



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Joni Gordon, 2002  
July 8-Sept 23

Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by Joni Gordon. 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.

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Joni Gordon on July 8 and September 23, 2002. The interview was conducted at Joni Gordon's home in Los Angeles, California by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

JG: JONI GORDON

PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

[SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Joni Gordon in the subject's residence in Beverly Glen Park, high up on Beverly Glen in Los Angeles, California. The date is July 8, 2002, and the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. This is tape one, side A. This is a first session and we're proposing a second and perhaps somewhat longer session in early August?

JG: Yes.

PK: So I'm going to be brief in my own setting the stage introduction to this interview. We always ask ourselves or whoever reads this transcript will ask why am I here, why are we doing this. And the first answer to that is that you've been an important gallery director and dealer in the Los Angeles area for a number of years, practically a quarter of a century.

JG: I opened Newspace in September 1975. But actually Newspace had gone in another form two years before, almost three years before. It had been founded in Newport, hence the name Newspace. It was the first graduating class from University of California, Irvine.

PK: Oh, so Newport Beach?

JG: Newport Beach. And on a street called Superior, one of the main arteries of Newport. And the then leader, bringing a group of exciting painters and thinkers together, was a young man named Jean St. Pierre, a very gifted artist. And he was part of that first graduating class at Irvine. And he called together some of his buddies and a few women artists, and they formed Newspace. And it was a cooperative at that time. We're talking about 1972, '73. Even then the gallery had some energy going for it and some backing, and they decided to come up to Los Angeles. And it was shortly thereafter, after the gallery's demise and although they had done brilliant, brilliant shows, which we can go into now or later, wherever you say, Paul.

PK: Let's save that.

JG: Okay. The gallery was folding and Jean St. Pierre was living like a trapped animal in the back of the gallery when I found him and bought the gallery.

PK: In '75.

JG: In 1975 on the eve of my 39th birthday, September 23 and my birthday was the 24th. I bought the whole place out. And it's just a wonderful story to share with you on the second round. And by Tuesday morning I was an art dealer.

PK: Well, that's going to be, maybe, although I can't say this ahead of time, probably our main story, or certainly the important part of a thread that we're going to bring through. Which is your various involvements in the art world, including LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art], as a founder of LAICA, your career as a collector with your four different collections you told me about and showed me briefly just now here in your house and then also in your house in Santa Fe with the decorative arts, and the Monterey furniture, I believe. So we'll be hearing about that. And then Experiments in Art and Technology, EAT. And then Contact.

JG: I did that for nine years.

PK: So we have, it sounds to me, at least four different areas to examine. But before we do that, I always think it's important to know something about the person, the individual -- where they come from, perhaps give some sense of even the growing-up experience and educational experience that leads somehow to a career in the arts. So why don't you start with that.

JG: Okay. Thanks. I'd like to say I was born on a pallet or in a tube of white paint, but, no, I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, 1936. Cleveland is a remarkable, conscience-stricken, conservative, distinguished city, largely founded by the Rockefeller family who drifted over from New York. And left a tremendous imprint of cultural wealth in Cleveland. Just to name a few things; The Cleveland Symphony, The Cleveland Art Museum, The Cleveland Playhouse, and the Schools of Medicine are so distinguished. And they have had an ethic and a continuity for several hundred years. And the city is a treasure trove. So to have been born in Cleveland, even though I was born with unusual circumstances, because my parents were divorced when I was six months old, and in 1936 that was very difficult. And my mother and I moved into my grandparents' home. And I lived with my grandparents until I was seven when my mother remarried. I think one of the earliest impressions I had was a longing for . . . I was kind of stunned by beauty at a very, very early age. Sometimes my mother would take me to the Cleveland Art Museum and . . .

PK: A great museum, of course.

JG: Absolutely.

PK: Sherman Lee [former director of the Cleveland Museum of Art]

JG: Sherman Lee, right. And the Chinese collections and, of course, the Medieval department. And the American paintings, and European painting and sculpture and so on and so forth. It was just a wonderful place. And I would even, as a child, feel the sensation of beauty or art. And there was this beautiful pond in front of the Cleveland Museum with swans in it. And there was a Rodin Thinker sculpture on the vestibule of the museum. And to me that became the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, beautiful location I had ever seen in my life. Now, I didn't know you could be a painter because I didn't care for trying to do that myself. My forte as a child was to look, to stand and look at something that I felt was profoundly beautiful. And I had favorite paintings even as a child.

PK: Like what?

JG: Oh, there was a Fantin Latour. And there were beautiful, beautiful medieval paintings. Book of Hours. And, of course, the Chinese objects; the vases, the porcelains, bronzes, because of Dr. Sherman Lee. And I just thought the Chinese art, even as a child, was the most extraordinary thing. I just couldn't get over it. And when they would tell me when you would go to the beach and dig a hole and go to China, I mean, I worked real hard at that because I wanted to be near those vases. So I was that kind of a kid, and an only child living with grandparents who owned a grocery store. And I was always interested in the way my grandfather stacked fruits and vegetables. I just thought that was a terrific thing to see oranges stacked like a pyramid. And apples. And he was so concerned with the way things were laid out in a tray, and keeping them moist and so on. So, as a child you take on these . . . what should I say? . . . little courses that your grandparents or parents teach you. And my mother, who is fortunately still with me, although she has Alzheimer's now, my mother worked in a department store. My mother was an incredibly beautiful woman. And she worked in a department store with cosmetics. She worked at Best and Company in Cleveland. And she made this little department (she was the only person there) a thing of great beauty. She would take these gorgeous bottles -- it was, of course, during the war years -- but somehow or other they still brought in the French Schiaparelli perfumes and bottles and all the great designers had these bottles. And my mother was crazy about them. And she sold cosmetics. And then when I was seven she remarried and we were able to separate from my grandparents. And we lived in Shaker Heights. And then right after the war, or just before the war ended we moved to California.

PK: '44?

JG: No, it was '45. February 11, 1945.

PK: Before we leave Cleveland, you've described a situation that, it seems to me, has you as a budding esthete, or esthetician . . .

JG: Exactly.

PK: Where it was even the arranging of the produce in the store suggests that kind of thing. That there are ways to do it that are thoughtful in terms of effect. And other ways that are much more that way. Also, you appreciated a cross media and a cross schools, movements, the periods, nations. And that seems to point a direction. I'm not sure if it's unusual or not, because I haven't talked that much with people about this sort of thing. But what interests me is that you obviously think of that as extremely formative.

JG: I do.

PK: That this really pushed you, nudged you, responding to your own impulse, then moved you in the direction it . . .

JG: I always felt good when I looked at beautiful things. I felt put together or relaxed. I lived in a stressful household. Of course, what family isn't dysfunctional? But I lived in a house where people didn't talk to each other for years sometimes. So I somewhat created a world of . . . I liked architecture, too, as a child. I would kind of like form structures. But I didn't draw. And it wouldn't have occurred to me to cut things out and to make collages, or paste the way I know artists do. As little children all their mothers tell me, "Oh, well, Christopher was cutting up things at two years old and pasting them and coloring them." I never did anything like that. I would rather just sit and look at picture books of beautiful paintings.

PK: Let me ask you this. Were you interested in those who did draw and paint?

JG: I didn't know anybody. No, because my family had musicians. My cousins, who actually were physicians, but they were violinists with different orchestras in Cleveland, particularly the doctor's orchestra and so on. And even though I didn't meet my father until I was in my mid thirties, I had heard that he had been somewhat musical and a singer, and I was interested in music for my own performing arts.

PK: So did you play?

JG: I played the violin. And badly. They paid me to stop. My teacher really paid me to stop. [laughs]

PK: But that's still, in a sense, is obviously an art, creative activity, musicians are artists. But with your great interest in these objects and with paintings and drawings, illuminated manuscripts, one would think that you would say, "What about who made these things? What about the people?"

JG: I probably did. But I was kind of a devilish kid. I was interested in sports also. And I didn't have anybody who could nurture these things. I was kind of a poor kid and we were struggling for everything. Not so much my grandparents, but certainly my mother wanted to remarry and improve her life. There was no room for frivolous conversation.

PK: But before giving up on this notion and this interests me. There's a reason for this. You yourself eventually came to the point where you are very much involved with artists.

JG: Oh, yes.

PK: And as friends and then in your gallery, promoting them, supporting them and all that, you've lived the art life with the artists, not at a distance of just the esthete admiring the products.

JG: Absolutely.

PK: And so at some point, I guess maybe we'll get into that later. It'll just come.

JG: Well, I think one thing, Paul, is that everything that I looked at was long ago and far away, and the people were dead. And largely the medieval armory, sculpture and everything at the Cleveland Art Museum came by way of war and weaponry. Cleveland was very famous for this medieval collection. And I didn't see any contemporary art. I mean, they were probably starting to collect it, but the most recent works that I remember was Afternoon at Starkey's, which they own the masterpiece. But Cleveland was thoroughly entrenched with Chinese, of course. So everything seemed very romantic because it was very far away, and an awesome number of years between my reality and that history.

PK: And maybe not, possibly in some cases, but enough removed, always enough removed . . .

JG: Yes. It didn't hit me until I saw the Pasadena Art Museum.

PK: Okay. Well, we'll be hearing about that.

JG: Yes. Then we'll go there.

PK: Well, okay, so you left your grandparents' house. And was this on the occasion of your mother remarrying?

JG: Yes, it was.

PK: And going with her husband then to California

JG: Not quite yet. We settled in Shaker Heights, a part of Cleveland. And, by the way, my original name was Toffler, and my cousin was Alvin Toffler who wrote "Future Shock".

PK: Really?

JG: Yes, At any rate, I was taking violin lessons. I was really interested in singing. I had a wonderful voice as a young person. I was interested in all the spoken and dramatic arts. I could read poetry like nobody's business. And I did love to read and speak the spoken word so to speak. James Whitcomb Riley and T.S. Eliot, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickinson. I read very young. And the poets. At 10 years old, 11, I was reading Edna St. Vincent Millay. And Longfellow and Wordsworth.

PK: Wordsworth too?

JG: Wordsworth. I loved Wordsworth too. I was just crazy about poetry as well because it was word pictures. When Wordsworth particularly talked about intonations of immortality and recalling the beautiful lake country, I knew exactly what he was talking about, because I remembered the beautiful British paintings at the museum and so on. But my daily life was a little on the harsh side because war was tough. My mother was in a new marriage. My grandparents were sick very early on. And it was difficult. I have a very ambitious mother who really urged my step-father to come west and to rebuild their lives. And so we did. We drove across the United States. And it was during that drive, of which I was eight or nine, yes, I think I was eight, driving across the United States that I began to look to see . . . I was sitting in the back seat of a 1946 Buick and it was a hatchback.

PK: So it must have been 1946 then.

JG: And we drove, not Route 66, because it was winter time, it would have been too cold. We took the southern route. And I saw the first sugarcane fields and cotton fields. And coming across Texas the oil wells. And I saw structure and landscape. And, I don't know, I seemed to get it. I just, I thought about photography. Because Life magazine, all through the war years had these great photographs of Margaret Bourke-White. And I was thinking about what I might do as a person, as a woman. And I could see what women did. Edna St. Vincent Millay was a poet. Margaret Bourke-White was a photographer. I couldn't dance, but Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham were the dancers. And I became very interested in what women did. Life magazine . . .

