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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Judy Dater, 2000
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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Judy Dater on June 2, 2000. The interview took place in Berkeley, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with photographer Judy Dater at her studio residence in Berkeley, California. The theme for this brief and focused interview is Artists and Models. This is one in a series. The date is June 2nd, year 2000. And the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. Having said that, now we can get down to business. We are going to be talking about a very specific subject or theme. What is said about it, of course, remains to be seen. But I'm very interested in your perspective and your own experience regarding this subject. First of all, we're not talking about all models -- we're not talking about for the most part professional models. I guess you would call them private models who elect to pose for your photographs or for perhaps paintings and drawings. For some reason other than the fee, \$12.00 or whatever it is an hour.

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it puts it into the realm very much of a kind of social interaction probably involving a full range of human motivation and experience. At least that's the way I view it. But I'm, of course, mainly interested in hearing how you view it and I should say also, to be up front about this that you just read an essay that I wrote called *Eros In The Studio*.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which is about a male artist [and] his female models, his studio and his erotic drawings, and so [a] certain base line given is that there is at least the potential for an eroticized exchange situation . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, maybe you could give a little bit of your own -- before jumping right into your own background with the subject as an artist -- as a photographer -- your first experiences perhaps. Do you remember when you first worked with a nude model?

JUDY DATER: I remember. Boy there's just -- there's so much to say.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Go ahead and say it.

JUDY DATER: But it's sort of hard to know even where to start. I mean, on one level I could start with that poster that's on the dark room door because it is on the dark room door because it actually -- that painting, *Persephone* by . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Thomas Hart Benton . . .

JUDY DATER: . . . Benton was in a book called *Great American Paintings* that my parents had in their house when I was a kid growing up and I used to love to look at that book and look at the pictures of the paintings and that particular painting really got me when I was a kid. I didn't understand it. I didn't, on any, maybe, intellectual level, but it certainly affected me on a kind of an emotional level or an erotic level. And I think I was looking at that since I was, you know, four or five years old. And fascinated by it. I mean, totally, totally fascinated by it. And when I started photography that particular image never left me and what there -- the part of it that never left me was the subject, which was this wrinkled up old geezer looking at this gorgeous, young woman naked and not knowing she was being looked at. This sort of tantalizing, titillating, voyeuristic scene that was going on there. Which I found fascinating and maybe repelling or repul- -- not really repulsive in a gross sense but like there's something wrong here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm. But that was at the same time attractive.

JUDY DATER: But totally attractive and totally fascinating. And I made a lot of different photographs on that theme of the nude person being looked at by a clothed person and not knowing they were being looked at and I kept trying it over and over again and it finally kind of came together with the image in a Twinka [Thieband]

photograph.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah. Now, that - that's a classic there.

JUDY DATER: That's a classic, and that one really works and the twist on it is that it's two women and they - one is nude and one is clothed and has a camera and she's - but they're confronting each other and they're looking at each other, rather than the nude being looked at and not knowing she's being looked at. So that painting, [Persephone] really influenced, over many, many, many years, a certain part of my work. But to go back to the question, which was when did I - do I remember the first time I worked with a model? I remember the first time I almost worked with a model, which was, I was like 15 years old, or 14 or 15 and I was going to be living in L.A. 'cause I was born in L.A. I used to take Saturday morning drawing classes at the . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: At Chouinard.

JUDY DATER: No, at the Art Center School.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: First street. And it was, like, I don't know, an eight or ten week drawing class and it was for adults and I was like the youngest person in the class and the last day of the class we were gonna have a - they told us ahead of time - there was gonna be a nude model and I couldn't face it. I just couldn't go to that class. I was too freaked out by the idea of being confronted with a nude model so I didn't go to the last class. But that would've been the first time I photographed a nude model or drawn a nude model 'cause this was like a Life Drawing class.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What . . . do you . . .

JUDY DATER: But then years went by and I went to U.C.L.A. and I was an art major and I was taking drawing and I took a Life Drawing class and I was probably 18 years old and the first day of the class we had a model and the model, you know, took her robe off or whatever, I don't remember exactly the situation. What I remember is that for the first 30 seconds, sitting there, with the paper on the easel and this woman naked -- I just remember feeling myself turning beet red. It was like this wash just completely came over me. It just, like, flaming red and burning up and I was just like paralyzed. It was really vivid. And then it passed. It passed really quickly, like in a minute or two and then we just got into the business of drawing and it never happened again. Not even close. It was just that one first shock of that experience. That's what I remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It was a female?

