



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Samuel
Clayberger, 1999 September 1

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Samuel Clayberger on September 1, 1999. The interview took place in Clayberger's studio in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Samuel Clayberger Junior at his Fletcher Street, Avenue?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Drive, you got close.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —drive, sorry, [laughs] studio in—what is this section called?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Glassell Park.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Glassell?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: G-L-A-S-S-E-L-L, Glassell Park. It's—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Adjoining Eagle Rock—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Between Eagle Rock and Glendale.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So now we're situated. We're placed, and the subject of this interview on September 1, 1999 is, well, in general artists and models. The artist and the model, working in the studio, but more specifically this involves the creation of information that will be used for an essay on Sam's erotic drawings, and they're focused, therefore, in that manner. The title of the essay may be "Eros in the Studio." So this gives a sense of, again, the focus of the uh, essay and of course that then matches the drawings in question. About how many drawings do you think will be included in this exhibition or in the book, rather?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh, 15 to 20.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, so not very many. And the—it needs to be said now that these few interviews that we will do are—they'll not stand alone. [00:02:01] They're actually—they complement and they pair with the responses of—uh to a questionnaire that's been given to several of your models. And I guess if we're lucky we'll get about five back, maybe six. And these are questions that I've crafted, that I've written, pretty extensive as a matter of fact, to elicit responses from nonprofessional models who've posed for you, Sam, starting back in, I would say, the late '60s, that—mid '60s as a matter of fact.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Mid '60s.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And since this interview is intended to be entirely candid, you know, about the whole dynamic, the phenomenon of uh, models in the studio, but not professional models. That is to say, where there is often a friendship involved. We will speak directly to this subject. Why bother to speak any way—in any other way. And the—I should say I'm Paul Karlstrom. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. One of the models who is—will be responding to the questionnaire is Anne Karlstrom, my wife. Back in, probably—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sixty-six?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Probably about '66. So we have a chunk of history that we're dealing with, and by the time we're done we may come up, well, to the future, because Christina, who has agreed, probably, to pose and was to do so today, decided not to for her own reasons, hopefully next week, and then she may well become part of this continuum. [00:04:10] And so it really is a view of this phenomenon over time. Okay, that's about as much introduction as we need.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: With the fact that uh, the feelings, erotic feelings one way or the other have—from the artist's point of view, are different from '66 to '99.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, there's another aspect of this.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: [Laughs.] Another thing to make it more complex.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It is a very complex subject, and one of the things that I've already discovered in thinking about this—something actually I've thought about for many years—I'm an art historian, and I remember with great pleasure when my wife first posed for you, and it was very exciting, and at some time—point I'll actually talk about this, so certainly include it in the writing, but it's—it's a very complicated subject because it's sort of a metaphor for aspects of life and human behavior, and human interaction. And so this is what we'll be talking about. And I should say that you have not yet read—well, you may have read Christina's responses—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —Christina, whom I don't know, but Sandy's responses you haven't read yet. And the idea is that you can at least start out by—it's all your show or all your story. And why don't you—my sense is that you have a cast of characters in mind and that you actually have some things that you really want to say about the experience and about them as—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And my reaction to them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, so why don't you do it. [00:06:01]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Go ahead. Okay. Well, since Anne Karlstrom was my first amateur model that—of these being considered, I've had a couple others, but they are long since lost. But uh, Anne was a good model, very cooperative, and as far as the erotic implications, uh there was great desire on my part. The only problem was that Anne projected this almost virgin queen quality, you know, a sort of alabaster and aloof, you know. So it was nice to look at that lush beautiful young body and, you know, feel like, by god, you even get within six inches of her and she will just, you know, freeze you with a withering glance. So you would never do anything but, be anything but perfectly gentlemanly. Although the feelings were there because she was a very beautiful woman. And one of the aspects of beauty that a lot of people don't talk about is intelligence and a sense of humor. This is why I like the amateur models because they—they—they're people. They haven't reached that aloof quality about their nudity that the professional models have. And they're dealing with their mod—their nudity with their inherent modesty. Anne came off, you know, very much like most models, nervous at first, but after a while she relaxed and took some very natural poses, which is what I have in mind for almost any model. Although some of them are very incapable [laughs] of giving that. [00:08:06] They want to pose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They can't ever really just relax and be sort of comfortable with—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Some of them can. Some of them just think they have to pose. That's even especially—especially more true with professionals. The amateur models, I think I've told you before that lots of time they—"Well, what do you want me to do?" I say do something natural. I know that's hard to do, but they'll try something, and they'll—"I'm posing. I'm posing." They'll even admit it. I says, how do you sleep? And they'll curl up the way they sleep, and I usually get something that is worth drawing, which helps them relax in the beginning into realizing what I have in mind. Some of them relax into a pose that we—we would call erotic, which is not—nothing, you know, nothing to do with masturbation or anything like that but just with the—exposing themselves. And uh, some of them, it's very comfortable. Uh, it happened accidentally a couple of times with Anne, but it wasn't a thing that—that was suggested or came up. Now with uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now let me ask you—I'm going to try to put in questions that will help—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes good. That's fine.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —compare them. One of the issues of course is open poses, and that's kind of a euphemism, although I've heard it used by models actually. And they understand the difference and so forth.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yeah, that an open pose is more erotic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you have said that this is something that you don't require but that it's a—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —never turn it down. [Laughs.] [00:10:00]

PAUL KARLSTROM: You never turn it down, which I think, you're a most reasonable man in that respect. In the questionnaires, you know, this issue is put forward direct as a question. What you said was very interesting to me, and it has to do with that which seems natural and that which seems requested or contrived. And you were saying about Anne, big Anne I guess we should call her.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Tall Anne.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Tall Anne, not big, tall Anne, in this respect you described her as a model. You described