PK: Especially creative.

JG: Oh, always creative women. I was crazy about Margaret Mead, very young. I read everything. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. She developed my interest in cultural anthropology.

PK: Women of substance and achievement?

JG: I would say so. Yes.

PK: So do you think that this is . . . I'm trying to find . . .

JG: Nancy Drew.

PK: Well, okay, there you go. Well, would you think of yourself in that respect as a proto feminist? Like feminist art historians who make that special concentration. Another way to ask it, were you aware of the fact that there were these women of achievement, that they seemed somewhat few and far between in the bigger scheme? Or did you not recognize that?

JG: I did recognize that because of Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson, and I was inspired first of all. I just was crazy about Marian Anderson. And when she sang in Washington and she had been denied access to many public sites, but then she sang at the Lincoln Memorial, it was so thrilling. And I was deeply inspired by both Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson. And there were outstanding women, but I didn't care if they were men or women. Of course, I identified with the women. But I thought it was great to be an outstanding man also. I didn't identify with scientists. But I did identify with certain explorers who were anthropologists, men. I thought, oh, Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Schweitzer was my kind of guy. I thought that if you could wear jeans, a jacket and a pith helmet you had it made. How I didn't invent Abercrombie and Fitch is beyond me.

PK: That would have been good.

JG: That would have been okay too. At any rate, I was always attracted to women and men who moved, literally moved mountains. Not so much business people because I didn't know anything about business.

PK: And now we know all they do is move capital into their own funds.

JG: Exactly. Into their own pockets.

PK: That's my editorial comment.

JG: Exactly. And I could be a footnote to that and say amen. Oh, yes. So, all right, so what's a young girl during

the war years to do except God bless America and thank God that your family was on the move. I really identified with the Donner family and the romance of going west. I just thought it was absolutely terrific. Now I knew that we were going to have to live with another family because we couldn't find or afford a place to live. And I lived with another family for six months. Maybe a year.

PK: And where was this?

JG: This was a small house in Beverly Hills. These were neighbors of ours in Cleveland. And I lived there. And I went to school.

PK: Beverly Hills High?

JG: No, no. I was a little girl. I was in the third grade. But it was during the third grade, the subject was California, and my new teacher, whose name was Mrs. Smith, had us make these maps of California and sew them. Well, I couldn't sew very well. Couldn't do any of the feminine arts so well. But I struggled. But what I did find out about was the Mission system, the Indians, the produce, and orange trees, which my grandpa loved. I just thought it was really terrific to see life through this crystalline setting of Los Angeles, the orange groves in the valley, the missions, and the poor, struggling Indians. Now our baseball team in Cleveland was the Cleveland Indians and my grandmother called me a wild Indian. I was always a wild Indian. So the Indians just came to me like lost relatives. I always had a feeling, a tender feeling, and a deep concern for the Native American.

PK: Did you actually meet any? Did you visit any reservations?

JG: No. No. Not until years later. No, I just was interested in them.

PK: So they were kind of an abstraction that came out of the social studies or California history.

JG: Exactly.

PK: We all had to take that.

JG: We all had to take that. I'm sure, I'm bringing a smile to your face because you're remembering yourself.

PK: Sure.

JG: Well, you either got on with that kind of study and I just loved it a lot. I just thought, those stories of the explorers and meeting up with the Indians and so on was terrific. By the sixth grade we were studying Africa. And I became very interested in Africa. Well, certainly because of Schweitzer, but I was terrified by African cultures, at the same time I was deeply attracted to them. I was terrified of the scarification, but it was the teachers' abilities to enliven social studies that clicked with me all the time. I just thought that was fabulous. I ate it up and I was a good student, not in math and not in science, but social studies.

PK: This would have been, oh, what '49? You're talking about grade school.

JG: It was '47, '48. My step-father died in '48.

PK: Okay. So you were in the fourth grade, third, fourth grade?

JG: Yes. By the sixth grade my step-father had passed away.

PK: Okay, sixth grade you studied Africa.

JG: Yes. Now I had never been to a museum here, never.

PK: How did your mind help you construct this world about Africa? Because I don't remember even studying Africa.

JG: I had two sensational teachers. My fifth grade teacher had an absolute obsession about the railroads, particularly the Santa Fe and the Union Pacific and all of its places where it stopped and the commerce that it brought. And she would just linger on and on and on about stopping in Albuquerque with the American Indian sitting at the depot. So here I am this fifth grader and I'm eating all this stuff up. My sixth grade teacher, Betty Smith, another Smith, was very taken with Africa. And they, Pathé used to make these social study films that they would show in the classrooms. There would always be some kid that was running these damn machines that would spin these films, and the films were horrific. They were practically cannibalistic. It would show, National Geographic probably did the films, they would show these bodies with scars all over them. I would look at these things absolutely terrified, but mesmerized.

PK: So you were attracted to what we used to call the exotic.

[SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PK: Continuing this interview, first session interview with Joni Gordon. We're kind of reciting biography, autobiography now, the journey of early life from Cleveland to Beverly Hills. And being stunned by the beautiful, by beauty, and your interest in the arts and so forth. And we left off talking about it specifically studying Africa and the impact that had on you apparently. You said you were terrified or fascinated or some word like that. And I asked you if this fascination wasn't in part a kind of attraction to, almost romantic attraction to, what we now call the other, to the exotic. Even though it's Africa you would say, to the Orient. Because it was not a world that was familiar to you. And is that the way you would describe it?

JG: I think that there is a lot of truth in what you said, however, I didn't have a Victorian sensibility. And I wasn't interested or wasn't aware of, I shouldn't say I wasn't interested, but I certainly was not aware of animal life for instance. But I was interested in the housing of the people and the culture. The art that they were making, but that really came quite a bit later. But most of all, yes, I think there was an exoticism in my range at that time. And this is preteen and, mystery stories and music were so important in my life. At that time I was even doing some performing in music.

PK: You, of course, without being alone in that at all. I mean, this is pretty standard. We used to, well, the Africans and other people of color as they say now, but at any rate, far-away tribal types were called natives.

JG: Exactly.

PK: And native meant something a bit different from what its real meaning was. But we called them natives.

JG: Natives. And I couldn't quite put together what I saw in the United States as people of color and these cultures. So there was a lot of education that I needed to do about how people got to where they were through history.

PK: But I gather, because you mentioned this first of all an introduction to California history, the Missions, and then the California Indians, Native Americans. And then you mentioned Africans, Africa and Africans, and it seems to me that this was a special interest of yours.

JG: Yes.

PK: Do you think a bit more so than some of your school mates?

JG: A lot more than my school mates. The girls were all Brownies and Girl Scouts, and I wasn't any of that. I was a great kick-ball player, and all the boys wanted me on their softball team. I was interested in sports, and I was interested in intellectual pursuits, and kind of a secret writer. I was writing. Poetry, plays, this is about a teenager. But at 11 years old, just a week before graduating grammar school, I wasn't living in Beverly Hills at that time by the way, I had only been there six months. We were living in West Los Angeles.

PK: And so that's when you went to school with my friend John Huntington.

JG: John. Exactly. I went to Fairburn, Emerson, UCLA, all within a few miles of each other. And I wasn't any of the things that the girls were doing. I didn't belong. I just didn't. I had a working mother. My mother was a widow at 36 years old, her second marriage. My step-father just dropped dead when I was 11 years old, the week before graduation. And my mother did not remarry until after I was married. So I did not grow up with a father so to speak at all. Three and a half years. And that was that. However, it was extremely important to me to find mentors to somehow attach myself to if they would have me. Intellectually, spiritually, and to cultivate something called taste and style or exposure to very lovely things. My mother always had lovely taste. Once again, after being a widow she went to work in cosmetics at Saks Fifth Avenue. And so she was beginning life all over again. And we struggled, the two of us, side by side. I shared a bedroom with my mother until the day I was married.

PK: You must have been pretty close.

JG: Well, not always because I wanted so much and no one in my family had ever gone to college. But I did go to UCLA. And my mother was a very self-made woman. And she liked lovely things. Now, I knew very early, because of my real devotion to *Life* magazine, when I was in high school in '56 that famous issue of *Life* magazine came out on Jackson Pollock.

PK: So then you realized there . . .

JG: That there were artists.

PK: Exactly.

JG: I never knew that people even made art. It always to me, well, if you looked at a suit of armor it was iron. I didn't think people made it. I just thought it grew on an iron tree or something. Or that pots came formed the way Chinese pottery did. They just descended from heaven. I had absolutely no idea that people threw pots.

PK: The cultural artifacts things?

JG: Yes. I just didn't at all. I don't know what I was thinking. I thought that they were maybe just like a bunch of bananas in my grandfather's grocery store. They were just there to look at.

PK: How extraordinary. Well, then you were disabused of that when this issue of Life magazine came out?

JG: Absolutely.

PK: I'm surprised, by the way, that in your high school that they obviously didn't have any art appreciation or art classes.

JG: Well, they did but I didn't take it. Because I couldn't draw. And nobody saw that I was seeing. Nobody saw that I was standing around looking. Because my artistry, personal expression, was in theater arts. I was the lead actress for every production, even Bobby Redford's mother in the senior play at Emerson Junior High School. There you are. With your friend John Huntington.

PK: Now, isn't Emerson [Junior High School] a Neutra?

JG: Yes, Yes. Well, when I found that out, which was when I started this school, I thought, wow, it's getting closer and closer that what was so removed from me and just conceptually in photographs or charts was suddenly my body and spirit now in place in situ with these actual places. Here was Richard Neutra and the development of Westwood. My mother and I lived in one of the first duplexes built in Westwood after the War. And Neutra, a name I had heard and then I began looking for things about him and found out where his studio was. So what I was getting together was a powerful set, I was connecting dots, I was actually doing what I did in books as a little girl. On sick days you connect dots. I was connecting dots. Then an architect from Germany made this school; it stood for certain values of architecture, and it certainly departed from every brick and mortar building in Ohio. Here was this extraordinary roof and auditorium. And I began waking up. I had two fabulous teachers in social studies and English. I can't put enough emphasis on teaching. It has more meaning to me now than ever, especially with the crisis in our schools.

PK: This sounds very much, though, like the way it should be, this opening up of the world.

JG: Yes, it was like that.

PK: Whichever way they go to it they have to get to the point where it expands beyond their immediate lives, and community, or neighborhood, and the other kids.

JG: Oh, these teachers deeply affected me. I still remember their names like yesterday. Well, one was Paul actually. My social studies teacher, yes. I'm trying to think of his last name.

PK: But you didn't call him Paul. You called him Mr. Something.

JG: Oh, always mister. And another was Kay Hammond, who was my English and social studies teacher seventh and eighth grade. And those years make or break. I mean, I was still a wild Indian. I had a boyfriend who had a motorcycle, and I was forbidden to do that, but of course, didn't I do that?

