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Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Morris Broderson,
1998 March 11 and 13**

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Morris Broderson on March 11, 1998. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, 1998

MB: Morris Broderson

JA: Joan Ankrum

PK: Paul Karlstrom

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Morris Broderson, the painter, on March 11, 1998, at the artist's studio in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles. This is a first session, tape one. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. A special note on this interview: Morris Broderson has been deaf, I believe from birth. So it's congenital deafness and is almost completely hearing-impaired, and so this is an experiment to do this kind of oral history. To facilitate this process, Morris's dear, long-time friend and, for a long time also, art dealer, representative, Joan Ankrum, is sitting with us and we will have a three-way conversation. This interview with Morris is following up on, I think, three sessions of interview that I did with Joan.

So this tells us who's here and I would like to start in what I think will be the best possible way. Since we've been talking with you, Joan, we have your recollections of, well, among other things, your connection with Morris, and what I would like to do is pick up there and perhaps you can start it by just very briefly recapping how you two met and then, very quickly, I would like us to then ask Morris questions about the meeting of you two and those early days, how he remembers that. So bear with us, transcriber and listener, but we will see this through. So, Joan, why don't you just, again, revisit the circumstances of you two meeting.

JA: Morris came into my life very early in his life and comparatively early in mine. Morris was only fourteen years old when I first met him. The occasion that brought this about was when I was introduced to him by my then-husband, whose name was Morris Ankrum. And Morris Broderson was his sister's child, and so my husband introduced me to him and I was very moved by the fact that he was completely deaf but his personality was such that I was very much charmed with him. But then what transpired was that he had no place to live at that time and he came to live with us in our home in Altadena, near Pasadena.

And it was there that I discovered his talent when he did a little pencil drawing of me. And I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw this beautifully executed pencil drawing, and I was so taken with this drawing that I thought, "Well, something has to be done. I have to find some help for him because of his deafness." So I sought a teacher for him and was not able to find anybody that was willing to take on the instruction of somebody who was born deaf. He was born with embryonic nerves in his ears. So I began working with him myself. We sat on the floor and did little drawings, using as reference [Kimon] Nicolaïdes' book called *The Natural Way to Draw*. And that was really the beginning of our association, and he progressed to such a point that his drawings were so good that I thought, "Well, we have to find some instruction, some professional instruction." So a kind of bond was formed at that time.

PK: How old was he when you met, again?

JA: He was fourteen.

PK: Fourteen.

JA: And at that time I was about twenty-seven.

PK: And, Morris, you were born. . . .

MB: 1928.

PK: 1928. November. . . .

MB: November fourth.

PK: Okay.

JA: Um. . . .

PK: Is that it for now? To get us started, do you think?

JA: It's a start.

PK: All right, Morris, Joan has been briefly telling the story of when she met you . . .

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: . . . when you were fourteen.

MB: Yes.

PK: Can you tell us your memory of meeting Joan . . .

MB: Yes.

PK: . . . and your early years?

MB: At that time, when I met her for the first time, she talked to me very well, and also I realized that she cared about art. That moved me so I drew something to show her. She said, "No," and showed me the drawing by students in a book [The Natural Way to Draw]. Free-line, in the form, round, and round. So I followed, listened to her, what she said. I tried to see what she meant, so I did it. I drew more. She said, "That's it." She felt that I had the feeling in drawing.

PK: A feeling for drawing.

MB: Yes, meaningful drawing, better and better. Then she called [the director of the Pasadena Art Museum] to make an appointment to meet the art teacher in Pasadena [at the Pasadena Art Institute]. . . .

PK: An art teacher? Yes.

MB: . . . when I was fourteen years old. And lucky for me to study with the teacher. He was a wonderful art teacher. His name was Francis de Erdeley.

PK: De Erdeley, um-hmm.

MB: Wonderful teacher. Perfect.

PK: And you were fourteen years old then?

MB: Fourteen years old.

PK: And he was teaching in Pasadena?

MB: Yes.

PK: Can you tell us about your first classes with de Erdeley?

MB: First class?

JA: The first classes.

MB: At night.

PK: At night-time?

MB: Yeah. This teacher realized that I'm deaf, so he wrote down on the paper to tell me what to do with my work, the drawing, you know, the line, and I learned something was wrong with that.

JA: Because he couldn't. . . . He was also Hungarian. He spoke with an accent.

PK: Oh, my.

JA: And so with the combination of Morris's lack of hearing and de Erdeley's accent. . . .

PK: In other words, he probably wouldn't have understood him.

JA: [chuckles] No, that's right. So he would have to indicate by his own drawings what he wanted Morris to understand.

PK: So would he correct your drawing? He would say, "Oh, like. . . ."

MB: Yes. Right on my drawing paper. [De Erdeley would correct on the margin edge of the paper, not right on the drawing]

PK: Right on your paper?

MB: Yes. So he started working like that. Then I saw what he meant. After that, then he looked at it again, and said, "That's better."

PK: And so he encouraged you?

MB: Yes, he encouraged me.

PK: He felt you were improving?

MB: Yes. I wanted to prove that I can improve more.

JA: That was just the first lesson. The second lesson, de Erdeley looked at his drawings, and he was absolutely astonished.

PK: Well, let's see if Morris remembers that.

JA: Yes!

PK: Because, Joan, you already told us about that.

JA: Yeah.

PK: Joan is talking about the second session, and do you remember anything special about that second session? Did something special happen for you with your teacher?

MB: Yes. Professor de Erdeley sees that my work is better but he did not tell me.

PK: Oh, he didn't?

MB: He did not want to spoil me. He did not want me to have a big head.

PK: Uh-huh. Well. . . .

MB: But I would not do that [get a big head], even if he told me, but he didn't tell me.

PK: But did he tell anybody? Oh, did he tell Joan?

MB: Yes.

PK: But she didn't tell you?

MB: No. [Not for several years.]

PK: Ah-h-h. She didn't want you to have a big head.

MB: Yes. But I never once felt I was good enough.

PK: You never did have a big head?

MB: No, no, right. My heart asked me to be true to myself, what is in my heart.

PK: Um-hmm. Well, I think that, if I may say so, that this is a quality in your art that other people see and they respond to—that there is this feeling that comes from your heart, not only the head and eyes.

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: How long did you study there in Pasadena with de Erdeley? [One and a half years]

MB: Not only in Pasadena. He told me go to USC during summertime. During summertime during my vacation from School for the Deaf. So he told me go to USC to study in art class through summertime, when he saw that my work is a lot better. Asked me to forget high school, go to USC and with him from now on. "Would I like that?" he asked me.

PK: Study?

MB: I said, "I would like it!"

JA: He said, "Leave junior high. Go right into USC."

PK: Oh. And it was possible?

JA: He made it possible.

PK: Oh. And you were how old when you went to USC?

MB: Fourteen.

PK: Still fourteen?

JA: Yeah.

MB: During the summertime.

JA: Yeah, the summertime. But then. . . .

MB: That's the fall I'm fifteen.

JA: By the fall.

PK: Very young to go to college.

JA: Yeah, yes.

MB: That's how. I was young.

JA: It was through de Erdeley's concern about his having instruction. He knew that Morris didn't have the academic credits. But with his cooperation he convinced USC that it was [imperative because Morris was an extraordinary talent].

PK: This was a talented. . . .

JA: Yeah, that this was very important for him [to continue study at USC].

PK: Perhaps because you were deaf, USC then viewed this as, well, an exceptional case.

MB: Well, then I went to USC art school, a special art class where Professor de Erdeley taught.

PK: I see. So, did you finish USC?

MB: Yes, four years.

PK: So you have. . . .

MB: Nothing.

PK: . . . you have a B.A.? Bachelor's degree?

MB: No, because I did not finish high school, so there were no diplomas for me from high school.

JA: Never got a master's degree.

PK: No, but what about a bachelor?

JA: No. He doesn't even know what that is. But, anyway, he. . . .

PK: Well, when you. . . .

MB: But I had grades, an A, B, C, D, F, and mine is always A in Art.