what might be even understood as sort of a personality or a character, demure and so forth, and in terms of open poses—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Hey, don't forget, this is the way I'm reading her. That isn't the way she is. That's not what I mean. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: —No, no, no, I understand that. You see, the way this works is the only reality right now is yours—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and so my questions are based—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes. That's the way you have to be when you're an oral historian. But the idea of what is natural and what is comfortable without thinking about it seems to arise in what you said, because I gather that she would get into poses that were somewhat open or quote erotic, but that not by request but by, that was just what was comfortable. Do I understand that?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Not that often. I don't think—you have a couple of the drawings that were a little bit more open, but I don't think there were many more.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because that makes a difference, as we will discuss, and—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Oh yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and you'll be thinking about this with the other models. It has to do with motive, intention, you see. So it's—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, we're go chronologically. We'll get to uh, Sandy later, but with little Anne, uh there was never [laughs] any need to even expect open poses because she had—was one of the most least inhibited models I've ever worked with, you know. [00:12:17] And she had one painting where she was just sort of leaning at me, and she just sort of crossed her ankles and put her knees out, and I'm looking right into her crouch, and she—surprisingly it turned into a very good painting. Her husband now owns it. [Laughs.] I don't know what she's going to tell her grandchildren when they—when they come around. I told you about the lady that gave the painting back because she—it was too erotic, and her—her uh, she didn't want it around when her grandchildren got old enough to ask questions. I'll show it to you later. [They laugh.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well they do—I happen to know that little Anne and her husband, I think carefully secreted—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yeah, but they'll get found. Don't worry about it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I think they also feel that when the kids are—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Old enough.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —older than, you know, after all that's part of her history.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: [Laughs.] Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well this gal, her children accepted it, but she was worried about the grandchildren, so she brought it back. It was even a little bit more explicit than that one of uh —of little Anne. I'm sure you've seen it. But little Anne was, you know, just a delight. Uh, sexually she didn't—she wasn't as appealing as tall Anne. And uh, she was nice to look at, but her body type was—the baby fat got in the way. I don't know if it was baby fat or if she was just sort of a round, round kind of person, but I never found that particularly, you know, erotic. [00:14:07] Gee, I guess I'm not a pedophile. [Laughs.] But she was a delight to work with too because she was very cooperative, and, you know, tried all kinds of poses until I'd see something that I liked. And you know, there were no reservations. Tall Anne had some reservations, and they showed, but, you know, no problem, it was her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did she state this?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Anne, tall Anne?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, tall Anne?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I just couldn't—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Nothing was stated, it was just like—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, I didn't ask for anything so she said, "I can't do that," no, nothing like that. It was just I knew the reservations were there because, you know, she's a woman, and I could tell.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I may have been wrong. [Laughs.] It's been known to happen, but—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You never know.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, you usually can get a feeling for what a model is about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you said Anne, tall Anne, you described both of these models who were really quite different, in terms of their—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Cooperativeness and relax—

PAUL KARLSTROM: They're both cooperative, is what you said.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes, oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But in quite different ways.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, well, no, they both cooperated. They tried to move around to get something that I said, ooh hey, that's it. You know, and they went the whole way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So they knew why they were there, in a sense. They knew that—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, but it wasn't to make an erotic drawing it was to make a good drawing, first of all, and if some of them came out erotic fine. And I think little Anne was at a point in her life where, you know, she was kicking over the traces, and so she thought, "What the hell? May as well," you know, so her poses were much more erotic than others, knowing full well that with my wife in the next room there as nothing going to be happening. [00:16:08] She was safe, so she could be as, you know, tantalizing as—maybe she was playing the game that young girls do trying to see if they can turn on this dirty old man, you know. [Laughs.] Checking her own uh, prowess, you know. I understand that's one of the hazards of being a high school teacher is with all these girls getting their hormones raging around and making it difficult or hard, if you'll excuse the expression, for the teacher. Sorry, you can delete that. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, that's fine. I wouldn't know. Well, after all, we're dealing with a certain theme. You can't be too—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Squeamish.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —squeamish about that. A question, you said that tall Anne was more appealing or sexually attractive to you as a person.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I guess body type having to do with this, interesting then that little Anne, who was much more quotes available, at least visually available, sexually and seemingly more herself interested in display, that that alone didn't evoke necessarily a sexual response. This is something that we're going to have to sort of sort out over time, because this has to do with then the definition of an erotic drawing, and you know, if—if the pose itself, what captured as an image is erotic but isn't necessarily effective on you as the artist, that's an interesting statement.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It's a matter of degree. You know, I mean when little Anne, you know, just sort of dropped one leg down and smiled at me with her very pretty crouch, you know, I mean, I gee, I mean, it wasn't, oh, it was just like a still life. [00:18:01] No, it's just a matter of degree. I mean, I just found tall Anne sexier and more appealing just as a woman with her clothes off than little Anne with her legs spread wide.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Interesting, yeah.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: You know, that has nothing to do with art or anything [laughs].

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a very personal—you're right—that's a very subjective and personal thing but interesting nonetheless.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And then when it comes to Sandy. Sandy had a lovely body, and she was graceful, but of the women I've drawn she came as close to being a still life as possible. Uh, she just didn't project a sexuality. She is one of the few women—I think it was about the fourth time I was drawing her. We were down in my studio down on Monte Vista, and I think I did ask her, open your legs. Don't be, you know, because she always sat around with her knees clamped tight together. She said, "Oh, I couldn't do that. No, no, I couldn't." I says, I'm not gonna leap on you, just—"No, no, I couldn't do that." And that was it. I mean, I didn't press the question. I just uh, suggested it because she was limiting herself so much with what she would do. I mean, the knees were together. I mean, it wasn't like this one was down and this one was up. It was always [clap] clump right together. And uh, she had a lovely body. She was, like I said, she was very graceful, and, you know. She uh had great hip bones.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Can you tell, this is of course maybe a pretty obvious question, but can you tell pretty quickly which women are—are more comfortable with their bodies? [00:20:05] I mean, does this come out almost right away? What you described, not to interpret too much, but what you describe with uh Sandy, you described someone who is very unsure of herself in terms of her body and that it's—there's a discomfort that you just described.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, I think she was, at the time, she had that discomfort. I know months uh, after she posed for me the last time she was studying art, and she went to the extent of doing a life-sized self-portrait nude that she took into class and shook the hell out of them. So she must have gotten something out of the posing that she was able to do that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I think so.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: So [laughs] I think it was a step in the right direction. I—from what I have heard of little Anne and her reaction, she—that was her starting to kick over the traces from a very almost Victorian attitude about the way she was raised. Those are words from tall Anne, that she was afraid she wouldn't make a good model because she had a very Victorian, very stayed upbringing. You know, and then she turned out to be one of the most [laughs] uninhibited models I ever had because when it was little Anne that got me together with—I mean tall Anne that got me together with little Anne.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, and she had said that. And I was very surprised. But uh, Sandy was, like I said, very beautiful, but almost nonsexual.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was it as if she were skittish? You know what I mean?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, no, it's just—