PK: Rebel without a cause.

JG: Absolutely. Definitely. I saw all of the forbidden movies of that time with Jane Russell, *The Outlaw*. If anyone said no, I did it anyway. I smoked early. By the ninth grade they weren't too sure they wanted to graduate me. I was always in trouble but always outstanding. Because I was floundering emotionally. I had nobody, nowhere to put myself. I really had no place to put myself. I had lots of kinds of friends, but our conversations stopped at getting a new pair of shoes or -- girl things.

PK: No world of ideas then?

JG: No. But John Huntington and I had. We had wonderful talks.

PK: Well, tell me just a little. We have to do this because he's an old friend of mine. He's an art historian who studied Asian art, and then went on to, I think, Ohio State.



JG: I think he did.

PK: And so you actually remember him in this positive way. He was a friend that you could talk with?

JG: Yes. I walked to school with him.

PK: And he was interested in something beyond the games at school or such things.

JG: That's right. Yes. Absolutely.

PK: What did you talk about?

JG: Oh, it was a world of ideas. First of all, he was extremely handsome. A big fellow. And not too much of an athlete. But always polite and he was very verbal and we liked each other. I had several other male friends like that who I was just crazy about. One I still see to this day.

PK: Who's that?

JG: His name is Phil Drescher. He was the president of the student body. I just loved him.

PK: You said earlier you were looking for mentors. Usually we think of mentors as older.

JG: Well, yes.

PK: But it sounds to me like to a certain degree, these friends . . .

JG: Anybody. I was looking for anybody to whom I could form an attachment of substance and values. Because I was a loner, and my mother worked and I was a latchkey child in the fifties.

PK: So what school was that?

JG: Emerson Junior High School.

PK: That was in junior high? And did Huntington go on to the same high school?

JG: Yes.

PK: What's that called?

JG: University High School. Which many, many years later, my son, John, was student body president. Believe me, the worm turns. All right. I'll make a long story short. I was building my character blocks. Westwood was just a terrific place to grow up in. There were wonderful record stores. I was interested in music, both in classical and jazz. I didn't go to any museums. I didn't even know there were any. Because no one was there to take me. I was never invited. However, I started making nicer friends from my area whose families had collections. And my first real friend, her father was the president of the American Lincolnian Society. And he had the finest collection of Lincoln material west of the Mississippi. And Lincoln letters. He was a renowned collector and historian. And they owned a Tiepolo painting. And he owned a Reubens painting and a Stradivarius violin.

PK: Who was this?

JG: His name was Justin Turner. And if you take a kid like me - they lived in a beautiful house, I lived in a tiny apartment with my mother, but these parents always liked me because I always loved their stuff. I didn't know why they liked me, but I do now. At any rate, Barbara, my friend, would invite me home after school and I would just look at this violin, and the paintings, and the books, and I was in seventh heaven.

PK: They lived in Westwood also?

JG: Yes, they did. And of course, now I realize that some basis of connoisseurship was developing. And that I wasn't such an angry, lonely kid after all, that there were possibilities here. By high school, Barbara went to Beverly Hills High, and I went to University High, but one day when I was 16 or 17 my friend Barbara invited me to the Pasadena Art Museum. She had her license to drive. And we drove. We were 16 years old. And there was an exhibit of Galka Scheyer's art collection. And it was the first time in almost 10 years that I had been to a museum. I didn't even know Los Angeles had a museum. My mother didn't have time to do that and I don't think she knew where the museums were herself at that time.

PK: So you never got downtown to the old art museum there?

JG: No, no. Didn't know anything about it until years later. Well, at the Pasadena Art Museum I just thought I had

died and gone to art heaven. First of all, it was the collection of this powerful woman. And of all things, it was housed in a Chinese, or was it Japanese? No, a Chinese house. My two loves. I mean, Chinese art, of course it wasn't Japanese. A courtyard. All those tiles that I remembered from books and from the museums and books of Chinese fairy stories and so on, and all this art. And I thought, well, this is unbelievable.

PK: How eclectic, too.

JG: Yes.

PK: I mean, those different things together like you enjoyed in Cleveland so much.

JG: Yes, exactly. And I began to see that this is a possibility of the way the world really is. It was a construct for thinking, that you could exercise and keep alive several parallels of thinking. Like two continents, Europe and China. Or several different types of art. American contemporary art, let's say, and German Expressionism. That everything in nature needed balance and parallel. And that if you were perhaps singular in your vision, and everything was a single track, you could fall off. And there was no net below you. But if you had a parallel track you were much safer and you could have kind of a universal concept of the way the world is, a dichotomy or yin yang, or I didn't have the language that I'm using now at that time, but the construct was building inside of me. That it was possible to see dichotomy.

PK: This is also a sort of cognitive thinking, synthetic or synthesized.

JG: Exactly.

PK: And it seems to me that that's what interests me. Is this sort of retroactive? You were looking back and understanding? Or did you actually at the time . . . ?

JG: I did think that at the time. I do. Because that's what gave me this courage to move through different spheres of uniting collections or what man does under one sky, one earth. These are variables. But only in high cultures. I am really only interested in the high cultures. I am not interested in meaningless trends or . . . I'm interested in knowing immediately the difference between quality and the assumption of quality.

PK: This must have been, eventually, in your adventures in the art world, an interesting thing to -- an interesting place to come from.

JG: Yes, it was.

PK: As this contemporary art, especially conceptual art.

JG: Well, that came quite a bit later for me, Paul, because I entered the visual contemporary scene at abstract expressionism. And fortunately for me, timing was everything. That *Life* magazine issue came and it had a lot to do with Betty Parsons. And I went to New York. I put together all my savings. I used to work in summer camps. And I went to New York to meet Betty Parsons. And then later in life I became her dealer.

PK: Well, that's something, obviously, we can talk more about.

JG: To be continued.

PK: But I want to get a sense of timing now, because you were 16 when you had this epiphany at the Pasadena Art Museum.

JG: 1956.

PK: And then you graduated from high school in . . . ?

JG: '58.

PK: '58?

JG: No, no, what am I talking about? '54.

PK: Yes.

JG: It was '52 when I went, '52 that I had the epiphany. I'm mixed up with time a little bit. Okay. I'm sorry.

PK: That's okay.

JG: '52 I was taken to the Pasadena Museum. '54 I graduated high school and went to UCLA. '56 the *Life*

magazine came out on Pollock and I went to New York.

PK: So in that same year?

JG: Yes, as soon as it came out.

PK: And so what? Tell me how excited you were? It must have been major?

JG: Christopher Columbus. I mean, I discovered the new art. I just couldn't get over what was going on. And that men and women did this. I just couldn't get over it. I didn't know that.

PK: What preparation did you have, if any, at UCLA? What was your major?

JG: I was English and anthropology. I started as theater arts, but I wrote a play my first year at UCLA and it was produced. And it ruined my life. I should have been rejected for years. I would have been probably a playwright. I won two big awards my first year at UCLA. One, my play was produced, and second, I won the State of California Poetry Award, all in my freshman year.

PK: That's too much too soon.

JG: It was too much too soon. That's exactly right. I couldn't write another word as a playwright. But I had one love. Well, several, but one in particular who was eventually to play a major part in my life. And that was Edward Albee, who became one of my best collectors and friends.

PK: Really?

JG: Yes.

PK: He's having a big success now.

JG: Unbelievable. Yes. *The Goat*. So, well, anyway, we'll go into that later, but the point is, I have to go back to one mentor before Betty Parsons. And that is my mother had a boyfriend who took a real shine to me as a young woman and provided me with books and records. And sent me a gift of art. He lived in Canada and he sent me some Canadian art, which I wasn't real crazy about, but I knew that I should like it. But he gave me a world of ideas. And at that time the United Nations building was just opening up. And these fabulous works of art were going into the United Nations. And I began to see the public art. I still hadn't gotten the idea that people made art. I don't know why. I thought it came from a department store. I can't tell you that because I never saw anybody making art. I know. Goofy. But the wonderful art was being brought to New York and that New York, just New York had it. I mean, you name a subject, Etruscan, Ethiopian, no matter what it was, there it was in New York.

PK: And you learned this from the books provided by . . .

JG: This man. Yes. He subscribed to magazines for me.

PK: How nice. That's a good mentor.

JG: Oh, yes. He was a very nice gentleman. And he subscribed to *National Geographic* and *Commentary* and *National Review of Poetry*, *Canyon Review*.

PK: What was his name?

JG: His name was, well, he was a QC, Queens Counselor. His name was Samuel J. Drache. And he was a friend of my mother's. And he was just wonderful to me. He took a real concern in my education and so on. So I was terribly lucky. And then I had people who were interested in helping to finance my music lessons, my singing lessons. And at that time I was moving from like wanting to be a big band singer or something to opera. I studied opera for two years. So I had all these talents, but nothing really, first of all, I couldn't bear to perform. I hated it.

PK: That's a professional liability there.

JG: I couldn't conquer my fear. It was a real huge liability. My second drawback was that I was a terrible musician and I was terrible with languages.

[SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PK: Continuing an interview with Joni Gordon. This is session one on 8 July 2002. This is tape two, side A. And, Joni, we are doing a pretty good job of navigating this personal biography. You're telling us your story. And it

seems to me that we have you at UCLA. We have you at college. And I think we better make sure, because we may or may not revisit that. But you talked a bit about people who were important to you in Emerson and even in grade school. And it seems to me that you had a sense of those contacts, those experiences that made a difference, that really contributed.

JG: Yes.

PK: The main thing I heard about from the UCLA period, besides your impressive start as a freshman, is reading, encountering the artists, the people behind the art works with the Jackson Pollock *Life* magazine article, famous article that actually led you to go to New York. What else do we need to know about UCLA that really makes a difference to your story?

JG: The Art Department at UCLA at that time was on a quad, and it was where the School of Architecture is now. And within the Art Department were also the early exhibitions of anthropology. So that under one roof you were able to see three segments of art in action. You would see the painting studios. You would see an exhibition gallery, which was led by the director, Frederick Wight. And I became Frederick's dealer, and I handled his estate, which I know we'll talk about at length because . . .

PK: Yes. I, of course, knew him as well for many years.

JG: Of course. And he was so meaningful and influential in my life as an art professional because I wasn't involved with art. But I was involved with art history as a volunteer to his galleries. But we'll go into that later. So, let's see, first there would be the studios, then there would be the galleries directed by Frederick Wight. And then in the early days there was a third component. UCLA had received, I'm talking about the years '54 through '58, had received the Wellcome Collection, which was a British pharmaceutical company who had divided their collection of ethnic art, and ethnic graphic material between two institutions, primarily UCLA and Harvard. And so you were liable to see all of these three interactions. And when I got to UCLA, having never been in an art studio in my life, because my interests in high school were theater arts, and I guess there were people who were making art, but I never saw them. I didn't know about any of this. When I first saw the Art Department I just couldn't get over it. And what a class it was because it was Vija Celmins, Richard Diebenkorn, Tony Berlant - I'm trying to think of some of the others - Oh, Charles Garabedian, all attending school within this one wonderful building on this quad. Directly across from the quad was the music building, which is still there. And then on the other two sections was the administration building and the School of Business. And then the science . . . it was a cultural science building. Kinsey Hall?

