



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ed Garman, 1998
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ed Garman on March 25 and March 30, 1998. The interview took place in Imperial Beach, California, and was conducted by Derrick Cartwright for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, side A [session 1, tape 1; 30-minute tape sides]

ED GARMAN: I'm going to turn off the fan and see what happens.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay. Thanks, Ed.

ED GARMAN: Keep things, I try to keep the studio fairly, pretty well balanced with the dehumidifier and temperature and stuff like that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, there's a certain format that they like us follow.

ED GARMAN: You do that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So I'll just begin this tape by saying, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Ed Garman on March 25, 1998 at Mr. Garman's studio in Imperial Beach, California. The interviewer is Derrick Cartwright. So I thought maybe what we'd like to do, just to begin with, is go over some of, laying some of the background information. And then proceed to the real interesting questions as soon as possible.

ED GARMAN: Hm-hmm.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And so I thought, let's just review some things, and you correct me if I'm wrong about any details. Right?

ED GARMAN: Hm-hmm.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You were born in 1914?

ED GARMAN: I was born on July the fourth, 1914.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah. In Bridgeport, Connecticut?

ED GARMAN: In Bridgeport, Connecticut.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But you spent most of your childhood in . . .

ED GARMAN: Yes.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: In Pennsylvania. Talk about how you ended up there.

ED GARMAN: Well, my, my mother was originally from Pennsylvania. She was from Jamestown, Pennsylvania. And that's about 60 miles, 70 miles northwest of Philadelphia on the Lehigh, Lehigh River. And historically that distance from Philadelphia was about as far as Benjamin Franklin got when he went inland to, to settle the Indian wars that were going on. He, his last outpost was at Weissport, which is just across the Lehigh River from Lehigh. So that, that puts the geographical area in proper perspective. My mother was from that area. She was born and raised there. Now my father was a, was a railroad man and, the Lehigh Valley Railroad went up the Lehigh River Valley, in order to get to the coal mines, which was up north of Lehigh and Wilkes Barre and Scranton and places like that. That was the anthracite coal there. So they, the railroads came up there. So my dad was a railroad man. And he came up there and probably worked around Lehigh and met my mother, of course, there. And courted her and married her. And something came along, which I don't know much about. But anyhow, it was the beginning of World War I. And my father and mother, he was a restless man, and they went on to Bridgeport and they worked in the munitions factory making live ammunition for, for whatever it was needed for at the time. So they were, they were settled in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Well, my sister was born there. I had a sister who died when she was, when she was about two or three years old. And then I was born there. And shortly after that my mother and father separated and got divorced. She came back to, to Lehigh, to her father and mother's home. And he disappeared. And I know nothing about him since then. Is there any question on that?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: No. I think it's . . .

ED GARMAN: No, that pretty much covers that. So I was, I grew up in, in a little town called Jamestown, which was at the head of a little valley. The Lehigh Valley had its railroad yards there. And my grandfather worked in the railroad yards repairing locomotives and all the other vehicles. So he was settled down. And they were Pennsylvania Dutch. The language of my home was Pennsylvania Dutch.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Can you still speak it?

ED GARMAN: No, I know nothing about it anymore. My mother was very careful with me because from the very beginning she knew the handicap of being bilingual in the east, particularly Pennsylvania Dutch. Because that had a stigma attached to it. And so she talked, spoke English to me all, all my life. My only connection with Pennsylvania Dutch was by ear.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: By your grandparents?

ED GARMAN: My grandparents talked it constantly. So that I, and when Mother was away from home why I grew up around my grandmother. So she was primarily Pennsylvania Dutch and she spoke to me in Pennsylvania Dutch. So by ear I was, I was pretty good at Pennsylvania Dutch. But that was as far as it went. And, of course, they were Mennonite and had a very rigorous belief about how one should conduct their life. Between, between the Pennsylvania Dutch discipline and the, and the religious discipline, why I lived a very controlled existence.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: What do you remember most about that period in your life living in Pennsylvania? Up until, I guess, around 1930 is it that you moved to New Mexico?

ED GARMAN: Yeah, I moved, went to Mex, New Mexico in 1933, after I graduated from high school. I don't, I don't consider it, the early years, it probably was a significant period in my life, but it doesn't have much to do with my conscious memory. It was just a matter of living day in and day out and getting through the day and whatever was going on at the time.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: In one of your biographical papers that I read you discussed how as a child you were fairly to yourself. That you lived to yourself a great deal and that you didn't spend a lot of time going into town with your family. That you explored the hills and valleys instead.

ED GARMAN: That's true. I was a country, a country boy and liked it. And our household was at the top of the valley adjoining the forest land. And that was in that area. That's Appalachia. And trees just grow like weeds do around there. And I loved the woods and the, and the open spaces and we had lots of water running through it. Creeks and rivers and things of that nature. So I really enjoyed being there. And I liked the freedom of it because whenever I got connected to people then I got into a restrictive environment. And I never understood how people really thought and felt, because every individual seemed to be in a different mode of thinking and, and, and living, so that I didn't understand it very well, what was going on with the people. But I understood what was going on with nature. It was very definitive. It was just as restrictive. It had its cause and effect too. But I knew what was going on in nature so I loved it. I loved it, I still love it.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But it must have been such a huge change to go from the hills of Appalachia to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1933. Could you talk a little bit about what brought you to that place from Pennsylvania?

ED GARMAN: Well, when I graduated from high school, now you must remember in 1933 that was the pits of the, of the Great Depression.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: And you have to realize too that we consider five or six percent unemployment high today. In those days that was 20 percent unemployment. Or, in as much as no, people were not registered as unemployed. It may have been larger. So, everybody was poor. And when I got out of high school, of course, I couldn't look forward to a job. There were no jobs even for adults. Doctors, lawyers and whatever were unemployed.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: So I had to find a way and I decided that I would go to college. So I had decided, found out which colleges were the most economical. And I found that I could, that if I went to the University of New Mexico, budget-wise I could live and go to college, at that time, for about \$25.00 a month. And my mother said she could help me out on that. And so she did. So I went to Albuquerque on that basis of, of economy.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: With no idea of what you'd encounter there?

ED GARMAN: No idea.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You didn't even have a hunch?

ED GARMAN: I had no idea. To me, the only thing I knew about the west was what I'd read in Zane Gray. And the west was far more appalling to me when I got there.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: It surprised you?

ED GARMAN: It totally amazed me, the vastness of the space. Because in Appalachia you can't even walk, walk very far anywhere in anything without bumping into something. In the west you get out on those mesas and you can walk forever without bumping into anything. And you have the sky above and expanding land below. And, and it's just a tremendous experience. I consider it the most profound experience that I had in my life, other than my personal life later on when I met my wife, Coreva. But that experience was equal to any religious revelation that one could experience as far as I could see it.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Experience of the landscape?

ED GARMAN: The total spatial environment. The element of space and light. Because the, the sun turned on in the morning and stayed out all day. And when we settled down at night, in Appalachia it was always clouded. You rarely saw the sun, even in summer.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Not to mention the coal dust in the air.

ED GARMAN: And then of course, the pollution was tremendous. Because of the railroads. They were, they were burning coal at the time. And their firing system wasn't very good. So the element of space, which I think is very much paramount in my, my work today, is, I considered the space element as, as the most important aspect of painting, from my point of view.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you, had you had any art training before you arrived at the university?

ED GARMAN: No, I didn't. I had I, in high school I was part of the theater club. And had done scenic design. Worked with the people who did the scenic design. So that when I went to, to the University of New Mexico, well, to pick up some social life I joined the theater club there. And immediately got into theater design. And, of course, the theater design in college was much more rigorous than it was in high school. So I really got quite fascinated with the whole problem of, of presenting a play through the quality of the, of the theater, that is the design structure, the lighting and the props and stuff like that. So I did a very intensive program in theater for myself. I was a very good self-taught person. And so I investigated thoroughly. And that's how I happened on the two theater designers, Gordon Craig from Great Britain and Adolph Appia from Switzerland. They were working at the time that Wagner was presenting his great musical panoramas and dramas in, in Germany. And the problems of theater for Wagner were entirely different than an inside theater. Because it was primarily an outside theater. And so they developed an advanced, entirely new theory, theories on theater. And they became quite minimal. As they used basic structures like cubes and, and planes, structural planes, like ascending stairways and things like that. Plus the best lighting that they could produce.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, lighting was so critical.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, absolutely critical. Because it was nighttime theater, why, it played into their hands to utilize light very cleverly. Which they did. Anyhow, what they did was they resolved theater to a very minimal aspect of it. It's just simply light and planes, light and planes. Much like modern dance is today. You have your, your actors, your dancers, and then you have light and maybe a scrim in the background or a panorama. There's not much structure to it. So that's, that is the inheritance that came down from that aspect of the theater. But I found the minimal aspect of the, of the theater very, very big with me because, again, I was back to the minimal landscape with line and space. And I, I could join the two and got a strong feeling about that. And then of course, in extending my, my theater experience, why I worked for the Albuquerque Little Theater at that time. And Albuquerque, and Little Theater at that time was very hot, because, of course, there was no TV and you had movies, but theater was the breeding ground for acting and actors and anything associated with theater all across the country. It was really big. And so I picked up there and learned every, even more about, uh, theater. And because of the economy at the time you had to be very inexpensive in the way you handled your theater material. So it was constantly looking for simplification, simplification. And, uh, seeing what could be done. The most that can be done with the least. And, uh . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: That's still true for you, right?

ED GARMAN: Yeah. Most with the least. So that, uh, that stuck with me very hard too. And that was a very rich experience.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you remember any of the performances that you were part of in your theater days in New Mexico?

ED GARMAN: Not very well. I did a theater, I did a stage for a Greek play called "Alcestus". The University of New Mexico Latin teacher, they were still teaching Latin, oh, transcribed or translated a play called "Alcestus". And I, for the life of me, don't know what it was about, but, anymore. But the professor wanted a Greek environment for the, to play out these characters, which were mostly dressed in white robes and all that sort of thing. Sort of the romantic concept of the Greek theater. Anyhow, I kept working on it and simplification and simplification. And he wanted a series of columns like the Parthenon or whatever to be at the background. Well, I finally resolved on one column. I had it backstage about the middle, one column. And it was about six feet through and went clear up to eternity. I mean, the visual effect of it was eternity. Furthermore, I had made it hollow, I had it built hollow. And I had a door in the back in which actors could be in there in anticipation to coming on the stage. Instead of coming in from the wings they would suddenly appear around, around the column. And then I did the lighting on that. Which was, caught the reviewer's eye, that the lighting was, the lighting was very special. And that was my standout, because I had achieved in the theater what, what Craig and Appia had done in their part. And it was a tremendous hit. And the translator was thrilled with it because I had done what he wanted done. But he had visualized it in a more literal way. And that still is a good memory.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Why did you, why did you stop being involved in theater production and scenery design and staging?

ED GARMAN: Well, of course, I, I left the theater, or left the university because of, of finances. I just couldn't afford to go to the university anymore. So I started doing some painting. And I probably did odd jobs somewhere in order to keep going. Anyhow, because of my experience with, with drawing and planning stage settings, well, I had accommodated to drawing and, and color and gotten fairly good at it. So it was very easy for me to shift into doing something in painting. Which I did. Which was environmental. I was fascinated by the landscape because basically there was nothing there but a few accents. And I could do something with that. Anyhow, that was Depression times, that was about '34, '35 I guess it was. Uh, I was so poor that I would go down to the Rio Grande River and, uh, seasonally I would try to fish and get fish for, for my lunch. But when I built my fire to cook my fish I found I could make charcoal sticks out of the cottonwood. It was great charcoal material. And then I salvaged paper from the, from the Albuquerque Tribune newspaper. I'd go to their trash heap and salvage sheets of newsprint. That was newspaper.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: For printing. That had been unused. So I'd use charcoal and newsprint and was drawing with that for a long time. So I got more and more involved in painting because there was nothing else to do. There were no jobs around. And my education was interrupted. And that was about '35 or '36. And I'd been studying contemporary history, art history. At that time the artists that were hot in America were Tom Benton and Grant Wood and a Midwesterner named [John Stueart] Curry. And several others who were doing the American scene.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, let's talk about that. What was your feeling about those artists and what they were doing?

ED GARMAN: Well, I took a, I made a trip back to Kansas City in about '35 or '36. And Kansas City had a very, very fine museum. And they had Bentons and Currys and Woods, and along with all the other fine artists at the east coast. And I studied them and I marveled at their technique enormously. But emotionally I couldn't get a hold of, of what, what their consequences were. Where, where was it going and what did it do? Naturally, the critics of that time were drumming up the excitement for that nationalistic point of view in America. Which I didn't feel very strong about. And, uh, I'd been studying new Mexican painters. Particularly the mural painters, Diego Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros and several of the others. And, uh, I thought well, I ought to go down there and see what they were really doing and how it affected the, the painting environment. So I went down there. I think it was about 1937, maybe the end of '36. I stayed there for six months. And I got into their milieu so to speak. And I found out that their mural painting was primarily a, a nationalistic, uh, advertising campaign for their own people. Just like ours in America. Our nationalistic point of view. Furthermore, the artists truly weren't interested. They did a good job, but it was primarily a work project for them that kept them going to do their individual work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How did you discover that?

ED GARMAN: Well, because one, uh, I would visit the sites of the muralist and the muralists were never there. Now, there's plenty of work to do in making murals besides being up there with the pallet and the plaster.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: But I never found Diego Rivera at work. I never found Orozco at work. Or I never found Siqueiros.

They all had murals going at this time that I was there. There was an artist named [Alfredo Ramos] Martinez who later came to America.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right.

ED GARMAN: And did mural work up here.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right here in San Diego.

ED GARMAN: Yeah. I found something of his in there that he was working on. And I watched him work and I could see how, how the technique was so vital to the, to the results of the, of the murals. But anyhow, I got acquainted with the, the people who were doing the work. And I asked, 'Where are these men?' 'Well, they're back at their studio preparing what they call cartoons,' I think they were. And that's quite a job to make these huge cartoons because they're basically what the muralist uses to trace his drawings, transferring his little drawings to, to cartoons and on up to the, to the, the site. So that was a very interesting thing. And again I found out that the pursuit of the, of the nationalistic scene wasn't giving me anything. And wasn't really giving those artists anything. They were very good at it. They knew what they were doing. They knew what they were selling, but it was a thing that had a very strong period at the end of it. And as we know today, they're primarily tourist attractions. They're not working anymore in the light of the, the needs of their time. It was to drum up national interest and that's what it did. Anyhow, they were very beautiful. I went out over to Cuernavaca, which is about 40 miles west of Mexico City on the way to Acapulco. And there were some very beautiful Diego Rivera murals in Cuernavaca, which were simply just made beautifully using the revolutionary theme. But they were exquisitely done. And I recognized a great artist that was there, working there. And of course, eventually I met Orozco at his studio. A friend from one of the other muralist groups, there were Americans working down there.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: Working for Diego Rivera getting mural experience. So that, through them I met Orozco and one of the persons, one of the people, a young woman from the States, who I don't remember anymore. But she took me out to Orozco's studio with his permission and we talked awhile in a very, very strange way because he was partially deaf and partially blind. And so it was a very strange conversation because I had, I talked very loudly to the translator and she talked very loud to him. But it was a nice meeting because I think he liked my questions. Anyhow, I finally got around to, to the future of, of, I asked him, I said, I knew, I knew he was doing work along the revolutionary line because it was very dramatic and it, and it sold. They were interested in selling. Diego was very commercial. Anyhow, I asked him about abstraction. And he said that he thought that that was the wave of the future. That it was the only, the only field, that abstraction was the only field that opened the door to every culture. Whether you were French or German or Indian or whatever, that, that, uh, setting aside your local interest, if you were investigating painting to see how far you could get with it, well abstraction was the way to go. So I consequently started tracing down the American, the Mexican abstractionist and found some very, very good ones.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Who are you thinking of?