JA: He's talking about grades.

MB: Yeah. That's all.

PK: But you did finish?

MB: Four years. [MB never graduated from high school, but had one year in high school in Pasadena]

PK: At USC did you take anything besides art classes?

JA: You had art history.

PK: Art history.

MB: Yes.

JA: Speech. English.

MB: Speech. Diction.

JA: He had some English.

MB: Yes. Speech class.

JA: English. How to speak.

MB: Yes. A teacher who taught me how to talk. How to pronounce words.

PK: Not that degrees matter that much, but I was curious. You don't know, Joan, if he actually has a college degree?

JA: I guess. . . . You never had a degree? A diploma?

MB: No.

JA: Never did.

PK: Oh, well. It doesn't matter, here you are. Here we are.

MB: Never had it.

PK: Okay. So, what do you remember. . . . Let's go back a little bit again to when you first met Joan. She encouraged you in your art—no question about that—but what about. . . . I gather that

she took a very special interest in you and became like your own aunt—or I don't want to say mother—but sort of. . . .

JA: Well, you tell him how you felt about me.

PK: How did you feel about Joan when. . . .

MB: I was very fond of Joan—very, very much. And she told me other things, and I watch her arrange the flowers, put in the vase, watch her do with the flowers for the balance—you know, for painting, her _____ for the furniture, something more like art. I learn a lot from her. It was easy for me to learn from her. It was so clear to me what to do with things for painting.

PK: And how to arrange them.

MB: Yes, like still life.

PK: What about. . . .

MB: She also told me about the colors, cold colors and warm colors.

PK: So Joan was your first art teacher?

MB: Yes, very much like art teacher before she brought me to meet de Erdeley. Very much like teacher.

PK: Then she should have a degree from an art school.

JA: [laughs]

PK: Morris, what about the years before you met Joan? What were they like for you? You were isolated. You couldn't hear. What was your life like?

MB: Well, I was seven. I used white chalk, drawing [like, white] drawing. In school for the deaf in the Berkeley, I drew every day.

PK: So you were in a school for the deaf?

MB: Yeah. In Berkeley.

PK: In Berkeley?

MB: School for the deaf.

PK: I think that's a famous one.

JA: Yes, it is.

MB: Yes.

PK: Very famous, and there was a famous artist—[Douglas] Tilden, I think, the sculptor.

MB: Yeah, there was a sculpture, Eating with the Bear.

PK: Yeah, that's right. But do you remember what it was like for you at that time, before you had

made a special friend to help you? What was it like being in this world. . . .

MB: I was not unhappy. I went up to the mountain to go swimming.

JA: What was life . . .

MB: Life?

JA: . . . how did you feel about your life before we met? How did you feel about your life?

MB: Fine, fine. No trouble with my parents, no.

PK: No problem with them?

MB: No. I was deaf, but I wanted to learn to talk.

PK: Um-hmm.

MB: No, but they were not perfect, no.

PK: No. Well. Did you have. . . .

MB: But I wanted to learn to talk very much.

PK: But you had friends then, and other children. . . .

MB: Yes, up in the mountains where my mother lived in Cedar Pine Park.

PK: Where's Cedar Pine Park?

JA: Near Big Bear [California].

[Interruption in taping]

PK: After this very short break, a water break, we're picking up again. Morris, you were telling us about your years before you met Joan. You make it sound as if it was all very happy. No problems at all.

MB: No, right.

PK: No problems?

MB: No, no problem.

PK: Okay. Everything was fine with your family? With your parents?

MB: Yes.

PK: Okay.

MB: But my parents didn't talk to me, didn't explain things to help me understand.

PK: They don't talk to you?

MB: No. When I was a very small child I look at the people that were talking and I thought, "It should be like this when I'm a man."

PK: You didn't know. . . .

MB: No, _____ talk, like people do.

PK: But nobody . . . you had no way to ask? Oh, how poignant.

JA: He didn't know. . . . That's why I say, when you say, was he happy. . . .

MB: I did not feel sorry for myself, but I look at the people and they're talking, "Am I going to be like this is all my life? No. I'm going to talk."

PK: And so you. . . . See, you thought that some day at age twelve or sixteen or twenty . . .

MB: Yes.

PK: . . . that all of a sudden you would be able to talk. Very interesting.

MB: Well, I would listen and talk to my mother with my voice.

PK: You did?

MB: But I did not talk that well. Very bad.

PK: But you tried. . . .

MB: I thought I talked well, but no.

PK: Did she talk back?

MB: No. But she talked to me, yes. But not how to pronounce. Joan taught me how to pronounce. If I didn't pronounce, she would tell me. She still does now. Yes.

JA: [laughing] I still tell him how to pronounce [and explain the meaning of the words—JA].

PK: You still do. Well, it's obvious that you two, after all of these years, still have a very, very close . . .

MB: Yes, very close.

PK: . . . friendship. In fact, for a time you were living in the same building, in your place on Orange Street?

JA: Orange Street. . . . Orange Drive.

PK: Orange Drive. Not far from here. Not too far from here.

JA: Well, we lived in the same building . . .

PK: Yeah, but I mean not too. . . .

JA: . . . but before that for a while he lived with us in Altadena.

PK: Right. And now you live in Pasadena and Morris lives here in sort of the Hollywood area of Los Angeles. We're sitting in. . . . You have two apartments. Two apartments. One is this, your studio, and we're sitting surrounded by wonderful paintings and there's a new one with flowers on an easel, that you're working on now. And then across the courtyard—and this is a courtyard with all sorts of wonderful tropical trees—is your apartment where you live. So you have these two apartments. But it's been a long time since you and Joan haven't been together.

MB: Yes.

PK: This has been like three years? About three years? Yeah, since you. . . .

JA: Three years since we moved, since you moved here. Three years.

MB: Three years? I think so. Three years. Um-hmm.

JA: Yeah.

PK: And you, obviously, are working very regularly. How do you find it, though, being on your own?

MB: On my own? I love it.

PK: Do you?

MB: I love it. More like independence.

PK: And so you can go out. . . .

MB: But she's happy now. She is with Bob [Baumgarten].

JA: [chuckles]

PK: That's right. Well, everybody's happy. And then you still can get together very often.

MB: Right.

PK: I'm very interested in your relationship, and Joan in her interview told quite a bit about you two. In fact, Joan says that in many ways you became very much in a way the focus for her life.

JA: You became. . . . You made me a life. You changed my life.

MB: Yeah.

JA: You took me away from [Morrie], my husband. You opened my eyes to my condition which was unfortunate, in many ways. And he made me see. . . .

PK: Right, well, let's let. . . .

MB: _____

PK: You tell us about that. Joan has already told on tape. But it sounds like it was a very important time for her—a crucial time.

MB: Yes. Right.

PK: You played a very important role. Do you remember that? Do you remember what happened?

MB: Yes.

PK: Could you tell?

MB: Well, _____ for art, but other things no. [JA giggles]

PK: Yes, please go on. [chuckles]

MB: Morrie knew. Morrie was Joanie's husband. He knew _____, you know, so Morrie _____ for Joan. That's what he had me doing. And also he would hurt Joanie's feelings for no reason.

PK: He would hurt her feelings?

MB: Yes. I thought it was wrong.

PK: And you watched this, you saw this?

MB: Yes, I saw the whole thing. The written, I'm the only one. But other people saw, yes.

PK: What were you able to do to help Joan?

MB: Yes. Something like that. Good thing. I saw Morrie was very fond of another woman whom he liked very much. At that time Morrie thought I was blind, but no. I was like very good spy.

PK: You were a good spy?

MB: Wonderful spy.

PK: Wonderful spy.

MB: But I [think needed]. He shows to me that _____, because he thought I was blind. He thought I didn't know what love is, or sex.

PK: That you didn't know what love or sex were?

MB: I knew that time.

PK: How did you know that?

MB: Like everybody. _____ the animals, and they knew about sex.

PK: The who?

MB: The animals.

PK: Animals? Yes, I see. Okay.