PK: Yes, I can't remember . . .

JG: It was the School of Anthropology actually. And social studies and you're almost touching upon the Powell Library. So I would say that the art was in contact with the student body in a way that it's not at this moment, because it's been pushed out to the outer limits.

PK: To the Hammer.

JG: To the Hammer. And the art-making studios are quite remote from the center workings of the college. And it's also encapsulated within a video and film world. Okay, but getting back to my days, it was really a knock-out of very serious exhibitions. Shortly after I graduated in '58 there was the Bonne Fete Monsieur Picasso celebrating Picasso's eightieth birthday. There was a major Matisse exhibition that Frederick Wight curated. There was the Carlo Ponti exhibition. The opening of the Wellcome Collection, which literally was welcomed into the Art Department, and it was a staggering gift that was given to UCLA.

PK: That's African art, right?

JG: Yes. It was African and New Guinea art. Almost exclusively. There is some Malaynesian art. But it's, I would say 70 percent African.

PK: So was that your first contact with that?

JG: It was my first contact, yes, with what people made and how they made it. I could go up to the second story of the art building and walk into a studio and see people standing in front of easels. And they would be sketching, or there would be a live model, or a still life setup. And there was an instructor who was walking around from student to student making comments or just observing. And I thought, my god, this art isn't made in a factory.

PK: Or it didn't come from factories either.

JG: Right. It's not from art heaven. It is made by hands of people who can do that. And who educate themselves

in doing that. They take their talent and they hone it and do something remarkable with it in the quest of their own style. And I never said a word but I went almost every single day to the Art Department and just looked. By this time I had left the theater arts department as a freshman, and I had gone into the School of Letters and Science as an English major and an anthropology minor. But once again I found myself observing and learning to make judgments about . . . but not right off the bat if something is good or not good. We didn't have, in those days, "does it work?" We didn't even know about that. There was a lot of space between seeing, between observing, seeing and critical judgment. There was a lot of thought given. There were not conclusions made. At first you just kind of celebrated the idea that somebody was making something in a university like UCLA. That was unbelievable to me. That a university would nurture artists. Now, I didn't even know you could study art history. Nobody told me. I probably would have done that. I would have done that actually if somebody had told me, but nobody did. And it didn't even particularly exist. The department of Art History was really at Berkeley. And they were just kind of forming the nucleus of scholarship. And so I didn't . . . And, of course, Fred Wight played a tremendous role in all of this. He was from Harvard and had been the former director of the Boston Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the director of the MIT Galleries. And he was very, very close to the then chancellor at UCLA.

PK: Murphy.

JG: Yes, Dr. Franklin Murphy, who was a physician as well. And they conceptualized, during the time I was at college, the sculpture garden. And as all of these magnificent things came to the university, in particular for me the David Smith sculpture. The Smith sculpture just took my breath away always. The Noguchi sculpture.

PK: Lachaise maybe?

JG: Well, I liked Lachaise but I never was crazy... I was never mad about his sculpture because it was too exaggerated, I'm more of a minimalist. So exaggerated forms don't exactly move me the way restrained order does. But at any rate, I was there during the time of the formulation of the so-called collections of UCLA, and they were expressed through the sculpture garden or on the walls at the university in the different buildings.

PK: So when did the Grunwald Center open? When did UCLA get his collection?

JG: All during that time. During the fifties.

PK: Late fifties?

JG: Late fifties, early sixties. And, of course, I mean, this was a home grown collection from Westwood. Exactly where UCLA is. The Grunwalds lived near Wilshire Boulevard. And here UCLA now is the recipient of all of this. And it became evident that there were huge collections of individual expressions from photography, every media of art; photography, all of the printed manifestations, from etchings, aquatints, lithographs, etc. And with that, of course, was launched Tamarind lithography and this input of creative energy and business acumen and scholarship all came out during the fifties and sixties, which formed the basis of our cultural community as it is right now, which is beginning to be very, very substantial. Except a lot of the great people were under-used such as O.P. Reed.

PK: Oh, I knew him.

JG: Yes. And clearly one of the most fabulous men, and scholars and Galka Scheyer, I believe, was still alive. And so were the dealers from whom Galka Scheyer bought art. Dalzell Hatfield, for instance at the Ambassador Hotel, who was such a superb advisor to Galka Scheyer. And there were great, great dealers. All the way there was this trail from Pasadena, through downtown Los Angeles, heading up Wilshire Boulevard, heading west to La Cienega. But you would think today that the world began and ended with Ferus Gallery. And it's not true. There was this huge spoke and it seems each decade produced quite a fabulous complement of entrepreneurs and scholars in various fields. Now, hanging on to all of that were these collectors, such as the Arensbergs and Katherine White, her African and 20th century collection. All of which we lost.

PK: Yes.

JG: And why did we lose these collections and the Edward G. Robinson collection? Well, because we had no sticking or staying power until Norton Simon. And, of course, that ended as a disaster for the county [LACMA], but ended as a powerful, magnificent statement for Pasadena, once again. Things come home to roost in Pasadena.

PK: Also it has its own separate identity, which is not a small point.

JG: Exactly. No, not at all.

PK: Because I reviewed Suzanne Muchnic's book about Norton Simon. And, if I may throw in my little observation . . .

JG: Absolutely.

PK: Here is a collector who is not exactly home-grown, but certainly Californian. And what he did, no matter what one may think of him, and he was very problematic, I realize, but created something that has an identity.

JG: Definitely.

PK: And so I think that it is unfortunate for LACMA, but I think it was very worthwhile to have it.

JG: Absolutely. And this is not a boutique museum. I mean, we have to learn to discriminate between boutique museums and something like the Norton Simon or . . .

PK: It's simply the best picture, actually, just looking at the old master pictures in the western United States.

JG: Exactly. Absolutely. Incomparable. Incomparable. And it was really fortunate for myself that the formation of much of this developed during the fifties and the sixties due to a lot of spirits, but particularly for UCLA, the Franklin Murphy spirit, hard to say who all the spirits were for LACMA. I think they're still trying to find that out for themselves. But architecture was already in a high-principled order of achievement starting with Frank Lloyd Wright and all the way through the case study people. And L.A. was just a rich and enriching situation. It was also its own worst enemy because of being blindsided by very peculiar ideas, most of which they thought that everything would be available to them forever. And that gullibleness was very self-destructive for Los Angeles. However, they were determined in many ways and are making up for many things now. Anyway, I don't mean to go into all of this. But it was with this backdrop that I was able to form myself and with a lot of guidance and help from an awful lot of people, which you and I discussed; Ralph Altman. I would find things on my Sunday flotillas out to the neighborhoods. I would set sail in the morning with maybe \$5.00 in my pocket. And I would come home in the afternoon - I was married, by the way. I had married in my senior year, during college in 1958. And I would come home with an ancient Greek pot, American Indian pottery, and I would take everything to Ralph Altman, who was my teacher, who held fort on La Cienega. And Ralph would say, "Oh, my god. Where did you find that?" He said, "There's a pot like that at the Getty or Metropolitan." Or, "This is in the Heye Foundation in New York." He said, "Go back and get more." Well, these were gypsy places. They would set up on a Friday afternoon.

PK: Sort of flea-markety.

JG: They were. Pre-flea market. They were the immigrants who were coming into Los Angeles in droves during the late fifties and sixties from all over the world, bringing with them their treasures and renting these stores down near Chouinard Art Institute and just overnight they would put up a table, and put a pot on it. And, if you knew anything at all, for a couple of dollars you could buy this stuff. And that's what I did.

PK: Ralph Altman should have been out doing that.

JG: Well, yes, I think he was sometimes. But, you can always tell a great city, frankly, by the depth and how many dealers there are, particularly in the obscure or unusual arts, like ethnic art. And right now, frankly, there is nobody.

PK: Well, just think of the old days though, with Stendahl.

JG: That's right.

PK: I mean, really, he was major dealer.

JG: Major, major. A man named Mr. Clay, on the corner of Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood was a dealer's dealer similar to [Leonard] Kaplan down in Laguna who had all these Chinese and Northwest Coast pieces, or George Weynham in Pasadena.

PK: Oh, I know that guy [Kaplan]. He's still around. He is an artist too.

JG: Well, he is. But I don't think . . .

PK: We have his papers.

JG: Really? I knew him as a great dealer. Fantastic dealer! I can name all the great obscure dealers, dealers' dealers who had an obsession with a field of art, or a branch of scholarship, or whatever, and would set up overnight these rickety places. I mean, Leonard Kaplan succeeded. He was on the main streets of Laguna.

PK: One of the strangest places, I visit his gallery. There were those surrealist paintings of his.

JG: I didn't go myself. Once he no longer was a dealer, I just wasn't interested. But anyway. So did I answer any questions that you asked me?

PK: You've done actually a rather marvelous job of painting a picture of the cultural life, starting with UCLA, but then looking around and . . .

JG: I was looking around.

PK: And also really going over a couple of decades and sort of pointing a bit towards now, pointing ahead. What happened, how did you begin to focus your interest? What about the trip?

JG: To New York?

PK: Yes. Because that must have made a big difference. To what you might want to do.

JG: Exactly. Well, on Saturday afternoons I was working for Esther Robles and occasionally I crossed the street, directly across the street from her was Felix Landau. Also I was walking the walk of La Cienega, and not just on Monday nights. I began to see that is was where a ritual was taking place. Artists would bring in their stuff. The dealers would hang them up. People would come and look at it. Reviewers would come and write about it. It made the newspapers. It made a couple of the early art journals. And there was an intake and an output from La Cienega that was starting to happen. And it became real bristling. Now, I was also very interested in men like Dalzell Hatfield, who was a great dealer at the Ambassador. And there were pioneer dealers all over the city practically. Not so much in Santa Monica, but in Beverly Hills. There was Frank Perls, Paul Kantor and [Claire] Copley. And then even people who were teaching extension.

PK: Copley? Was he around at the time?

JG: Copley? Absolutely was. He opened in the late fifties, early sixties on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. First surrealist show and dealer. In fact, for his first show, and I was there, was a Magritte in the window. A Magritte on a little easel. And L.A. didn't know what hit it. L.A.'s the only city in the world that's known by two initials. You can't say N.Y. and people are going to know what you're talking about.

PK: That's true.

JG: When the great dealers came on sometimes they weren't always on La Cienega. Although I really realized the importance of Ferus. But there was also Rolf Nelson. There was a foil to Ferus directly across the street called Ceeje. Of course, Esther Robles and there was Ed Premis and David Stuart. Well, on and on it went.

PK: You worked at Esther's?

JG: I worked at Esther's on Saturdays.

PK: Who is gone now, I think she passed on.

JG: She passed on but Robert Robles lives in Palm Springs.

PK: Right. Never did, by the way, after years of promising me that all of those records would come to the Archives, we still don't have them. I have to try one more time.

JG: Oh, no.

PK: But you worked for her.