ED GARMAN: Well, I'm not, that is my one failure on this tape is I, I just don't call to mind who they were.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But you were aware of these things?

ED GARMAN: They're very, I went to galleries where their work was exhibited and I saw the work. Carlos Merida was one.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: Coming back now. Carlos Merida, I thought it was great stuff.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Tamayo? Was he another artist?

ED GARMAN: Tamayo?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: He wasn't fully abstract.

ED GARMAN: Tamayo was not fully abstract and I didn't see, I don't think I saw a Tamayo there at all when I was there. And I don't know at what age level he was. Because, remember, this is '35 or '36.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure. That's right.

ED GARMAN: And the men at that time who were coming into their own were already middle aged. So that there were about four or five that I thought were really splendid, which Merida was one of them. And I found out

Merida has lasted very much. Very strongly down into today. Anyhow, when I came back to the States six months later I knew that I had to find a door that would get me into the abstract. So I fiddled around with drawing, more or less, free form drawing because I wanted to get away from the subject. And, uh, I think this drawing here is 1937. It's a free form drawing. It's about that time that I met my wife, Coreva, and she was a philosophy major at the university. And she was, her prime interest was platonic thought. And I met her at a small restaurant and she knew I was a painter or aspiring to be a painter, and so she started talking to me about the philosophy of art. Well, of course, I didn't have a philosophy of art. And so she talked to me about the platonic ideas, that is idea before fact. Is that clear?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: That is the idea existed before the thing. And that the idea enclosed all other things. The idea of the chair encompassed all the chairs. So you see, the idea was the abstraction of the chair. So I got, I got a really fundamental philosophic notion about what an abstraction really was. It was not simply simplifying what was in front of your face and making circles out of apples, and circles out of oranges, and triangles out of whatever. And I knew what abstraction meant. And Coreva gave me a full, full, full education on what abstraction really meant and how abstraction was the foundation of thought. And I absorbed that like a sponge. So that when I began painting seriously, well, I was doing up-and-running abstractions. So by the time we were, our relationship was so good that in, by 19, August of '38, why we got married.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So you'd known each other a year?

ED GARMAN: I'd met her at Christmas of '37 and we were married August. So it was about nine months. Nine or ten months that we knew each other. But we . . .

Tape 1, side B [session 1, tape 1; 30-minutes]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You were saying that . . .

ED GARMAN: We were on campus. We, our relationship was primarily on campus. And I had gotten a job up in the Jemez Mountains, which was about 60 miles northwest of Albuquerque with an N.Y.A. Camp as an instructor. Because it was a bilingual problem. These people were being taught, the Hispanic, it was set up for a Hispanic education and building. And what they had to do was get familiar with the ruler, the yard stick, the tape, the, the English language for the materials that they used in building adobe, all that stuff. Which oddly enough, these people came from provincial New Mexico and north and northwest. They didn't use English at all. They were entirely Hispanic and Spanish speaking people. So they had to learn how to use the foot rule, how many inches in a foot and all that sort of stuff. And I was drafted to, through some connections, which I don't recall, drafted to go up there and do that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you like it?

ED GARMAN: Yeah, I loved it. I loved it because, again, there we were dealing with fundamentals. And how these, how these fundamentals come into play if, if you're receptive to them. And I was very receptive to fundamentals. And so dealing with teaching the fundamentals simplified the language problem because it was an on-hands production. I could put my hands on what it was we were talking about and they could put their hand on what we were talking about. And so we got along great. Well, anyhow, Coreva didn't like my being up there and she being in Albuquerque and we'd lost our connection. So, so the, through a friend, why we got together and the friend decided we ought to get married and that would simplify matters. Because then she could come up and join me at camp legitimately. That's how straight everything was. So we got married and she came up to camp. The summer, the rest of that fall before she went back to the university. It was in August and she was not due back until about September. Anyhow, we got intimately acquainted and we got to know each other very well and liked it. So that I could continue my platonic studies and correlate them with my, with my Hispanic teaching. And finally that died out and I moved back to Albuquerque. And then I found, I got a studio. And I started painting full time. Because we had saved some money and Coreva had had an inheritance that she was living on and we could make out on a minimal basis. And so I started painting. And of course, Coreva was urging me to go abstract 100 percent. Which I did. I wasn't sold on it, but I understood what it was about. And so when I, when I started working I immediately made quick progress. I made amazing progress in about a year or two. So that I had accomplished a lot of work by 1941, '42, at the time that I met Bill Lumpkins, who was a member of that Transcendental Painting Group, and also Raymond Jonson, who was a member of that Transcendental Painting Group. Anyhow, I had met Bill because Bill was working for the state of New Mexico in connection with Hispanic education in construction. So part of his job was to come over to Jemez and see what was going on. Well, then of course we met. And I had some of my drawings there. And he said, 'Did you do this?' And I said, 'Yes.' He says, 'They're pretty good.' He said, he said, 'Can I come down to Albuquerque and see what you're doing down there?' I had stuff down there stored away. And he came down there and was very excited about it. Well, earlier than that when I was still doing work that was connected to landscape and figure studies I

had an exhibit at the, my first exhibit at the Santa Fe Museum of Art. At that time, at that time, which was late '37 possibly, they had an open door policy for exhibitors. They didn't have jury shows or anything like that. You simply went in and signed up for an alcove, which allowed you to show about 10 paintings or 12 paintings. You signed up and waited for it to open up. And when it opened up they called you and said, 'Come on up. Your alcove is open.'

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I know a little bit about this. This is so interesting. You'll be concerned because this was [Robert] Henri [phonetic]. You know, Henri played a role in founding this.

ED GARMAN: Yeah. Yeah. He and Edgar Hewett.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right. And they established this policy.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, Edgar Hewett was, was the, was the personality in archeology and anthropology in New Mexico.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you know him?

ED GARMAN: Yes.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Ah, interesting.

ED GARMAN: He, he dominated the scene there in Albuquerque. And Santa Fe. American School of Research and all that stuff. And he insisted, as a, a member of the board or whatever, that there would be an open door policy. So he was very much a part of that. Well, I had met Hewett in, in Albuquerque because as part time work I found a job in, in the archeology department under the, the W.P.A. I guess it was.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: Sorting pottery shards.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you like that?

ED GARMAN: I loved it because these shards were, were collected by the bushel from the various pueblos there, the ancient pueblos that were being dug into by archeologists and archeology students. So there was a lot of pottery come out. Well, because the nature of the pueblo series was that there was a great deal of trading going on between the pueblos. And one of the problems was to find out which pottery was indigenous to which pueblo and which pottery was trade ware. Well, one of my jobs was to find out what was what. So I sat at a table day in and day out sorting pottery shards. And that incidentally trying to classify the local shards as to style. Because as in the two or three hundred years that pottery existed in primitive pueblos why they developed different styles. From very practical utilitarian stuff to, to sacred stuff. So sorting that out was part of my job. Well, occasionally I'd find a nice piece of shard maybe, four or five inches in size, which showed enough of the detail. And usually, well sometimes it was well placed on the shard so it made a picture. A beautifully designed picture. Absolutely abstract. Because it was broken up. And it was abstract and I could see a beautiful abstract design there. Truly non-objective, done in black, red and yellow, which were the dominant colors. So I picked up from the pottery shards a concept of design that I felt I could utilize further down the road. Which I did. Which I still do today. My stuff really has a southwestern look. I think it does.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I think so too.

ED GARMAN: I think it does. And that's all good because I got that impulse from a very, very good start. Because you can't go wrong on, on design on good primitive art, which is honest, quite exquisite and extraordinary. So that when I got into painting, anyhow, I got this show at the museum due to the expansive attitude of Hewett. And, and of course I knew him and it meant a lot to him and I'd read his material that he had written.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Had he seen any of your paintings at this point?

ED GARMAN: No, he hadn't. Not seen none of my paintings. In fact, I probably hadn't done any of, of the kind that would have interested him. Anyhow, I did portraits and landscapes and, and darn mythology stuff. And I had a good show set up. Well, who should come in when I had finished hanging the show, was Raymond Jonson. Well, Jonson looked around. Again, he always said, 'Did you do this?' And I said, 'Yes, I did that.' And he says, he said, 'How long have you been painting?' And I said, 'About three or four years.' He said, 'How did you accomplish this quality in paint?' Now he was very much interested in the quality of the paint. He felt that there was something very mysterious about the way paint worked to create the illusion of what it was. It, it was kind of a mysterious film that was at work on the surface of painting, that projected a quality he liked. And apparently I had it. Well, I got it from studying old master's formulas. I got that stuff out of the library. I did, how did they, how did they mix their paint? What did they do? How? And of course there was literature out on it. And I found out that there was

a certain way to mix oil paints so that it retained its flexibility. Because one of the problems of oil paint is it does get brittle. Because it doesn't truly dry. It oxidizes and becomes crystalline. So I wanted to get that problem out of the way because I was working on canvas at that time and I, in storing canvasses I had to roll them. Because I was reusing the stretcher bars because I had to live cheap. So I would take the canvas and I worried about the problem. So I found a way of creating a very flexible oil media. And that oil media made me paint in a certain way in order to make it work properly. That is I had to paint thin and I had to paint with body. So that they looked very much in a finished state like the surface of a Renoir, which was a very rich and beautiful surface.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Very different from the surfaces of today.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, very, very different than this. Well, Raymond saw, Jonson saw this, this quality of paint and he was struck by it. He was very excited about it. In fact, he begged a sample of my oil mix from me and kept it in his studio when, to experiment with. And he had a huge bottle of it. Maybe a quart size bottle of it. And that was in his studio for years. And he always, he had 'Garman's Mix' on it.

[Laughter]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You saw that later?

ED GARMAN: Yeah, I saw that years later when, when he had his Albuquerque studio. I got a big kick out of that. Well, anyhow, that got him interested in me as a name, you see?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And that was your first meeting?

ED GARMAN: That was my first meeting, yeah.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Through that show?

ED GARMAN: Yeah.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: He had heard about you maybe from Lumpkins or . . . ?

ED GARMAN: Well, no, then Lumpkins, Lumpkins came a little later. When I moved to Albuquerque to live with Coreva and I was painting abstractions, Bill would drop in because we got, I had gotten to be good friends. Bill is a wonderful person type, I mean, a human being. So regardless of what you were interested in, he was interested in you. So he'd come down and he would see my progress. He says, he says, 'This is remarkable stuff.' He says, 'I can't believe it.' Because with Coreva's tutoring and my instincts, which were pretty, apparently pretty good, I was making great progress in, in the non-objective field. So I finally got a group together. And I don't recall whether I showed them in that, in Santa Fe or not. Anyhow, he said, 'I'm going to bring Jonson down and look at these things.' He said, 'I think you belong . . .' by that time the TPG had gotten, had gotten started early in '38, I think it was. He brought Jonson down and he, Jonson saw the stuff. I'd hang, my backyard had a big wood fence. I'd hang my paintings on this wooden fence in the daylight. And Coreva and I would sit out there in the evening in the twilight and see what miracles the light would perform on these abstractions. It was like a light show.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: Anyhow, Raymond came down. It was about 5:00 in the evening and the paintings were on the, on the, on the wall. And he looked around and he said, he says, 'Congratulations. You're one of us.'

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Now this was before 1941 when you formed the . . . ?

ED GARMAN: Yeah, yeah. This was before then. This was '30, about '39 or early '40.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So you were an unofficial TPG member at that time?

ED GARMAN: No, no.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: No?

ED GARMAN: No, but the work, the point was, the work did the trick. That he was sold on the work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see.

ED GARMAN: And I've shown you a 1941 work, what kind it is. And consequently, I think I had already made a connection with the Museum of Non-Objective Art in New York with Hilla Rebay. Anyhow, I had shown a few pieces back there.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How did that come about? That's such an important connection.

ED GARMAN: How did that come? That was an important connection. Give me time on that. Because we're going pretty fast.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah. Well, we can come back to the Guggenheim and how they acquired your work. But let's talk more about Jonson and that initial, those initial encounters with your work.

ED GARMAN: Well, as a consequence of, he was asking me to become a member, I remember there was about only six or eight months left in the official TPG situation. Anyhow, Jonson stopped in the studio every week because he came down to the university on a teaching project. He was teaching, started in '33 I think it was. And he was teaching there regularly. And during, during those critical years just before the war, why he started teaching more and more days. So when he was through teaching in the middle of the day, let's say 3:00, before he started back to Santa Fe he would come over to the studio and call his wife to say that he was okay and was on his way. Then he'd visit with me about an hour or so and see what I was doing. And of course, he was always tremendously enthusiastic because it was a different kind of thing than he was used to, because I didn't have to go through all the processes that he had to go through to reach abstraction. I had sort of just went boom into it. And due to Coreva.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you think just because of Coreva?

ED GARMAN: Just because, solely because.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Wow.

ED GARMAN: I had no experience with, I hadn't seen any of Jonson's abstractions at that time. I hadn't seen any of Bill's abstractions at that time.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But you were aware of Kandinsky and you knew . . .?

ED GARMAN: But I was, because of my studies I was aware of Kandinsky. Now we have to go back. Because in 1935, and this is what pushed me the hardest into, to painting as a, as a career opportunity. Was in, I was going back and forth from Lehigh to Albuquerque by rail and my rail connections gave me a stop over in Chicago of about three hours. And it was mid day. And the Art Institute is only several blocks away from the, whatever the railroad center was at that time.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Central.

ED GARMAN: The Cen-, yeah. Anyhow, it's a huge railroad center. And the trains would come in there and I would have to find something to do with the time. Find something to eat and that sort of thing. So I would walk out on, I don't know what the name of the street was, anyhow, I finally bumped into the Chicago Art Institute. Well, on the particular time that I bumped into the Art Institute there were huge banners out on the front of the building, Vincent Van Gogh. I, of course, I didn't know anything about Vincent Van Gogh or any of that group, except possibly in reading about them and about their eras. So I went in to that show. And I was just as stunned by the Van Gogh exhibit as I was when I landed on the desert of New Mexico. It was just amazing. I didn't think that pictures could have that intensity and that strong feel of projection. They really projected themselves. I could stand in the room and I could feel them hit my chest. It was just such a marvelous, marvelous, marvelous experience. Well, I, I spent my three hours there looking at the Van Gogh. And when I got back to New Mexico after that trip I had my resolution in mind that I was going to seriously investigate painting. But my painting, my resolution was to think in terms of color. Which I did. The space was the first layer and color was the next layer. So I had to co-join those two things and get them working together. And in the luminous way that light, the light of New Mexico is so utterly luminous. It would just come into any place you were in. And everything was, was gorgeously luminous. Now a lot of the painters that came west were overcome by the light of the west because it was too bright. They saw everything white.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Who are you thinking of?