MB: Same thing.

PK: Yeah. And you knew something was wrong.

MB: Morrie thought I did not know anything about sex, so he told me all about it. But I knew.

PK: He told you about it. That was very nice.

MB: He think sex was bad.

PK: That it was bad?

MB: Sex was. Sex is bad. He told me about how they do it. But I knew that.

PK: I didn't understand that. Did you?

JA: He said he told him about what people do in bed. Is that what you said?

MB: Yeah. How they do it.

JA: Yes, he thought Morris didn't understand about sex.

PK: Right, right. Why did he tell you? Why did he want to?

MB: Not blind to it. He thought I didn't know anything about other things. Nothing.

PK: And so was he trying to help you?

MB: Help me?

PK: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, but Joan trying to help me much different from Morrie. Much different. So then I saw the whole thing. I told Joan about Morrie, his love affair with a woman, the whole story, what I saw. When Morrie came home. Joan told him everything that I said. Of course, Morrie say "not true," but . . . impossible.

PK: Impossible?

MB: After Joan was finished, then Morrie came to me and said to me, "Thank you very much." I said, "For what?" You know. Oh, he was very, very upset, angry with me. He knew I was right. Now he knew that I'm not blind.

PK: What a way to find out.

MB: Too late.

PK: It seems interesting—although we're not going to analyze Morrie—it seems interesting that he was telling you about love and sex but then assuming, even with that, you wouldn't recognize what he was doing. That seems very bizarre, to me.

MB: it is.

PK: Very strange.

MB: It is.

JA: Well, he was a pretty—Morrie—strange man.

MB: Very, very. Very strange.

PK: Did you tell Joan, “Joan, he’s not treating you right”? Did you try to warn her? I mean, did you. . . .

MB: What Morrie did? No.

PK: Well, just. . . .

JA: He just told me the truth, that he was having an affair with my best friend. [laughs]

MB: Yeah.

PK: But he didn’t say, you know, “Joan, you’re a good person. You should get away.”

JA: No.

PK: He never gave you advice?

JA: No. You never told me to leave him.

MB: No, never.

JA: No, he never did.

MB: But I have to tell the truth.

JA: He had to tell me this.

MB: So that’s what I had to tell her—the truth about Morrie and the woman.

PK: Well, the result was. . . .

MB: I’m glad I did, because Joan become more like a woman than ever.

JA: I grew up.

MB: And _____.

PK: Instead of a little girl, she became like a woman?

JA: Tell him how you felt about Nora. . . . He told me I was like Nora in *The Doll’s House*.

PK: Oh.

MB: Yes. *The Doll’s House*.

JA: He told me that. We were watching a film of *The Doll’s House*, and Morris said, “That’s you. That’s like you.” And I didn’t even see it at that time_.

PK: So. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

PK: Okay, now we're starting again. This is Tape 1, Side B, in an interview with Morris Broderson. This is Session 1, continuing. Morris, we were talking just now about Joan and her becoming free, finally finding herself and becoming free, and I gather that this became important for you as an idea, a theme in your painting. Is that so? Did you become, then, interested in the idea of freedom? Can you tell me about that, how that developed? And how it would be in your work?

MB: She realized that she could be independent and more free and more alone. She wants to do what she want to do. Not to ask Morrie, no. She wants to do, she would do it. He would not like it. Too bad. She would do it in her own way. During that time, Morrie directed and produced the play called Come Back, Little Sheba. Morrie wanted Joan to play the part of Lola with actor. She had the part wife. While they were working on rehearsal, an actor working along with Joan. Joan _____ like him, too, very much, before I met him. This man's name was Bill. So Bill asked Joan to ask Morrie to allow him to go places with Joan. Joan said, "No." So that's more independent, more doing what she wants doing.

PK: So, Bill's last name again?

JA: Challee.

MB: Challee.

PK: And you, actually then, became partners . . .

JA: Yeah.

PK: . . . with him in the gallery. Joan then eventually opened a gallery with Bill. But this independence. Let me make sure I understand this. That you felt even at that time Joan really wasn't free or independent, because she wanted to go out with Bill but did not want Morrie to know. Is that it? Did I understand that right? Do you want to . . .

MB: Yes. You see, Morrie did not know about women. But Bill understands about women he [found] them other things. _____ warmer to women. Understand like Bob understands you, Joan.

JA: Yeah.

MB: That's like therapy, very good. Understand. I understand women. That's how we don't have argument. Sometimes we do, but very rare.

PK: So Morrie, for all of his attractiveness, didn't really understand women.

JA: No.

PK: But Morris did.

JA: Yeah.

MB: Oh, yeah.

PK: And William. Bill, William.

JA: Yeah.

PK: What finally brought Joan to the point where she became free, independent? What happened to make her independent?

MB: She was in love with another man. Joan, she was doing to be free, to do what she wants. So she does not feel guilty.

PK: No guilt?

MB: No. She was happy with Bill. Good for her blood, inside. And better health.

PK: Good for her what? For her. . . .

MB: Blood.

JA: My blood.

PK: Oh, good for the blood! And good health!

MB: And health, yes.

JA: In good health.

PK: Does that mean that love. . . .

MB: A lot more _____ .

PK: So is this the benefit of love and maybe even sex?

MB: Which would you love better being younger.

PK: Yeah, you feel younger?

JA: My. . . . The sex life was _____.

MB: No.

JA: Never had a problem about sex life.

PK: Well, but. . . .

JA: Yeah.

PK: Go on.

MB: _____.

JA: There was nothing wrong with my sex life. [everybody laughs]

PK: Well, I wasn't exactly asking that. [laughter] But, in general, I guess we're talking about romance. I'm leading somewhere with this, to the work.

JA: Yeah.

PK: And it seems—I'll just jump right to it—it seems to me that your work is infused with a

romantic spirit, and what we have been talking about—this experience with Joan—represents a kind of longing for a truly romantic union . . .

MB: Yeah, um-hmm.

JA: Yeah.

PK: . . . which it was not with Morrie. And sex with one person isn't always the same, and what was lacking, perhaps, was the romance, the feeling, the full feeling—true love and so forth. And I'm sorry I don't want to make such a long question. The question. . . . That's my editorial remark.

JA: Is what?

PK: I say that was my editorial remark. Now I will ask the question. Do you feel that even at that time these ideas about love and freedom came into your work?

MB: Did _____?

PK: Did the ideas come into your painting, into your work?

MB: In my work?

JA: Did your ideas. . . .

MB: No.

JA: Your idea about freedom. . . .

MB: Oh, um-hmm.

PK: And about romance, about love. . . .

JA: Did it come into your work? Your ideas about love and freedom.

MB: Um-hmm.

JA: How did it come into your work?

MB: You mean, like the one in Time magazine? You remember?

JA: Well. . . .

PK: Let me try again to ask the question better. We've been talking about you and Joan, and one of the main important things was the situation with Morrie, which was not an entirely happy relationship.

MB: Yes.

PK: He was not treating her . . . he did not understand a woman. Right?

MB: Yes.

PK: You understand what I'm saying?

MB: Yes.

PK: Bill did. The new man.

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: You approved of this. What I sense and what I'm asking is, these ideas of freedom, of independence, of love, did they somehow come into your painting? Into your work? Into the subjects you painted? Did it affect your work?

JA: How did it affect you? For instance, like when you painted Chicken Market. He walked by the _____ and saw this chicken.

MB: Yes.

JA: That was a big recognition of freedom.

MB: That chicken market, I would ride the streetcar, pass by every day, and see the chicken market, that could be good for painting. Very good. So one day I looked and I saw somebody's child pick chicken up. Chicken was screaming that I liked very much. And the old man _____ what they saw I was doing. The chicken was screaming. That's part of the painting I did. It's called Chicken Market. A big painting, almost like this big. But this is bigger [this, than] Chicken Market.

PK: So the Chicken Market was like about five by five [feet]?

MB: Yes, right.

JA: Five by seven, I think. Five by six, something like that. What about the chicken that was _____. [whispers]

MB: It [rained]. Oh, yeah. . . .