JG: Yes.

PK: Were you graduated from UCLA?

JG: No, I was still at UCLA. And I may even have been married when I was working for her on Saturdays. Then I was starting to hitch up or knit together some desperate ideas that people made things, not things made things. They didn't bear little pots of something that grew into big pots. I don't know where my notions came from. And if you looked a lot things would come to you. It would reveal itself. But not for "getting it." There is nothing to get in art. It isn't a solvable problem.

PK: So this is one of your disappointments.

JG: Yes.

PK: The current art world?

JG: Absolutely. Because it doesn't -- it's like putting braces on baby teeth. You're going to lose your baby teeth. You're going to lose the braces and you're going to get disinterested because you're just working too hard to solve the riddle.

PK: Let's talk then just a minute about what we have about then. And I gather you feel that there was really a different perspective or attitude towards art.

JG: There was.

PK: That is not what you described as standing in front of an object and saying, "It works," or "It doesn't work."

JG: Right. Or, "I get it," or "I don't get it." That's right. What it was was awe for the object, the painter, the gallery, the assignment. And the sheer delight of finding yourself from a desert cultural city to an adolescent, growing up. With so much possibility and potential. And who was in charge? The artist.

[SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE B BLANK]

[SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a second session with Joni Gordon, gallery owner, Newspace Gallery for a number of years. She'll remind us in a moment just how many. Celebrating today an anniversary. Which anniversary is it?

JG: 27 years. In business, continually.

PK: And today is September 23, 2002. The interview, again, is at the subject's home in Beverly Glen Park, which is high up in the Bel Air section of Los Angeles. And the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. So we've had to wait since our last interview, we've had to wait a bit, but there's still much to talk about. And last time we were covering a number of topics, and we were just reviewing that a few minutes ago. And it's useful to think of what that involved. But I would say in general, there was your own personal background, how you came to your interest in art and culture.

JG: Yes.

PK: And how that, in various ways, led you to the gallery. I mean, finally, it seems to me, everything then in a way came together in the gallery. And that's what we're going to be talking about today. We talked a bit about the Los Angeles art world that you observed, which is always interesting, because you were there, involved, and observing. You started out, although I know you don't want to talk about this, but let's just sort of kick off on this point, quickly looking back and needing a job when you were a young woman, you were just out of college, is that right?

JG: I was in college.

PK: Still in college?

JG: Yes.

PK: And so tell me again, how did you take this first step, this connection with the art gallery world?

JG: Well, I was an English and anthropology major at UCLA. No one had told me that you could really study art history. I had no possibility of entering the Art Department in any other way except wandering through this wonderful old building, which then became the School of Architecture many years later. So I would spend my lunch hours walking around this art department. And there would be people who were just painting. And it was the first time, I would see Charles "Chaz" Garabedian's paintings, and Vija Celmins's, and Tony Berlant. And one time I even said to them, "Well, what are you doing?" "We're painting." That's what you do in nursery school. You're in college. Stop that. Go and study." That's what I would think. That this was play. I didn't know that you actually had a field of study known as studio arts and that you could go to college to study to be a painter. But I caught on very quickly. And then I realized that there was a connection between these artists and galleries. They would have their masters' shows. I was always there. And I started buying from their masters' shows actually. But I needed a job. I was working my way through school. And I went to La Cienega. And I started, I remember, at Esther Robles's Gallery. And this is like 1957. In fact, one of the first shows I saw was Robert Cremean and Stanton Macdonald-Wright.

PK: Interesting. Yes, because we were just talking about Robert. Yes.

JG: In fact, in the back room she had a Stanton Macdonald-Wright that was just such a knock-out painting I never



forgot it. And a Georgia O’Keeffe. I remember so many wonderful things about Esther. And there was also another woman working there by the name of Betty Asher. She was working there Saturday afternoons as well.

PK: Oh, that’s right.

JG: And so I said, “Do people work for you? Or do they intern or come in and put things away?” And Esther said, “Yes, how about you? Because you’re tall.” I could reach all the stacks in the storage. It never occurred to me to even get paid. I was so moved.

PK: You were so grateful. You never anticipated this wonderful new world.

JG: I was so grateful. I could play with the kids who were just sloshing around all this paint at UCLA. And it was getting pretty serious. So that actually was the first time I met the woman who most influenced my visual life, Betty Asher.

PK: How is that? Do you want to talk about that now?

JG: Well, it comes actually a little bit later.

PK: Okay. As long as we don’t forget.

JG: I won’t. Oh, no. I can’t forget that. So we met, and she would work Saturday afternoons and I would work Saturday afternoons. And then I found out there was another gallery across the street named Felix Landau. And I said, “Look, maybe I can work for Felix in the morning and Esther in the afternoon.” And that’s what happened. I started working my way up and down, across the street.

PK: La Cienega Boulevard.

JG: Right. And I was very close to the fellows who owned Ceeje. But I was most moved by Edward Kienholz and Walter Hopps and Irving Blum as an entrepreneurial outfit. It was almost like a sporting goods store in a way. They sold Harleys as well as the paintings. Some of the paintings were even of Harleys. It was such an interesting thing to me.

PK: So you’re talking about the Ferus Gallery?

JG: Yes. Right.

PK: Wasn’t it right next to Esther or one away?

JG: No. Actually, their first gallery was behind an antique shop, which was owned by Streeter Blair, the painter.

PK: Sure.

JG: He was a primitive painter. He started painting quite late in life. Very, very charming paintings. And, in fact, left some extremely important paintings of different states in the United States. And Vincent Price took an interest in them, and sold them to Sears and Roebuck for the most part. It was very interesting. Now, how do I know all this? Because I was always hanging around. And I didn’t ask so many questions because I didn’t know what to ask. But I would listen. And everyone would kind of raise their voice, after they made a sale. Suddenly the volume got louder and they were all excited. And I just picked up on everything that I kind of liked. I was only 20 years old.

PK: When did Ferus open?

JG: Ferus opened in ’56 I think. So I’m talking about ’57.

PK: Right. So it was just shortly thereafter.

JG: He may have been even earlier than ’56. Yes.

PK: There’s a new big show.

JG: Yes. The Gagosian Gallery, which is one of the reasons that it’s kind of urgent to talk about this.

PK: Well, then tell about it.

JG: But anyway, I began to see that there was the artist as like the sun, and then the planets that traveled around the sun were like these galleries. And then there were these moons, sun and stars, which I kind of thought of it as this constellation of how paintings are kind of birthed and rise up into the world. How do they get

from UCLA, for instance, out to the world? And I began to see how that happened. In somebody's car trunk they would put all their paintings and kind of dump them off at a gallery. And my job at the gallery was to intake or to put things away. And I was learning so quickly that my grades were suffering a little bit, because I had started as a theater arts major, and had a play produced my first year at UCLA. And that kind of wrecked my career. I got recognition too quickly. So I changed my major to English. But then I suddenly realized that art was holding my interest. And always anthropology, always. I was crazy about cultural anthropology. To make a long story short, it was at that time that I met Betty Asher and I was learning a great deal through the generosity of Esther Robles and Robert, and of course, Felix was such a wily fellow. And very urbane and international. He had just a terrific cosmopolitan attitude about art and dealership. I was going with somebody who was in the hotel business. Monte Gordon. He eventually worked for the Ambassador Hotel and I got to know Dalzell Hatfield. And I got to know him very, very well. And he shared with me the history of the early days of bringing the Braque paintings to N.Y. and L.A. Braque's paintings to the United States, and working with Galka Scheyer and I was just a sponge. I took in everything I could. And I was knocking around from pillar to post, or gallery to gallery, absorbing as much as I could. Well, then it turns out that in my senior year at UCLA, 1958, I did get married. And there were no conditions on my marriage. I've been married 45 years in February. I have a wonderful family. I'm fortunate. But there was no doubt in my mind I was going to amount to something and have a career. I didn't know how, what or why, but I found out I couldn't write about art. I couldn't translate my thinking and feeling into language. I just couldn't do it. And it wasn't a writer's block. It was something else. It wasn't meant to be. But I was developing an eye. And I had a friend who would take me to the Pasadena Art Museum all the time. And I saw my first of everything. Dealing, of course, with the great Abstract Expressionism collections. California modernists, etc., etc. And then at the County Museum I saw in the fifties the Jackson Pollock's "Blue Poles" and great Franz Kline show, Soutine and I also got my first Jasper John's coat hanger lithograph, and so did this woman Betty Asher. And we bought it out at the gift store of the Los Angeles County Museum when it was in downtown Los Angeles.

PK: And connected with the Natural History Museum, for the record, it was actually called The Los Angeles County Museum. And art was part of it and natural history.

JG: Exactly.

PK: Sort of like a little Smithsonian or something.

JG: That's right. And so that's how it was. After my marriage, which was in February '58, and I also graduated in June of '58, I was busy establishing a home and so on. But I knew that my life was going to be in art. And, in fact, I had a friend who said, "There's a woman who's a friend of my mother's. I must take you to meet her." "What is her name?" "Betty Asher." Well, there comes up that name again. I said, "Well, I had worked with her on Saturdays at Esther Robles. But she was shy and somewhat reticent. And I'm just a kid off the block. And we really don't know each other at all. So I'd be very happy. And I know that she bought a Jasper John's lithograph the same . . .

PK: So did you do it at the same time?

JG: Yes. Just by accident. And we were also looking at the same art. Except she, in her wisdom, because she was 22 years older than me, the same age as my mother actually, she hooked onto Ferus's gallery immediately. And that became her focus. And what a focus this was, of course, as we look back now. And she went with Irving Blum all the way through the tides of Los Angeles painting into New York painting. Meaning Andy Warhol and the pop school. Anyway, my friend takes me to meet Betty Asher. And said, "Aren't you the one that comes in on Saturdays when I'm there?"

PK: That's what she said? And you said, "Yes."

JG: Yes. And, anyway, at that time she had the first of what I think of as maybe four collections. And the year was '58, '59. But she was passionate and driven. And tremendously focused. She owned a Cremean, a very fine Cremean. And she was pulling out though, away from representational work into Robert Irwin, Billy Al Bengston, the new so-called Abstraction or Pop Art materials.

PK: Was she interested at all in Wallace Berman, let's say?

JG: Well, everyone was. We all were.

PK: Yes. Tell me about that because he's very much under-rated . . .

JG: Oh, yes. But that's going to be changed real soon. There's finally new things happening. Oh, Betty was quite moved by Wallace Berman. But not as much as by other people. She liked him and she got it. She got everything very quickly.

PK: What about Ed Kienholz?

JG: She got Ed but I don't know if she was too crazy about him.

PK: It doesn't sound like it might be exactly her esthetic interest.

JG: No, it wasn't.

PK: What about you?

JG: I was very close to Ed. In fact, it's my coat that's on the Barney's Beanery sculpture on the woman at the counter.

PK: I didn't know that.

JG: In fact, it's my purse too. But, you see, Betty was 22 years older than me, and Ed was 10 years older than me. So I was like this kid, and it was an unusual time. But at any rate, I saw Betty at least once or twice a week. And I just would go over to her house and we'd sit and talk.