ED GARMAN: Well, I'm not thinking specifically of anyone, but let's talk about Walker, a TPG painter. When I first saw his landscapes everything was tinted with white. And the artists that were associated with him, everything was tinted with white. Everything was pale. Now when I walked out on the, on the, on the land, on the landscape and I would pick up these stones and, and look at the plants at close range I found that intensity of color there that I couldn't believe. Because everything was, in the east was grey-green. So that when I saw these colors, and of course the first time I saw turquoise I was flabbergasted, but here were these brilliant reds and yellows and blues and all that sort of stuff. And the greens were phenomenal. And the flowering plants, the cactus flowers were phenomenal. So I saw so much beautiful color in the west that, that the painters that I was acquainted with apparently didn't see or weren't able to translate. So that they're the dominant feel of their paintings where they

were toned with white. And of course, you'll find out later on when you see Walker's non-objective paintings, they're very tinted with white. They go to the pales and the whites. Because that was his concept of the light. On the other hand, mine was a very, very intense color like that. And oddly enough, Jonson and Lumpkins' paintings, Lumpkins' came out of the landscape and he saw them dark and rich, but he didn't see them as luminous. And Raymond, who had come from Oregon and Washington and Maine and places like that still was thinking in terms of the heavier colors. So that his first paintings were not brilliantly colored paintings. His earlier or abstractions. He didn't, until he got into the digits and the, and the number series and stuff, didn't start to using bright colors.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: What about Bisttram? Where does he fit into this?

ED GARMAN: Bisttram? Bisttram was, of course Raymond had spoken to Bisttram about my work and Bisttram said, 'Well, that's fine.' I think Bisttram was losing interest in TPG because it wasn't going nowhere, anywhere, because of the war. And so he had to accommodate that. But Bisttram had been down to the Museum of New Mexico when something of mine was hanging. Oh, I suppose it was the annual shows. They had the annual shows where all the artists of the southwest came, put work in at the museum. It was a juried show. And so he probably saw a Garman and concurred with Raymond that it was pretty good stuff. And I didn't know that. One of the things I was, knew about, I never, I was totally innocent about my work. I didn't know my work was very good. Even though I had the approval of these artists who I respected and admired, I really didn't sense in my heart that my work was very good.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: At what point did you know?

ED GARMAN: And I didn't learn, didn't have that confidence until well into the sixties. That was, I was way down the road before I began to realize that my work was, was very good.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How do you make sense of that? I mean, you've been so committed to this project.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, I was so committed that I, because I was brought up in an environment, my mother had made many, very many personal mistakes in her life. And she taught me that making mistakes was very, very expensive. So I, whenever I looked at my project I looked at it through this film of am I making a mistake here? Am I doing it right? I have to be perfect or it's not good enough. You know? That idea pervaded the thing. So that hung, hung, it still hangs into me right to this day. If I don't do my best I may have made a very critical expensive mistake.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: On the other hand, Ed, you told me that when you're very free about throwing out things or discarding things that you don't think are quality.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, well, that's discarding mistakes.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay.

ED GARMAN: See, I didn't want mistakes in my life.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But it wasn't, it's not so expensive to you to discard these things?

ED GARMAN: No, not at this time in my life or at any time along the way. Because when I was really poor I would reuse my material.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see.

ED GARMAN: That is, when I shifted to, to Masonite structure, the wood structure things why those I could sand down and re-gesso and paint as though it was an original material. So I wouldn't be surprised that some of the paintings that still exist may have been painted, resurfaced, reground, sanded down to the wood and, and start all over again. But the business of, of mistakes -- and then of course Coreva was teaching about platonic perfection didn't help the situation either. [Laughter] So I was between a rock and a hard place between my personal environment and my philosophy. So I had to stay with it. You see?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yet at the same time you're getting all this reinforcement from these painters who clearly you had admiration for?

ED GARMAN: Absolutely.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: From Bisttram and Lumpkins.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, that's what's true. And wherever my peers, wherever my, my work contact and my peers there was an absolute admiration. But I didn't know where it was coming from. Because I distrusted the PR principal. As people said nice things about you whether they were relevant or not. So I was very, very cautious

about accepting admiration. And I only accepted admiration when they were willing to exhibit with me as a peer. Then I knew it was for real. But to come to the studio and say, 'This is beautiful work,' and leave, is one thing, but to invite me to share space with them on a museum wall or a gallery wall was a compliment of a high order for me. I thought that was good. And that's what Raymond and Bill did for me when they invited me into the TPG. Even though I never really hung work with them why the invitation was there and that was very good. And then later on, right about '41 or '42, sometime in there, Raymond invited me to have an exhibit at the University of New Mexico, a one man show of my work. So I hung about 30, 35 works there. A big show. And I gave a talk with it. And it was a very exciting experience for me because here I felt that I had won the approval not only of, of what I felt was my mentor at that time, was the community who were interested in that sort of thing. And I did get good results from the community. There were people that came forward that I didn't know existed. And, who had been interested in Raymond's work and the TPG work but didn't know I existed. And I got a real good thing out of that. Well, I felt so pleased with that that, oh, now where are we now? Let's see the chronology. In 1941, I think it was, Coreva and I made a tour of the United States art museums and galleries. And we started with Kansas City and went east. St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, ended up in New York City where she had a cousin that accommodated us while we were there. Well, while I was there we went over to the Museum of Non-Objective Art. And we found out Ms. Rebay was giving a talk at one of the openings of various sections of the museum. So we went to that. And we met Ms. Rebay. And I was very impressed with her. She was truly, truly devoted to what she believed in. And that meant a lot to me. So we talked to her and Coreva said, which I wouldn't have never done, Coreva said, 'Ed does abstractions.' And she said, 'Oh, well,' she says, 'If you'll send me some photographs why I'd love to look at them.' And I sent her some photographs and she immediately . . .

Tape 2, side A [session 1, tape 2; 15-minutes]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Archives of American Art interview with Ed Garman on March 25, 1998. This is the second tape.

ED GARMAN: Of the show of Ms. Rebay [inaudible]. Anyhow, she was very, very enthusiastic about, about what I had sent her. And two of her favorite painters were Kandinsky and Rudolph Bauer. And I've indicated a preference for Bauer because of, again the thing of simplification thing. I thought he was, got very, very effectively did what he and Kandinsky set out to do. And he did it with simpler methods, as more direct. The Kandinskys were always very rich and very beautiful but there was a direct and powerful impression from the Bauers. That stuck with me very hard. Well, in writing about, back and forth to Ms. Rebay about some of the things we were interested in why I mentioned that I, my preference for Bauer. Well, she brought Bauer down to see my work, which was something else. Had I been there I'd have sunk through the floor. But he was very enthusiastic about what I was doing. And so I maintained a relationship up until I was, to the Guggenheim, which became the Guggenheim, until World War II. So that my feeling about Rebay and the Guggenheim is very, very high and very rich. Because I think she was right on the button as far as my philosophic interest is concerned and my spiritual interest.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Hm. Let's talk about that. How you were developing these spiritual interests and preferences almost for modes of painting. And you've mentioned Kandinsky and Bauer. And also you admire . . .

ED GARMAN: Malevich.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Malevich.

ED GARMAN: Kupka.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Kupka.

ED GARMAN: Delaunay.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: All those, all those people. One of the problems of being abstract, and I was, you see, I've really never been just a painter. I've been interested in something else. Coreva got me interested in philosophy. And philosophy, no matter how esoteric it gets seeks relevance. And I felt that, that a lot of art that we see, that was contemporary to me and whatever I was doing, had only one relevance and that was the marketplace. Or self-aggrandizement. Being a very important person in the art field. That is, if I had a name, it didn't matter what I did the name was paramount, you see. So that one of the things I learned from seeing the Kandinskys and Bauers were I never saw a bad Kandinsky. I never saw a bad Bauer. And that was very impressive to me. I never saw a bad Jonson. These kind of artists that worked on these things were operating on some level that much of the stuff that was going out, and I figured out that had to do with relevance. And I thought to myself, what, what is the relevance, how does the relevance thing fit into it? And going back to philosophy. Now your major, your major philosophers, through time, have always considered the most relevant thing something outside themselves, like God. Or something omnipotent. So that, that force came in and made what you did relevant.

That is, in as much as you're in harmony with the cosmic, in a sense, religious cosmic, why what you were doing was significant. That if you did a good deed you did it not for your own benefit but to please God and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on. So that kind of relevance became important to me. Well, in thinking it out, now remember I came out of the Depression, I was in World War I, and I could see very little relevance in, in society. To whatever was going on I could not see its relevance to the finest that I hoped to be as a human being. Because the economy has downgraded people, the war downgraded people as individuals particularly. So I had to find something. So I said politics is not relevant.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: That's interesting to me. Politics wasn't relevant?

ED GARMAN: Politics wasn't, yet it was an intensively political time.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Exactly.

ED GARMAN: But it was irrelevant. It wasn't . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Artists were being political. And that was their road into relevance. Something that people like Ben Shahn [phonetic].

ED GARMAN: That's right.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And others who were . . .

ED GARMAN: But where are they today without relevance? Yeah. So politics and nationalism was not relevant to me because the nationalistic borders were being broken down left and right by science philosophy and technology and all kinds of things. And then religious creeds weren't working. Certainly religious, religious theories weren't saving the world from the troubles they were in. They were just giving people peace of mind mostly. And that sort of thing. So gradually I eliminated these things that were, may have been particularly relevant in its particular spot, the political thing. Like the Russians were very political with their art. But where is that political stuff today? What is its relevance? So the relevance has a temporary value, it has a permanent value. And I was looking for something that I could hang onto that had a more permanent level. And I figured, generally speaking, I felt idealism was, was the solution to the problem, to be truly idealistic. Well, I had run into idealism in philosophy because most religious philosophy is idealistic. So I understood idealism and I said why can't painting be as idealistic as any philosophy or any religion or any political philosophy or anything else? And I said, what are the consequences of that, of thinking that way? And I said, well, it represents freedom. It represents freedom from all the exigencies, the trash that comes into our cultural life. And I can be free and clear of all that stuff, if I stuck with painting. And that, that's more or less what steered me. And of course, Coreva's platonic philosophy of idea existing before fact, and that the idea should have a very valuable foundation. So it worked out very well. All these things coincided eventually in what I wanted to get with. So that explains in many ways why I'm, let's say a visionary and why I prefer privacy. Because to become involved with, with what's ever in my culture means that on the basis of idealism was to be totally involved. For example, in the sixties I was totally involved in environmental studies for two years. In which I participated extensively in the environmental activities and I didn't do any painting. I gave my, I believe my idealism and I stuck with environmental things. Until Coreva said, 'It's time for you to change. Things are underway.' And we had gotten things started here in, in, in San Diego that have been lasting. So, let me see. I'm lost about where I am now.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, we were talking about this sort of definitive move you made into spiritual and idealistic art, art practice. And also your relationship to Rebay and others like Bauer, Kandinsky, etc.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, well, of course, oh, when I studied intensively the, the pioneers of those five people, I found that they were, they, however they did it, that they had relieved themselves of all these affinities with their cultural picture. That is, they had relieved themselves and found that to relieve themselves and get that freedom and to work within that freedom, within the context of painting. Now painting is a wonderful thing because painting's one of the few arts that can separate itself from cultural affinities. That is theater almost is bound to it. Architecture is almost bound to it. The dance is bound to it in some way because the physical presence of the artist is required. Music is less bound to it but it is, it is a, it is an entertainment type of expression. That is, the artist composes by himself but it has to be played by a second party. And it has to be heard by another party before it reaches its full fulfillment. Now with painting, the fulfillment is reached when the thing works. Now what happens after that is a whole other dimension. And we don't need to, the artist does not have to think about that at all. All he has to do is know it's right and in that rightness why something will come of it. And that's the idealism of it. It's as build a better, build a better mousetrap and consequences follow. Well, that isn't true because you can build good mousetraps forever and nothing will happen. But anyhow, in painting you can do that because there is an audience out there that is curious about what a painter does in his private life. That is his creative private life. And what will come of it. What happens when an artist is left alone to do the best that he can do as a consequence of trying to be the best that he can be, which is basically my philosophy. And then of course I was drafted into the, into World War II. And went through all the stuff of boot

camp. Was shipped overseas. And was on the Martial Islands and ended up on Okinawa. And I could see the horrible waste. I could see waste where I couldn't see any planting, any planting that indicated that there, that that waste was in any way useful. It was just an abundance of material that one side could throw at another just on the basis of momentum and that sort of thing. It was just a waste of material and human life. It sickened me being on the spot.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Can you talk a little bit about what your specific roles were in the military? What kind of activity you saw?

ED GARMAN: Well, when I went in the Navy I was very quickly sorted out as, as a very good swimmer. I was a very good swimmer.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You were a great athlete. Right?

ED GARMAN: I was a good athlete, yeah. In every way. I ran against some of the best sprinters on the east coast and lost of course. But anyhow, I was a very fine swimmer. I had gotten very close to Olympic quality. And so when I ended up at the base here in San Diego I was quickly sorted out as a swimmer. And in as much as I had Red Cross training in swimming, life saving and that sort of stuff, which I did in Albuquerque in connection with the Albuquerque YMCA, why I was selected as a, as a, as a swimming teacher. The boot kids would come in and they would have to learn to swim because they couldn't be put aboard a ship unless they had, were able to swim. That is, manage to get from the ship to the life raft if that, if they were dumped and that had to happen. So I taught swimming and I was there for a year. And of course my Red Cross training got in the way and finally the Navy found out that I had good Red Cross training. So I was drafted into the medical corps. And I went through the courses and I ended up in the Navy in the medical corps. Well, then I was shipped to Okinawa in the medical corps. And of course, I saw the worst of what war can do. And I was attached to a Marine group who were fighting on the front and I'd get first aid work there. And collecting bodies endlessly. Collecting bodies, tagging them and, and I saw that. And bad, bad situations. And then when the war was over then I was, worked with the civilians that were, the Okinawa civilians, which was even more tragic than the, than the people in, in battle. Because they were victims in the way that the military were also victims. But they were victims in a way of we picked up people that, walking wounded that had been wounded two or three months before and seriously infected people. We were on, we picked up women with dead babies on their backs, still carrying their dead babies on their backs. Stuff like that. Now that, that told me a lot about waste. Tremendous waste and the innocence, the innocent always suffer the most in a war. In any war. So I, that was, when I came out of the war I was convinced that our culture had very little to offer. And though I tried to maintain it because by that time I had a family, a wife and two children. And I had an obligation to take care of them. So I went to work during that. But I was very, very, very cynical about what the culture had to offer. So that, by that time we had, I had, we lived in Long Beach and I painted there. And I got acquainted with, with John McLaughlin. I got acquainted with Lorser Feitelson. And there were a couple of other people up there. The Baroness Rebay, Miss Rebay, had written me a letter telling me, telling me about her contacts on the west coast and how I should get acquainted with them. So that, that was a good thing. But I was so, so poor at that time, trying to catch up with, with, with what society was doing with people that just getting a job and maintaining my family. And I did paint on the side. And I did a lot of gouaches. These. Here's '51. Here's the kind of thing I was able to do in spite of all the problems that existed in my personal life. Because the idealistic thing says, Ed your personal life is separate from your creative life. And that no matter what was happening in my personal life, if I had time to do creative work I was able to shift into it. Like going into the, from the earth to the stratosphere and just one big jump I could get into it. And Coreva was 100 percent behind me on that. Always, no matter what our cultural life was. Our personal life, or our family life, or our economic life. If time offered it, she said, 'Go paint.'