PAUL KARLSTROM: The sort of, you know—[00:22:00]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, she was to be enjoyed for a thing of beauty, not a thing of beauty that also happens to be a sexy women. She was just more like a still life, you know, a beautiful relationship in a Morandi. You know, this color against that color against that shape and what they do to each other. She was more to be appreciated like that. I mean, if all my models I responded to like that I'd quit painting nudes. [Laughs.] Sorry.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it doesn't sound like there's a lot of blood there.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Flowing, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So your impression was that she wasn't ready or able to present herself as a fully sexual, you know, full human being, that it was pretty much a visual—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I can't blame it on her. It just might have been me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I don't even mean willing, but the impression you got. You can't know exactly what she's thinking. But it sounds as if you encountered there a resistance to, shall we say, fully entering into this kind of certainly, "Eros in the Studio," is not the story we're telling?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, no she was—I don't think there was any Eros involved with her attitude. No uh, I—in the beginning, you know, I mean, I saw this very lovely body, you know. And uh, she was exciting, but the more I saw how she felt about her—I felt how she felt about her body, the less exciting she got because of the—now then we come to Christina F. What will we call her, red haired Christina.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, yes, that's right. You're going to have to—how are we going to distinguish?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Red haired Christina. [00:24:00]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Red haired, okay.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Christina is the one with the cadmium orange pubic hair.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, we'll just call her red Christina.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Red Christina, okay. Red Christina was an entirely other bag of snakes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, but she started posing quite a bit later than these other ones.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We've talked about three who posed in the '60s—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sixties, early '70s, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —early '70s, yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And this was late '80s. [Laughs.] Maybe I was more of a dirty old man then. No uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean back in the '60s and '70s?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, no, in the '80s.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, you were older, that's for sure. [They laugh.]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She came to a drawing workshop and—is you got problems with that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I think it's okay.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She came to this drawing workshop, and, you know, I think the second day she was here I asked if she'd pose for me. And I think she thought that would be a good idea, and she was very uninhibited. In fact, she—the first session I have about five of the drawings that are still around, and one of them, she's sort of laying on her back with her legs open, and she saw it years later. She said, "I did that the first time I was here?" [They laugh.] This was uh, I think, shortly after she had posed for about eight drawings in a sketch book of mine where, you know, it's my erotic sketch book because a number of models that I've drawn, I mean, I didn't start this until about three years ago, when they're posing for me, and I'm making drawings I'll say, well, I got a question. Would you pose for an erotic drawing? If you don't want to no problem. If uh, you would like to I would like to see what your attitude about an erotic drawing would be, because I've got a little sketch book here of just erotic drawings. [00:26:00] And uh, I've got, you know, I don't know, five or six of her that are very erotic, but most of them are very funny too because she has a sense of humor. She doesn't take herself too outrageously seriously. And I've since drawn her and painted her. I've got a sheaf about an inch high of drawings of her, and I've got 13 paintings of her, which, since she's moved to Redlands I'm not adding too very much, but she's still been one of my favorite models, you know, even after having two children. But uh, she was always a very good model and very difficult to ignore as a woman, to put it bluntly. You know, she was just a very warm, outgoing person and not inhibited. So she was a delight to draw and paint.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She hadn't posed—I know she did then end up posing professionally, right?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL KARLSTROM: But at that point not so—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —she was in the drawing class.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She was in the drawing class, and she started off as an amateur and worked for me for, oh, about, I guess, almost a year before she decided that that would be—she had a couple other jobs. She was working with some earthquake preparedness bunch that was driving her nuts, and she had to get all dressed up for it. So uh, she decided she'd try modeling. So she started modeling professionally. And uh—but she still comes back and poses for me periodically when the kids are off camping with their father who now has a new wife. But so I get to draw her periodically or paint her. And uh—[00:28:03]

PAUL KARLSTROM: She actually is one—one of two who, to this point, have favored us with completed surveys, questionnaires. And of course I've read some of you the questionnaire, and it might be that we want to—well, we

might want to then even right now go into this unless there are other more general comments you have. But one of the things that struck me about her response was that she was very open about the erotic nature of the experience—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —the sexual aspect, and for her it was something she, as far as I can tell from her responses, really—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Enjoyed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —enjoyed.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I guess a question, without looking at her too closely right now but just a more general question is, can you divide your models—amateurs? And these are only a few, if I understand, from over the years you've had a number of friends or even strangers you've asked, and maybe they've become friends, but at least they've posed. So you have a terrific reservoir [laughs] of experiences to draw upon, which I suppose wouldn't be a bad topic for this general introduction because we're not going to be able to visit all of them, but can you in—to any extent divide them into two camps? I mean, are there those women who, when they are nude in your studio on the platform or wherever they may be posing, respond to it themselves to the degree you can tell, erotically, or sexually, and then another group where you can sense that that is—[00:30:06]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: They're fighting it all the way. Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it really does divide up—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, I mean, there are all—there are shades of gray in between, but there are some that are very definitely at home, and they're—you know, it's a sexually jolly thing to be doing without, you know, having to commit themselves to fornication or anything like that, [laughs] and they're—it's pleasuring them. And there are the others that it seems to be in their mind, "By god, I've got to be careful, whatever I do he's going to think I want to go to bed with him." You know, but that's there in the back of the mind. I mean, no matter how you tell them that this isn't about, you know, getting it on, this is about, you know, me harnessing my sexual urges to try to make a beautiful thing come out of it, a drawing, a painting, or you know, a watercolor.

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PAUL KARLSTROM: It must be interesting. Okay, I think that this now is recording. Um, tape one, side B, interview with Sam Clayberger, uh sort of an introduction, a preliminary to discussion of artists and models and particular individuals and experiences in the studio, we call, "Eros in the Studio." And we were cut off. I'm not exactly sure where, but you were talking about differences, in general, differences in responses. And pretty much two groups, those who acknowledge and enjoy, if I understand—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —the erotic component of this experience and those who—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: May be enjoying it but are afraid of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, and would you say that second group, they tend to cast it more in sort of a classical notion of being a muse to the artist, basically being an inspiration or even just a still life as you were saying, you know, the image that then is turned into a work of art. In other words, the high art notion, the other being maybe higher but also erotic?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: A little more human, yes. Uh, I don't know. I never—I always think they each have their own—their own attitude about this, which comes back to one of your questions of, why did you pose for Sam? You know, I mean, as many people as you ask that, that's how many different answers you're going to get. So you know, I'm just guessing and trying to, you know, use my intuition to figure out where these gals are coming. [00:02:02] Although I will admit I don't spend most of my time worrying about their attitude about having their clothes off. You know, I just—what's the old expression, I don't ask questions I just had fun. And um, you know, as far as the eroticism, you know, with some of the women it's there. And it is a nice feeling because there's no obligations, which is the hard part for some of them, to realize there's no obligations, because their attitude about nudity is, you know, like so many people, it's the same thing as sexuality. But once they realize that they can be nude and there can be sexual feelings without any actual contact happening, you know, it becomes a liberating thing for quite a number of them. I had a neighbor one time that I conned into posing for me. And she just loved it. She thought that was just wonderful. She said, "It's so—I felt so free." The funny part was that she

felt so free that a couple weeks later she came and posed for one of my uh, painting groups that I had at a studio over on Figueroa on Monday mornings. And she felt so free that when, you know, the coffee breaks came she just, you know, walked over to the coffee machine and, you know, and had her coffee and just left her robe off. Shook the hell out of some of the little old ladies, but the guys thought it was nice. And unfortunately she moved [laughs] because she was a very, very, very nice person and very warm. It's funny. A lot of these things I haven't thought of for a long time. [00:04:02]