JUDY DATER: Female.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about your first male?

JUDY DATER: I don't even remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Isn't that interesting?

JUDY DATER: I'm sure it was in the same class. But it wasn't -- there wasn't, like, a big difference, I don't think. It was about the nudity. It was about . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That you're not supposed to be looking . . .

JUDY DATER: You're not supposed to be looking at a naked body and it was coming across [as] a naked body at first -- for the first time in a situation that you wouldn't expect, which was in public. But then once you kind of got used to being in this drawing studio, it was -- then it became the accepted thing, you know. It was, like, accepted and expected that this is what was gonna happen and then it became very detached and you -- I mean, I guess for me I remember getting -- you get caught up in the details.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: And there is this looking and there is this fascination but it's more about how are you gonna render the details than anything else. And, I mean, I did that and I love life drawing. I always think I wanna do it again. I haven't done it for a long time but then I started doing it in photography, but that was maybe three years later.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, that early? Okay. Because then . . .

JUDY DATER: Well, it was like one of the very first things I did, I mean, I went to U.C.L.A. for three years and then I transferred up to San Francisco State when I was a senior. But I hadn't taken any photography until I got to San

Francisco and the photography was in the art department, of course, both at U.C.L.A. and San Francisco State. And I took the photography class -- beginning photography when I was a senior, probably -- I think second semester even. And I remember one of the very, very first things I did was to take some nude self-portraits and then shortly after that photograph certain friends of mine in the nude. One woman in particular I remember was my first nude model. And to me it seemed that -- it just seemed like the logical thing to do. It was like an extension of life drawing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: There wasn't too much difference between drawing a model nude and photographing a model nude.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We'll come back to that because Dennis Ledbetter, [photographer, mutual friend] for instance, senses or feels that there might be a big difference.

JUDY DATER: But anyway, so that's what that was -- but my early -- that was my early feelings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At State who did you study with? Was it John Gutman?

JUDY DATER: No, I studied with Jack Welpott who I married.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. Okay. That's how you met?

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The early fascination with *Persephone* and that voyeurism, and then at age 15 your inability to confront a nude model so you didn't go the last class . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . at Art Center, and that [other] experience -- brief first response at U.C.L.A. in the life class. Do you see any -- do you analyze that at all? I mean, in your own case do you feel that the difficulty, and then the embarrassment had any connection with ways that you responded to that *Persephone* painting? Do you see that?

JUDY DATER: I don't -- I haven't analyzed it. And I think -- I don't think that seeing the *Persephone* painting damaged me or anything like that. I think it's the kind of thing that people would make a big fuss about today because people are so protective of their children, in terms of nudity and sexuality that it seems almost obsessive or excessive to me. I don't think there was anything wrong with me looking at that . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: No.

JUDY DATER: . . . painting. I don't know, I think I was just coming from a kind of conservative family background and my parents were pretty conservative. They weren't -- I don't think they were aware that I was, like, studying this painting all the time in this book. They just happened to have the book.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUDY DATER: They probably thought it was, like . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's an art book.

JUDY DATER: It's an art book. They didn't think -- I'm sure they didn't think about it one way or the other -- whether there were nudes or not nudes in it. I mean, they weren't prudish but they weren't, just your basic, middle-class respectable people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of like my family. [I wonder] what my parents would think if they were still alive -- rest in peace -- me writing essays about artists in studios, erotic drawings and so forth. I don't think they would approve.

JUDY DATER: They wouldn't?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, who knows. But you can't let that determine . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't wait until they died to do this but [unintelligible]. I think I do -- I think it's not surprising what you described at all. I have a feeling that this would be -- it's actually pretty common experience.

There's that first . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . you know, the first encounter . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . shall we say, with a naked, nude person and then trying to establish a way to relate . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . to that individual. After all, they do think and they're aware of the fact that you're looking at them.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, they're professionals but you don't know what that means, I guess, when you just start out. With *Persephone*, as you described it, there was clearly an erotic response on your part -- this was an element there and that's partly why it was so fascinating.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I wonder if that was in your mind when you were unable -- when you didn't go to the last class at Art Center or that first encounter [at UCLA]. Was it anything, do you think, about sexuality or is it just simply you don't look at . . .