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: That's a tremendous asset.

ED GARMAN: That's a tremendous asset. The biggest asset I have. I owe it all to that lady. So that I was able to do this work but, again, I was doing work that I didn't, that wasn't up to what I had in my mind. And so I was very timid about showing work while I was in the Los Angeles area. In fact, I didn't show any.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: None at all?

ED GARMAN: None at all. I just sat tight and waited for . . . I resumed, I had resumed my connection with the Guggenheim, and was sending work back east on a regular basis. Which was, was healthy for me.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: And the response was very good there.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I wonder if, I was sort of hoping that in my interview, next interview session we'd talk about your experiences here in California. And so I'm wondering if we could just for a minute circle back to your work with the TPG and your place amongst those artists. Because you were the youngest, you were also, well,

one of the youngest. And also last, I think, to join that group. Could you talk a little bit about that context of those particular painters? How they related to one another? How they got along? Or how they agreed to be a group? How they agreed to disband? You've also served as their principal historian.

ED GARMAN: Well, that came later. I, I am more of a transcendental painter today than I was then.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Interesting.

ED GARMAN: Yes. Because there's a lot of water under the bridge between then and now. At that time, again, we're in the war situation, these people were all working on a part time. They were struggling to keep their momentum going with what was going. Bisttram finally had to shut down the school in Taos when he went on to Los Angeles. But meanwhile, the relationship between all these artists was very good. They were truly companions in the enterprise. Now remember, the, the curious, the interesting thing about the transcendental painters was they were very diverse stylistically. Extremely diverse. The difference between Pelton and myself was enormous. Nevertheless, we had the same goals in mind, and that was the transcendent experience. That is, we were pushing beyond the norms in our field to get at something else. And that thing, for want of another name, is, was the transcendent, that it went beyond itself. And by going beyond itself, that is, in, in what it was working with, why that's ambiguous and I want to straighten that out. You had to, you had to reach an area where the work projected a quality that you didn't even, weren't even able to think about putting there. You just tried for it. It was always, I'm trying for this and I don't know whether I can achieve it. But you worked towards it. If you work toward the supreme organization and arrangement and the input to bring it to top level within itself so that it would project this feeling. It goes back to that feeling of quality that Raymond spoke about in painting. This, the surface, a beautiful surface of a painting as in a gorgeous Renoir has a, is a world in itself. It's transcendent. It goes beyond the materialistic effect of, of painting. Now we make a, in modern painting, contemporary modern, or late, we make a big deal about the painterly quality. Well, that isn't what it's about. It's to transcend the painterly quality. So that among many transcendental painters the handling of the paint is not significant. It goes back to somebody like Vermeer. When you go back to look at a Vermeer you are not aware of the paint. The images are so translucent and so exquisitely done. And there is no paint on the canvas. You look at it close and you wonder where the paint is. It looks as though it was painted without paint. And yet it's all there. And that is the transcendental effect. And it goes back through all that sort of qualities, so that when a transcendent, the person who seeks the transcendency, is going for a quality that is beyond the thing. You get a good example of that in Agnes Martin. She doesn't have very much going on the canvas, but it does an amazing amount. And that's the transcended thing. And you have a lot of those painters, not a lot, but you have some of those painters around. Who in one way or another go beyond the qualities of the material or the qualities of the ideas themselves. I think I've done a lot with, with Plato. And so that's what that is about. Now did I get off the track?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, no. I, you're right on track. I'm just interested if you could shed any light on the . . .

ED GARMAN: Oh, the people.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Personal interaction. How did, did you get together as a group and talk about each other's work?

ED GARMAN: Before my time these people would get together. Because Santa Fe always was a hob nob center. And people from anywhere at all who wanted to hob nob with each other usually ended up in Santa Fe. Taos didn't have much going for it at that time. Albuquerque was a commercial center. So if you wanted to get into an art atmosphere you went to Santa Fe. Well, of course, it's not too far by modern standards. 60 miles from Albuquerque, 60 miles from Taos. And these people would get together because of their common interest. And they were, they got together mutually having fun. They really had fun together. The time, and what Raymond told me and what Bill told me about those periods, he said they were, they were good times. Because they would have done what they were doing anyhow. It had nothing to do with the TPG. TPG just gave them an extra voice in the cultural milieu. So that they were that kind of people. They were constructive with each other. There was no, Raymond, Bill, any of the others, would do anything to help you out in terms of what you might have needed that they had to give. And so that's the way that worked. It was, it was, it was not a club, but it was a nice companionable group of people. And their friendships lasted as long as they lived.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And you're still in touch with . . .

ED GARMAN: And still in touch with Bisttram and, with, Lumpkins and Miller and so on down the line. So there's a, that, I treasure, I didn't get too well acquainted with Miller because she left the area. As soon as the war broke out realistically for America she and her husband went to L.A. to get work in, in the war plants. And they never really got away from it again until she came back to Albuquerque many, many, many years later.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And then Pelton too. She went off to Cathedral City? Or was that earlier?

ED GARMAN: Well, Pelton already had been there. Pelton was solidly fixed in, in Cathedral City. Now when I was in the Navy, as a swimming expert I went over to Palm Springs to make a movie about survival in the water. And there was a number of us from San Diego, and then of course the movie crew from Hollywood, and a lot of other people who were doing the script and that sort of stuff. But there was one hotel over there who had a massive swimming pool, almost Olympic size swimming pool, where we did our work. Well, the work was dependent on the light. So sometimes about 3:00 in the afternoon why the light would go on us and they said, 'We're through for the day.' And I knew that Pelton was in the area. So I, I didn't know where but I knew she was in Cathedral City so I thought, well, I'll just walk over there and visit Agnes. And I walked over there and it took me, it must have been about six or seven miles, it took me a couple of hours to get there. Well, that was about 5:00 in the evening. Well, it was still lots of daylight left because it was summer time, I think it was summer time. Anyhow we didn't have any discomfort on the desert, physically. And so I met Agnes there and she invited me in and I told her who I was and my connections. And she invited me in and was glad to see me. And she offered me a cup of tea and some figs. She had a fig tree growing outside of her house. And some figs for refreshment. And then I was there about an hour and a half or two hours and we didn't say a word about painting, or her art, or Transcendental Painting Group or anything. She simply pumped me for personal information about Raymond, about Vera, about Bisttram and what they were doing and that sort of thing. You know, just a painter's interest, you see. So I left there and had met a very lovely lady. And of course always being sold on her art. In fact, I put her at the apex of the TPG group. And so I left there and did my six or seven miles back to the, to the base. And we finished the work there. And I went back to the Navy again and eventually on to whatever else happened. But that was my experience there in the Navy.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: There was Florence Miller? Is she the other woman who was part of it?

ED GARMAN: Florence Miller.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Florence Miller, excuse me.

ED GARMAN: Florence Miller, yeah.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So there were two women in TPG. Did that strike you as, as unusual at that time? Or were . . .?

ED GARMAN: The women thing, the women thing didn't come into it. At the time that we were, that I was meeting at Jonson's home for soirées so to speak, parties there, there were always women painters.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Ah.

ED GARMAN: And they, they were, they were of various levels of painting. But the, all were treated as artists not as gender representatives. So that when the question of having Agnes and Miller in the thing, the gender thing didn't enter. They were artists, they were doing our kind of art, why not?

Tape 2, side B [session 1, tape 2; 30-minutes]

ED GARMAN: . . . here that had not been too good for, for the concept. For example . . .

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: . . . of the TPG relationships, was that it was very friendly, very comradely, very much interest, certainly very encouraging to one another. Because they were so, absolutely sold on what the other artist was doing, even though it wasn't their own kind. So that, that worked very well. Well, for me because as a later historian of the group I found that was an easy thing to work with. Because I could find, because of that close relationship, correlations that you wouldn't find just looking at the work. And those correlations are the significant thing. Now as a historian the relationships and the significances of the causes of the events are more significant than the events. Because when you find that foundation of significance then you know something big is going on. When you have an event without a significant cause then you don't know, know something isn't going on. It's like a fashion show. The parade goes on but nothing is really happening. So that to find the significance in, in the event or the, particularly the cause of that event, it's very, very important. That's why I'm so wrapped up, currently, with this, with this study of Chevreul's, Chevreul's, "The Law of Contrasts and Color." Because the, the cause, his studies are the cause of impressionism. See? No matter what the impressionist did, no matter what the deep end eventually happened on the other end of impressionism when it became dissolute, why the foundation was here in Chevreul. And that foundation is the significant thing about impressionism. Not what each individual did with it. Even though the results in many cases were very beautiful. So that when you came to artists like Cezanne he undoubtedly understood the business of color or whatever this is. And in working out his program he undoubtedly did a lot with it because he did personalize color just as the impressionist did. All romantics personalized color. And most art, going back forever, is romantic in some way or another. And they personalize color. Chevreul talks in here about the Greek painters. I don't know anything about Greek painters. I

only know them as sculptors. And that's, and mosaics and that sort of thing. I don't know anything about them as painters. But he talks about Greek color in 1839. So that the romantic aspect of color is the dominant aspect of color in past history and current history. But Cezanne depersonalized it and he used it as simply as a constructual item. The same thing with Seurat. Seurat depersonalized it and made it basically a scientific demonstration of how colors work in a, in the scope of his artistic concepts. Which are great ones. The best. So that, here again, we have cause being more important than effect. And this is the thing that I think is important. And this is what I think was important about the Transcendental Group. Because they put the idea of the transcendent into the semantic discussion of modern art. Up to that time it was abstraction, non-objectivity, all the variance, surrealism and this, that, and the other thing. But it was the effect that these artists that I'm talking about in the contemporary field were going after and not working with the causes and what it potentially had. Now the transcendent painters recognized in each other that we were, that we were working towards an effect that had a very broad cause. And that is the sublimation of the material, the sublimation of any ideas. And that we weren't just making paintings to hang in museums and galleries and commercial venues. That we were working towards the sublime so to speak. And by so doing we had a common bond, which you won't find anywhere else in any other group of artists. This business of the transcendent, and that is what held us all together. And what has drawn Miller back to it, after all these years of being away from it, for some 20, 30 years.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Was there any relationship between the group that you were part of and other artists working in the New Mexico region at that time? Were you familiar, for example, with people like, well, Georgia O'Keeffe and Rebecca Strand and people like that?

ED GARMAN: Remember this, the transcendental painters, and think about Mondrian being the idea.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay.

ED GARMAN: A man like Mondrian, and it's a matter of record, could appreciate what everybody else was doing in their art, but nobody could appreciate what he was doing in his. That's the way it was with the TPG people. We could always appreciate what was going on in the other fields of art. 100 percent, 100 percent. It was difficult for them to come over to our side of the picture.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So do you remember dialogues that you had with some of these other artists? And what came of this?

ED GARMAN: Well, there was a, there was a, when the Transcendental Group came out there was a big dialogue going on. But I knew, I knew the Albuquerque artists. And I talked with them and I admired their work and I could see, see what they were doing. The same way with, with the Santa Fe artists. Those that I met, Alfred Morang, of course, he was one of the writers, but he did landscape. And I appreciated Alfred's work. And I appreciated anybody else that, there were a number of artists that I appreciated very much. There was an etcher, an etcher, engraver that I really loved. Still do today. Slips my mind. That's the one thing you're gonna have a problem with, Derrick is . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Already.

ED GARMAN: The names. The names are really very difficult.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: And, the names are like islands, they make connections. And I wish I could bring them back, but it's too much water under the bridge. And besides, names have not been part of my philosophy. That is, who did what was not significant to me. It's what they did was significant to me. So that it's a little difficult. It's the same way with any other field that I'm interested in. Philosophy, technology, anything else. I'm only interested in what's done, not who did it. That is, an unsigned work of art is just as significant to me as a signed work. Maybe sometimes more. Like the unsigned work of the medieval architects and sculptors and that sort of people. I don't need a signature to tell me that that stuff was great. It's, it's great on its own. So that the TPG people were very, very generous in their admiration. I heard Bill Lumpkins go into ecstasy over a local artist's work, whoever he may, he or she may be. And Raymond, we would go to an art exhibit and I would go with him and I'd say, 'What the heck is he doing in this kind of a show? It's not his field.' So he would go up to him, to a, to a painting, maybe the only good thing in it, and he'd say, 'Ed, don't you think this little spot here is absolutely gorgeous?' And he would go to that little spot and talk to me about it for 15 minutes. That this is an admirable thing. And then I would say, 'Well, why didn't they paint the whole painting that way?' And he would say, 'They don't know what they're doing. It's an accident. But it's still quality. And quality is what counts.' And that sort of thing was characteristic of the, of the TPG. Pelton was the same way. When I read her journals, the things that she admired me, admired simply amazed me. Just simply amazed me. The breadth of her, her enjoyment and interest. And I found that to be true of all the really greats. The Kandinskys, the Mondrians and everything. Their breadth of interest elsewhere, while it doesn't come across back to them. There's no reciprocal thing about that. Where are we now?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I'm actually thinking we should stop here for today.

Tape 1, side A [session 2, tape 1; 30-minute tape sides]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: This is just a test of the quality of this sound. This is Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing the interview with Ed Garman on March 30, 1998 at Mr. Garman's studio in Imperial Beach, California. The interviewer is Derrick Cartwright. Okay, Ed. How are you?

ED GARMAN: Fine.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Good. I thought what I'd like to do chronologically, is pick up where we left off last time, around 1945, 1946. Right after your involvement in World War II, when you moved to Long Beach. You mentioned briefly that Baroness Rebay put you in touch with Feitelson, Lorser Feitelson and John McLaughlin sometime around then. Could you talk a little bit about your experiences amongst those abstract classicists and how you found them as painters at that point?

ED GARMAN: Well, the truth is that I was unable to make contacts at that time because I was doing double duty, both in employment, I was fully employed and taking care of the economics of our family. And then I was painting every bit I could and I was, I didn't have a car. And those people were in Los Angeles, so I never got to meet them at that time. Later on, why something else developed with Feitelson and McLaughlin that we will probably talk about. We left off in, after my return from the, from the Navy. Now what we did skip was that I was doing some painting while I was in the Navy.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right.

ED GARMAN: And . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How did you, how did you manage that?

ED GARMAN: It was a curious situation because I was waiting to go overseas and I was in the barracks. The barracks which was, had four bunks high from floor to ceiling, crowded with people. And I had chosen a top bunk because it was near to a, a 25 watt night light.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Not a lot of light.

ED GARMAN: So, and not a lot of light, and so I started doing gouaches. And I started, because of the light, I always prepared a black background, or ended up with a black background so I could see my colors. So I did in the winter of '44 and '45, I must have done 30 or 35 watercolors, gouaches at that time. Well, that was an interesting experience because in order to get perspective on the, on the paintings, why I'd bring them down and set them on the floor close to a window to see if the light was working right for them. And the Navy guys were curious about this. "What is Garman doing?" You see? So they were fascinated with that. Well, that went on for that winter. Well, finally I had enough of them and I had been going over to San Francisco Museum of Art, which at that time was, was probably as interested in moderns as any museum in the country was. And I met Grace Morley, who was the director of, of the museum. I met her. And she was operating the elevator. I would be the last one out in the evening. And so she would take me down and we were talking while we were going and she found out that I was a painter. And she said, well, she asked me if I was painting. And I said, yes, I was doing it in this, in the barracks. And she said, 'Well, bring some over and we'll talk about it.' And so eventually I brought some over there. Probably in January or February of '45. And she said, 'Oh, we've got to exhibit these.'