PAUL KARLSTROM: And relatively it's a long history an enviable one in a way because on a pretty regular basis, it seems to me, you've had, well, I mean, you taught figure drawing at Otis for how many years?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Seventeen, but who's counting? [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you retired, what, about eight years ago?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Uh, '91, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Hey, not bad, huh?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Not bad.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I got it right. So this is nothing new to you, and of course for our purposes we are distinguishing between the arts school—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Professional models.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —academic exercises with the professional models, although you also have engaged them, or engage them here or in your various studios either for classes or—what about for yourself, though? When you're getting a model just for yourself do you—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: The professional models fall into the same two categories you were talking about. Some of them it's, you know, "I got to take my clothes off because I'm between engagements as an actress, and this is a good way to [laughs] basically do my show off thing," which actors like to do and get paid for it when they can't get a job acting. You know, that might be a little harsh, but I think that's one of the strong motivations. But there are models that, professional models, that are great for the workshop that just are about as exciting as a mashed potato sandwich. There's this one gal, and she's very prompt and very good. She takes nice poses and everything, but she doesn't project any sexuality at all. Some of the gals that I have hired, the professionals, you know, they are just so happy with their body and their—the way they feel about being observed, looked at, you know, scrutinized, whatever you want to call it. I mean looked at. They'll enjoy it, so those are the ones I hire for myself when I haven't been able to con anybody into posing for me. [00:06:21] When I say conning into it, it doesn't mean that I'm asking them to work for free or anything. It's just that, you know, sometimes amateur models you have to, you know, convince them, do a hell of a job of convincing them that it's not jump the bones time, and it isn't a big pass. But you know, the professionals know that, so you don't have any problem getting them to pose one-on-one. But uh—and some of them are very relaxed and sexual, and some of them are very, very still life. I don't know if I've ever told you, but there used to be this actress, beautiful blond, with uh, you know, just flawless body, beautiful skin, real blond hair, and pretty blue eyes, and people at the workshop always used to say, "I can't draw her. She's hard to draw." And I finally figured it out. The lights were on, but there was nobody home. I mean, she didn't project anything. There was this beautiful shell, but there was no personality glowing out of it. That's why our little friend, you know, Molly is a—you know, she projects who and what she is. And that's—they're people. I have told a number of people, I don't know if I said it in the other interview, that, you know, I can sit down and draw a female figure almost any proportions, doing almost anything I can imagine, but that's not what it's about. You want to draw a person. [00:08:00] And the more a person appeals to you as a person, as a human being, plus as a human being, beautiful, sexual creature, you know, the more you have to work with to make a good drawing. God, I don't think I could have said anything more profound than that if I tried. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's pretty good. That's pretty good.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I'm being facetious. No, but that's the way I feel about it. I mean, what—I've had women's libbers saying, "Oh, you're exploiting these women." Uh, I guess I am. I want this feeling that they have about their own beauty and sexuality and desirability to use in my drawing. And if that's exploitation, guilty your honor.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well this touches on several very interesting points, and one of them is the awareness of self on the part of these amateur models, their self-awareness.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't mean self-consciousness necessarily, but self-awareness—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, self-awareness.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and that this is the source, I gather from what you say, of a kind of energy then that infuses the model, the person, and which you respond to as an artist.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it's that self-awareness of, if not their sexual availability but their sexual potential, you know, this side of their nature, because I think you're absolutely right, to a certain degree nudity, displaying self, is a kind of, at least visually, making yourself available, for amateurs especially. [00:10:00] What about those who—and let's look at our cases, but you can, you know, mention anybody else of course that you want to, but I was thinking then about number one, tall Anne and who is described as, from your perspective, as demure and something of an ice princess, but one that inspired a kind of heat in you. She was desirable.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you have any sense of her self-conception within the posing sessions, or is it something too mysterious that you really can't define? And I'm talking about this kind of self-awareness. You know what I mean. Any clue?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No clue at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you can't?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Because she was so uh, business-like about it. You know, and she was so lovely and seemed so relaxed because I got all those nice poses out of her that were relaxed, you know. That one with her hands clasped in front of her crotch, which is one of the first that I ever did of her, that was so natural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which happily is in my office in San Francisco.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: But your office is in your home, isn't it?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, oh yes, it's not my—[Laughs.]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It isn't like the office of the Huntington. No, okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There are limits. [They laugh.]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Stuffy, stuffy, stuffy. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you couldn't—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I didn't know how she was feeling about it. I just know she was very cooperative and very—seemed comfortable after that first pose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess one of the questions that I'm certainly working at here, it'd be interesting to get a response in connection with other models, but in what ways do you read sexual involvement or interest in the models in this, in "Eros in the Studio"? [00:12:14] This is "Eros in the Studio." You obviously can speak to the way you responded to them, but what are the signals, the clues, if there are any at all, on the part of models getting a response to your desires, shall we say, to you interest?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Uh, I would say most of them try to keep it, try to keep it to themselves. I mean, there have been a couple models that didn't put robes on between—between poses and, you know, I'm looking at the drawing. They come over and sort of lean against me and look at it, and I got that message, but [laughs] the two that I can remember I didn't respond to [laughs]. I just kept it very professional because some of them, you know, it's hey, let's do something about this. But those are the exceptions by far.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the ones, though, that you were highly attracted to? So this then is about you, not about them.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It's about me. You know, it's difficult sometimes. There was a gal that, she was a professional model, and I had here her one time just to work for me. And it was entirely different than—professionally, than working one-on-one. I got halfway through the session, and I paid her and told her to go home.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes. I was a lot younger. [Laughs.] This was back in the '70s, and uh, she was just—her name was Ruth, and she was just too uh—too much.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you mean by that, too interested, too obviously interested in you? [00:14:03]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I just responded to her being as being the sexiest thing since sliced bread.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And she knew what—she was aware of this and was—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I don't think she was going out of her way to do anything different—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh really, so this was just—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It was just—

PAUL KARLSTROM: —a big response on your part that—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Big response on my part.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —interfered with—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: With me being able to concentrate on a drawing. So I just chased her home. I paid her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And did you tell her why?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did she say?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She said, "Gee, I'm flattered." And, you know, went home. Took the money and went home. [Laughs.] No, I wasn't—I—

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a professional. What about—you know, we are going to talk more about this in individual cases, but again, remember it's "Eros in the Studio," and so it is a sort of charged situation, potentially, that takes different forms. But with the amateurs, I gather you choose them for several reasons but one is that you're attracted to them?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes. Usually as people and as beautiful people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, right, and that it would be more interesting to see them naked than not.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Not yes but hell yes. [They laugh.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, that's an easy one. Now we've already discussed that there are differences than in the way—in the ways that these models present themselves in the studio in terms of acknowledging to one degree or another or maybe not at all a sexual component, an eroticism. My guess personally is that it's there in one form or another, and Sandy simply was—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I haven't read hers yet.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, no, I'm not quoting from her.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh, you're not.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm saying that she, and I would have said this before, was very much struggling with her own sexuality. [00:16:05] This is just my own memory of the time, and was to a degree afraid of it. So this would affect what she communicated and was able to do as a model. And some of the cases, like with little Anne, it was quite the opposite. Here you had somebody who on the face of it, when you would meet her, would think, "How prim and proper." It was almost unbearable sometimes how prim and proper she was. Well, hey, go figure. Who knows? But uh, several parts to this question, the first one is that getting into the studio, when they disrobe, as they say, get on the stand or begin to interact with you, she's nude, you're the artist, looking at her there's the male gaze, that that becomes the um, key moment, perhaps, in giving you any kind of a signal, or even in conditioning than your own response to them, is this true, that the clothed person is one thing. You think you feel one way about that person like that, but then it's not necessarily the case once they get into the studio and they have to confront their nudity uh, as then part of a dynamic? Well—do you get it?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes. Haven't thought about that particularly, but—