PK: What did you talk about? Art?

JG: Art. Yes. And her books. And she also loved American Indian art. And she was the only person I knew that did. And she had a marvelous collection of Kachinas, many of which she had bought from Man Ray. And I know that because I sold the collection.

PK: Well, we have an interview, just to insert this for a moment, cross referencing, with Betty Asher, done years ago. And I'm not sure, I think maybe Tom Garver did that for us, for the Archives. But I obviously haven't read it yet because I think this new story as you're telling me about her, and her interest are really quite interesting.

JG: Oh, fascinating, because she and Robert Halff and Gifford and Joann Phillips, the original members of this whole contemporary art and MCAC [Modern and Contemporary Art Council] at LACMA. And fortunately they all rose to the occasion of the new idea, the new ideas. As the galleries were moving west let's say, out of Hollywood or the Wilshire area, and were launching themselves onto La Cienega, they were young, married and successful people. There weren't so many financial struggles for them. They were on their way. And they could spend a few dollars on art. And not too many people had done that. Either it was Huntington on one extreme or \$100 for an Edward Kienholz. So it was very, very interesting. Kind of a wild west.

PK: Now, [local] myth has it, or at least conventional wisdom has it that Walter Hopps, and Henry Hopkins as well, consciously and strategically helped to cultivate this interest. Is that really true? Were these other people coming to it by themselves and it was just coincidental?

JG: No, it was Walter Hopps, frankly. Not Henry.

PK: Not so much?

JG: Henry was a dealer before he even went into the museum world. He had a gallery. But it was Walter who started so-called art education. He would give his lectures and take folks all around to visit some artists that he had a lot of conviction about. He was a taste-maker and very strong in his perceptions. He saw things very quickly. He was able to advance everything fast-forward. He saw a connectedness between post-war Europe, New York and the new art of Los Angeles. And many other places as well. And he was the guy who talked art.

PK: Where did he do that? How did he do it?

JG: He did it out of galleries and people's living rooms. Which is how I formed Contact. I modeled it after what Walter Hopps did. The idea was to bring the person who made the thing, the art, together with the person who could see the art if only they opened their eyes. And he was interested in making connections. And he did this in a very vital way.

PK: How did he bring his group together, his audience? What was the mechanism?

JG: It was like a rumor. I mean, it was a very tight little crowd.

PK: So it was like a club?

JG: It was like a club. And it was evening-oriented generally, although he met with some women in the afternoon, like Marcia Weisman, and so on. And these people were hungry for the new. And architecture was flourishing at that time. Everything was going on in post '45. It was really very, very interesting. So in 1964, a

year after my first child, I wanted to do something with artists and my community. And I knew that the forerunner of this had been Walter Hopps' lecture series or taking people about, the first tours and so on. But I admired him, but I was a little too young to know what was going on when he did that. I wasn't able to join up with that. But I'd hear about it from Betty.

PK: She was in it?

JG: Oh, yes. And she would tell me, "Oh, we saw this, and we saw that." She always had visuals in her mind. Always. So I called up the leading artists of our times, this was in 1964. I told them a bit about Walter Hopps. They all knew about it because Streeter Blair was one of the people I called who owned the antique store where Ferus Gallery was located and rented the space actually to Walter Hopps and Ed Kienholz. So he was one of my speakers. And Frank Perls. I was just crazy about Perls, of course, and his family. And I started tape recording every single one of these sessions. And I did this for nine years, ten sessions for ten months. September through June.

PK: One session a month?

JG: Just one session a month for ten months, beginning in September, ending in June for nine years. The accumulation of tapes and the pioneering material is now so incredibly important because, for instance, it was the first time that Robert Irwin ever discussed in-depth not only his philosophy but three or four of his actualized ephemeral works. And it's all on tape. Experiments with art and technology. The archives of which are at the Getty. They presented the case of all of their thinking, and all of their concepts and works, and I had it on tape, and I've just given it all to the Getty.

PK: Who else?

JG: Through the years? Well, Vija Celmins. At that time Vija was a graduate student at UCLA. I was crazy about her work. I was the first one ever to buy her work. I bought it out of her graduate show at UCLA. I went outside into the hallway and I called Betty. I said, "You've got to come and see these great paintings." She called Irving and history took over. Although David Stuart was her first art dealer. Vincent Price, we went to his home.

PK: Oh, yes. He was into spreading the word, art education.

JG: Absolutely. Yes, John Weber had a gallery here before he moved to New York. And he was, at that time, the director of the Dwan Gallery in Westwood Village. And, of course, here's Esther and Bob Robles. I opened with Edward Kienholz at my home and we met earlier at his studio where he was just finishing his Barney's Beanery.

PK: And that's how you got to be in it?

JG: Yes, he needed things. He needed clothing.

PK: I see also you had Carl Dentzel speaking.

JG: Yes.

PK: I mean, it's a variety of art interests and collecting interests and so forth.

JG: Exactly. It was eclectic.

PK: Not just contemporary art.

JG: No, not at all. Because I was always interested in anthropology, so I needed Dr. Dentzel and . . .

PK: Lance Richbourg, I remember him.

JG: Do you remember him? He showed at the Ceeje Gallery.

PK: Yes.

JG: Which was the perfect foil for Ferus, because eventually Ferus moved across the street. And so many of the early UCLA artists went to Ceeje . . . of a certain type, Expressionists.

[SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B.]

PK: Doing this second session with Joni Gordon. This is tape one, side B. Picking up with where we left off.

JG: The third year of the nine years of Contact, Paul, we're here at Judy Gerowitz's and Lloyd Hamrol. And, of course, she became Judy Chicago. We were the first people to visit Gemini. Then Frank Perls told us the most

amazing story of his family and how the dining room was painted with these great German expressionist paintings and so on. Charles Mattox, one of the great kinetic artists, sculptors. Ernest Raboff. And I ended that year with Robert Cremean at Esther Robles. So I did that for nine years. At the end of that one day Betty Asher said to me, "I'd really like to do an exhibit." She was working at the County Museum as an assistant to Maurice Tuchman. And she said, "I keep thinking about ceramics.". And I said, "How about cups, Betty? You really love cups." She said, "That's it! Let's do a cup show. I've had this thought that we write to all of the prominent American artists." And at that time she had met Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein and so on. We're talking about 1972, '71, '72. And she said, "Why don't I just ask them." And all these other young ceramicists in L. A., John Mason, Peter Voulkes, Adrien Saxe, Ken Price, and Alexis Smith, who did a really conceptual cup work at that time. We had about 200. We wrote letters. We were not turned down by anybody. Nobody. We had cups coming out of the woodwork.

PK: So, wait a minute. Was this basically commissioning or asking them to make cups?

JG: Yes. We didn't necessarily think it through actually and realized that we're asking these people to do a cup for us. Who's going to buy these things? And then on top of it all we signed a contract and rented David Stuart's gallery.

PK: So this was aside from LAICA, LACMA, and after nine years of Contact?

JG: Oh, yes. This is totally entrepreneur. And I was finding myself.

PK: So did you actually end up doing . . . ?

JG: We were partners.

PK: Yes, but did you do a lot of the contacting work, writing the letters . . . ?

JG: Oh, yes. I did it. I did all of that.

PK: Yes, because Betty had her own job with LACMA.

JG: Well, she did, but she really knew more people than I did. And I was getting, not cold feet, but I didn't have the experience or her name. She was already a very well-known person. I didn't have any name except from Contact. So we did a Cup Show that hit the ground running. Henry Seldis and Bill Wilson wrote huge articles on it. Betty, of course, was our best customer. She started collecting.

PK: What year was the show?

JG: '72.

PK: '71, '72. The end of '71.

JG: Into '72. We set the whole show up like a department store. We draped the tables. We had hundreds and hundreds of unique cups.

PK: So you had hundreds of artists?

JG: No, some sent in two or three cups. But maybe a hundred artists.

PK: Whose cups do you remember the best?

JG: That were fabulous? Well, it's at the County Museum under Betty Asher's collection. She started, really, from that show amassing this remarkable collection from the concept of a cup. The cups I remember the most, well, I do remember Alexis Smith's cup clearly. And Philip, I can't think of his last name right now, but really I remember everybody in their own way. I mean, I can see it. We have photographs of it. I've given most of that to LACMA already.

PK: Hefferton?

JG: No, not Hefferton. I handled Hefferton.

PK: Did you?

JG: Yes. Still do. I have a lot of his paintings. So it was during the Cup Show that this fellow comes wandering in one day and we kind of liked each other. And his name was Bob Smith. And he says, "I'm the director of Brand Galleries and I've got to get out of there. I want to start a museum." And I said, "Okay. Let's do it."

PK: So where were you at that time?

JG: I was just doing the Cup Show. Contact was over.

PK: Okay. So you were hanging around the Stuart Gallery?

JG: Yes. He just walked in and everybody was looking to do something. So the idea just hit me right. I had the time. I seemed to be able to organize things. And we founded LAICA, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. At that time my husband had become an attorney, and he was able to put together the lease structure for the building in Century City where we opened. We got it for \$1.00 a year. It was an unbuilt out space. And we didn't have to really invest a dime. And we opened, I think, with a terrific show, one of the opening shows that Hal Glicksman curated, which was absolutely fabulous on Los Angeles, or Southern California assemblage, collage and assemblage. Gifford Phillips started this wonderful LAICA magazine called *The Journal*, which came directly out of LAICA. But the most important magazine was *Art Forum*, which was above the old Ferus Gallery during the fifties and sixties on La Cienega for about 10 years.

PK: Was it that long?

JG: Yes.

PK: Because I know it was briefly in San Francisco, then here, Coplan's the leader. Right?

JG: Right. And Phil Leider. So here was this same deck of cards, the same cast of characters, but we were shifting roles. And it was a very fruitful time. And I was getting a little wiser, and stronger, and older, and so on. It was in LAICA that I began, I asked for a corner for myself to do books by artists. And I started this area within LAICA called Books by Artists. And one night I had a dream that I needed Chris Burden's books for the book department at LAICA. And I knew that the books were only in one gallery called Newspace. So I called the director of the gallery, Jean St. Pierre, and I said, "Can I come down tomorrow and pick up some Chris Burden books for the LAICA Books by Artists Department?" And he said, "Okay." I had that dream that I went down to the gallery. I did in fact go down to the gallery. I acted on it. And I knocked on the door. And it was 27 years ago today. And why am I so clear about that? Because it was the eve of my birthday, my 39th birthday. Which is tomorrow.

PK: Tomorrow's your birthday?

JG: Yes.

PK: Happy birthday.

JG: Thank you. And I bought Newspace on the eve of my 39th birthday. Which gave me the form and the structure I needed. So I went down and I knocked on the door of Newspace. Around the corner was another gallery called Cirrus. And this artist answered the door and he was drugged. He was living like a trapped animal in Newspace, which was bolted because his creditors were like wolves at the door. He was sleeping under a desk in the back. In the main room were Garabedian's paintings. He had just finished a show and Jean wouldn't let him in to take out his paintings. In the back there was a drawing, a pencil drawing called *The Church of Human Energy* and it was signed Chris Burden. And I went in ostensibly to borrow these books. And I walked out owning the gallery.