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Just like that?

ED GARMAN: Just like that. Yeah, she was taken with them immediately. Well, the, that worked out. I was shipped out and I was overseas. And my part in the war was very brief because it was a closing out period. I got to Marshall Islands and I got to Okinawa and then I got home safe. And I was discharged. Well, eventually the exhibit came up of my things. Well, Dr. Morley put them in a special room all by themselves. A beautiful room, an octagonal room that you could get in and out from two different ways. And it was a beautiful show. I didn't see it. This was, this was the reports that I got from acquaintances I had up there. And Dr. Morley was thrilled to death with it. And we corresponded. And she was a wonderful lady, sweet person. And that was that. Well, one of the interesting side lights about it was that these young sailors got so interested in what I was doing and then they'd, they'd ask me when I, where I was going when I was going over there. And I said that I was going over to the Museum of Art. And they said, 'Well, can we come along?' Well, a couple of them did that. Now these boys were from Arkansas, I don't think they had ever been to a museum. I don't know if they had art in, in, in school. But anyhow, they were quite innocent of what was going on in, in the art world. So I took them over there. And they had a wonderful time. I talked to them, you know.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you remember works and things that you discussed?

ED GARMAN: Well, there was a, there was a André Masson. There was a Mondrian. There were several Kandinskys. There was work of that time and level. And they were absolutely fascinated with them. And then from then on out when I was working on my bunk it was, 'Shh, Garman's working. Shh, Garman's working.' And it was very amusing and very touching too that these fellows felt so solicitous of me in what I was trying to do. And that was rather fun and it's a good memory.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: That's amazing that you could be so productive in that situation and have a show so soon after your military service. That was unusual.

ED GARMAN: Well, it, it was, it was [inaudible] that the Guggenheim also had a show at about that same time. And, but getting into the exhibit, yes, it, I have it listed here. A group, Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Non-objective Art five gouaches. So this is five gouaches from approximately that same period. So that was very nice because I wasn't able to get back to work vigorously at that time because of the necessity of doing a job, getting a job, work done. And earning a salary.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: What did you do for work at that time in addition to your painting?

ED GARMAN: I was a what they call a traffic manager in, in the retail business for a large department store. The traffic manager sees that the, the merchandise that is supposed to be, land in the store, lands there properly and at the right time. And as the buyer puts in an order and then from then on out I'm supposed to see that the work, the stuff comes in. Because if they buy for a sale, let's say, let's say this is March, say the first of May they're gonna have a refrigerator sale at a very big store and they order in a carload of refrigerators. Well, that carload of refrigerators can get lost anywhere in the United States on the freight lines because there's this constantly shifting of, of trains and that sort of thing. So my job was to see that the merchandise landed and was properly handled until it met, got onto the sales floor.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you enjoy that? Is that . . .

ED GARMAN: Oh, yeah, that's a good, that's a very interesting job because it's always fresh. Because you have all kinds of stuff out there in the shipping channels. Anything, everything from nylon hose at that time to, which were hard to find, and to big things like refrigerators, washing machines, furniture. And usually the store, the systems I worked for were big department stores. When I had, was in Boise, Idaho, why I had 18 stores to, to see that shipments landed properly. The orders went out, one order went out but it had to come back in 18 different sections because it was all through Idaho and Washington. And so that, it was an interesting job. It was a stressful job. In spite of that I always painted . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Really?

ED GARMAN: When I could. Now we talked earlier about attitude and that is, I always kept my paintings separate from anything that was going on in my personal life. Because I didn't think my personal life belonged in the kind of painting that I was doing, which you see. That is the clarity and, and the, and the direction and the positiveness of it all is, is quite apart from life, which may not have any of those things in it.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And that requires discipline, right?

ED GARMAN: So that required enormous discipline so that when I sat down to do the work why I simply cut off what was going on in my personal life. And Coreva was so good about that because she'd protect me. Because when, in Long Beach we already had the two girls and we had the two girls in Boise. And they wanted "Dad time", as much as they could get. And of course, I wanted to do that. But then there had to be times set away, aside for the, for the art. And they learned to respect that. When Daddy was painting that's, that wasn't their time. And so they busied themselves elsewhere.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So you went from Long Beach to Boise and then from Boise to Imperial Beach?

ED GARMAN: To here. To here.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And when, when was it that you came first here?

ED GARMAN: That was about 1951. Coreva's health didn't, wouldn't tolerate the Idaho climate, which was a bitter year that year. It would get down to 35, 40 below zero. It was so cold that it didn't even snow. Everything turned to crystals so to speak. So she couldn't endure that climate. So we came down, I think, early in 1951.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And you had been in San Diego before in your Navy days?

ED GARMAN: Yeah, that, why I was here in my Navy days and Coreva and our first child was here with me in those Navy days. And so she got acquainted with San Diego climate. And when she decided to move I gave her a choice between San Diego and Dallas, Texas. Because Dallas, Texas accommodated my interests at that time.

And so she chose to come to San Diego. And in as much as she wanted to be as far south as she could get why we drove down to this corner of the North American continent.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, you're right here on the edge.

ED GARMAN: And settled down. And then we found, we lived in a mobile home for awhile, and then I found this property here, which was very inexpensive. I bought the property and I first built that first studio which is now our storage shed over there.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Uh-huh.

ED GARMAN: And then eventually I built this, we built a home. Which I participated in to save labor costs. And then I built a, built this studio.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Wow.

ED GARMAN: To, to accommodate the work. The one problem about being an artist is not doing the work, is storage for the work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, you've got that. You're so well organized.

ED GARMAN: Yeah. So I made [inaudible] storage, storage.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you always think about it in those terms?

ED GARMAN: In, always in those terms. That is, okay, it's fine to be a painter but what are you going to do with it? And one of the problems that the young artists who come here talk to me about is they just don't have room to accommodate what they're doing. Because if they have the luck that I have sometimes they have to wait 50 years before something gets into circulation. And you may as well have good storage and preservation conditions for that. Because some of the works I can pull out today, like the works we've been looking at, are that old and they look as pristine as the day they were made.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: They do. You've really done a remarkable job of preserving.

ED GARMAN: And that's, that's very, very important. That's part of your job as an artist, is to establish the survival of the work. And that's one of the things I learned very much from Jonson. Because Jonson knew he wasn't going to take the country by storm. So he set up preservation conditions. And he was a good preservationist. And I learned a lot from him through that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Let's talk a little bit about San Diego as a place to be an artist, and maybe southern California more generally. How has being here for, now, over 45 years, almost 50 years, how has that had an influence on your practice as a painter? Your feeling of participation in the modern art world?

ED GARMAN: Well, by now you must have gathered that I don't need the modern art world. I don't need the community. I don't need much of what's around me. So I didn't, when I built here in Imperial Beach the isolation was part of the good, good thing that came from it. I liked it because my time was very full. Because I was still doing a full time job and I had the family who was getting more active all the time. The girls were about six or seven years old by then. And we wanted to use the facilities here in San Diego for their pleasure. So I made, I made no attempt to contact artists in this area. And I made no attempt to exhibit because, because of the poverty again, why I couldn't afford to get things done. Like framing and shipping and all that sort of stuff. I maintained my Guggenheim relationship but very little else. But, and then I maintained my relationship with the University of New Mexico through Jonson.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right.

ED GARMAN: And I had regular shows over there because I would drive over there at least once a year and take a group of my works over there. And he would hold, keep them on hand and eventually build a show around them, or of them. And that was the extent of my exhibiting. And I was satisfied with that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So you weren't interested in contacting San Diego painters like, what's his name? Everett Jackson? Or people like that?

ED GARMAN: No, I knew Everett Gee Jackson. I had met him once.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: They were part of a community of people that you saw regularly and discussed art?

ED GARMAN: No, they were not. No, they were not. I didn't have any acquaintance at all with the local artists. I

would see them at exhibits. If I went to an opening or something like that I would see them. And if I thought their work was of interest to me I would introduce, introduce myself and ask questions about their motivation and that sort of thing. And, because I was, my primary interest in art has to do with ideas and what I am projecting with my work is, is a, an environment of ideas. I don't know whether that word environment creates a problem. But I see my work as an, as an environment. And it's an environment that is free from all the things that I freed it from. That is the, the contingencies of life, the normal atmosphere of life, which is economic and political, and all the other associated things with, with social life, such as religion and, and creeds and color and all that stuff. That's completely set aside. So I had an environment in my work that is quite apart from social and cultural life.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: It's an environment that doesn't exist unless Ed Garman creates it.

ED GARMAN: That's right. Very good. And I felt it was very important to create that environment. Because people are so involved in their personal environment and the problem connected with it that they don't realize that there's a potential, a potential environment that has none of those problems in it or with it. So that when a witness or a spectator, an audience, sees my work all this stuff falls away from them. And they don't make a personal connection with my work. They can't do it because it isn't there. It's non-political, it's none this and none that, none everything. It's even non-contemporary because it has nothing to do with what's going on in the contemporary world. It was very easy for me to sail through all of the contemporary goings on from 1941 until 1998, and totally ignore what was going on out in the art world. Even though I kept up with it as a matter of curiosity and interest.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Easy for you to ignore it?

ED GARMAN: Absolutely ignore it. When I think there's a quality exhibit that's based on the quality of the work, that is, they are doing this thing, they are doing their thing, but are they doing it well? That's my concern. Are they doing it well? And so I'd go to an exhibit to see if they were doing it well. And I would learn a lot by doing that because I had my ideal situation in which I knew I was doing what I was doing was doing well. I would use this as a standard, my work as a standard of quality. So that when I would see another artist's work I would check it out, whether he was a good craftsman or not. I would check it out whether he knew what he was talking about. If he was up to date on his own ideas and all that sort of thing. And I can take almost any art in stride because I can see it from the standpoint of what I think was its motivation and accomplishment. So I have no problem dealing with other art. And, but I have a problem dealing with other artists because they cannot come over on my side of the fence. 'How can you do this without being aware of what's going on politically?' 'How can you do this without realizing there's a war going on?' And that sort of thing. Well, all that stuff's going on all the time. And so that's one of the contingencies that I consider throwing aside. So that when I get up in the morning and come to the studio I am fresh all the time. I don't, I don't have this load or this burden of, of the world on my back worrying about what's going on and how the world will take what I'm doing in it. Because it has never meant too much for me. And fortunately I've had people come and visit me who, who were interested. Like . . .

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: People would come through with other interests. Like Michael Zakian who did the study on Agnes Pelton. He eventually showed up here because I was clued to what Pelton was about. And he immediately became interested in what I was doing. It was exciting to him. It was fresh to him. And through his, his interest, why he got people that were in, in, in, in Palm Springs. Mr. and Mrs. Alan Leslie, who were connected with the Palm Springs Museum. And they eventually showed up here. And they added six pieces of mine to their collection. And they have a very, very fine collection of southern California and American abstract artists. A very fine collection. And so I felt honored to be in that. But that's the way it happens. And then of course, Zakian brought in . . .

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: Zakian brought in Gerald Buck and Gerald Buck immediately became interested. And he acquired two pieces for his collection. And he passed the word on to, to Paul Karlstrom. And of course, he bought, he brought you in on it so that's why you're here.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: That's right.

ED GARMAN: So you have a whole connection . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see.

ED GARMAN: . . . of things that started way back in the early nineties and came down, came down the stream. But none of them were here because they were interested in meeting Ed Garman the artist or seeing Ed Garman's work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, but, Ed, you've had exhibitions at Ohlone College and these things didn't come out of these connections.

ED GARMAN: All these, they came out of the same source.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Really?

ED GARMAN: That is, the Ohlone College age of it came out of the fact that Margaret Stainer was interested in Pelton.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see.

ED GARMAN: And she was preparing a show of, of Agnes Pelton's thing. And again, I was a source. So she came down for an interview with me on the Pelton business. And she of course experienced what was here and was rather overwhelmed by it. And didn't realize that there was this kind of art around for her to see. And, or my kind of an artist. And, because I really don't talk art. I talk ideas. And most people are more interested in art than how did you paint it this way? And how did you paint it that way? In fact, few people ask why I painted it that way. But again, it was a, a connection that was aside from my art and the consequence was that Stainer eventually had an exhibit of mine at Ohlone College. And I addressed the students and had a wonderful time with them.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sounds like it.

ED GARMAN: So that's the way it worked. Invariably it was just like the meeting of, of, with Morley. And, we met in the elevator. And it was her curiosity about my interest because she knew I'd been there many times, because she operated the desk part time. A director worked in those days.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Hey. Yeah. That's right.

ED GARMAN: They, they, they were, they were on the desk and they met their clients, their people and their audience. And that's the way it was with, with Morley. And that's the way it was with Rebay in the Guggenheim. I was there. I asked questions. She got interested in me because I asked the right kind of questions. And that's the way it worked all the way down the line. When, now I had an exhibit in, in La Jolla.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, let's talk about that.

ED GARMAN: In . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: In '72 was it?

ED GARMAN: Let me, let me catch up here with my . . . [Long pause] That was in 1968. I had done the, a book on Raymond Jonson, "The Art of Raymond Jonson, Painter" and it came out of a long friendship with Jonson. And shall we take these things as they come up?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sure.

ED GARMAN: Okay. I had a connection with Jonson since about 1938. And so here it was in 1968 or '58 or somewhere in there. He had a, an exhibit at the Museum of New Mexico. A retrospective. And it was a wonderful exhibit. Something like 70 works used in the whole base floor of the museum. In going back and forth to the museum I helped, was over there to help him hang, hang it. And I also gave a, a speech at the opening. Well, coming back and forth from Santa Fe to Albuquerque we talked about why there wasn't a good publication out on Jonson. And he said, well, he couldn't find anyone that he was sympathetic to, that he could talk to and would present his point of view. Rather, they always wanted to present a critical point of view from an outside position. And he felt that due to his own personality and character and the quality of his work that he needed a more, a more intimate type of exposure. Well, unthinking me, I said, 'Well, why don't you let me see if I can get something together, because I know you well and I know your work well.' I selected maybe a third of what he was exhibiting over there. And so I got to work on that. Well, the work went along very well, well, and it finally got published. But John Waggaman was a photographer that lived here in, in La Jolla and he was a very fine photographer. And he had connections with, with the La Jolla Museum. Well, when I was looking for a photographer I settled on John. So we worked together on the Jonson book and he did most of the photographs for illustration there. Well, consequently he spent a lot of time here in the studio with me talking about these things, bringing me the proofs and all that sort of stuff. And he saw my work. And he said, 'Ed, this stuff should be exhibited.' I said, 'It's fine, but it, it's not likely because of the environment that we have here in San Diego.' And so he said, 'I'll work on it.' And finally he worked on it and he finally got me a retrospective in, at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Who was the director at that time? Do you remember?