PAUL KARLSTROM: In other words, do they change, or does your feeling about them sexually, uh change?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Usually the thing that wants me—wants to draw them in the first place is who they are and are they attractive? But somebody with an outgoing personality with a sense of humor that I would like as a person, you know, could have a couple warts, and I wouldn't mind because they're a nice person. [00:18:09] I mean, I have a prejudice against 350 pound women, but otherwise, I've drawn all kinds. There's round ones and very skinny ones, you know, beautiful women come in many shapes and forms, but the thing that—I guess the way to answer it would be uh, when I see the woman nude for the first time it usually enhances what I felt for her, you know, that person that she was with her clothes on, you know, with a sense of humor and a sense of fun, you know. And uh, I very seldom wind up with being shocked when a model takes her clothes off because her body has been abused. There was a professional model in here a couple years ago, oh, about a year ago, that, you know, she had—the hair was dyed. She had scars on her body and these badly done silicone breasts, and I felt so sorry for her because she had let her body be abused. And it was, you know, a complete physical turn off. Uh, I did a couple drawings of her, but none of them communicate anything erotic about the woman. I mean, she's nude, and she's got her blonde hair and everything, but there's nothing even slightly erotic about them. I'll show them to you later if you want to see. [00:20:00]

PAUL KARLSTROM: So I gather that on some occasions the experience in the studio, or the confrontation if you will, actually does change the way you uh—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —feel, and I gather—for instance, that was the case with Sandy, where—and even though her body was lovely—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Lovely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and so forth, that something changed. That is has—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, well she—the way she felt about herself communicates it. You know, I—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You didn't sense any of that when you talked with her, when you met her or talked with her.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No. Don't forget, I didn't pick her. She picked me. You were talking to Sandy about that, and Sandy said, "Gee, I'd like to try that." So that's how I got that model.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So we told you, Anne and I told you, and—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative], and uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You hadn't met her?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, she—you brought her over. You brought little Anne, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You had never met her?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I won one and I lost one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is an interesting dimension.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, you brought both of those gals.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Isn't that funny because Sandy—never mind. This will all come out in the, you know, in her recollections of how, you know.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, because I don't remember. She remembers it differently. Gee, that's surprising.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But still, you don't engage models sight unseen, so—and we never would have assumed that

just anybody would do—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Hey, you brought me two physically attractive women. At the time you thought maybe that's what I wanted.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, did they come over with the idea then they would pose on that occasion, or did they come over to—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I don't remember—I don't remember .

PAUL KARLSTROM: See I think, my guess—I don't either, but my guess is that we would have not been so presumptuous, and we would have said let's meet first. [00:22:04] And then—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well no little—before I met little Anne, tall Anne said, "A friend of mine, little Anne, would like to try posing, but I don't think she'd be a very good model because of this Victorian background." And then I says, oh, that's fine. I'll give it a try and see if she likes it. And then you just brought her over and she posed. Or maybe that was the time you did the two of them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Probably.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I would expect that because they wouldn't have sent her over by herself.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well I do hope that little Anne completes her survey because then we can remember her.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That'll be very interesting when we hear what she has to say because, you know, she could be—what she is reading from me, I would be interested to hear because what—if there's anything sexual that Sandy is reading I'll be surprised, [laughs] not interested to hear but surprised, because I don't remember, you know, finding her sexually that exciting. Like I said, lovely, but uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well it's true. I mean, the way memory works, I mean, that's partly what this is all about—uh, which we won't talk about now because we've already talked about it, and this is where I will be in a little bit writing on. Um, let me see. Once again we're talking about amateurs here, and you have stated, I think pretty clearly, why you prefer amateurs. Why don't you say so again so I have it here on the tape, and we—[00:24:05]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, because there's a real person that uh, is dealing with her nudity. Now if she is mature enough to realize that nudity and sexuality are two different things, lots of times tied together but two different things, that I want her to—I want to look at her beautiful body and makes drawings from it. That's— that's what I want. How she is going to react—well, I know how she's going to react, in the first 15 minutes she's going to be nervous, but once she realizes that it isn't a big sexual pass I want to see how she reacts to the experience of being an artist's model. Also uh, that has a lot to do with the poses that she takes once she realizes, whether they're erotic or very demure or athletic, you know, because there is a small percentage of them that like to do these very athletic, strange, strange things. Uh, I don't know where I found her, but I had this gal that—oh, she interviewed me for—about painting nudes. And I got her to pose for me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know who that is. Barbara.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Barbra, I had forgotten her name.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that's Don and Sandy sent Barbara to you.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh god.

PAUL KARLSTROM: See, so here's Sandy.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: How incestuous can you get?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: [Laughs.] But Barbara was a kick.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We're trying to locate her to get—she only posed once, right?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Was that all?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know. I don't know.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: But she did a couple yoga positions that she held long enough for me to make a drawing that were, you know, just a nice surprise. And she was very nervous about the whole process, but she seems to

enjoy it once she got into it. [00:26:01]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, okay, how do you—I don't know if she's going to—we're going to get her to—although Sandy, believe it or not, and Don tried to track her down, they're still in touch, to get her responses. So they're good collaborators here on this.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Great. Barbara, I had forgotten her name.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I can't remember her last name, but it was Ted, Ted and Barbara something. We knew them. But tell me about that. That's very interesting. She came in as a professional, uh—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She was a writer. She was doing an article.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —she was writing an article for something. I don't know what it was.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Some magazine, I think it was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And she was doing field work, basically, and—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She wanted to know what it was like, you know, what my attitudes and stuff, so I put her to work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So—but very interesting to me how she then entered into the spirit of things, apparently. And you know, adopted poses that were gymnastic, I suppose, and no doubt very revealing.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well there's one she's leaning forward holding her foot and the other one is out at the side, uh a bit revealing, but it wasn't meant to be—it wasn't an erotic pose. It was just one of the positions that you do to stretch your back as part of the yoga experience. I studied yoga little bit. I never could quite do that one. [They laugh.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I certainly couldn't do any I'm sure. But it's interesting. It sounds to me, although I don't want to jump ahead on this, that uh you're like a student of life and of, well, of people because what you're doing is through this experience, through their experience—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sure, I'm trying to make something that is—