JUDY DATER: No, I think it was totally about sexuality.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm. Okay.

JUDY DATER: I think it was a terror of confronting it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: I just wasn't ready at that moment in my life to deal with it on a real level. It's one thing to look at pictures in a book. And certainly that wasn't the only . . . that painting of Persephone was just the beginning in a long line of looking at various kinds of erotic things or nudes and reading dirty stories and true romance and trying to find the dirty pages and from here to eternity and, you know, all of that stuff. And having sexual fantasies. But the actual doing of it was another story, the actual reality of no more fantasy here. Here's what's gonna happen. It's like, "Oh, I don't think so. That's beyond what I'm ready to deal with at this moment." And I don't even know how conscious I was of, you know, I wasn't thinking of that consciously. It was just, like, somebody had to put the brakes on here. It was like too close for comfort. And I don't know that we knew whether it was gonna be a male or female model.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUDY DATER: I don't know that was -- again, it was just the idea that nudity equated [with] sex. That's what it was about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So have you ever gotten over that or does that remain with you? I mean, you do -- you've done a lot of nudes [unintelligible].

JUDY DATER: I've done a lot of nudes and there's always a sexual charge.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: But that's not all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. One would hope.

JUDY DATER: And it's certainly depends on the model . . . You know, some of 'em, there's more than sometimes it's much more charged than other times.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me ask you this. This is getting quite nicely into some of the issues of you're [being] a woman, of course.

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: One of the things that fascinates me is the possible differences, to the extent that you can generalize between. The female and the male experience. Female artist, male artist. And the idea of nudity equaling, as you said, sex. Of course we know that's not all . . .

JUDY DATER: It's not always the tr-, that's not always the . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's not always the case but the fact that it's there as a potential, that colors the whole experience. My question is this: Do you find the erotic potential and possibility of an erotic exchange -- tension, atmosphere, whatever you want to call it. Do you find that in your experience it is possible with female models as well as male models? In other words, is it a generalized kind of thing? You know, nudity being a one-to-one encounter, or is it gender specific?

JUDY DATER: No it can be male or female. But in different ways.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you mean? Can you explain that?

JUDY DATER: Well, I can look at a nude woman and I can see the attraction in her sexuality. I know I'm not gonna do anything about it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUDY DATER: But that doesn't mean that it's not erotic. Or that I can't see the potential for that or that I couldn't fantasize how some man would be drooling over her. But I'm pretty heterosexual and even though I can see that -- it's maybe more of an identity thing than me wanting to go to bed with this woman. It's more projecting or something. And it doesn't happen all the time. But it certainly can. And I think photographing . . . and it is easy, it's much easier for me to photograph a nude woman . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

JUDY DATER: . . . than a man.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh. Why is that?

JUDY DATER: I guess because I know nothing's gonna happen and we can joke -- I can joke with her and . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: More relaxed.

JUDY DATER: It's more relaxed. And . . . I don't know. I was looking at some photograph the other day 'cause I was looking for something and I'd forgotten I'd even taken this picture of some model. It was back in '72 'cause it was in that same package as those pic- -- when I was looking for those proof sheets of the picture of Vernetta. And I came across this picture that I had done of this woman. I've never photographed any woman and I've used a couple of them but I never used this one in particular that was incredibly erotic photograph of this woman with her legs spread apart and you could see everything . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: . . . and it reminded me of your talk [writing] about the open poses.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Open poses. Right.

JUDY DATER: She was -- and I'm sure I didn't ask her to do it. I'm sure she just did it and with her tongue kind of hanging out in a very erotic gesture, and I looked at it for the longest time. I thought, God, maybe she was coming on to me and I was just naive here and either not paying attention or -- I don't even know what. But I looked at it and I thought, "God I wonder why I never used that picture. That's really sexy."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: But I just forgot I'd even taken it. It never would've occurred to me to use it [then] because I think I probably thought it was too much. Today it probably wouldn't be anything but . . . Gee, maybe I better print that one. You know, it was very . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wanna see it.

JUDY DATER: It was sexy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Maybe we could use that as an illustration in the book ["Eros in the Studio" essay].

JUDY DATER: Maybe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: With the model's permission. Do you have releases for . . . ?