ED GARMAN: A fella named Brewer. Brewer, B-R-E-W-E-R, Brewer. And he was very sympathetic. He didn't know I was here. So when John brought him down why he was also amazed at not only the quantity, but the quality of the work. And so he was very enthused and set up the exhibit, which took place in 1968. And it was a, it was a very fine exhibit. The local artists, particularly from the University of California at La Jolla, were down and they saw that and were, were very exhibited, were very enthused about it. And I got good press coverage. But it's interesting, the minute the show closed all interest stopped. No one showed up here and said, 'Gee, Ed, we want to see what else you're doing.' Nothing like that happened.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you think that's San Diego? Or do you think that's . . .

ED GARMAN: I don't know if that's, if that's human nature or what. Because I have a few people here who are so enthusiastic . . .

Tape 1, side B [session II, tape 1; 30-minutes]

ED GARMAN: . . .with every other artist's experience is that they, they shuffle through all this running people through their, their programs. And then the, the continued interest is the exception. And of course, I'm used to that. And of course, I accept it because I don't want a tourist, I don't want to be a tourist interest here, that people come down. I get calls from people who say, 'I have someone who is, who is an artist. Would you mind if I brought them down?' And I ask what kind of art they do and this, that and the other thing. And I say, 'Well, I really don't feel I have the time for it. I have, I have works on the easel and I need to work on them, my family and that sort of thing.' So I beg out of 60 percent of calls that would, just drop in stuff.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And how do you make the distinction between the 40 percent that you will end up seeing?

ED GARMAN: They will drop a word in that triggers me that they're on the right, that internally some way or the other that they are the right thing. Or I might ask them, I say, 'Who's your favorite, modern famous, favorite modern artist?'

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And what would a bad answer be?

ED GARMAN: Anything that's done after 1910 that is in sympathy with the idealistic situation. If they say, 'I'm crazy about surrealism,' well, now that's a no, no, no with me. Because that's a contingency I don't want to deal with. Or if they say, 'Well, I'm a great fan of Tom Benton,' why that doesn't work with me either.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But a good answer would be?

ED GARMAN: But a good answer was, 'I saw a wonderful show of Kandinsky in Chicago a year ago and I just couldn't get it out of my mind,' that's for me.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: What about someone who says, 'I'm enamored of the Arthur Dove show that's going on now.' How does he fit into your . . .?

ED GARMAN: That's fine.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah?

ED GARMAN: Anybody that can accept the good stuff of Arthur Dove is okay by me. Because I'm a fan of Dove myself.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Although you said to me once that you thought Dove really wasn't a non-objective painter?

ED GARMAN: He wasn't. But that has nothing to do, because my criteria is open. Agnes Pelton was not a non-objective painter, but she's 100 percent ideal modern from my standpoint, is she represents the ideal of modernism and she is very modern. And regardless of the fact that she is abstract has nothing to do with it. What I go by is feeling.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see.

ED GARMAN: If, if the feeling of the work is right, for me, then that's highly acceptable for me. And I can enjoy total realism if the feeling is right. That is, let's say a good, a good still life, that's a good example of a still life that can carry over into the transcendent. Because those artists, in working through their, through their pictorial problems, can elevate the, the objects that they're painting to a very high order. Now, a painter, an Italian painter, Morandi, I think it is. Every time I see a Morandi I get a lift from it. From my standpoint. Whatever their standpoint was, but I get that feeling of, hey, this is something going on, you know. And so I accept a Morandi as

within the category of, of what I consider my field. So anybody that touches on the edge of it I'm very sensitive to it. I'm hypersensitive to the fact that there is some sort of a spiritual connection between that person and the work they saw and why they might be interested in what I'm doing. So I see, I weed them out like that and take it from there. And of course, I can always, usually tell if they're discriminating in their choices. I say, we may talk. I enjoy talking to people about their interest in it. And of course, they're interested more than anything else in talking about their interests. So it is very easy for me to set up a conversation and talk to them about their interests. And by doing so I can touch on whether they're a likely visitor to the Garman Studio. Touch it off.

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: In talking about art, one of my basic ideas is that art, art of my kind is what I call organic. That it springs not from some outside conceptual premise, but comes from an internal necessity as Kandinsky says, 'Inner spiritual necessity.' That it comes from the way I am as a human being and what my interests are centered on. So it's very important to me that, that what I talk about in my art is as clear as talking about fixing a car. So that the assumption is that I'm not off into some esoteric area, that it's unspeakable. But that it's very much a matter of nuts and bolts. And that in talking about what I am interested in has very much to do with a very basic part of our human nature and a very basic part of our need from our environment and the people we live with and our whole social structure. So that I think that what I am doing in ideas is applicable on the basis of a world view. That I, I can talk to somebody from China or from India or from Africa, no matter what their context is, and eventually steer around to this common factor. And that is that it's a part of our organic nature. And that my, what I'm speaking with is, is comprehensible to them in their context. And that, that really works out very well for me. It doesn't matter. Anyone can come in here; the butcher, the baker. The plumbers come in and they're crazy about my art. The electricians come in and they get crazy about my art because they're innocent. And they ask me questions and I'm able to answer them that they're satisfied that I'm not giving them a bunch of gobbledy gook. And that's very important to me because my premise is, is very practical in basis. I'm creating an environment that has a certain quality to it and a certain substance to it that they don't find in their day-to-day occupation.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Let's talk about your practice as a painter. And I know that you want to talk about it in terms of a philosophical approach. So maybe you could just take me through the steps that you go through today as a painter when you sit down to make one of your watercolors, which you're still actively producing. You mentioned that you come to these things fresh always. And it seems to me that that involves a kind of discipline. We've talked about shucking off all the concerns of the mundane and committing yourself to a pursuit of these transcendental ideas.

ED GARMAN: Transcendent.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Or transcendent ideas.

ED GARMAN: Yeah.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And also this effort to create another environment, which you describe as very basic and simple. But it can't be that. I mean, it's really a challenge, right, every day to approach this?

ED GARMAN: Well, yeah. Of course, we're looking at 60 years of experience of, of, of clarification. Now when you, when I started out I didn't have that clarification because I was experimenting around. When I laid the groundwork to my major effort as a painter I spent about five or six years researching all the other modes of art. I studied dance, I studied poetry, I studied music. I was a musician. I had done violin for years. I played with a good orchestra, classical music. I had that background. I had, my literary interests were very broad. I read everything I could lay my hands on. Theater, of course, I was in that. And so I had a very broad perspective on how the arts were operating. Because I was looking for something. And I found that, that because I was a very private person, I found that I had to find an art that was suitable to me as a person. And I found that when I was working in theater you had a whole host of people who had, you had to work with and compromise with in order to get the job done. Poetry was based on words. And words are dependent on, on the interpretation of the reader. Fiction is much the same, though it's much more, more descript, descriptive and definitive. Philosophy, there were too many different points of view on philosophy. Each great philosopher had a distinctive point of view. He either was contradicting another philosophy or he was branching out into something which, which he thought was worthwhile. So every art was tested. And finally when I got to painting why I found that, I found that I could, something that I could do by myself, I could be its sole audience. I could be the sole person to discriminate whether I was doing it well or not. And in as much as in that five or six years I had seen an awful lot of art. I had traveled all through the country, the United States. I'd been into, to Canada. I'd been to Mexico. And all that sort of stuff. And so I came to a decision that when I was going to paint I'd have to clarify myself as much as I clarified myself in relationship to the other arts. And I found, tried to find out what I was thinking about and why I was thinking about it and that sort of thing. So there was a purging there in about 1936 and 1937 where I decided what I could do without in painting. And finally I came around to the fact that I could do it without

everything else that most everybody else was painting with, because I had good examples. I had Kandinsky. I had Malevich, which I was acquainted with. I had, I had Delaunay. I had Kupka. I had all those good artists. Not only did I have them visually as proof of what they did, I had most of their theory to read. So all that reading clarified my position so that by 1938, when I met Coreva and she brought in platonic theory, I was ready for a total clarification. Now by that time I also had clarified the technical problems. Because I realized that, that the technical, the technical thing could be just as intrusive as a political idea. That is, the way you painted often demonstrated your thinking about painting, you know. That is, technical things sometimes come up straight out in front and nothing else. And I decided that I would, would do the opposite of that. That is, I would eliminate the technical presence as much as I could. And so consequently, by 19, oh, 1940 I eliminated everything from my painting except color and space. And it was done with flat painting so as not to intrude into the color. That is, texture would be an intrusion into the effect of the color, even though you could change color with it. But I didn't want the intrusion of the, of the textural qualities of paint in my painting. I wanted it to disappear. So that by that time I was, by the time Coreva came in with her platonic theory and the purification, that is a pure idea, I connected pure idea with pure painting. So that in purifying painting I was also purifying my ideas about painting. And that was very critical. So that the work that I did between 1938 and 1941, when Jonson of the Transcendental Painting Group caught on to me, why I was doing, in my own terms, mature work. I had got there, you see. So that from then on out it was just a matter of being able to work under the conditions which I had determined for myself. And by the, by 1942 or 1943 I had set up the foundation for my technical work and my idea of how to paint for the rest of my life. So by 1998, when I go to work, I go to work absolutely fresh as though I had never done anything before in my life. But it's dominated by these ideas of purity and immaculate conception so to speak. And, and all that sort of thing. So that I come to a painting much like stepping into the fresh air first thing in the morning, and breathing the air, and seeing the sun and the light. So I get out my panel and I see it all for what it is; nothing, empty. But the empty space is, has a dynamic of its own. So it asks me, 'Okay, here I am. I've got lots of potential. What are you going to do with it?' And so the simplest thing to do is, is, is to make a mark on it. To change its character from being totally open to be starting to close up. So that the first mark no matter how it is done, whether it's drawn with a ruler, or whether it's a swatch of color or a dot or whatever, or a placement in the space, it changed that space forever. From, from, from an ambiguous omnipotent quality to something very specific. So you ask the question, 'I'm an artist. What am I gonna do with what I did here?' And the answer is, 'You've got to enhance it. You've got to make it project those qualities that are most dear to you.' And so the more qualities the most dear, dear to me are the purity and the clarity of, of whatever idea develops from working with that. So that on any, that mark may tell me that, well, we're going to have a closed system today. Or we're gonna have an entirely open system today. Or we're gonna have lots of color today. Or we're gonna only stay in one color today. But it may tell me all kinds of things, and I've got to choose from all the possible options the one that's going to work best with that, for a start. So the problem is one of enhancement, one of clarification of what comes afterwards. So that when you do paint A, you've got to have a clear idea of what B is going to do to A. When you put in C you have to have a good idea of what C is doing to B and A. So you have a, a domino effect that starts with this possible, very simple mark. So from then on out you're on the starting line of a very, very, very tough game. And that all these players are coming into it and they're coming at you. That is, you're not directing them. They're directing you. And so working through a piece, at that level, demands that you be totally there and that you be totally aware of what you, what you stand for while you're working. You can't go off and say, 'Well, I'll draw a tea cup.' No, that would be a contradiction because that little loop that you started with may be a suggestion of something organic. But you can't take it that direction. You've got to take it toward purity and maintain that momentum of purity at a higher and higher level. So that in every case your work, get the most of what you have done, the most out of what you have as a minimum. So you get the most out of the minimum. Coreva has a word for that. She calls it simplecity. She says that the basic thing is simple but it becomes more complex. And that the proper description of it is simplecity. Which I thought, think is very good. She's always so bright about that stuff. Anyhow, the whole procedure is to come out on top of all these dominoes that are falling in place one at a time. And because you don't have a prior concept or image or vision you've got to wait for one to happen. And you'll have to be darn lucky. Because in spite of the fact that you may work, have worked your head off into a real sweat, you can come out a total failure. So you have to be very, very lucky that all the things that you put into play are going to be operational at the level that you thought you were going to be when you did it. And that isn't always so because the medium is very, very stubborn. And that little format is very, very stubborn. It doesn't want to give itself up very easily. So you have to work with it and reconcile it and work towards harmony, because you could have an awful mess at the end, which you don't want. You want the harmony and the equilibrium, the balance that can come out of manipulation of all these factors.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you ever step back after you've been at work on one of your paintings and say, 'Darn it. I made that tea cup after all?'

ED GARMAN: Yes, you do that. You do that. An artist can be, be trapped by easy solutions. That is, you are well aware that if you put this red in there that it's gonna work. But the painting really doesn't call for that red. Now that is your solution. You've, you've blocked, you've closed the gate on the situation. And you've put your red in and you put a lock on the, on the gate. And you know you did it and you shouldn't have done it. And, but you

took an easy answer. Which is something that a painter, or anybody else can do very, very easily. Like if you're cooking a good meal and there's something very bland about it you say, 'Oh, hell, I know salt will work.' And you put a bunch of salt in instead of a more subtle condiment. So you have to avoid the easy answers. And if you avoid the easy answers you're going to make mistakes and you have failures. And I accept failure as a premise of my, my working. Now in the early days a failure upset me very badly because I counted the hours that I worked on it, the materials that went into it, and the fact that I hadn't moved myself ahead that, to my knowledge. Which I, of course, you do educate yourself. To my knowledge to the path where I wanted to be. And for many, many years that obstacle was always there. I didn't like failure. But now I accept it wholly, because that's part of the game. Because now I see where it's coming from better than I did then. Did I cover your question?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah. Yeah. Anything else that's gotten better over 60 years of applying yourself to this? In addition to tolerating failures? Do you feel more, more confident when you . . . ?

ED GARMAN: Oh, I'm absolutely confident. I'm absolutely confident. My only sorrow is I have so few to share it with.

[Laughter]

ED GARMAN: Because my work is really hard to take. When you consider that everyone who comes in contact by my work has a, a context of their own. And if they're to get to the work on the level that I am giving it, they have to set aside a lot of that context. And that is a very, very hard thing to do. Now people can say, 'I like Garman. I like your work because I love the colors.' Or, 'I love your inventiveness.' Or, 'I love this or that.' But that isn't what it's about. The bottom of that. They haven't quite got there yet. They have this, what, I, the answer I really would like to say is, 'Oh, I feel such a release.' The word is release. 'I feel such a release from what I am to what is there.' You see? Am I stating myself clearly?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yes. Yes. Absolutely clearly.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, yeah? So that to relate to what is there with that complete freedom of mind and feeling is a wonderful, wonderful experience if you can get to it. It's almost like a religious ecstasy.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You mean the high modernist critics, like Greenberg or someone like Michael Fried described, you know, this experience as grace. Right?

ED GARMAN: Yes, that's a good word. It's grace.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Of, of release or something that can only happen in front of a work of art of the kind you're describing. And . . .

ED GARMAN: That is a very good word to use. I, I attach grace to the emotional thing that you get from a religious experience. But grace is a good word.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Do you feel that in front of your own work?

ED GARMAN: When, when, when it is successful. Now how do I know a work is successful? Well, I don't know when I'm finished with it because I'm high on the operation. That is, I've had my emotional aerobics and I'm high off of that experience. So I have to wait until that all cools out. And so the way, the work is put away and other works come in, other things that I do, because I write a lot, and I talk a lot, and do this and that. Intervene. So I'm back to neutral territory. So I pull out this work and I look at it and I say, 'Oh, my goodness. How did I do that?' I mean, it, it's a lift. When I get that lift in seeing a work that I did in the past, no matter how far back it is. Now the work on the easel is 1945. I get that lift from that work. So that I know I was right in 1945 in that work. There may have been other failures. But in that work I was right. So when I get that lift, that's my verification and confirmation that I did all right. And then when someone comes in, like you, and see this piece and say, 'Gee, that is a nice thing,' that's further confirmation. Because you're not rejecting it.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: That is, the natural inclination is to reject something that is not in harmony with your own spirit, or mental outlook, or current context. So that rejection, I'm very sensitive to that rejection. And I know when my witness is rejecting no matter how subtle it may be. And I can feel that and I can tell that, because I am geared and keyed to notice those things.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Hmm.