JA: That's the one that I. . . .

MB: Free. This chicken had nothing to worry about. Death.

JA: You told me that that made you think of me.

MB: Yes, that's right. That's what I wanted.

PK: The free chicken?

MB: More like Joan because it was free.

PK: Not like that other chicken in the chicken market?

JA: No, no.

MB: Yeah, the chicken on the floor.

JA: Well, maybe. Maybe the one that's screaming. Maybe it did make him think. I don't know. But all I know is he always told me that he saw that chicken that had gotten outside the fence [it] made him think of me.

PK: Um-hmm. Were there other works that would express this same idea? Other works that you did?

JA: Other paintings.

PK: Other paintings that have the same idea of freedom. Like the chicken.

JA: [whisper] Anne Frank.

MB: Anne Frank.

PK: Well, there you go. See.

MB: When I read Anne Frank, it moved me very much. She said she believed that people are good at heart.

PK: Have a good heart, um-hmm.

MB: Well, all the people against Jewish _____ what she say about the hiding. She had to hide someplace with family.

PK: Hide with the family?

MB: Yes. Scary.

PK: Did you, personally, identify with someone like Anne Frank? Did you identify with her from your own life?

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: You know, being limited, not entirely free because of the hearing. That you're a bit, you know, locked up in a room?

MB: Um-hmm. Very locked up in the room. But there were good things she wrote every day on her diary, a book.

JA: But he wants to know if you felt like Anne. She was locked up.

MB: Yes, locked up.

JA: But you were locked up because of your hearing. That's what he's asking you.

PK: So did you feel a little bit . . .

MB: Not that locked up.

PK: No? You felt free.

MB: Yes.

PK: So you didn't identify.

MB: But I knew I have problem with hearing.

PK: Which then limits you. Like Anne Frank can't go out of her room . . .

MB: Right.

PK: . . . you can't—as much as you want—talk and that's. . . .

MB: Um-hmm.

JA: [Aside to PK:] See it's subconscious.

PK: Well, you know. Oh, look it, here's Bob [Baumgarten]. [laughter] Bob's taking a nap. [laughter] I don't want to force these points, so I'll leave this one alone. But what I'm trying to understand, what I'm asking you, is what was your earliest work about? What did it mean to you? We've heard about freedom, independence, Joan, Anne Frank. Okay. But what do you remember as the meaning? What were you trying to do in your art? What was the meaning?

MB: About Anne Frank this amazing thing. She write a diary every day in spite of the horrible war. You know, the war. She's still writing every day. Very clear. Very unusual. _____ impossible to write every day, _____. But Anne Frank did do that. _____ hard to write diary every day.

PK: So what does that have to do with you? What does that have. . . .

MB: Painting, just doing, from my heart, to come out.

PK: Every day? So part of it is the doing it every day. The regular working . . .

MB: Yes.

PK: . . . working, working.

MB: Find out _____ theme of flowers.

PK: The theme of flowers?

MB: Yes. Now. Flowers and still lifes, too.

PK: What do you mean, that that is the theme.

MB: Series with flowers.

PK: Yes, series.

MB: Only flowers.

PK: And so you work on the same thing.

MB: Now, yes.

PK: Over and over again.

MB: Not over [again], with different paintings.

PK: Yeah, I know, but the subject, the theme. . . .

MB: Yes flowers, yes.

PK: Why. . . .

MB: Series of flowers.

PK: Why do you want to do that?

MB: It's [definitely] like what I think for Anne Frank. So that was my series of Anne Frank—and also series of bullfighter.

PK: Bullfighter?

MB: Bullfight.

PK: Why?

MB: Because I saw a bullfight. That moves me for painting.

PK: And is it as if you need to work on an idea, sort of work through it?

MB: What I saw.

PK: Um-hmm. Until you get it the way you want it? Is that it? To keep working until it's right?

MB: I need some new ideas for painting.

PK: Um-hmm.

MB: I'm hungry for new ideas. So that gets me to work. And more more happier when I've work to do something new. Not the same thing over. Develop.

PK: Develop? And then you come to a point where, with the flowers, you will say, "This was wonderful. I've now talked about these flowers. Now I find a new subject. A new subject."

JA: He's thinking what you will do after the flowers. How that will open up another way.

MB: Yes, right. But I'm not going to tell him what I'm going to do. [JA laughs]

PK: Well! [laughing] Well, you don't have to tell me what you're going to do, but what I'm trying to understand is the process of working on the same . . . on series. This process. At some point, somehow, you know that that's done. Then you go on to something new. You don't have to tell me what it is. But how do you know that time has come? That the flowers. . . .

JA: Tell him about how you did all the skulls. Tell him. . . .

MB: Skulls mean death for Medea that I saw the play. So I thought it was good for painting.

PK: You thought the skull was good. . . .

MB: So that's another series, of Medea.

PK: When did you do this series? When?

MB: When?

PK: Um-hmm.

MB: Last year.

PK: Oh, just last year. How many?

MB: I would say twenty paintings.

PK: Oh, twenty!

JA: You didn't see the show?

PK: No.

Bob: It was down in Santa Monica.

PK: Yeah. I missed that, unfortunately. Twenty paintings of skulls?

MB: What?

PK: Twenty paintings of skulls.

MB: Yes.

PK: And you thought of them as emblems of death. They stood for death. Death.

JA: Symbols of death.

MB: It is.

MB: It's about Medea found out that her husband was in love with another woman.

JA: Medea.

PK: I know, I know, right. Why the interest in death? For you?

MB: Why?

PK: Why the interest in death?

MB: It was a powerful play, and the acting. I liked the story.

PK: So it's a response to the play?

MB: Yes.

PK: Not necessarily working out your own concerns about death. It's just the play.

MB: The play, yes.

JA: About Medea.

MB: Medea.

JA: Her husband betrayed her . . .

MB: Yes.

JA . . . had an affair. Well, you know the story. I think maybe that has some relationship. [laughs]

PK: Well, maybe. But that's not what he's saying.

JA: That's not what he's saying?

PK: No. Well, he has to. . . .

JA: I know his. . . .

PK: Yeah. At any rate, let's do this. This is a good start, and I don't want to wear you out, so I think that we should pause.

JA: Yeah, we'll go back.

PK: And we'll go drive to Pasadena and who knows what will happen. So thank you, Joan. Thank you, Morris.

Bob: I'll open the door and welcome you in.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: . . . 1998, and this is Tape 1, Side A. For this interview a series of questions have been put together. These questions were given last week to Mr. Broderson and to Mrs. Ankrum, and we will work through these questions in a very orderly fashion and give Morris Broderson an opportunity to answer as he sees fit. He has also been asked to write separately, if he likes, his responses to the questions. These responses will be included with the transcript of our interview today. So, we can begin. Morris, I just told the tape that we will be working from these questions and that I will ask the questions in order and you are to respond any way you wish. I will actually read them as they are here so you can listen to me, but also you will see here what I'm asking, and then it's for you to answer. Okay?

MB: Okay.

PK: Enough of me. Now on to Morris. The first question on our list is about, really, about your deafness. We know that you were deaf from birth, and the question is this: What was the impact of the deafness on your life, number one, and on your art?

MB: Number one, what?

PK: On your life. The impact of deafness on your life but, number two, on your art.

MB: The last word?

PK: Art.

MB: Heart.

PK: No, not heart.

MB: Art.

PK: Art. And so two parts to the question. Deafness—the impact, experience of deafness on your life and, then, on your art. Style and subjects.

MB: Um-hmm. Some people ask me why I paint. Is it because of my deafness, that I like to paint. I say, no, it has nothing to do with being deaf—just from my heart, that I care for art very much. When I was little—four years old or maybe five years old—I look [at, in] a room where the artist paint in this room. I came in; he was not there. I look at a canvas painting of Durston that I admire his work very much. I look at his painting and say to myself, “I wish I could paint.” This is the first time I found that I want to be artist, from this artist.

PK: Four years old?