PK: Just like that?

JG: Well, what happened was, Jean was overwhelmed with debts. People were loaning him money left and right.

PK: Tell me Jean's name again.

JG: Jean St. Pierre. He had run it as a cooperative, but he had many backers, among which were the Gribins.

PK: Larry Gribin.

JG: Exactly. Ruth and Larry Gribin. Well, I go to the back and the place is so dirty, I mean, it's just filthy. He was living there three or four months without any provisions. He never went out. It was just absolutely horrible. Okay, I get the Chris Burden books and I put the books in front of me. He's sitting there and I'm here, we're on opposite sides of the desk, and he is playing a song on this phonograph. It was Canon in D. He was playing it over and over and over. And I began to really listen to the music. And I was listening to him. And he tells me this story that his was the first graduating class from University of California, Irvine. The first graduating art class. And that many of the artists had come together and opened a gallery, Newspace. New for Newport and Space for space. And when he felt a little flush they moved up to Melrose. At that time the address was 5015 Melrose.

PK: And that's where Cirrus was at the time?

JG: That was around the corner. And then everything snapped. He couldn't pay back anybody. He ran out of energy. He started to drink and all hell broke loose. And it was the end. And he was afraid for his life, people were threatening him left and right. And I asked him to tell me how much money he owed people. We were together about three or four hours.

PK: He's looking happier. Right?

JG: Can be. I mean, we were both hypnotized. And I said, "Okay, I'm going to buy the gallery. And I'm going to buy all your debts." This was a Thursday night. I had to be at the museum by 7:30 because I belonged to The Modern and Contemporary Art Council with the museum. So I must have gone to Jean about 2:00 in the afternoon and stayed until 6:00 or 6:30. And I walked out owning the gallery.

PK: Shocked probably. Were you shocked?

JG: No. I woke up. I knew I could do it. I needed everybody's help.

PK: With all those best friends.

JG: I knew I could do it. I went to the museum that night. And I was chairman of the new talent committee with Elise Grinstein. The year before we had chosen as our artist for the new talent awards, Chris Burden and Alexis Smith. But I had to get up that night and say, "Guess what? It's the eve of my 39th birthday and I've just bought an art gallery, Newspace on Melrose. And I'm open for business on Tuesday. And I have to resign from the committee." Well, people were stunned. I mean, absolutely stunned. It was 1975 and the Whitney Bi-Annual had just opened up. And there were four Newspace artists in The Whitney.

PK: Who were they?

JG: They were all chosen by Marcia Tucker and Barbara Haskell. Of course, Barbara Haskell had been from L.A., so she knew a lot. And she chose people mostly from Nick Wilder's gallery and from my gallery. Who were they? Connie Zehr, Martha Alf, Gary Beydler, one of the most exciting works there. And Charles Garabedian.

PK: Is that when Garabedian started to get so much attention?

JG: He started to get attention really when he went to show with LA Louver.

PK: I remember in the old days he was . . .

JG: Yes, he had attention from where we were. Sure he did. He was with another gallery too for awhile. Very exciting. I can't think of her name, but she was a big collector. So here it is now, I now own Newspace. I came home and said, "Monte, I have to tell you." He said, "What did you do today, honey?" "Well, I bought a gallery." "What?" I said, "Yes, this is what I want to do, and I think I can do it. I'm going to do it." There was no question in my mind. And I already had some wherewithal because I had worked for Esther and worked up and down and across the street.

PK: Felix?

JG: Felix, yes. Who had the most superb director of all. Her name was Joan as well. And, oh, boy, there was a lot to learn. But I had also looked at a lot of art because I was on the new talent committee at LACMA. So I had kind of a whole roster of people in mind. By the time I opened Tuesday morning the gallery had been painted. We just worked. I called in the artists. I told them what was going on. I said, "Those of you that want to stay with the gallery, I want you. Those that want to leave, leave." Most everyone left because they did not get on well with Jean, and they weren't going to get their money. So they were unhappy. . . . Anyway, I brought in my own team. I opened Tuesday morning with Jean St. Pierre's white paintings. All white. The whole thing. And I sold out the exhibit. This is September 1975.

PK: Was that through your contacts?

JG: I don't know what it was. It was just a change of energy, the nerve of having all white paintings to open an exhibit. I was both the laughingstock and just believed in minimalism. It just was right. The minimal. And, in fact, the next suite of white paintings that Jean did were purchased by the Orange County Museum by Tom Garver. Tom Garver bought Jean's series of white paintings. Well, I followed that with all black paintings. By the third or fourth show I had the sculptures of Christopher Georgesco. There were great rumors about his work. I mean, everyone was tipping everyone off about this brilliant, young sculptor. The review was so phenomenal that I just didn't even know what hit me. Of course, we were the new kids on the block. The gallery had changed ownership. There weren't that many galleries at that time.

PK: Was that a down period?

JG: Yes.

PK: Mid seventies.

JG: It was a recession. Terrible recession. On the first day that the review came out, which was absolutely raving, a cab stops in front of the gallery, and a man gets out and he runs into the gallery. And he walks around the gallery. It was just me sitting there at my little desk. And he says, "Send me that." These are 10 feet tall concrete sculptures. He says, "Send me that." I said, "Okay. Who are you?" "I'm Edward Albee."

PK: Oh, that's how you met?

JG: That's how we met. But having been a theater arts major at UCLA he was my hero. I could just think of one thing to say to him. "I always knew I'd meet you." So anyway, that became a relationship and a communication of extraordinary depth and value to me, because of his passion for art. And he came in on the basis of the review. He bought this marvelous sculpture right away. And he told me he would like me to come to New York to meet his best friend in art who was Betty Parsons.

PK: Who is the artist that he bought there?

JG: Christopher Georgesco. And he and Therrien were starting out at the same time. And they were the post DeWain Valentine, where DeWain was working the lacquers and lucite sculpture. And then Peter Alexander was working in plastics and so was Irwin. Georgesco was working in concrete. But several tragedies intervened to hurt him. But he's back. And it was Albee that really helped me so much. So I went to New York. And it was Edward that introduced me to Betty Parsons, who was my all-time hero. I had two Bettys in my life. West coast Betty was Asher. East coast was Betty Parsons. And, of course, I told her how when I was 16 I came to New York, and I saw her installing the exhibition of Ellsworth Kelly. At any rate, I became Betty Parsons' dealer. I did not represent anybody outside of L.A. except Betty Parsons. And she introduced me to Lee Krasner and Edward introduced me to a lot of poets and playwrights in New York. And we are friends to this day. In fact, Edward has just written a beautiful catalog on one of our artists, Jeff Price, who opens in New York in October. So it's all very fortunate.

PK: What a fortuitous series of events and introductions.

JG: Yes. Now, this is where Newspace really became quite remarkable. And, really, I never talked about some of these situations that I'm going to mention now. Somebody introduced me to a man named Alfred Taubman, who was in Detroit. He was a builder with a passion for art. And he was just starting to collect. This was well before Mr. Taubman bought Sotheby's and, of course, many years before his personal problems. But Mr. Taubman wanted to build a collection. He was having a home built by Richard Meier in Florida. And he tells my friend of his interest. And my friend turned to me and said, "Joni, he wants Rothko, Calder, Stella, Warhol. You're the only person I know who knows all these things." Over a period of three and a half years, he purchased from me four of the world's greatest Rothko's, Calder, Betty Asher's Warhol, "Silver Marlon", other Warhols, Betty's magnificent double concentric squares, many Lichtensteins. And that gave me my cushion to ease things up for me a little bit financially where I could purchase the building that I now own.

PK: When did you make that move?

JG: I was in the first Newspace at 5015 from '75 through '79. And I bought the present building at 5241 Melrose in '80, in the fall of 1980.

PK: 22 years now.

JG: Yes, right. And five in the old Newspace, so 27 years. I moved further east by six or seven blocks. Across from Raleigh Studios and next door to Paramount. And I was lucky as each one of these acquisitions of Mr. Taubman were fabulous stories, particularly rescuing one great Rothko out of the jaws of Christie's Auction House in New York.

PK: How?

JG: It was scheduled for auction and I had already promised Mr. Taubman that he would have it. I had to go to New York and break the contract, which really was some doing, with Christie's. Begging them, I mean, I was near tears. But I had to persuade them, please, to let this go. And they did do that. I was able to come up with enough correspondence to show that I did have the rights of purchase with Mr. Taubman and that this is the expressed Rothko painting. And the owner should not have given it to Christie's. I had to prevail. I had to prevail. My life was on the line.

PK: So how did you meet Taubman again?



JG: Well, I really didn't meet him until the end of our relationship. Because we would talk on the phone, everything is negotiated through his friend, my friend. We had a mutual friend. But when he came to buy something he would send out a lieutenant to approve art work for him. But by this time he had already done all of his homework. He knew everything about the painting. For instance, one of the paintings came from Barbara Reese Poe. So it was one of the last great Rothko's. It was a maroon Rothko. And I had to come up with so much paperwork about all of this.

[SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PK: Continuing this second session interview on 23 September with Joni Gordon. This is tape two, side A. Rothko, Taubman and so forth. We were talking about the role, I mean, he obviously was key in providing, as you said, a level of security for the gallery.

JG: Yes, of course. You know, I had very humble beginnings. And I paid \$200 for Newspace, for the key. The key itself cost me 26 cents. My rent was \$200.00, plus all of the debts of Jean St. Pierre. And it was a very humble building, the first Newspace at 5015 Melrose, that I was in. 5241 Melrose, Newspace is still beautiful inside and I'm in an improving area. And I've always been off the beaten track. But I decided at the very beginning of my gallery that I would operate on two levels, possibly even three. The two levels being a sincere and serious exhibition schedule of Los Angeles painting and sculpture, contemporary. The second level would be 20th century master works of extreme importance and scarcity. The third level, if I chose to do the third level, would be in the ethnographic arts. Not so much in exhibition, but in representation for collections. And in that area my proficiency is American Indian art, and African art. And that's when I would work with Dr. Ralph Altman while he was alive. And I was interested in this ethnographical material. But not to sell it, just to exhibit it. But my first devotion was to Los Angeles painting and sculpture. And it says so on the letterhead from the day I bought the gallery. Now, going back to the gallery for a moment. This is the gallery where Chris Burden had his first shows, Paul McCarthy, John Baldessari, Judy Fiskin, John Sonsini, Dan McCleary, Robert Cumming, and the entire group of non-objective painters, with the exception of John Miller. But I was terribly interested in all the monochromatic, what I would call reflective restrained painting; following the tradition of McLaughlin. I was deeply concerned with the slow, immutable . . . I was involved with it spiritually, aesthetically and philosophically. And I tried to impart that value all the way through my whole career.

PK: That's interesting, because I'm not sure I knew that. So you're attracted to minimal art.

JG: Always.

PK: People like John McCracken interested you and . . .

JG: Yes. I have a major McCracken in the gallery right now. The largest one he's ever done actually. And John McLaughlin is a large part of Newspace.