JUDY DATER: I would have to see if I have one for her. It's been so long and I -- I could check. I could try and find it. But I sometimes get releases but I didn't get one every single time. I can't even remember her name right now. But I could figure it out.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Isn't that interesting, though, that something that now you identify pretty regularly as "hot" . . .

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and it's erotic and sexy -- at the time you didn't read quite that way, I gather. From what you've . . .

JUDY DATER: Well, maybe I did and I just thought -- maybe I thought it was, at the time, just too much -- maybe I thought it was too sexy or too erotic to be art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: You know? Maybe I just thought it was going too far. Maybe I thought it was just pornographic. I don't know. But whatever it was I know I never printed it. And I thought well it is -- I don't know what to think. But there it is. I took it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So the -- this model was a friend of yours . . .

JUDY DATER: No. I met her but I don't remember how. I mean . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you asked her to pose, right?

JUDY DATER: I asked her to pose and I must've met her somewhere. But God knows where. I don't remember. I used to see -- I used to meet people at openings and parties and different places and -- fellow students, you know, friends. And if I liked their looks and thought they were interesting I would wanna try to photograph them. And not always with the intent of photographing them in the nude. Sometimes I'd be doing a portrait of them and then they would say, "Want me to take my clothes off?" Sometimes they would suggest it, sometimes I would suggest it. It just sort of depended on how things were going.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's talk about that for a minute. I think it's interesting that they might suggest this. To what do you attribute that interest on their part? Did you -- did it just seem natural as it unfolded? Evolved that way?

JUDY DATER: It felt really natural. They were curious. And they wanted to see what they looked like in the nude or what it would feel like to be photographed in the nude and they must've felt comfortable enough that they thought that they weren't threatened. Maybe they thought that me asking them was a come-on in the beginning. When I looked at this woman I thought, "I wish I could remember where I met her," because maybe she thought I was coming on to her. Certainly that's [something] I felt sometimes with various men I've photographed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's not, you really can't -- it's not that easy to get away entirely from that aspect of it, I guess?

JUDY DATER: No, especially if you know -- if they know you wanna photograph them in the nude.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So they, in many cases, right off the bat equate that request or nudity . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . with sex.

JUDY DATER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not surprising but . . .

JUDY DATER: I mean, I think everybody that -- male or female -- if you approach them and you're a relative stranger and you tell them you would like to photograph them or draw them or whatever. I think first of all they're flattered. If they're not totally paranoid and scared then they're gonna be, they're gonna be flattered.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUDY DATER: They like it. And I think they -- and in asking them I am flattering them by telling them I think they're interesting looking to begin with. So right away I'm sort of flattering them and it's the truth because I don't like to photograph people that I'm not interested in the way they look. So I tell them that and it doesn't matter, either sex. So there's an assumption, I think, that this person is attracted to me and I think that carries certain expectations.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Well we are human beings.

JUDY DATER: Yeah. But the truth is -- somebody asked me this recently. "How many of your models have you slept with?" And I said, "Well some of 'em."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: But the thing about it is that every single model that I've slept with -- I've slept with all of them before I photographed them, not after.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

JUDY DATER: And that's why . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's not a result of . . .

JUDY DATER: It's not a result of the session. The session came because I slept with them and I already had a relationship with them and I liked them and I was interested in them. I think probably in every case [I was] in love with them and wanted a picture of them. But there was never a time when I photographed somebody and that led to sex. Ever.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: Because if I'm picking somebody because I wanna photograph them, it's because I wanna photograph them not because I wanna sleep with them. But that doesn't -- but then there's that other part where I wanna photograph them because I have slept with them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's complicated.

JUDY DATER: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's -- but we have a couple more minutes here. I hesitate to ask this question and maybe I will turn the tape over because I think it'll lead to a nice . . .

JUDY DATER: I could tell you one funny short thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

JUDY DATER: If you want.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

JUDY DATER: A friend of mine that's a painter -- asked her present husband, her now husband, if she could do a portrait of him -- wanted to draw him and he said yes and they hadn't known each other for too long and she got him to come over to her studio so that she could supposedly draw him but they -- she never did. They skipped right over that phase. It was just an excuse.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well there are different ways to get to the art. Which is okay, it seems to me.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But one of the things I've noticed is that in [art] history, writing the history of art and certainly among certain artists . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . whom I've spoken with. There is an avoidance -- I mean, a real conscious effort to not sully this artist model, this artist exchange with any of -- with desire. And this is what we're talking about . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . I think. So, let's turn over [the tape].

[TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. Continuing this really interesting interview with Judy Dater on artists and models. And as I said at the end of the first side, desire and the presence, you know, the role that this can play, whatever that term means in this kind of encounter. And you told the anecdote about this friend of yours -- artist who invited, I guess, her husband-to-be to pose and he went to her studio and they sort of skipped over -- they just -- they said, "Well, let's get on with what we're really after," which . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he -- did she ever draw him or was that -- now they just -- it was sort of beside the point after . . .

JUDY DATER: I think it was beside the point.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's real desire. That reminds me of a story I bet you know. It has to do with Charis Wilson and Edward Weston. It's in the *Day Books*. Where he describes discovering her.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that he was actually consumed by desire but I think it [the story] was real interesting, and I probably mentioned it in -- referred to it in my essay. I'm sure I did 'cause it fit so well.

JUDY DATER: Right. Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But he basically said that it became a battle between photography or art and sex or love or something like that, and that photography came out a very distant second.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And then here's Weston, you know, the power and this is desire, I guess, finally harnessed and channeled, is the way I would interpret it. I know Charis [Wilson]. . . I'm sure you do, too.

JUDY DATER: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's wonderful. And we interviewed her for the Archives some years ago. Now she has this book . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . which I haven't read but that strikes me as a very interesting story because it's an acknowledgment of these two forces of interests . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They're progressing in peril and I don't know, it may be just completely obvious it seems to me it's something that hasn't been acknowledged quite that openly in the literature. And this is one of the things that we're trying to do. To see how they work together.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you have any thoughts on that Weston, Charis Wilson "phenomenon".

JUDY DATER: Hmm. Well, I always thought that Weston had a pretty lusty appetite for women, and she was obviously not the first one that he'd slept with -- the first model. And it seemed like his women -- well, like Tina Modotti. He did a lot of very sensual photographs of her. I mean, I don't know that you'd call them erotic but they're close to erotic, if not erotic. And so he had a . . . I don't know how that started but certainly his relationship with her, because he was photographing her all the time in both portraits and nudes. And I guess there were other women that he photographed in the nude that he would have long relationships with. I guess Charis, what she was like 18 or 19, around that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: It was probably too much for him. I mean, I thought she really came onto him, too. Isn't that -- wasn't she equally attracted to him? I mean . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think so. I mean, even of her own account . . .

JUDY DATER: Kind of seductive?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: And it was -- he probably just couldn't resist. I mean, why should he? She's a young, hot woman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. And I think [this] moves -- could move into a whole other interesting dimension about some of the differences between men and women. But she certainly was in awe of him as . . .

JUDY DATER: He was pretty famous by then, right?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

JUDY DATER: So that's the power thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's the power thing.

JUDY DATER: Because there's so much power and fame. And that's the -- Henry Kissinger said, what, "Power is the greatest aphrodisiac."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, I guess so. Especially for women. If one must generalize.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about those differences? I mean, let's see if we can get into this a little bit.

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And understanding that we can really only talk from our own experiences, but one of the things that puzzles me or fascinates me are these apparent differences between men and women. And, of course, now we're talking specifically about this artist-model relationship and the studio experience. I suppose how desire manifests itself and, well, it's sort of a muddled affair in some ways, it's like jumping off to the deep end and trying to deal with it. But, you thought for a number of years about this subject and you worked with nudes who were friends, and it seems to me that this exploration that you've carried on . . . is that a way to describe it?

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Starting with *Persephone*, I suppose. Have you ever observed or reflected upon the differences that being a woman might bring to that encounter -- to the activity?

JUDY DATER: Which activity, exactly?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know, working with the nude . . .

JUDY DATER: Oh, how, how was it -- as a woman? Oh, well -- okay. From my own experience, I mean, I did this book with Jack where we both photographed the same people. We both photographed women -- the same women, in the same moment, in the same room and were photographing them sometimes in the nude and sometimes not but often in the nude. So there I am a young woman working with an older man and we're both looking at the same woman and we're both photographing the same woman and we're getting really different pictures and everything that I said before about my personal experience working with women, yes, I can acknowledge the sexual charge there. But that was my experience of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: And Jack's experience of it was -- or at least what he would talk about -- because who knows what he was really experiencing -- but the way he would talk about it -- it was very similar to the way you describe Sam [Clayberger] and his relationship to his models. It was pretty sexually -- much more sexually charged -- much more a man looking at a woman and getting off on it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: Very much a seduction. I think when you're photographing -- when anybody's photographing another person in a private situation, it's a kind of a seduction but it's not always a sexual seduction.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That connects to power, doesn't it?