PAUL KARLSTROM: —revealing.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —that has life in my own art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you think they learn things about themselves, I gather you think that—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Of course they do. [00:28:04]

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and that you also learn more about them. I mean like, for instance, tall Anne. Uh, you had some brief contact with tall Anne first. We get to talk about her later, but just within this context. Then actually you got to know her much more through—she posed for you quite a bit over a period of years. She was like a regular almost. I mean, there was periods of time between, and that whole phenomenon is interesting because we don't know, and maybe we'll find out if she does her survey, why. Because it takes time. I mean, you give up a slice of your life, which is involving other things, to come do this. So there must be a draw. Um, who knows if we'll find out. But at any rate, you got to know her much better, and I would say in some ways probably more intimately, or maybe I should ask you, through the studio experience, the time with her in the studio.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, that's when I spent most of my time with her. I mean, when we got together socially, you know, there's only certain things you talk about, and there's always mundane things you're doing earning a living and stuff that you talk about. But when we're together we're talking about art or her attitudes about art. It's just a one-on-one. That's why I told Christina that I, you know, Christina dark that I didn't like a third person in the studio. I had a model here one time—

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do we call this Christina?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Dark.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, she's not dark. She's got blond hair.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She's blond?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh boy, and I'm a trained observer. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, I mean, yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I don't remember—I thought she had darker hair. [00:30:03]

PAUL KARLSTROM: God, well now I'm beginning to doubt myself.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Hey.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Blond and red.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Blond and red.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Unless I'm proven wrong.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Okay, blond and red.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Anyway, sorry I interrupted you.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Christina blond. It's called a senior episode where you get interrupted in a thought, and then—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, and I'm senior because now what was your—the point you were making with Christina.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That's what I'm saying. That's the thought that went away, the point I was trying to make.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh. [They laugh.]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That's a senior episode.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sorry, you see I interrupted you and lost the—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I'm sure it wasn't of anything momentous.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The—how—something else that we'll be able to talk about more, but how does your desire adjust? Okay, there's a given that with amateurs in most cases there was an attraction to them.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's why you—okay.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Ask them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And—but then it becomes quite clear also that your desire adjusts and modifies over time.

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PAUL KARLSTROM: All right, I think this is going now. This is um, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, our interview with Sam Clayberger on the subject of artists and models.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: "Eros in the Studio."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Subtext "Eros in the Studio." And we're sitting not very erotically at the moment in the studio. This is tape two side A, and the interviewer's still Paul Karlstrom. And let's, Sam, see if we can't pick up um, where we left off. Let me see if I get this right, I think it had to do with shifting and changing attraction and desire.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Over the months or years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, and well that but then also the—trying to pin down a little more precisely how the experience of these—usually young women—nude effected, conditioned in some way, directed your own desire. Did it increase it? Did it decrease it? You've said that seldom was there anything about their bodies that had much of an effect on this except with little Anne.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Little Anne and Christina. Christina was very physically attractive.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, but you said little Anne was—you never really got into what you called baby fat on this.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so in a sense, well, you see what I mean.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I could be a little bit more objective about drawing the very erotic poses. [00:02:02]

PAUL KARLSTROM: On little Anne?

SAMUELCLAYBERGER: Yes, you know, if tall Anne had given me those poses I'd have chased her home. [They laugh.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is understandable. And then with Christina I gather there was not only the maintenance of this desire, it remained, but it increased as you got to know her better. Am I right in saying that this is—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh, of course, yes, because she just got to be a delight and, you know, my favorite model.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well now, okay, with any of them, what I'm trying to do is chart or map desire from your standpoint. Their own will appear in their survey. But uh, how do you remember with these individuals how that progressed, how your own desire, your experience of them, your response to them erotically changed, increased, decreased, what?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh. Gee.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because you had very different experiences with them and the way they comported themselves.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yeah, they're all different. They're all different. But uh, as I said about that, Sandy's the only one I ever asked her to, you know, open her legs, and that was about the, oh, third or fourth time that she posed for me. And you know, that—I was just trying to see if that would do it, if that would get her relaxed and to be more of her—not more of, but less of a still life project, you know, if the way she felt about herself. [00:04:02] I mean, again, this is looking at that in retrospect because I wasn't aware of doing that at the time, but I think that's one of the reasons I asked her, because, as I said before, I very seldom ask—ask a model to take a revealing pose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, because very often you didn't have to, right?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, most times. I mean, there's a percentage. They're not all revealing poses, but uh, there's a certain percentage of poses that wind up that way because a model is trying different things to, you know, to make me—to help me find what I want to draw or paint. That's one of the nice things about little Molly. She's, you know, very uninhibited, and she, you know, she bops around and, you know, tries things. I don't know if I told you, but little Molly, I said, if you feel comfortable, don't put your robe on. And uh, maybe—because sometimes I find a pose when you're least expecting it. And if you're nude then we can just get right to the drawing or painting. And she was very comfortable with that. She wandered around the studio looking at things. She sat over here balancing her—a cup of tea and eating pan dulces, got into a great pose. And she said, "We'll do that another day," because it was a three—three hour session was almost over, and she had to go off to another job.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, wasn't that the case though with your—some of your amateurs too?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, they walked around. In fact, I was at some of the sessions.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that didn't seem to be so much of a leap for most of them, really. [00:06:00]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Uh no. But then they didn't—some of them didn't know how it was done, that models jump into their robe as soon as the pose is over.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because my impression—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: The professionals anyhow.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —my impression, and of course I have limited experience, mainly—well, I mean, this tape

should know that I've attended some of these sessions. I mean, I am neutral. I am the oral historian but also a participant as well, which is an interesting position to be in, but I remember attending a number of sessions with, not the first one or even two, because—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: But later on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —later on with you and Anne and also with little Anne.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Anne and Sandy, I mean, little Anne.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Tall Anne and little Anne.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Were you ever in any of Sandy's?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, mm-mm [negative]. And also with Anne, at least once, with a small class, and I actually then—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Incidentally, you asked me to ask Danny, may not remember. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, that's, well, you know, there you go. This is also about memory, because that which I thought was quite interesting.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, and Anne was a little nervous because my son was in this class.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, tall Anne, my wife, okay, yes, yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Didn't shake Danny at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, and I'm not sure if it was even a class or if it was—this is where maybe we'll never know where—it was just the two of you. I'm not sure.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I don't remember that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But anyway, that doesn't matter because we remember selectively. But um, I'm trying to remember, but certainly in the sessions, I believe, in the sessions with you, uh, I mean, the private sessions, individual sessions with Anne, tall Anne and you, and tall Anne and little Anne and you, breaks between poses they certainly didn't bother to put on—[00:08:02]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I have pictures that I took and that you took of them sitting there drinking coffee and —

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, so that became part of the deal, see. That became part of this, I would describe it of course as liberation, to be able to do that and to not feel that, ooh, well, now I'm not doing my job, which is to pose. The clock has stopped moving.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Well, the professionals do that to keep it—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Professional.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —very professional, but that isn't necessarily what I want. I want as relaxed a thing as I can get with models.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So—um, which of these amateurs—okay, let me ask you a very direct question. Did you ever—you described one situation that was so erotically charged that the woman became—the model became so attractive—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I chased her home, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were there other cases like this where you were actually ready to take, at least tentatively, the little step over that line?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh, I've been tempted quite often, [laughs] you know, but there is a thing about that. Uh, you wind up with no models if you step over the line. Then the word gets around that, you know, "Hey, he's a grabber. Look out for him."