ED GARMAN: So that when I get that confirmation, now I have confirmation on some of these pieces that never failed with anybody, no matter how naive they may be.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Then you know you've really hit it.

ED GARMAN: Then I know I've really hit it, because then I know I've gotten to the true foundation of feeling.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And do you collect those works together at any time and . . .

ED GARMAN: I collect them. I haven't, I . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: . . . and sort of consider what they have in common or . . .

ED GARMAN: Stop it.

[Pause in Tape]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Just talk a little bit about how you've, you've developed this catalog where there are works that are now part of this permanent record of your production. And you're still making a decision about other works. We've just taken a little break where we looked at works where you're still deciding. And I'd like to get you to talk a little bit more on tape about how you're able to arrive at that decision.

ED GARMAN: Is that on? You recorded what you just said?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: Good. Well, it's, the basis is, now we discussed how, my approach to painting.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: All the way down the line, without, whatever category I was in I had this standard of expectations from a work, from the work. That is, my expectations was my standard. I didn't have any other. And my expectations was based on how successful I'd been with, with my work in general all the way down the line. And how successful I was as I was going along. Am I clear? What I am trying to say is that when I started a group of works, let's say like the variations of the structure, which were a simple division of the area, I wanted to see how far I could take that division, how, how I could maximize that simplicity that was inherent to the thing. All right, so one of my, part of my standard was how successful that was. Now if I felt along the line that a work was not successful I would not catalog it because the cataloging it is my stamp of approval on a piece. And if I, if it wasn't cataloged then it was not a valid part of my work. No matter how fresh it may be or how new it may be. Or how spectacular it may be. Or how anything it may be. Except it didn't fit my criteria of expectations for that particular category and work. And so the cataloging of the work is my ultimate approval of the, of the work. Now that doesn't mean that within that context, that doesn't mean it's the final approval, because somewhere along the line something might happen to the work. Let's say technically. Say technically something happened to the work, that may not interfere with the look of the work but I feel that is below my standards of technicality. Now no matter how good it is I remove it from the catalog. And that's an open space there. And the very next work that I approve the catalog and they get that number.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I see. So it's not a sequential catalogue?

ED GARMAN: So it is not a chronology. The catalog is not a chronology. It's merely a record of the works that have been approved for the catalog. So that you might in the very early catalog, you might find a 1947 work right next to a 1963 work. But that isn't the measure. The measure is that it's in the catalog. And the catalog number . . .

Tape 2, side A [session II, tape 2; 30-minutes]

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Archives of American Art interview on March the 30, 1998 with Ed Garman. Ed, we were just talking about the catalog. And you mentioned there are about 1200 works total.

ED GARMAN: That's right.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: But that you don't consider that a lot.

ED GARMAN: That, that, no, I don't consider that a lot when I figure that probably it represents about a third of what I really did well. It doesn't count the dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens I think that I did as sort of preliminaries to find out what would happen. Sometimes I try, I do something that I try to find out what would happen if I did this, or what would happen if I did that. But those, those investigative works aren't in the catalog at all. So that . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So what place do you . . .?

ED GARMAN: The catalog represents the best quality that I can produce within that particular era of work. That is, I have a lot of drawings here. Cut it.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay.

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: So whatever phase of work I was in at any particular time, certain works represent the apex of that particular phase of work. And it's only those apexes that I'm concerned with in cataloging the pieces. Eventually the other things disappear, destroyed or whatever, or used as backing for some other painting. But the criteria is a kind of quality. And I don't think putting my signature on a painting gives it that quality. It has to have it first. Now I, I know a painter who says this, I said, 'What do you, does this represent the top of your work?' And the artist says, 'It must because I did it, I signed it, and I'm the artist.' Now that is not my criteria. My criteria is that it has to speak on its own. It, my work should not need a signature at all. I only sign my work because it's required of me by the people who collect my pieces. So that instead of waiting for someone to tell me to sign it why I sign it immediately. And a lot of these things like these watercolors I sign the minute I touch the canvas because, so I know which side is up. So that I, I'm oriented to it properly.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Uh-huh.

ED GARMAN: So that, that's the catalog business.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I wonder if now we could shift to a little bit of a discussion about your practice as a writer.

ED GARMAN: Oh, my.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And I know you write daily. You're actually the only painter I think I ever met who keeps a dictionary and a thesaurus at the foot of their, foot of their easel.

ED GARMAN: Easel.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And I know that you've said this is because writing, precision of words is very important to you. But I wondered if you could talk about, well, maybe let's talk about the Raymond Jonson book as one of your chief writing preoccupations. But I also want to get to some of the other things that you're, you're still writing on a daily basis. So could you take me back to where that interest developed and how it's developed alongside your painting?

ED GARMAN: Well, one of the, my interest in writing has to do with explanation. Because for some reason or another we're a, well, we know what the answer to that is, is because we're media oriented. We're verbally oriented. The top level of our consciousness is to read the word. And you go into an art exhibit and you feel, see people, as many people with their noses on the labels as there are people with their noses on the work. So that business, that need for a verbal context is there. It's part of our culture. We're born to it from the time we are four or five years old, the word. Now when I first started writing to other people about my work, that is in response to questions, I found that I wasn't using the right words for what I was wanting to say. That is, I could make a generalization, which they would grasp immediately, but it wouldn't describe what I was trying to say. That is, for example, I use the word organic in relationship to how we feel about painting. That is, it is not an extra sensory perception. It's an internal, biological, physical, genetically based source for our feelings. The way we feel is deeply, internally, biological. So that when I use the word organic, that's what I mean. But that is very hard to get across to an audience because they don't think that way. They don't think that their most instinctive response is motivated by something more internal than their consciousness. And that, that type of consciousness that is prevalent with people who are word oriented is a very difficult thing to penetrate. So when I started first writing letters I was fighting with the problem of, of good semantics primarily. That is, black should mean black, and white should mean white, and up should mean up, and down. But that doesn't happen in the world of art. Up doesn't mean up, and down doesn't mean down. And black and white don't mean black and white. It, it's a chaotic world. And I didn't want to deal with that kind of a world. Because I think that ends up in globbledy gook. So my progress in writing was clarification. So as the years went by and I wrote more and more and I enjoyed the business of clarification. Because when I was doing a passage of painting that may have taken two or three hours to do, which was just sheer manual work, I would occupy myself with the process of clarifying what I was doing verbally. Why am I doing this? How will I do it and how will I describe it? So I went through that process. And that's a very enjoyable process, is to, to do that. Because it's a kind of a test. Because here you have one media trying to match another media. Well, we know that's impossible because the verbal thing is linear and the painting thing is immediate. And so they can't meet anywhere at all. So they have to run parallel with each other. So in running parallel with each other that's the way I worked out my, my mode of discourse. And consequently, as a result of it, I enjoy doing it as much as anything I'd enjoy doing. And so consequently, if I'm not, if I don't feel that I have a painting to do that day, day, that I have the time for it, then that's used as a

factor, as the time for it to paint that particular day. If I have a half an hour I can, I can type a page of something or other. So I arbitrarily pick out anything out of my writings and say, 'Can I do this better?' And I read it and I think about it and I may change one word, I may change a comma, or a period, or anything like that. But I've made it better as far as clear definite discourse is concerned. And that, that fascinates me very much. And that's why I have a dictionary and a thesaurus at the foot of the easel.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right.

ED GARMAN: Is because the, for example, there's a lot of talk about expression. Express this, the artist expresses this. He's expressing that. But when you try to analyze what's being expressed you can't find a basis for it. You can't, you will, you never understand what the artist expresses. And you don't know what the painting expresses. Because your own context intrudes on that situation. And you don't know the context of the artist. So you don't have a clear idea of where it's come from as far as expression is concerned. So I've worked with that concept and stumbled around with it a long time. And I've finally ended up with, that the work projects. That's it like, it's like being in a movie house. The, the machinery projects an image on the, on the screen. And you get out of it what you can. Now the projector is not expressing anything. It's merely projecting an image. And so I find that the word projection is a better word for me, rather than expression. Because I am really not expressing anything when I work. I am creating a, a piece that projects a certain feel to it, or a certain image to it. But the concept for projection works better for me than the word expression. Because the word expression is very ambiguous for me. Well, I can pinpoint projection. So that is, that is the function of my writing. And so in writing, why I, I try to zero in on my main themes. And one of my main themes is the biological source of the spiritual. And that's a very, very tough subject. Because that is not an accepted concept of the spiritual. Because the spiritual comes from extra sensory. No, that isn't the right word. Outside of ourselves. The spiritual comes from outside. It's something that dominates us from the external, from some external experience. That is our admiration for the, for nature or our admiration for this, that and the other thing. Some supernatural creatures and all that sort of stuff. Which has come down as a matter of common sense from our biological origins. We had to explain things. And so in explaining them we got them wrong most of the time. So that all those explanations have accumulated into a context, which makes it very hard now for the biological thing to get back into it again. Which is one of my main interests at present, is to get that. And in my present work that I'm working on has, has to do entirely with that and the consequences of it. Because if the, if the spiritual things comes from the biological, what is the consequence of it? Well, the consequence, it should be, it's relevance. What is its relevance? So that way, if you get a clear spiritual instinctive feeling about something it, how is it relevant? Well, what you've brought is something into great clarity. And that clarity should become your standard for measuring all your other types of experiences. That is, if you've got one clear note then you've got to make the other notes match it or you're not getting the best out of those other notes. Which is what I do in painting. When I paint. Or what a composer does when he composes. He's trying to synthesize a higher and higher level. And so these wonderful instinctive, spiritual things should become our standard. And that's its relevance. So I'm struggling in writing with the problem of biological origin and relevance. And it's a tough nut to crack because words stand in the way. I can feel it but I can't, it's very difficult to describe. But I'm, I think I'm succeeding. Just a little shift like the word from, from, from projection, from expression to projection. Those things work for me. And in the proper context I think they're clear.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Did you get the kind of pleasure you get out of writing today from the activity of writing the Jonson book? Was that equally the kind of engaged practice that you've described?

ED GARMAN: Well, you see, my writing that I'm doing today for myself is like my painting. I don't have a, I'm not writing for an audience.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Hm-hmm. But you've written quite a bit for audiences.

ED GARMAN: Yes. And I, I tailor my whatever it'd do for, for an audience. But in the Jonson book I had an audience that was highly critical. And that was Jonson himself. That is, Jonson, and I accepted that as part of, a part of the thing. That was, his gift to me was that he allowed me in it. And so that intimacy with Jonson and trying to match his feelings as an alter ego, that is, I was writing as though he was writing. And doing it of course with, I had to do it within my own context so I could understand it. So that in writing that book it was very, very difficult because I had, he was my major editor. And then his brother, Arthur Johnson, who is a very brilliant mind, and had done a lot of writing himself, was my, was my editor as far as the writing itself's concerned. So I had to match up to two conditions. One, Raymond's internal machinery should come through properly. And Arthur's editorship as far as the writing itself is concerned. Because he would say, 'Hey, Ed, what do you mean by this? Do you mean this or do you mean this and that?' So working with Arthur sharpened my awareness of how words functioned and how they should function and who I was writing for. Because if you write for one kind of audience you write a certain way, which you see in the popular media all the time. And you write for another kind of audience and you write in a totally different way about the same subject. So that's, that, that was a, a testing ground to my ability to stand criticism. Because I was entirely vulnerable to criticism of any kind. So that in maintaining my equilibrium under that type of editorship I learned a lot. And so I, I, my writing today is very

much influenced by that.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You mentioned to me that that was one period in your career where you didn't paint. When you were writing that.

ED GARMAN: I worked on the Jonson book for two years and I didn't do any painting at all. Because the amount of concentration that it took, now I have a whole, I suppose I have two feet of, of file down there filled with letters back and forth with Jonson and Johnson. But it has to do with the writing of the book. And because we were writing I refused to use the telephone because there was no record of who said what and why. I insisted on writing so that over the two years I wrote more letters than I did manuscript. And that was so I felt that I couldn't give painting a square deal or I couldn't give the writing a square deal. The same thing happened in the sixties.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I wanted to talk about that.

ED GARMAN: With, with the environment. In the sixties the environmental issue became so critical, that is, at a cultural level, that my feeling was that we all had to get to work on it. So that I spent two years in San Diego in the environmental scene with Citizens Coordinate and several other groups, trying to focus what the environmental issue was about. And we clarified that. And one of the consequences of that, I think, was the Environmental Impact Report that is common today. But at that time, when we were working on trying to resolve how to handle the environmental thing, the environmental impact didn't exist. So that, that thing in itself is the biggest and finest result of the, of the whole environmental movement. Is that we had to make, we've brought people up to the recognition that whatever they did could infect the environment. And I don't feel that that two year, and that took all my time.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah, talk about that period. What kind of things were you doing with these citizen's groups? And how did the issue first come to your attention that this was going to take the place of . . .?

ED GARMAN: I really can't tell you, Derrick, because for one thing that was a very happy, unhappy experience because again, you are dealing with people with a million motives, motives. I was on the committee for one of the council, San Diego council members. And he was trying to use the environmental thing as a, as a part of his platform. Well, he had input from eight or 10 other citizens besides myself. And I found out that no one could agree on what preserving the environment meant. Now one of the, one of the weaknesses that, are we wasting our time?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: No, I'm, I think this is important.

ED GARMAN: What, what, it is important because it comes from an artist who is not looking down his nose only at a puddle of paint and a brush.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Right. And this is a time when you chose not to be an artist.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, that's right.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: A period of time. That seems significant.

ED GARMAN: That could be significant. Because what I found out, and this is true today, the papers in the last few weeks or two are talking about the developers setting along, alongside, setting aside property to preserve so that they can have other property developed. Environmentally that's very bad. Because what it does is it sets up islands, little bitty patches. If you have little elephants on one patch and big elephants on the other side, you, on another patch they can't get together to interchange their genetic material. And so the little bunch dies out and the big bunches die out because of, of genetic poverty. And that happens with all species. Is you can limit these species, even though it's there to genetic power in which eventually it has to decline because of that reason. So that in working on environmental problems you have to look at a big, a very big scheme. And most people cannot look at the big scheme. Because no matter what they have a context that they are considering. I love your next yard, your yard to have grass in it but I don't want to water mine. You know, that, that problem. I have grass but I don't water it. So I mean, it's the littleness that, that hurts the big movements, the world view.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: You never in your time when you were so committed to the environmentalist issues, you never thought well, I'll make my painting another weapon or another vehicle in this struggle? That you'll pick up the environmental in your actual art practice.

ED GARMAN: Well that, to paint an environmental painting is a denial of my own context. Because that would be a temporary situation. I don't know, in the thirties a great many political cartoons were done because of the political situation in America. The Soviet has the same problem. The political situation dominated their art. So where are their, where are those in the context of art? Where are those posters today? Where are those artists that devoted their time to political statements of the thirties? Where is their art today? Apparently it is a

temporary thing. And I was not interested as an artist in the temporary thing. I wanted to create an environment, an environment that would be consistent with my world view. That is, it would be always here, it would always be part of the environment. It would resent, represent my environmental interests in that it would be . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Ideal.