JUDY DATER: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And control.

JUDY DATER: And I thought -- I feel like when Jack was doing it, it was a sexual seduction and when I was doing it, it was more of a psychological seduction in order to get them to cooperate with me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: Not because I wanted them to spread their legs or . . . be, you know, "Wanna sleep with me?", or whatever. Nothing followed through.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: I think for sure he did sometimes but not every time, and that wasn't always what was gonna happen. But he was pretty up front about his sexual desires for these women and . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: He discussed that with you?

JUDY DATER: He didn't exactly discuss it but he certainly let me know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: And, of course, it totally pissed me off but I was there, sort of protecting my territory so nothing was gonna happen right at that minute and they knew that but, I mean, that was a little game we were playing, I'm sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Gee, this is really interesting. What a interesting scenario because it sounds to me there is seduction present that relates to getting something from the model -- different . . .

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . things between you. But it sounds to me there's also a kind of -- I don't know what term to use. It's not sparring, exactly, but this has to do with your relationship.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were you guys married then?

JUDY DATER: Not yet, I don't think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not yet but . . .

JUDY DATER: Oh no, yes we were. Of course we were. Yes we were. When did we get married? In 1971 or 2. Oh maybe we started it before we were married . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: . . . but then we got married and then we continued it for a while.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When did you get married?

JUDY DATER: I'm tryin' to remember. '70 or '71, I guess. We bought this house in San Anselmo first in 1970 and we mighta gotten married that year. But after -- the house -- the house is what got us to get married, mainly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't want to divert this but it just occurs to me, when we were talking about power -- starting out with the assumption that's a basic component in human interaction. But I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing at all. It's a way of maneuvering.

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It just strikes me -- the way you describe this -- that there is a kind of power play or game certainly on Jack's part. I don't know about you. And he's setting this up.

JUDY DATER: Uh-huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not that that's the primary goal but -- from what you said -- it sounds as if that was present. Like making a statement? Kind of a . . .

JUDY DATER: I'm trying to think about the dynamic of how it -- how these things came to be because we

photographed a lot of different women together over a period of several years and we did talk about doing . . . when I first met Jack he had already started photographing women and he had done nudes and then I -- and I was doing them on my own and there were even -- I think what happened was there were actually a couple of people that we both had photographed before we started working on this thing together but -- and they were young women and they were probably students because those were the people I was photographing. So they were his students and my fellow students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: And he had photographed a few of 'em and then of course he and I started having this relationship and then we saw that we had done some of the same people and so we came up with this idea. "Why don't we photograph the same women and you do it your way and I'll do it my way and then we'll put the pictures together and see what comes out of it." So we agreed that we were gonna do this thing together and so that was -- that was the set up of how it happened. And sometimes the people would be people that I would see and sometimes they'd be people that he would see. Sometimes we'd see them together and we would agree that we were gonna photograph them but I knew, I mean, I was very aware of Jack's nature. In terms of his relationships with women and his desire for women and maybe I thought this was a safe way to -- a safe outlet. "You can photograph 'em all you want but I'm gonna be right there with you."

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's pretty interesting.

JUDY DATER: And I'm gonna do it, too. And then we'll go home [together].

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's really interesting because it underlines that very different approach. I think both of you are exerting a kind of power in that situation.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: If you're achieving some kind of control of the situation . . . and it seems most reasonable to do it together. It precludes, oh I don't know, going astray.

JUDY DATER: We finally finished that project and I kinda got tired of it and wanted to move onto something else. And I wanted to photograph men and do the same thing with men that we had done with women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

JUDY DATER: He didn't wanna do that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did that tell you?

JUDY DATER: A lot. Well, then we got divorced.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, see, that is really interesting.

JUDY DATER: Certainly. Well, not [then], maybe a couple of years later. But . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, how many men -- this is really interesting. Can we jump on to what follows from this?