PAUL KARLSTROM: But with amateurs, you see, you've described entirely different situations.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, but it's, you know, you never know when an amateur's going to call a school and

say, "Hey, you got a dirty old man on your faculty there. He promised me he was a—just a nice artist and he was going to—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes but, okay, I understand that, but we're also talking about people who came to your or came together with you one-on-one personally. [00:10:00] They didn't think of themselves as participating in a profession. And so what happens in my theoretical view of this is that it is then the development of a relationship because, you know, they're not posing for an artist. They're posing for Sam. And uh, so I mean, I don't want to beg the question here, but it seems that at some point there needs to be um, in our discussions kind of an acknowledgment of a very different kind, potentially, a very different kind of relationship because it has to do with people you choose for very definite reasons to be with. And I guess what is interesting here, all relationships, just like flirting, depend upon signals. And if you get the signals like I do, by the way, have gotten from Christina, blond Christina, who may be posing for you, since I'm the one who met her at Il Fornaio, this is also part of the story of artists and models, there was a mutual attraction or just an enjoyment of one another's people. Now, we're just talking about over a bar. They are not familiar with the etiquette and so forth of the studio and even professionalism. And, I guess my question is, that is—this creates a situation where their experience of this is the experience of you. And if they're enjoying it and even a little bit erotically liberated, you are the liberator. So I would think that at least theoretically this might—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh yes, it happens. But you know I've been sorely tempted many times, but I just do my damndest to—you know—Christina and I got much closer than I think any other model and I, but—[00:12:11]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, but—

PAUL KARLSTROM: You didn't—did you have an affair with her?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, no, but we—

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is a restricted tape anyway at this point, so—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, the—it got close, but you know, it was—

PAUL KARLSTROM: So she was obviously as attracted to you as—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, yes. Well again, she's an artist, and she wanted to be an artist. She was just a student at the time, and I became her mentor. So—

PAUL KARLSTROM: We know about that, yes. It's a lovely job, but it carries a burden of responsibility. [Laughs.]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Here, here, you know. No, we became, you know, very good friends, and a little closer than I should have, but no, no, no big affair.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you—well I guess this leads naturally to another question, if you really enjoyed the people it would be—the individual, it would be natural to want to say, "Well, you know, let's go have a—let's go out. Let's uh—" you know, not dancing or anything necessarily, but in other words to step out of the studio, which I think we've agreed in other conversations is actually a protected environment. It's like a moment out of time, but then to carry whatever mutual feelings you have in their eyes—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I sort of disagree. I think if a gal wanted to, you know, get closer to me she'd want it here not out some place—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not out in the real world?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —else where I was just another schmo, you know. They'd want to be closer to me here because this is what they're part of, the creating of art and, you know, and the relationship of artist to model. Model hyphen woman. [00:14:02]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well yes, I guess that's no doubt right. I was just speculating that a bigger step then is to go out into that other real world where you both function, uh, taking it out of the studio where it's very contained, and as I say, I would imagine safe. And I've heard some of—some models, some of your models describe it that way. And it's like to a certain degree you have permission within that environment to—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Take your clothes off and do erotic poses. It's okay.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —and explore, you know, yourself and your feelings and to think of yourself as attractive, as sexy, aware of the fact that you're being looked at that way, which is a key, key idea—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —for motivation that way, which—and so forth and so on. That's all sort of protected. It's all allowed within the rules of the game, I think. To step out of the studio, simply my—my thought, would be almost like a commitment to enjoying one another, spending time out in that real world, when you're out in—does that sound possible to you at all, or am I making this up? So say if you went, "Oh, Christina, this is a great session." And you know, "God, you're a great person. You know, I really enjoy spending time with you. Let's—why don't we go for dinner and a movie or something like that?"

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Oh, we haven't gone for movies, but we've gone to dinner many times, and uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Just the two of you?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes. Oh yes, sometimes she'll be here and pose for me, and then we go up to the Thai restaurant because she loves Thai food too. Didn't I ever tell you about the Thai restaurant that they look at me—I'm coming in with all these beautiful women? You know, "What the hell is this?" But there was a Mexican restaurant I used to take my models to when I Fig—have my studio was over on Figueroa, and they, boy, they gave me funny looks. [00:16:07] And then I was talking to this one waitress, and she said she just graduated. I said, oh, my daughter just did too, Laurie Clayberger. She said, "Oh, you're Laurie's dad. Oh, you're the artist." Yes, okay. They didn't look at me funny anymore, you know. [Laughs.] They knew I was bringing all these—I've told that to a number of models, and I said, gee, I guess they thought I was some sort of white slaver or pimp or something like that with all these beautiful that I come in there with.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, so maybe, you know, this idea, "Eros in the Studio" is entirely appropriate because what I hear you saying is that the true opportunities, if they're there at all, are—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Is in the studio because of the studio, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the studio itself is almost an erotic—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It's a stimulus—

PAUL KARLSTROM: —yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —a stimulus for the woman's erotic fantasies, whatever they may be, and uh [laughs] sure as hell mine, you know [laughs].

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: But you know, the channeling of these—of the way I feel about this woman and a sexuality, the channeling of it into the painting, you know. That one of Anne like this, you know, that one's got it. I mean, the way I felt about her, it's right here, you know. There's this elegant, you know, smooth-skinned beauty that uh, doesn't quite know where she's at. [Laughs.] Do you ever see that in the painting?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure, yes. It's pretty modest uh, but not real self-conscious. It's just her idea of appropriate modesty, I think, under the circumstances—[00:18:03]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —Well, it'd be one of the first poses, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, which she actually did overcome, but we're not going to talk about her in that respect yet. She has to fill out her survey. But one of the things we can talk about um, and it'd be interesting, maybe we can sort of wrap this up, referring to about, what was it about two months ago a month and a half ago when Anne and I visited you here. You had invited her to revisit the past by posing. And in her characteristic way she didn't really give a response. She just said she'd think about it. And of course it is absolutely true I knew it would depend entirely on how she felt at the moment. And after we sat here and talked for quite a while, it was fun. We looked at books, you know. We had a really nice visit, drank coffee and all that. And then all of a sudden I stepped aside, next thing I knew she was then changing into a kimono, I guess.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: [Laughs.] A kimono.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it didn't surprise me. I was wondering though if we were going to run out of time, and so then she, it must have been for, what did she do, two 20-minute poses, I guess about?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: About, mm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that was quite interesting because for one thing it was revisiting the past way back in the '60s, but also—well, I shouldn't—I mean, I have my own views on it. I should ask you how you found the

experience of her. She's 55 years old. How old are you?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Seventy-three.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Seventy-three, okay. How you found the experience of her at 55, this mature woman, compared to this 22-year-old or whatever she was when she started posing for you? [00:20:06]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Apples and oranges. They're different. The uh—you know, my hormones were raging a lot more vitally when I first drew her and she was younger and gravity hadn't done anything nasty to her. And we're both older. I'm older, and uh she is still remarkably beautiful, but it's not the beauty that I remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's not youthful, post-pubescent.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Post—yes, yes. She's still a very beautiful woman. And that painting I did of her uh, I guess she was in her 40s then, could have been 10 years ago before—