MB: Four years old. Little. Or maybe five. He was a wonderful very fine person, that I like him very much. I remember very well.

PK: Who was he?

MB: His name was ...

JA: Arthur ...

MB: ...Arthur ...

JA: ...Durston.

MB: ...Durston. Oh, he was wonderful. Very kind and polite and charming, quite. When I said to my mother, “I want him to draw something for me,” mother said, “No. It’s not polite to ask him.” I say, “Okay.” I believe the artist heard me. When I came into his room when he was not there I saw the drawing on the table. I felt that it was for me, a gift, and I took it. That was nice of him. When I came home from School for the Deaf, I came home on the train. Mother took me to my grandmother’s house. When I came in I walked straight to the artist’s room. There was nothing there. I came to my mother playing cards with friends. I said, “Mother, where is he?” She said, “He died.” I said, “Oh.” “He died in his sleep.” I said, “Oh.” I realized he’s not there anymore.

PK: Um-hmm. So, at that time, you knew, or felt, you wanted to be an artist.

MB: Very much.

PK: Um-hmm.

MB: At the School for the Deaf. Deaf born. I was eight, eight years old. We liked to draw on blackboard. We thought it was so much fun. We draw every day on the blackboard, every day. Other children noting what we did. Every day they told us to stop drawing. [I’d, We’d, They’d] say, “No.”

PK: No? Why?

MB: Because they thought I should play games with them. I said, “No. I want to draw every day. That’s my passion.”

PK: Um-hmm.

MB: Some years later, Grandma brought me to Joan's house for dinner. Oh, I like her very much. By that time I was very thrilled. My dream came true. I ask Joan, "It would be nice for me to stay with her for two weeks." She say yes. Her husband at that time. His name was Morrie Ankrum. So when Joan learned that I liked to draw very much, when I draw something, she would say, "It's not quite right, the way to draw. You should be more free." I realize Joan knows about art. So I follow what she meant. I was very easy for me to have a sense what Joan means. Then she will be able to find art class for me in Pasadena.

JA: You should tell him the first time that I saw your drawing.

MB: Yes.

JA: The first time.

MB: That time when I [draw, watch] Joan playing on the piano, then I thought _____ free line. That's when Joan. . . .

JA: [whispers] That's _____.

MB: Yeah. She was very thrilled with me. She realize that I can do it. So she encouraged me to draw more—every day.

JA: And it was the second one that he brought that I said. . . .

PK: You know, if you're going to talk you have to talk loud so the . . .

JA: Oh, yeah. I was just lip-reading. Okay. No. The first drawing that I saw of his that got me excited was to see this remarkable talent coming from this supposedly non-understanding person. Here was this wonderful drawing. That's when I got excited. And you didn't seem to understand it, so the next day you brought the other one. And that's the time I said, "Oh, I don't think so."

MB: Right.

JA: That's the one I said I didn't like.

PK: Let me try to finish this question. I wonder if your deafness in any way led to your choice of subjects—the subjects that you choose to paint—or to your style.

MB: Style?

PK: Yeah, is there a connection between not hearing and the worlds that you make. Wonderful worlds in your paintings.

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: Do you feel any connection.

MB: Nothing to do with deafness, no. Just from my heart. [Holding, Only] my soul. Not deaf soul.

PK: That's a very good answer: Not a deaf soul but a soul that hears.

MB: Is [fine], yes.

PK: Yeah, um-hmm. What about this? Joan says that people would come into the gallery and be moved by your pictures and—you check me on this—and in some cases, it was maybe they didn't know that you were deaf but they made some connection that. . . .

JA: People would often come to the gallery who knew nothing about your background or the fact that you were deaf, just strangers off the street, and they would be so moved—they didn't know why. Sometimes to the point of tears, they would be moved, not knowing that you were deaf at all. They just didn't know why they were moved, but they were moved to tears. Like Al Davis. Remember when he first came to the gallery. Allen Davis. He rushed out of the gallery. He was so disturbed. I thought he didn't like the paintings.

PK: But didn't it have something to do—if I remember correctly—with hearing? I remember from your interview [that] it wasn't just that they were moved. But it had something to do with sound. I can't remember. . . . Well, it's in your interview that some viewers would see this and make a kind of connection, that there was. . . .

JA: I think they. . . . I think that came a little later.

PK: Yeah. Okay, well, I don't want to complicate this. I don't want to. . . . Okay. We're done. . . . Now you have something on that, Morris?

MB: [When, Well] I noticed famous artists do their own work. It's hard for me. When I'm going to be a man, that mean I'm going to do my own work. Well, what kind of work? It's hard for me. What kind of work? When I finished I cried for [a full year]. My teacher say, "This is the [last] night for you to be finished. I say yes. After I left art class, I walk. The sky was dark at night. I look at the sky. "I'm free now, but I'm not Morris Broderson yet." I want to find a way, on my own way, to find something what I want. That's [the, my] painting.

PK: And you felt you would do this through your art?

MB: Yes. I had learned the lines and the [form], shadow, [in, from] art class, but I want to go the other way. Maybe see the abstract, then I would like to do it very much.

PK: Abstract?

MB: To break my work.

JA: Semi.

PK: Semi-abstract?

MB: Yes, abstract.

PK: To get at a feeling rather than the look.

MB: Yes.

PK: You could make it look like you see.

MB: Yes.

PK: A glass, a portrait.

MB: Book

PK: A book. But, if I understand you, you were interested also in finding a way to paint the feelings, and that with semi-abstract this would help you do that. Is that right?

MB: More free. Not too abstract. Semi-abstract. The figure semi-abstract. Not perfect figure.

PK: Why would you not want it to be the perfect figure? What would you get by. . . .

MB: Oh, this is what I need. Something to learn. [Sitting] figure. I need it for painting—and drawing too.

JA: You said you didn't like the perfect figure.

MB: I had enough perfect figure.

PK: What would be better about a not-perfect figure? What could that do for your art—for your expression, for your feeling? What was it. . . .

MB: At the horse race, people figure _____ and flat figure. And a bull fight.

PK: Bullfight?

MB: Series of bullfight.

JA: But why would it be better in semi-abstract than in realistic? Why would that be better?

MB: Well, I have studied for fine art that it was better to have semi-abstract, kind of idea of bullfight, instead of realistic.

PK: Um-hmm. I understand. Yes. Okay. Let's go to number three. We'll forget this two for a moment. We're now going to number three. Last time, you talked about the early years, and so I don't think we [need to go over this again] unless you have some memories of early years that you want to talk about. Are there some memories of early years you want to. . . .

MB: You mean, after ?

JA: No, before.

MB: No, before.

PK: Is there anything further you want to say? Anything really important in your memories? Besides Joan, besides Joan.

MB: It's hard for me to say something before art teacher, you know.

PK: Okay. Well then, no, is the answer. We've talked about Joan already, and her encouragement of your art for your drawing.

MB: Yes.

PK: Joan was very important. Joan then really devoted herself to helping you and your career as an artist. She opened a gallery to show your work. Very close. You two were very, very close.

MB: Yes.

PK: Did you feel at some time that she was like a parent?

MB: Like what?

PK: Like a parent.

MB: A parent?

PK: A parent. A mother.

MB: Yes.

PK: A parent. Father and mother.

MB: No, aunt.

PK: Aunt.

JA: But he said. . . .

PK: I'm asking you if you ever felt that. . . . My question is this. . . .

MB: But I feel she was aunt by marriage to my uncle.

PK: All right. . . .

MB: But she's closer to me than Morrie.

PK: I hope so. My question: She was very much part of your life and your art. Did you feel, eventually, that it was too close? Too close? That she controlled, out of love. . . .

MB: [Love]. But I remember. Nighttime we had good talk in _____. We were very, very close together. So I felt maybe we should not be that close too much, and that I want to be free myself to study what I want on my own [life, time], of course. So I got very friends, yes, but for my own good.

PK: Did you finally break away a little bit? Go away from Joan?

MB: Yes.

PK: Can you tell me about that?