JUDY DATER: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it has to do with selection of the models. Now, my friend Sam, who I wrote about, never does a male. Except when he was teaching at Otis -- life drawing.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting. He admits to being sexually motivated but still with a primary goal of making images. He is an artist and I think it's important to reiterate that.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I suppose there are plenty of straight male artists who make no distinction between male or female, in terms of their models. What's the problem? On the other hand, in modernity, I don't know that very many men have selected male models [on a regular basis] over females.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, it just seems pretty much across the board that they have their preferences [for women].

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Suggesting that desire, like and other personal interests, move right into the studio. In selection. What about women? Do they . . . how would you characterize, again, in general, from your own experience, this issue of a model -- male, female? Does it make a difference? How?

JUDY DATER: Well, it makes a difference. I'm trying to think of -- I'm sure that there are other women photographers who have nudes of both male and female models but I can't think of who it is right now. There's gotta be. But I know for me -- when I'm photographing people -- male or female -- nude or clothed -- the thing that I'm most interested in when I pick somebody to photograph is the -- I don't know, the energy that they have. The kind of interesting, quirky stuff of who they are that they're projecting and I've said this a million times. I really feel like a casting director and I'm looking for my cast of characters. Like I'd be casting for a movie. You don't just have a movie with nothing but male actors or female actors. There's usually both types and I think that who you end up picking or choosing is completely, utterly, totally pertinent to what you're trying to say. And it's like Fellini. I mean, he's got a strong cast of characters. I really feel like it's completely connected to film in a way. At least for me, that certain directors have a certain group of actors that they like to work with.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Like Ingmar Bergman and . . .

JUDY DATER: Yeah, like Ingmar Bergman and any of 'em that you can think of. They pick their actors 'cause the actors can project his feelings or thoughts or emotions or whatever and he knows which ones can do this for him and that he can work with them. And . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: 'Cause both Fellini and, especially Bergman, got very attached and personally involved with main actresses.

JUDY DATER: Well, yeah that's true. Their main -- that's true.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's not distance but I'm sure in some cases it is, maybe Hitchcock or something. I don't know how much that . . .

JUDY DATER: Well, we could think of directors that may be more contemporary directors, even Americans that are using -- oh, like the Coen Brothers. They have actors that they like to use over and over again.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. Exactly.

JUDY DATER: In their films. Of course one of them is married to Frances McDormand and but, I guess . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's natural, I mean . . . Or is it with Bergman? I don't know. This gets us a little off but . . .

JUDY DATER: Well, he was married to what's her name for a while . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which one?

JUDY DATER: Liv Ullman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Liv Ullman. And then . . . Bibi Anderson was one of his, I think.

JUDY DATER: But I guess what -- I guess that's what it is. I'm looking for people with really interesting faces. That's usually the first thing that's attractive to me. Not their body. And maybe how they dress or how they carry themselves or their whole persona or what they're projecting. And it can, I can see it in a man or a woman. And that's the interest. And then -- I haven't done any nudes for a while but, I mean, not really in any intensive way. Mostly I've been doing portraits but even when I was doing pictures people before when they were nude it was . . . the best ones are the ones where I really liked the way these people looked and a lot of it had to do with their face and their -- the energy they have. So I don't know. I think of them as my cast of characters. I think, I mean, Ruth Bernhard. She only photographs women.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. That's right. Now I don't know if I knew of . . . she's gone, isn't she?

JUDY DATER: No, she's still alive.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, sorry Ruth.

JUDY DATER: She's gettin' up there in years, though. I mean, Imogen Cunningham photographed both men and women nude.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Famously so. With Roi [Partridge] and . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . in the woods of Seattle or someplace.

JUDY DATER: And even other men besides Roi but definitely Roi and certainly plenty of women. And who else? I mean, who's . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah. I think of Stevens and [Alfred] Stieglitz. Rebecca James and Georgia [O'Keeffe].

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that's all a very interesting situation because there's a power play involved in that as I understand it and . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't even know if we need to go there, but my impression is that there is a sort of competitive edge between Rebecca and Georgia competing for the man's attention of husbands, who's the [more attractive] . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That gets real interesting and complicated. I guess -- in a way we have to be careful because it's so individual . . .

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Alfred] Stieglitz was this great photographer, [and] he did pretty erotic -- certainly a lot of nudes of Georgia and they were sort of suppressed for years. Now everything's open, of course.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But that was a real focus of his photography. Okay. Coen, in a sense, demand really that quite often use their art and their photography as a way to access women. Isn't it almost that simple?