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, yes, mid-40s, yes.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That—that she was in great shape then too. Hairdos different, of course, but—do you know I have a photograph of her with long hair wearing it down, and I started a painting of her with this long hair, long dark hair?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, well she's had that at different times.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And uh, I mean it was almost down to her waist. And uh—

PAUL KARLSTROM: —well, never that long.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I never could make that painting work. I don't know what happened to it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that one that I took or you took? You must have taken that.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I started the painting from her over at that studio on Monte Vista. And I happen to have a photograph of it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Of the painting.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, of her in the pose to cover myself and—even with the photograph I never could make it work. I had her sitting on—she brought her little Indian rug with her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh. Yes?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And I put that under her as a very active against this very elegant simple forms of her. [00:22:05] And bust my ass on that rug, [laughs] but I never could get the figure to be what I wanted.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I think that's one of the few of hers I've thrown away. I had one where I think I did it from a photograph I took of her, and she's—and I have her standing out in the countryside. Doctor Bernese Alloy [ph] bought that many years ago. Then they took down a Zuniga to hang it in their bedroom.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: I was very impressed. It was a Zuniga drawing. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, there's so many directions to go with all of this interesting stuff, and time changes people—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Here, here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: —in fact, day to day and then of course each individual is different. And I suppose what we want to end up with here are some—actually some generalization that can be made about a phenomenon that is very, very individual. But you can't write about things that are only uniquely—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —generalizations.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you can't write about them as only individual either because then finally you have to write about everybody in the world. And the idea is to find those shared human experiences.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That's your job. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's my job. That's my job. Um.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, the generalization is that there is always a sexual dynamic between an artist and a model. Sometimes it's very weak. Sometimes it's very strong. And it's—it depends on the two people, the dynamic of the relationship. [00:24:00] If they're both, you know, trying to make the other one happy, like any [laughs]—like any sexual relationship actually, if you're trying your best to make the other one happy then everybody's happy. You know, the more you give the more you get.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Here's a question related to poses. You've discussed open poses as almost symbolic. It's interesting. That's sort of how—one way that you judge the level of uh energy or eroticism in, well, in the model perhaps, but certainly in the drawing.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, not everybody would see it that way, but what matters here, we're talking about you because this is your erotic drawings and what you consider erotic. And we can talk about that more later. And since I've noticed that with many of your models they're completely relaxed about it. They're just spread—spread as wide as you want or as they feel like doing, and it's obviously sort of a collaboration. They understand this is something that uh you—one of the things that you like in a pose.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It's a pose they can do that isn't going to get them in trouble. You know, once I've established that it's much easier, you know, for them to give me those kind of poses, or to, you know, they're actually—they're just increasing the range of what they can do.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now with—and then you described, certainly with Sandy but even with tall Anne that there was a sort of resistance. That this isn't what they felt comfortable with for one reason or another.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Couple questions, with Anne, the fact that she was demure and you sensed, apparently you sensed that she had certain self-imposed limits, it wasn't that she wasn't cooperative, it's just that this was not in her range—[00:26:11]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —I go this far, then I don't go any farther.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, so my question is this, when she—you described and we know there are at least a couple times, because we've got the drawings of her where her legs are pretty spread. One would call those maybe not fully open poses, but they are basically open poses. And you know, there it is. Uh, did it make it more interesting because this was like breaking out of character for her? In other words, this is what she—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —I don't remember. At the time I just thought, oh, she's relaxing a little bit more. That would be my reaction. But you know, she doesn't want to try to sit there on the points of her coccyx or the points of her pelvis down there. She dropped like this and get—a little bit more on the gluteus maximus spread.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, but the—what you said in the beginning about her was that you understood almost without it even being spoken that these were the limits. And so here is a case where for one reason or another—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: She exceeded the limits. You know, I was just delighted. [Laughs.] It's very simple. And if I remember the drawing it was pretty loose and uh, direct. I think I wanted to do it quick before she changed her mind. [Laughs.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well my guess—well I don't know, I can't speak for her, my guess is if she's in a pose and, you know, you've agreed to it then she's professional, so—. Uh, a lot is made about these open poses, and some of the models, I think most of the models knew this was something that you enjoyed.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It inspired you and whatever.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And once they saw the drawings, excuse me if I'm interrupting—

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, no, you're—this is about you, not me. [00:28:01]

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Once they saw the drawings and didn't—and realized I wasn't going to do a gynecological illustration—

PAUL KARLSTROM: —[inaudible].

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Smile, you're on candid crotch, you know. No, you know, pubic area is just, you know, a nice shape. And legs going out from it is different, but you know, you don't have to draw labia and clitoris, and all that good stuff to make it a good drawing. I mean, like I said, I'm not a—you know, a gynecologist I'm an artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well that's—well, let me ask, I don't know how much more we have here, but since we're on this subject I was thinking of Anne and those poses where you had someone who was resistant.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Anne, your—big—tall Anne?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, I mean, little Anne was not resistant at all.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: For sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But here was like a uh, I don't want to say a concession because whatever the reasons, I don't know how—

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: —I don't think it was resistant. It was just that in her demure, who she was didn't encompass that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, exactly.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: And she relaxed enough to a point where, oh, well, what the heck. You know, the world isn't going to end if I open my knees.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That's all there was to it. I don't think it had anything with her building up a—an erotic feeling for me or anything like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, no, I'm not suggesting that, but I'm saying—I want to talk about your response. This presumably, from everything you've said, must have been a real treat.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: It was surprising, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this was an erotic experience because you could, even though you were only drawing it, you know, delineating it, you were seeing it.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes, sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, so that then operates as, well, I guess, achieving part of what uh—part of what one would hope for, the artist, you would hope for in these sessions. [00:30:01] And so it becomes a symbol. I guess this is what I'm driving at, almost a symbol of an intimacy.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that good with you?

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: That's kosher. That sounds good.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: Is it turned off?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I say it's time unless you have something more to add to it.

SAMUEL CLAYBERGER: No, I feel very content.

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