MB: When Joan had a new baby—a son, baby son—I realize she going to be very busy. I left the house. I _____. I understood that Joanie was going to be busy with the baby, so I decided to leave the house and to live in the Highland Park all by myself.

PK: Highland Park? Is that what he said?

MB: Highland Park.

JA: Well, that's when you were living with me.

MB: Yes.

JA: Well, he could see that I was very absorbed in this new baby.

PK: Yeah.

MB: She had been waiting for a baby for long time.

PK: Did you leave, then? Did you go live elsewhere, on your own?

PK: Oh, this was very early.

JA: Yeah, it was early.

PK: That is understandable, that Joan's attention was being shifted naturally.

MB: Yes, right.

PK: I was thinking of maybe later on. After she had the gallery. After you were twenty or something.

JA: Yes, oh yes.

PK: My question again is, did you feel that Joan was too involved with your career, with your art, with your show? Everything was Joan. Joan was in effect making Morris. Did you feel you needed to. . . .

MB: Me?

PK: Yeah.

MB: You mean about the gallery, why she have an art gallery?

PK: Yes. Did you feel that you needed to. . . .

MB: No.

PK: Never? You never felt. . . .

MB: No. We knew that [apart] when we first talked about my work.

JA: But we're talking about later. When you left the gallery.

PK: Why did you leave the gallery? If you were so close?

MB: I went through therapy. The therapist and his partner/companion told me something funny about Joan and [his] partner Bill.

JA: His therapist [suggested we held back Morris's money when we sold his paintings—JA].

MB: So that's when I left.

PK: What did the therapist say?

MB: That accounting was not right with money.

PK: And that confused you?

MB: Upset.

PK: Upset you? Why did that therapist say that?

MB: He was wrong. The therapist was wrong. Two years later I realized that he was wrong. So I came to see Joan one night. By that time I had some problem with my drinking.

PK: With your drinking?

MB: Yes. So we became close friends again. I tried to stop drinking on and off, but now I don't drink. I have not been drinking for twenty years.

JA: Twenty years.

PK: So then you and Joan came back together?

MB: Yes.

PK: Okay.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: . . . taken a little break. Morris took a refreshing walk around the block to get away from my questions, but now he's gamely back again. Morris, let's look at the second question we skipped over. This has to do with you as a man, your sexuality, and your desire for life, for the world, for people. My question is this—and you are a gay man—does this come out in your art at all?

MB: No.

PK: In no way at all.

MB: Art, no. Because I look at a woman, you know, I don't feel anything. Nothing.

PK: Um-hmm. When did you first know that? When did you first feel that?

JA: It was very [early].

MB: All my life, but I did not realize until I was twenty years old. Very late, of course. But good thing anyway. I was a student, then I think I know about homosexuals.

PK: Um-hmm. But what about Joan? You love Joan.

MB: I love Joan as she is. I love her very much, but . . .

PK: Do you. . . . Excuse me.

MB: . . . but not attract to her, no. I like the way she looks very much.

PK: Did you ever draw Joan or paint Joan?

MB: Yes, I did some in oil paints, you know. Very, very few. Lola.

JA: [chuckles] Lola. He painted me as Lola in Come Back, Little Sheba.

PK: Oh.

MB: A play, Come Back, Little Sheba. She was very good.

PK: Did you have any other special women, like Joan?

MB: Close friends, yes.

PK: Many? Or one?

MB: Some. Close friends, yes.

PK: But never romance, never . . .

MB: No.

PK: Okay.

JA: But, remember, you liked to kiss me.

MB: Um-hmm. In my dream.

JA: And Dorothy [Hampton]. Well, you used to kiss me in the kitchen.

MB: Yes. In the kitchen, while you were cooking.

JA: On Northlake. We used to kiss in the kitchen. And Dorothy.

MB: Dorothy?

JA: You were attracted to her.

MB: Yeah, but not the sexual . . . you know.

JA: Same with me.

MB: Yes. Same.

JA: He wanted to kiss me and. . . .

MB: But that kiss affection.

JA: Yeah. The kiss to affirm his affection.

PK: Okay, we're going to turn this tape over so we don't miss any good parts.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: . . . men, women, and sexuality. You said that you do not feel your life as a gay man—your feelings—affect the art at all. Let me ask you a couple questions. When you had art class when you were young and you had nude models . . .

MB: Yes.

PK: . . . some women, some men.

MB: Yes.

PK: Did you feel a response?

MB: Not female figure.

PK: Not female figure?

MB: But I like it, because that's good for painting.

PK: For painting?

MB: Yes. The feeling, but you have to think of painting first. [To, You] have a good painting.

PK: And so, but with men, a different feeling, but the painting is first?

MB: Yes. Even though you show not good painting. You had too much, you know.

PK: But did that happen sometimes? Too much interest in the sexual?

MB: No way, no way.

PK: No, never, never.

MB: You have to obey art.

PK: Did you ever find attractive people, meet people who were very attractive—pretty, handsome—man or woman—who you then asked to pose for you in the nude? Did you do this?

MB: Yes, a few times.

PK: Could you tell me about that?

MB: One time when Joan and I live together up north we walked through the park, and I noticed a young woman with blonde hair, [curly] blonde hair, nice looking woman, that I would like to paint her. She asked her would she mind to pose for me at her [Joan's—Ed.] house. She said yes. I was thrilled.

PK: Did she pose with her clothes on or off?

MB: With clothes.

PK: With clothes.

MB: Never nude in Joan's house, never. Just with the clothes. Simple clothes.

PK: What was her name?

MB: Hmm?

PK: What was her name, this woman?

MB: The woman's name?

PK: Yeah.

MB: I don't remember. But she had interesting figure and face.

PK: What about ...

MB: I don't remember her name.

PK: What about your other friend ...

JA: Dorothy.

PK: ... Dorothy? Did you draw or paint Dorothy?

MB: Draw?

PK: Dorothy.

MB: Draw Dorothy? No, but I like her very much.

PK: Did you paint her or draw her?

MB: No.

PK: Oh, no?

MB: None. She was art student in art class. But I never dreamed to paint her. Very attractive. I like her very much.

PK: Did you remain friends?

MB: Yes.

PK: For many years?

MB: Four years, in the art class.

PK: Only in art class, I see.

MB: She also lived in Pasadena while she was a student. She lived with her parents.

PK: Uh-huh. So she was young?

MB: And beautiful. Beautiful!

PK: Young and beautiful. You appreciate beauty.

MB: Yes, beauty.

PK: Man, woman, flowers. Same thing. Beauty.

MB: Yes, beauty.

PK: What about men that you. . . . Did you ever meet a man or have a man friend pose for you in your studio?

MB: No. Nude, you mean?

PK: Well, either way.

MB: Yes. A Mexican man _____. I paint him [in] the back, which is a nice painting.

PK: Where did you meet him?

MB: In the park. [To Joan:] Do you remember the Mexican boy? He was a very nice boy.

JA: I don't remember that.

MB: Maybe from school. I don't think so.

JA: What about this man in the bar, the frontal nude, male? Was he Mexican or Italian? You painted him, nude. I sold the painting in the last show.

MB: Oh, Hair.

PK: Hal?

MB: From the musical Hair.

PK: Oh, that was from Hair?

MB: The nude, the boy?

JA: That's another one.

MB: Another one.

JA: But I mean the one with the red background. It was very good looking.

MB: Red. Oh, oh, yes, yes, that's right.

JA: Didn't he work at a bar?

MB: Yes, he worked in the bar. So that was the first time. Only once.

PK: You made friends and you invited him to pose?

MB: Yes. But nothing more.

PK: That's normal. That's okay.

JA: He said, "Nothing more."

PK: Nothing more, okay. Let's move on to number 4. Number 4? I'm interested in the sources of your inspiration. Besides the heart. I know that it all comes from your heart . . .

MB: Yes.

PK: . . .but in the world there are things that inspire us.

MB: Yes.

PK: Sometimes things we see, sometimes people, sometimes pictures. What are the things, the images, that have inspired your art?