JUDY DATER: Well, I think -- well, I mean, access them . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That means a lot of things.

JUDY DATER: It means a lot of things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In a sexual way, whether it's acted out or not.

JUDY DATER: I think -- right. Exactly. I think they do it 'cause they like it. And probably the degree of seduction varies from artist to artist and even artist to model. Even the same artist with various models, in terms of the degree of seduction that goes on and the degree of success with the seduction. I mean, I can't say what . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

JUDY DATER: . . . I cannot say what goes on. I mean, there's all this controversy around Jock Sturges.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: His models. And I don't know what the reality of the situation is. I mean, you look at the photographs, and they lead you to believe one thing or think one thing but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's true. He says it isn't so, you know, he talks about how it's all very innocent and the parents are there and etcetera. But . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of like Lewis B. Carroll.

JUDY DATER: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: *Alice in Wonderland*.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Parents were there.

JUDY DATER: Right. But that doesn't mean he's not getting an erotic charge out of it the same.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's for sure.

JUDY DATER: Who knows what that means? I don't know what that means.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's true and it obviously . . .

JUDY DATER: I guess the thing about it with him was that they're young girls -- teenage girls and there's absolutely nothing -- we know there's nothing innocent about that, so . . . I mean, teenage girls are not innocent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's true.

JUDY DATER: That's what I mean. So, but they're still -- they're still protected.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about this, I guess key, issue when it attaches itself to feminism and especially, I think, in the '70's. We were talking earlier about Linda Nochlin . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and said, you know, "What is it? Why are all these female nudes in the history of western art . . ."

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Especially a [more] recent concern with the tradition of male nudity as well . . .

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . but these are in more recent times. Maybe nineteenth century on. In other words, getting into Modernity . . . Victorian [era] and then our . . . I was going to say our century, I mean, that last century.

JUDY DATER: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And there is what is famously and somewhat erroneously applied, I think -- the "male gaze". This big issue . . . and still feminist colleagues, historians, deal with this and the goal seems to -- in the quest for parity and equality -- the goal seems to be equal time.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: As if there's equal desire in the same form and that that's manifested by women getting to look at nude men and drawing or photographing them. Which would suggest that the desire component is in fact equivalent. What do you think about that? Well we've talked about it a bit already but just -- now that puts it very correctly.

JUDY DATER: Um-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And feminist artists -- a few of them, like, Joan Semmel, for instance, in New York was dealing with that issue. In fact her paintings expressed -- she took control of the imagery, of the eroticism but on her terms. They're not a bit, frankly -- they're not looking at men [necessarily in the same way]. What do you think about that?

JUDY DATER: Well, I definitely think there's equal desire. And that women like to look at men as much as men like to look at women. And I'm sure it varies from woman to woman and man to man but, yeah, I bet it's pretty equal.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You think so?

JUDY DATER: Yeah, I do.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because what you described in your own experience doesn't make it sound . . .

JUDY DATER: No, I know. I mean, well I love to look at men but that doesn't mean I wanna sleep with all of 'em.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. But it doesn't seem as sexually directed, I guess, from what you've described.

JUDY DATER: Well, in terms of when I pick somebody that I wanna photograph [it's not] because of that sexual

charge. It's something else. But I'm aware of the sexual charge and it gets more charged once you have them alone.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: And so I feel like I have to be very careful who I approach and what the situation is when I'm actually photographing them because I don't want the situation to get out of hand. I wanna stay in control of whatever my goal is, which is to make this picture. But that doesn't mean that I don't think that I'm not totally enjoying looking at this person. I guess in the same way that I think that even your friend Sam [Clayberger] -- maybe his primary goal is to make the drawings . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: . . . and he's getting off on looking at these women and charged up by that and it makes him wanna draw and maybe he does wanna sleep with them but it doesn't sound like he is. Maybe sometimes, but maybe not every single time. But he still wants to make those drawings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it does come down to the art, finally?

JUDY DATER: Well, I think ultimately it does because if you're not making art then you're not an artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Um-hmm.

JUDY DATER: Then you're just a seducer.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's really the end of the tape and that it a absolutely perfect ending. Thank you.

[END OF TAPE]

END OF INTERVIEW

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