ED GARMAN: Ideal. Yeah. Of course we can't go back to the Garden of Eden. And we can't fix it up by making patches. Somewhere in the world we've got to find out another way of doing it. For example, this business of saving animals in zoos is not going to work. Because the whole genetic thing has gone down the drain. What you're developing is, is a zoo tiger and a zoo lion and a zoo elephant. It is not a wild elephant, not a wild tiger and not a wild lion. These things are no longer wild. And when that wildness goes then what they were is gone too.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Hm-hmm. Yeah.

ED GARMAN: Where were we?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well . . .

ED GARMAN: I get carried away.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Eventually I wanted to circle back to the situation that you came across when you relocated to California. And I was wondering if after you moved here and settled here in Imperial Beach did you keep up any contact with people? I know you did with Raymond Jonson, but with people like Pelton and Emil Bisttram I guess was in L.A. at one point? Were you in touch with those guys?

ED GARMAN: When the TPG folded up each went, it was 'man the life boats, every man for himself,' because the war was on and it was bigger than any individual interest could possibly be. So that when those people dispersed they really dropped out of the idea. They were doing their own thing and they were doing, in some cases, very fine transcendental paintings. But they were dropped out of the thing, the, the idea. And that is, they were doing their thing as individuals, not as a world view. And all the way, all the way down the line the world view idea was very dominant with me. I felt that what I was doing was pursuing something that should be done universally. That is, the cohesiveness between all these artists should be maintained. But that somehow was totally destroyed by World War II. There's no cohesiveness at all in the art world as I, as I can see it. Back in the early twenties there was the Blue Rider. There was the De Stijl, or whatever you might call that. You were, the constructiveness were there. The Suprematists were another thing, but it was a group activity which pointed towards a world view. We don't have a world view anymore. If we have a world view it's the market. And the market plays its own games. What sells is the world view. So that if we have an Andy Warhol, the merit of the work has nothing to do with it. It's the marketability of the work that has to do with it. So when that has come into the picture the probability and possibility of a genuine world view as projected by my ideals, as represented by the visionaries, Kupka and Malevich and all those guys is gone, it's disappeared. So the best I can do in representing that world view is to spell it out for myself or anyone, or anyone else who wants to read about it or look at it, is on an individual basis. But I'm going to stay out of the cultural concept of how art should work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: So you weren't interested really in, in re-contacting someone like Bisttram when he was here?

ED GARMAN: No. It, it would, it would have meant that in a way he will say, 'Yes, Ed, go ahead with it. I'll back you.' But that would be simply rhetoric.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: There would be no operational. And I'm concerned very much with the operational aspect. So I'm here, a prophet in the wilderness so to speak, saying my piece to myself and who else will listen. But I have no feeling that I can project it into the culture, except in the long term. Because there are people interested. There are.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: I think you're right.

ED GARMAN: We've mentioned Agnes Martin before. Agnes Martin is, is a good transcendental painter. But I doubt very much, knowing her experience with the culture, that she would accept being a, a prophet or a disciple or anything like that. She's, she would say, which all the others do too, 'I'm simply a painter and I want to do my thing.' And they do it within their context. And that's fine. Because in the long run the work is what matters and not their attitude. Because utopia is in every one of their works. As long as the utopian concept is projectionable why if it can be projected to some sensitive context, well, then we're fine, we're okay, it survives.

And it must have its, it must have its effect.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Now you mention Agnes Martin. And I know that you, you have stacks of contemporary art, periodicals under your work space here. What other contemporary artists interest you? They don't have to be like you per se in their work, but what other artists are of . . . ?

ED GARMAN: Well, they come along, they come along.

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: . . . question. Let's go on.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah.

ED GARMAN: I think if you lead in with a question it works better.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay. Well, I'm just interested in, in your reading of contemporary art journals you mention Agnes Martin, you mentioned Esteban Vicente as another artist who you think are coming close, intentionally or no, to your notion of . . .

ED GARMAN: Of the transcendent.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: . . . to your concerns as a painter. But are there other artists who you're interested in for other reasons? Or whose work strikes you as important even though it may not be of the quality or of the ambition of some . . . ?

ED GARMAN: Well, there are a lot, there's a lot of work that, by artists that, that by itself is a, is valid within my context. But is my context, am I applying, is this an applied context rather than an original context? Now I have a problem with any art that is totally expressionistic.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Why is that?

ED GARMAN: Because of the intrusion of the individual. One of the charact, charact, characters, characteristics or what I feel is transcendent art is that the in, the individual person is not there if, if you can, if I can bring out a work and you say, 'Oh, I know that's a Garman.' Then I feel something's wrong. Because I haven't transcended the individual, which is a factor in my prescription for the transcendent.

Tape 2, side B [session 2, tape 2, 20-minutes]

ED GARMAN: He never apologizes because the sun rises and sets.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: No.

ED GARMAN: These things happen. [chuckles] Let's get back to your question. What was your question?

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, I'm still interested in your attitude towards contemporary art practices.

ED GARMAN: Oh, oh, oh. I was talking about the intrusion of the individual. When I feel, see something that I think hits my button, presses my button, I don't accept it at, at face value because I would like, though it's acceptable at face value, I accept it like McLaughlin.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Good.

ED GARMAN: McLaughlin, John McLaughlin, I accept that 100 percent. Because his basic motive, regardless of the success, success of it, was he was reaching beyond the individual. He was looking for whatever he may have called it, was the transcendent experience. That was something that was beyond the material which he was working with. It was something beyond his personal choices as, as an individual. He could have worked for 100 years in black and white and never liked it for a second. But it worked for him in, in the concept, the ideal concept in which I'm trying to talk about art. And that concept is the kernel, the whole works. So that I feel, now I love the, the good McLaughlins and I'm gonna always qualify the good. I love the good Mondrians. I love the good, and by good I mean those that hit that context of selflessness and sublime, the sublimeness of the material. The material disappears and something else emerges and all that sort of thing coming through, so that works. Now there are any number of abstract artists who at some phase of their work hits, presses that button for me. And Dove does some of those things. I have a million names on my, in my head and I can't draw them out. The, hold it again, I'm gonna . . .

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: . . . to where this feeling comes from. Of the Cubists, Juan Gris is the one, some of his work comes closer to what I think is the transcendent than any of the other Cubists. As you come down the line there are other painters. I pointed out Charles Howard to you. He is, he is just on the edge of surrealism and yet he surmounts the realism and gets into another era of feeling that I don't connect to, to what I usually connect with surrealism. And that is the strictly psychological, self-interpretation of, of his self-imposed concept. And that is all, it's all so internalized that I don't know whether or not the work is valid or not. Because it seems to me that it's, it's quite illustrational and quite literary. And in that sense it doesn't fit my concept of the transcendent. It doesn't transcend itself. It's very much itself. And I, I question whether that's possible. Now the Charles Howard, Charles Howard edges on, on the surrealism but it surmounts again. Again, there's that transcendent quality that has leaped beyond that, that phase of work. Max Bill [inaudible]. Max Bill has worked for years from mathematical formulas. But that has nothing to do with it because his artistry in dealing with the concept carries it beyond the mathematical to a point of feeling. And when we're talking about what I'm talking about we're talking about feeling and as it connects to our inner spiritual necessity as Kandinsky would have it. Henry Moore, the sculptor, Henry Moore is an abstract sculptor, but his work, some of it, again I'm exclusive about any artist's work. It, some of his work, touches on the very same thing that Agnes Pelton's best abstractions work on. They work on that level. It's harder to do in sculpture because you have the materiality of the thing. But sometimes he surmounts that materiality and gets to an emotional level that, not that he puts it there but it comes out. That's the significant thing. That's what I talk, when I talk about projection, what comes out, the picture that comes out of the projector. Not what the projector puts into the picture. Which in the case of a projector is nothing except light. So that, well, that's a good analogy too. You have the light. You gotta put the light into it. So that . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Sort of like Rothko is?

ED GARMAN: Rothko is excellent. Rothko is an excellent example. Now I don't know much about Rothko but the examples that I have seen personally fill the bill. Now there's a case where I accept unconditionally the work from the, though I don't know the motivation, I don't know what it's about, from the artist's internal standpoint. What he was trying to do. I know what he did in doing them was that he didn't use the best materials possible, possible. That the work is fading. In that sense he was not consistent with his ideal. Because I believe that what the artist does should be as permanent as, as possible to get. And anything that's transient no longer fits the picture of the ideal because the ideal is part of the permanent environment. Let me see. Well, there are many, many, many things. Some of them are abstractionists, some are non-objectives.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: What about the hard edge painters of the sixties and seventies? I'm thinking of people like Ken Noland who did some horizontal stripe paintings, not that unlike some of your efforts? Or Ellsworth Kelly who did those large color filled canvases, sometimes shaped? Is that work interesting to you?

ED GARMAN: If you leave it at the word interesting that's fine. I've seen huge exhibits of their work and because of the hugeness of their work. And I, I get very little response from that, because they maximized the physicality of the work and not the content of the work. And so I feel that for me that's where it fails. Is that I would rather see a small Ad Reinhardt of his late thirties and early forties work than one of the, some of the monstrous things he did later on. And also some of the work that he did at the end of his life when he reduced his format and got a more intense image even with, even less material than he had done previously. So that Reinhardt is one of my favorite painters for what he achieved in, conceptually with the work. One of the failures of the minimalist artists for me is that they don't maximize their minimalness. And that, and that I consider a failure because to go less and less without meaning more and more doesn't touch my buttons. So there's that failing. Touch it again.

[Pause in Tape]

ED GARMAN: Albers is another artist that makes an interesting proposition, because his work is entirely based on, on Chevreul's concept of contrasts in color. And Albers' homage to the square is, is primarily the use of technical principles to get to a, what I call a spiritual value. And I consider Albers a very successful transcendent painter because he gets to the, the transcendent value, however he does it, because he's, he's that kind of an artist that has that kind of a feeling. Just like Max Bill with his, with his mathematics, he gets there. So how you get there is not the significant thing. Is getting there, that's the significant thing. Frank Stella, Frank Stella's work has really hit me very powerfully, as a physical thing. I mean, it's like having your, your radio turned up to full volume, with all intensity that, and noise that it can produce. It hits me visually that way. And that physical force has a value too. When a work strikes you physically it's part of the dynamic of the painting. And in as much as an artist is successful in producing the dynamic of painting and what is inherent to it, I feel is on the edge of the transcendent. And therefore it's possible for me to, to accept many artists within my context whose contexts are not that at all. So that, so that my door is not closed to any kind of art. As I was saying, Morandi, the Morandi still lifes have touched the edge of the transcendent, because of the way he has handled the work.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Ed, you also mentioned to me that one of the things you're still very interested in is the art market. And that you watch art prices and subscribe to auction catalogs and such?

ED GARMAN: Yes. I . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How does that fit in?

ED GARMAN: I pay a lot of attention to the auction market. I pay a lot of attention to the auction market because it tells me what, where the interest is in quality. That is, if somebody is willing to spend 30 million dollars for a van Gogh they're not doing it because of quality, although the quality is there. van Gogh is a very uneven painter. And so to get his top quality the market will tell you where that quality is. They're not simply buying van Gogh. You can buy a Rembrandt etching for under \$500. Why? Because it's been re-plated and it's really a phony etching. But it will carry the signature of the plate and that sort of thing. And they've refurbished it. But they're not buying quality, they're buying a name. Because a Rembrandt etching, if you've ever seen an original, is so rich in the color of it, that is the black and white color, the way he, he used the, what it's called, the bur, he scratched into the plate. He didn't use acid. That rich, rich blacks and the modulation of the blacks are super in quality. And you're gonna pay premium prices for that kind of thing. So I follow the auction market to see where the quality is and if people are buying quality. Or whether they're buying, whether they are collectors who will buy Matchbox covers as easily as anything else.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And what's your sense of it today?

ED GARMAN: And my sense of it is that there is a group of people out there who are interested in quality and, and are willing to pay the price for it. And those things. Now Albers has never been a favorite of collectors. But recently his work has gone over \$100,000. Now that is a landmark price. Anytime something goes over \$100,000 you're starting to see interest, collectors who are interested in quality. Because there are a lot of Albers out of there. Including prints and everything else under the sun that you could get at a reasonable price. But Albers is getting to the quality market. Now that's significant to me. That is, it is more than name recognition. It's a quality of recognition, that this work is functioning at a very special level. That is why I am interested in auction. Go.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Okay. Well, I guess I wanted to ask you now, you're going to be 84 in July. Is that correct?

ED GARMAN: That's right.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And you're still painting actively?

ED GARMAN: Right. Right.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: And I'm wondering what things you feel you still want to accomplish as a painter now that you've been painting for 60 years. Right?

ED GARMAN: Yeah. The same thing.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: The same thing.

ED GARMAN: The same thing. I want to create an environment in which the, the, the witness, the observer, the audience can get total emotional freedom to follow the line of the work as an environment. And I simply just want to make as many of those as I can. Because my, the amount of work I've done is intrinsically it's very, very small. And if one of my pieces was in every museum in the world there wouldn't be enough works to go around. In other words, I have a very small oeuvre so to speak. And it's simply not going to go around. So that anytime, now the works that you've, we've looked at some water colors this morning, which I consider fine quality of what I can do in water color, and small water colors at that. I have to do 40 or 50 or 60 of them to get 10 that are, are valid. I can show you works that, that I've accepted as catalogible but I don't consider them in my top choices, for one reason or another. You see? We'd have to look at those, all those work carefully. Some day you'll have time. Maybe you can do it for your own clarity. But that's, that's really what I'm about. Now my time is getting less and less and my energy is getting less and less. But my enthusiasm isn't waxed a bit. It's, it's all there. And as you see, I can talk endlessly here with you. But on a normal day, why it'd be probably getting close to time for my nap or something like that because the day to day work tires me out. Because taking care of Coreva, I'm on night time duty with her. And that takes my energy. I'm really only, in a 24 hour period I may get two or three naps about two hours each. So that takes it out of you. And . . .

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: How do you fit in painting with that schedule?

ED GARMAN: Well, like, like now, Trell is here, that's my daughter, she is here. She is taking care of Coreva while I'm busy with you. Now she will cut out time for me, about three or four hours a day. And in three or four hours a day, why I can do a water color. Because it has to be spontaneous. It has to be limited in scale. And other than that, why that's, it's up to me what I do with it. And of course, I like to keep my hand in it. I like to feel that Ed's

still here.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you seem very much still here, Ed. Let me tell you.

ED GARMAN: Yeah, I, I feel that I'm very much, very much here. And that my critical faculties are, are better than ever. Yeah. That's good.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Your painting still is a source of energy for you?

ED GARMAN: Well, it's a funny thing. Painting is like, doing a painting is like going to sleep in a sublime sort of way for a couple of hours. It's, it, it functions for me as an action as it should function as a finished product. That is, a total release from my personal life. And that's a good thing. We need that. All of us need that. Whether it's playing tennis or what. But we need that total release from life. And I feel that I'm doing something worthwhile with those extra hours. Because I can share that with something, that I can share with somebody else. And sharing is very important to me. That's been part of my life, my mode of living. That is, sharing with everybody and anybody who came along.

DERRICK CARTWRIGHT: Well, I think this is a good place to stop for today. Thanks very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

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