MB: Yes. At the horse races, I look at many people there, and look and study people watching the races. To paint: I choose to see what I like. Mexican woman with the long hair in the back. And also Mexican people on the floor having a picnic. I like it very much.

PK: Where did you see them? At the park?

MB: At the horse race.

PK: At the horse race? Hollywood Park?

JA: Santa Anita.

PK: Santa Anita?

MB: Yeah.

PK: Santa Anita.

MB: I saw a family eat [lunch]. It was beautiful. Good for painting, and a woman walking near that park, Joan.

JA: Mexican girl.

MB: I said that.

JA: But I mean, it's here in the room.

MB: Here?

JA: The painting is here.

MB: So you have seen it.

PK: I can see it.

MB: Yes.

PK: Maybe I did see it.

JA: It's right here leaning against the mirror.

PK: Oh, okay. I'll look at it in a moment then.

MB: Umm, very good.

PK: These are, then, images from life, from observation . . .

MB: Yes, from memory.

PK: . . . and from nature. You look around. You see people, nature. What about other paintings? Other artists? Are there pictures you remember that you saw in book, in museum, in home, that inspired you. That you said, "Ah! I like this. I want to do like this."

MB: Museum?

PK: Pictures. Pictures.

MB: Pictures.

PK: Source of inspiration for your art. Pictures. Paintings, other paintings.

MB: What kind?

JA: Rembrandt?

MB: Painting.

PK: You saw a Rembrandt?

MB: What?

PK: You saw Rembrandt paintings?

MB: Yes, at the county museum [a large show—JA].

JA: Did it inspire you to paint?

MB: No.

PK: Were you interested in the history of art? In other words, there's this long, many centuries, of artists doing this painting and sculpting and drawing. Were you ever interested in learning more about the early artists—the Old Masters, we call them. Did you read books, look at books with. . . .

MB: Some. Once I read a simple book of history of art. That was very good, but I don't remember who wrote it.

JA: [H.W.] Janson [History of Art].

PK: Janson.

MB: Is it? I don't remember the name. Dorothy told me about it so I bought it.

PK: So you did know about the other artists? You saw the work of older artists, like in Italian

Renaissance, up in the Netherlands, early Netherlandish painters. The Old Masters. Were there any artists in the book that you liked especially? You mentioned Rembrandt. Any others?

MB: Eakins [one of his favorite artists—JA].

PK: [Thomas] Eakins. American artist, good.

MB: Oh, I like him very much.

PK: Why did you like him?

MB: He moved me, the way he paints. Not because of a perfect figure. Just the way he feels about life is so beautiful.

PK: Do you remember any particular painting that you felt that for? Any particular one?

MB: You mean, by this man?

PK: By Eakins, yeah.

MB: Swimming.

PK: Swimming Hole.

MB: And the boxing...

PK: The boxing. Wonderful artist.

MB: His wife; he painted his wife.

PK: He painted his wife in the nude.

MB: Yes.

PK: He got into trouble.

MB: Trouble?

PK: Trouble, yeah. But that's a different story. [chuckles]

JA: Yes.

PK: Let's. . . .

MB: You know, why each work was very beautiful about surgery. _____ a doctor, beautiful, perfect painting.

JA: [whispers]

PK: [whispers] Oh, yeah. [normal voice:] Two paintings: The Gross Clinic and The Agnew Clinic Operation. [also by Eakins]

MB: Yes. During operation. Was shocked, because there was just a little blood on the finger.

PK: A little blood.

MB: I was shocked because of that.

PK: Shocked?

JA: That he was rejected by the judges for the exhibition.

PK: Oh, rejected? Rejected, yeah, yeah.

MB: Rejected because of that blood.

PK: A little blood.

MB: Yes.

PK: Not even. . . . Nowadays, in the movies, blood everywhere. Nobody. . . .

MB: That painting sold only for hundred dollars.

PK: To the Jefferson Medical Center.

MB: Um-hmm.

PK: In. . . . Um-hmm. That's very interesting.

MB: I saw it at my last show in New York at the museum. We were there, Joan. I went to the openings at the Whitney.

PK: I'm going to ask you a question that I'm not sure I want to ask, but I'm going to do anyway. You have been describing and admiring Thomas Eakins, one of the great—now the big—in modern scholarship—modern historians.

MB: Modern?

PK: Modern. Nowadays.

MB: Um-hmm, yes.

PK: They talk about Eakins as . . . his homosexuality. He is viewed as, at least in part, a gay man, a gay artist. Nobody would say necessarily that these pictures show that he's gay . . .

MB: Gay?

PK: . . . but he did many drawings of his young men friends and students, and he took photographs of them. Does that interest you at all?

JA: Did you know he was gay? I don't think he knew he was gay.

PK: Well, he does now. [chuckles]

MB: Who?

PK: Eakins.

MB: Eakins?

PK: Yeah.

MB: Was he gay?

PK: Partly. I mean, this is. . . .

MB: Like a bisexual?

JA: Bisexual.

PK: Yeah. But I wondered if you knew that.

MB: No.

PK: Okay. This is the first you hear this?

MB: Yes, but I knew he loved to paint nude figure, men and women. But I did not think he had any desire really for male figure.

PK: You didn't feel that in his paintings? That it was very objective, very neutral?

MB: Like what I told you before, no. About male figure. Good figure painting model.

PK: That's a good answer.

JA: Yes.

PK: I understand.

MB: Same thing.

PK: That's a very good answer. Let's. . . .

MB: Once a man asked me to pose for him. He was gay man; I don't know him. He wanted me to pose for him. I say, "No."

PK: Because you knew. . . . Because why?

MB: Bother me. He would bother me. At his place.

JA: Yeah, he knew this.

MB: Oh, yes.

PK: You knew that he was. . . . Well, why not? Oh, excuse me. That's very, very good answers.

MB: Good.

PK: Very good. Very intelligent, thoughtful answers.

MB: I hope so.

PK: Absolutely. Number 5. Number 5? We've now done with this and this. [crosses off items from list] Number 5. Your career. Your career as an artist. Looking back at your career, what do I say? Well, what has the art meant for you in your life?

MB: Art meant?

PK: Yeah. To you, for your life. For your life. What has it given. . . . Do you still feel that there is more you want to say, to show, to do.

MB: Yes. It's not [self-conscious, subconscious] now, but I want to learn more. I do not want to do same thing over and over. I want something new, never been done before.

PK: Why? Why do you want to do that?

MB: Could develop my work.

PK: Why do you want to continue to develop? What does that. . . .

MB: It's important from the heart, to prove myself.

PK: When your painting is on the wall and people like it, admire the painting, do you feel as if—in a way—they are liking you?

MB: Like what?

PK: That they are liking you, that they are appreciating you, when they look at your work. Work you. [gesturing that "Work equals you."]

MB: Yeah.

PK: You do feel that then?

JA: Do you feel, when they look at your work and admire it and like it, does that make you feel that then they like you?

MB: Yes.

JA: They like you?

MB: Yes.

PK: So you, then, identify with your work. That your work is not separate from you. It is you.

MB: Yes, not separate.

PK: Can you explain. . . .

MB: Grow together.

PK: Can you talk about that?

MB: It's difficult.

PK: Well, could you try?

MB: Okay. When I'm satisfied with my work, I feel that we are close together _____, so I see every day that still there's more to say in better way when I do new painting, in my [blue] shirt.

PK: So is it true that the art, then, becomes a way for you to give yourself to people?

MB: Give, yes.

PK: Give.

MB: Yes. It's very important.

PK: And it becomes then ...

MB: [A gift].

PK: ... and it becomes then, a kind of communication. Like your ideas, your very being, goes into these pictures ...

MB: Yes, always.

PK: ... and it is a way to talk ...

MB: Yes.

PK: ... to people.

MB: Yes.

PK: Do you think that you're successful in this?

MB: No, not yet.

PK: Why?

MB: Because I'm still studying. You know, still studying.

PK: How would it be more successful?

