make a nice exhibit and do a silent auction. They'll be signed and so forth and make just as much money, if not more, but have it distinguished."

So I do my bit, I feel. I'm constantly being called and interviewed and so forth. And in a way I pretty much have said everything I need to say about the subject. But on the other. . . . But it's not that I in anyway am running away from it or evading it. It's simply not part of my life. I once in a while. . . . Well, I can't even say that. I haven't been to the Heard Museum at an exhibition for years. Now there's other reasons. I'm at war with the Heard Museum, I must confess. But I'm at war with the Phoenix Art Museum and the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, too. So. . . .

PK: That pretty well covers it. [laughs]

FS: [laughing] Right, I mean. . . . But that is part of being an artist.

PK: Well, and also being an individual, and I have just two more questions that very much relate to this, I think. And I certainly don't want to sit here trying to put you in a box. I think you appreciate that. But nonetheless you have to a certain degree been put in this box anyway. And it has to do with identity, everything is identity. But there were two things that we've actually talked about already, and last night at dinner I was very interested in the story you told. . . . Well, you told several stories about your friend, Charlie. Charlie. . . . What was his last name?

FS: Charles Loloma.

PK: Loloma? How do you spell that.

FS: L-o-l-o-m-a.

PK: Okay. And he sounded like a wonderful character, and I wish we could tell the various anecdotes, but he seemed to be a paradigm in some ways of a certain kind of Indian artist, creative person, but very much—I don't know if you used the term "wild" or "innocent"—but falling into almost a romantic notion. Certainly not like you, because you're very sophisticated and worldly in other ways. But you told one story about a conference, a gathering, at Princeton University. . . .

FS: Oh, yes.

PK: . . . and to me this tells a lot.

FS: Well, very simply, Charles Loloma. . . . After meeting him I realized that he was the epitome of the kind of person that all American Indians are nowadays—simply that they have to live in a dichotomy. But Charles was truly an example of a person who early on took a Dale Carnegie course, was sent by do-gooders to the East to go to college, thrown into a very different atmosphere from his very traditional village on Hopi. And in fact as an adult became a snake priest, the most esoteric and mysterious type of individual who literally lives with the snakes weeks before the Snake Dance, and yet who produced very sophisticated jewelry. He was the first to put gold and turquoise and coral together. And almost every Indian artist who's a jeweler today is very influenced by Charles Loloma.

[chuckles] But the story I told was of a conference held at Princeton in 1971 called the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars, which was an oxymoron to start with. There never was any other conference, but this was touted as the first one. And it was at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Thought, and great money had been put into it with cameras and video, everything following us around as the delegates came in from all over the country. They brought every top Indian person there was, everybody from Buffy St. Marie to LaDonna Harris, who at one point later ran for vice president of the United States, to you name it. But it was quite a conglomeration, and we realized at the end, at the last session, we were to make or prepare statements in regard to what had happened as far as conclusions after many meetings and gatherings. Well, everyone was on their good behavior the first day, but after that it pretty much became just a crazy party [laughs] because it just was. . . . It wasn't organized that well and no one realized that with Indian people, especially, they have to have everything down black and white, or they're just not going to do anything. And so to make a long story short the last session in the morning came about before everyone was to disband, and there were many empty seats—I'm sure because of the night before. But most of the delegates tried to make it back to that last session. And when whoever was leading this thing called the meeting to order, he asked if there was anyone who would like to volunteer and make the first statement from all of this experience and rhetoric that went on. Well, it was just quiet, and no one was able to even, I think, conjure up any thoughts early in the morning after the late nights that everyone was having. And it was very embarrassing, because here was the culmination of this grand concept that somebody had thought of, to have a convocation of American Indian Scholars. So Charles Loloma is sitting next to me and he was half asleep in fact, but I realized that I didn't want to save the day. But Charles was very good at coming out with Dale Carnegie training and so I nudged him. And he woke up and I said, "Get up and say something." Which he did. He got up and all the cameras swung over to view him. Everyone looked. And he stood there, and at first he seemed catatonic and I thought, "Uh-oh, this is worse than just having silence." But then all of sudden he spoke, and he said, "The sun can't get to the earth no more," and sat down. And there was a big silence. And all of sudden everyone burst into tremendous applause at that statement. And in his own way he said something that could be taken as either profound or absolutely off the wall. [chuckles] But it in a way showed again to me. . . . And, you see, I've always been an outsider for any group. I've always felt as the stranger—and certainly with the American Indian, because I just. . . . In fact, it was often hard for me to identify many times. But here I realized that this was pretty much the essence. And that's what the Princeton, what they got out of it. [chuckles]

PK: It seems then a perfect sort of finale to this subject, because it can't be resolved. But if I take your meaning or the meaning, the true meaning of this anecdote, is that these groups—and in this case, the American Indian—are going to in some ways require a special world view, perhaps. That these aphorisms can, because they seem somehow tied to the mysteries of the past or tradition, can stand for the substance. Even though they themselves perhaps don't have any idea what old Charlie was saying. But because it *sounds* like the wisdom of the tribes, it becomes that, and where do you go from there?

FS: Right, it's a strange situation indeed. And, of course, the whole time is in a way very confusing. You talk about the "information highway." In many ways we know less than, conceivably, past cultures. If you believe that the Atlanteans actually communicated by telepathy, you realize that speaking is very primitive. But it's all relative. But identification is certainly important for any human being, and I guess this is why I am probably ultra-sensitive to the fact that I was mislabeled an Indian artist in the seventies—with good cause, because here I was part Indian, teaching at an Indian art school, starting a new series based on Indian subjects. There was reason for confusion. But I have never been confused simply because I know who I am. . . .

[End of interview]

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