MB: I'll be happy. I'll be happy.

PK: When it's more successful. But what will make it more successful? When you study, what are you studying? What are the ingredients?

MB: Same.

PK: Same.... What do you need to make it communicate?

MB: Like Chicken Market.

PK: [Aside to Joan] Do you see what I'm....

JA: Yeah, I see. [Asking Morris] What do you need to make you feel that you've succeeded? What do you need to find, when you study, that makes you feel more successful? What are you looking for?

MB: [One], the painting I want to work on, beautiful still life. Some things I have been working on, like [Ballads] or [The Rhythm], I have been working on them for three days. That's it. The painting is called Of All Time. _____ perfect painting.

PK: The painting is called Of Our Time?

JA: Of All Time.

PK: Of All Time.

MB: Of All Time. Once Joan asked me what did I think of the still life painting. I said, "Joan, I have been working on that painting for three years. I count up the time. So Joan, you can call that painting Of All Time."

JA: He says I chose that as the title.

MB Yes, yes.

PK: Okay, I didn't understand all of that. Did you? Did you understand all of that?

JA: Yes.

PK: Can. . . . Excuse me.

MB: Because she told me. I don't know the name of the painting, the title, just still life. She asked me to talk about it. That kind of still life that should be of all time. No mistake.

JA: So that's why I chose. That's the perfect title for it. Because that's the way I title a lot of his paintings, you know? Because I get him to talk about them and I would. . . .

PK: . . . see what it meant to him.

JA: Yeah, and I would seize that.

MB: Yes.

PK: So the titles, Joan, really come from a dialogue between you two.

JA: Yeah.

MB: I do not [always] still life and _____

PK: No, no, no, I know.

JA: No, I didn't. . . .

MB: Some people might mistake you got the idea.

JA: Oh, no, no, I never told you what to paint ever [or not to paint. I never suggested an idea to you for painting—JA].

PK: No, no, but in terms of the title.

JA: No. But the title, I would ask you, "Tell me how you painted."

MB: Right, yes.

JA: That's how I chose Sound of Flowers. Because I asked him to tell me about that.

PK: Well, let's talk about this. The Sound of Flowers. What did you tell Joan to help her come up with the title, Sound of Flowers?

MB: Yes. That I [tell her], "Joan, look at the flower, listen to the flower, like sound of flower," but it had nothing to do with my deafness. I would not do it myself, no. I cannot hear.

PK: Well, I think you. . . .

MB: But I saw the child, I like it very much. I say, "I must paint it."

PK: You saw a child doing that?

MB: Yes.

PK: Instead of [makes sniffing sound] smelling?

MB: Larry.

JA: Larry told him about this.

MB: Yes.

PK: Larry?

JA: This was a friend.

MB: Same day, when we walked together, but he saw that boy listen to something. Larry asking, "Did you hear sound of flower?"

JA: But that painting was chosen for a show of his. One of his first shows. And Larry gave it this terrible title, called. . . .

MB: I remember. Something. . . .

JA: Autistic Child. That's the title he gave it, then when Morris took [him, it]. . . . I saw that; I said, "Morris, we cannot have that title. You tell me about this painting." And that's when I said, "That's it: Sound of Flowers.

PK: Well. . . .

JA: But it had _____ with him. It had nothing to do with his deafness. What I think it had to do [with] was the shape. Was the shape, like an instrument. And that's why it suggested a sound. But it had nothing to do with his not being able to hear. But that's what it meant to a lot of people, I think. They saw this shape. And Larry himself said. . . . I think he said it looked as though he was listening to the sound, didn't he? He said it looks as though he was listening to something. So [I said to myself], "So that's what the title should be." Because instead of Autistic Child. . . .

PK: That's a very bad title.

JA: Oh, it was terrible.

PK: Who was Larry?

MB: Hmm?

PK: Larry. Who was Larry?

MB: Larry was a dancer. Modern dancer.

JA: Modern dancer.

PK: Oh, modern dancer. Did you draw Larry?

MB: No.

PK: Did you ever draw. . . .

MB: No, but I did draw _____, like the sound.

PK: Did you ever do. . . . You did some works of dancers.

JA or MB: [shakes head no]

PK: No. Did you ever draw dancers or paint dancers?

MB: Dancers? Yes, [many ballets—JA].

PK: Yeah, I thought so.

MB: Lizzie Borden. Lizzie. . . .

JA: Agnes.

MB: I formed a relation.

PK: Agnes De Mille?

MB: Yeah, that's right.

PK: Oh! I remember now.

JA: Lizzie Borden and everything.

PK: Yeah, I remember that.

JA: And we. . . .

PK: Joan told me about in New York.

MB: Well, I like her very much. That woman. Agnes De Mille. Oh, she wonderful.

JA: She was crazy about his work.

PK: And you loved. . . . What did you like about the dancers?

MB: Dancers?

PK: Dancers. Movement?

MB: Yes. I know ballet what I like. The Japanese dancers.

JA: The first one was the Japanese. I took . . . we went to the Philharmonic at the Greek Theater and saw the Japanese dancers.

MB: Kabuki.

JA: Yeah. The Ashes.

MB: The Ashes.

JA: It was a dance troupe.

MB: Dance. I saw it.

JA: Yeah.

MB: It was beautiful.

JA: He was always interested in dancing. Next to painting, ballet was his favorite.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that. You love ballet?

MB: My favorite.

PK: Oh, good!

MB: I know what I like. I know what I don't like.

JA: He's a very good judge of dancers.

PK: Ahh!!

MB: You remember when we saw the ballet? It was the first time for me to see. You remember the ballet?

JA: [I guess, Because] I took him to his first ballet.

PK: Do you remember what it was? Swan Lake, right?

JA: No, it wasn't Swan. . . .

MB: Rodeo.

JA: Rodeo.

PK: Rodeo?

JA: That was the first ballet.

MB: I think she walked on the stage. I think so.

JA: [Miss De Mille].

PK: She came out?

MB: Before I met her—long, long before.

JA: That was before she was famous [for Oklahoma—JA].

MB: It was my dream to meet her, in person. Many years ago. Then I did. It was my dream to meet her.

PK: And you did?

MB: Yes. We became good friends and Joan, too.

JA: Yes, we did.

MB: Good friends. She was wonderful woman. Very strong.

PK: And you admired her?

MB: Very much, very much.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing this second session with Morris Broderson. The date is March 17, 1998. There are three of us here: the interviewer, Paul Karlstrom, Joan Ankrum—and this is Joan Ankrum's home in Pasadena—and, of course, our subject, the painter Morris Broderson. This is Tape 2, Side A, wrapping up the interview.

Morris, on our list of questions here we have one more—one more question. You have answered some of this question, but what I want to know is, how do you see your work, your art, within the big picture of art of our time—California art, American art, twentieth-century art. How does Morris fit in? What is your place? What is your place? Are you all alone?

MB: Alone?

PK: All alone? All isolated? Or are you part of an art. . . .

MB: Some place like this, you mean?

JA: No.

PK: No. Is Morris Broderson alone?

MB: Alone.

PK: An artist not connected to all those other wonderful artists in the world? Are you isolated? Are you an individual, or do you feel connected with other artists?

MB: Yeah [but with very few, not part of a movement—JA].

PK: And who might they be?

MB: I'm the artist. I want to be Broderson. Not like other artists' work. I do my own way, to see what I like doing. That's part of my life. I'm Morris Broderson of art. I'm not ready to work up that theme yet, but I put away because I'm still working on other theme. So maybe I use later. My . . . I _____ my memory to come back, to forgot it. Like the ballet, I [saw it] very much, but then I want to do it now because that time my work was realistic.

PK: Realistic?

MB: Yes. That's not good for ballet. I want abstract, before I did it. So I save that theme of the ballet [like] for a little later, let's save it for five years. Until my work got semi-abstract It would be perfect.

PK: That's the way you work—the way you work with your themes. But what about other artists of now?

MB: You said "other artists"?

PK: Other artists. Do you feel any connection with them? With their work?