PK: But you certainly aren't, well, you didn't say this is your only interest.

JG: No.

PK: But that is a focus, because, of course, you have a number of other artists . . .

JG: I do. The abstract painters, the high achievers like Kristen Leachman, of course. And the ephemeral artists like Connie Zehr, even though she's new she's old in my heart and mind. She's been in my thoughts forever. Figuration, I think that one of the finest artists in the city right now, and has been for some time, and he's with Acme, is John Sonsini. And he had all those beginning shows which were with me. In fact, everybody of some substance started with Newspace. Although in my roster now I have two of the original artists for 27 years. Martha Alf, whose achievement is just a classic example of the independent California artist who has achieved such a high level of quality and she sustained her art through all her years. She's 72 years old.

PK: You said there are two that go back.

JG: Christopher Georgesco, the sculptor. I've always kept him with me, although he's had terrible, terrible tragedies. His father was a well-known architect in Los Angeles, very well-known. And he was murdered in front of his studio in Venice in the seventies. It was such a violent time in Venice. It just set Christopher back years. But he's stable now. He's doing beautiful work.

PK: How do you account for the longevity of those two particular relationships? Typically, from what I've observed, artists do tend to move around. For different reasons. Some of them are most legitimate. But there's obviously a kind of loyalty on your part.

JG: I'm very loyal.

PK: And a loyalty on their part.

JG: On theirs too. It's unusual because it is to some a relationship, like a marriage. And the honor, and loyalty, and trust that goes into a relationship like this is, well, it just makes life worth living. It's very rare. I realize it. But I know that also the great galleries, historically, always kept their artists, or some of them. Now, I mean, Betty Parson's gallery was broken because the artists walked down the hall to Sidney Janis. You know who I'm talking about? Pollock and Nauman and, etc., etc. I did the best that I could at a time where Los Angeles came into its own. I have felt now that we're in a very low period of art.

PK: You mean in terms of quality of what's being produced?

JG: Yes. You're known by your art school rather than what you're doing. And that there is a corruption of . . . much more of a blending between the commercial need and the artistic resistance. That's right. Art made to sell. Catering to a trend, a rumor. The commercial needs. It's so blended in the art schools, it's almost a how-to course in how to sell, how to make art that sells, how to program yourself.

PK: How to market yourself.

JG: Yes. It's deeply about marketing.

PK: Do you feel that that's true only of here, or do you see that broadly manifested?

JG: I'm seeing it more here, although New York is a past master at it. But they do it in much subtler ways. They're able to absorb many of the issues surrounding marketing a little bit better than we are. But it's here because this is now the third or fourth generation since the fifties, since we've began talking about Walter Hopps' classes, which was the age of innocence. I mean, Betty Asher used to keep a notebook. She'd write down the names of all these people that she'd heard about; H.C. Westermann, for instance. Joseph Cornell. And I used to see this notebook. This was her homework. Her self-assigned homework.

PK: What about Westermann? Did he show? He must have had a gallery here?

JG: Yes, he did. Several actually. He was very close to Betty. And she owned a lot of his work.

PK: Great artist.

JG: Great. Absolutely.

PK: That show at Geffen [Contemporary].

JG: It's terrific. Yes, absolutely resonate. And the thing is, I don't think people think or feel deeply. People today buy on rumor. There's absolutely no connectedness between thinking and feeling by themselves for five minutes to reflect on something. And so a lot of what passes for art is just a lot of buzz. And it didn't used to be that way.

PK: How would you describe Newspace within this community? I know it's changing, but within the community of galleries, I think, in particular, because they have their different personalities.

JG: Everyone does.

PK: And if you could describe it as . . . if you had to describe it as a community with Newspace being the you in the neighborhood, is there a way that you could give a feeling of a sense of that?

JG: That's the most wonderful question, Paul, because, of course, that is the question. First of all, I've been working out of the loop. When you say that real estate is about location, location, location, I've done everything to challenge that. Not so much as the ownership of the building, which is marvelous if I were just a property investor. But I've been out of the loop in terms of the marketing and commercial aspects for two reasons. Number one, I didn't join Bergamont [Station] Mall. I invented myself and Newspace. I look at art intuitively, with a bias on beauty, classicism, clarity, skills, and originality. I am independent. I could have moved at any time. I could have leased out where I am now. But I would never do that. It reminded me of a bunch of England's row houses where if you had too much to drink you'd walk into the wrong house. However, I miss my location being an attraction. I have to work awfully hard for attention.

PK: To get people to find you.

JG: Yes. Yes. So I have to make it kind of a destination. And somehow or another we have prevailed. I've been a success since the day I opened. I have no partners. I don't take any money from anybody. I've made it on my own. How, Paul, is unbelievable. I don't know, because I pay my artists immediately and never keep any money from them. They may get paid in installments, but they get paid immediately.

PK: Or when you get paid.

JG: Yes. Well, sometimes I advance the money if I think it's just too extraordinary. Okay. So what makes it different? The negative side is that I am out of the ca-chunk, ca-chunk of the tour buses.

PK: Well, you don't get drop-in traffic for one thing.

JG: Oh, I do.

PK: You do?

JG: From the studios. Oh, yes.

PK: Oh, yes, I forgot about that. I mean, there are people who are . . .

JG: And there's some new fancy restaurants too.

PK: Well, who knows. Maybe you'll be the magnet.

JG: Well, it could happen. I respect art and real estate. So there's that. I am out of the loop. Secondly, I haven't followed the issue, particularly, of the schools. For instance, taking on the new UCLA graduates.

PK: Well, not everybody's doing that.

JG: Or following the Dave Hickey mantra. It's just not me. I've kind of stood for old fashioned, basic values. Feelings, number one. I don't like paintings you have to read. I went to school with Margo Leavin. We grew up together. We stopped talking. Or she stopped talking to me when I opened my gallery.

PK: So she shows Baldessari?

JG: She does now. Yes.

PK: But you showed him first?

JG: Yes, I did. And I own very early works of his. And if I do the thirtieth anniversary party, John is going to do something special, and so is Chris Burden and so on. I've maintained wonderful, loving relationships with almost everybody. Only one artist in 27 years did a very treacherous thing.

PK: You can't talk about that? You don't want to talk about that.

JG: No.

PK: Describe though what that means without mentioning a name. What it takes. In other words, what you find unacceptable in your relationship with the artists?

JG: Well, you have a verbal contract. I've never had written contracts, but I have a verbal contract with each and every artist. And I am accessible 7/24. I'm an art doctor. My thoughts, my feelings, money, whatever an artist needs is there. The only thing that would break the code of devotion is if an artist sold work or made a deal and absolutely excluded me. And that would show a character flaw of the first order, I think. I have to have money to operate. I'm a self-made woman totally. Nothing was exactly handed to me. I put one foot in front of the other, one dollar in front of another. That I've been very fortunate, and very blessed is absolutely true, but I've also worked very, very hard. And been idealistic and faithful. I've made a few mistakes visually with certain artists, but I've gotten over it.

PK: Well, that's exploration, experimentation.

JG: Exploration. Exactly. I mean, my heart was in the right place. But I have such a good track record, Paul. It's unbelievable how many artists came out of Newspace.

PK: Do you think of yourself and Newspace as in some ways an incubator?

JG: Yes, I do.

PK: I mean, does that term sort of please you in terms of what you sought to give, not to experience yourself, but to give to the artist?

JG: Yes, it's a nurturing place.

PK: Do you feel like an art mother?

JG: Of course. You can't help that. That's part of the package.

PK: Well, a lot of the dealers have been women, and you get the sense, being careful not to get in any stereotypical roles, but there is with [Edith] Halpert.

JG: Of course. Those were my type of women. I am that type of woman.

PK: Yes, that's what I'm asking you.

JG: I have two successful, wonderful children of my own, four grandchildren. I have stood for those values. I haven't always been the most avant garde dealer. At one time I opened Newspace with all white paintings. But I have not followed very many trends. I've tried to keep close to my value system.

PK: Well, what about a couple of things there I want to ask you and maybe I'll just go ahead and ask them.

JG: Sure.

PK: The value system, you keep referring, you refer to yourself as an idealist and that there are certain personal values that you feel you owe to, and that you feel, I would imagine, define your enterprise, therefore the work of the gallery. And how would you describe the values?

JG: The human hand touches the painting. If it didn't I still think Pollock and Warhol were the two greatest. However, everything has to touch. All the points have to touch, north, south, east and west. A compass is made up of four points. The same thing in art. It's made up of at least four points. You have to draw. I'm not interested in illustration. I'm not interested in written language associated with contemporary art today. I am interested in the moving hand that comes out of drawing. I'm interested in the digging out of each artist, to dig out their innermost capacity for feeling, for empathy, for reductiveness, to translate human values and frailties into art.

PK: That's the second point.

JG: Yes.

PK: And that, not to interrupt you, but what you described there basically earlier more than that, in some ways the first two points also there would be a turn that would embrace them, which would be humanistic.

JG: Absolutely.

PK: So that's the direction I feel you're going. But I want to hear the other two points.

JG: But a humanistic, you can also, I mean, that doesn't mean that I'm attracted to the women's movement in art, because I'm not.

PK: Oh, no, that's political.

JG: Exactly. I am devoid of politics whatsoever. I don't need to make a statement about feminist art because I am feminine. So by the nature of my work I'm already defining it. And I have no calculation or strategy of marketing and so on. The paintings seek their own level. I've been very blessed with clients and people from modest incomes to the richest people of our time and city who have somehow either found me or I have found them, and we've connected. After Alfred Taubman, I sold to Mr. Segerstrom the Henry Moore that's in front of the Orange County Performing Arts. Nobody knows this because I've never talked about all this.

PK: Well, the tape machine knows it.

JG: It's time to make these things known. And then I had this wonderful, wonderful client named Leona Cantor, who was the ex-wife of G. Bernard Cantor from Cantor-Fitzgerald, who had the Rodin sculpture collection.

PK: I thought that was Gerald.

JG: Yes. Gerald Bernard. He was called Bernie Canter.

PK: Because they call it the Gerald Cantor Museum [Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts] at Stanford.

JG: Yes. Well, that too. This was his ex-wife. She was my wonderful client. She actually started Bernie Cantor in collecting. And she bought from me one of the greatest Georgia O'Keeffe paintings. I found an O'Keeffe behind every painting are these fabulous detective stories. It's like, what's the name of the programs on TV? *Crime*

## *Scene Investigation?*

PK: Right.

JG: Well, every painting, Degas said, "Every painting is a crime." And it's true. I can take that position because I'm constantly covering, recovering works of art that have been forgotten. Or from your book, for instance, I remember a certain Knud Merrill's that I'm just crazy about.

PK: Quite an artist.

JG: Yes. And Charles Howard, very provocative to me.

PK: Before we move on though, I want to make sure I have these four points. Because when you were talking about values, I guess those are considerations that govern you in your work with the gallery, and you said there were specifically four. The drawing and the evidence of the moving hand and touch. The second was empathy, emotions, feelings and beyond that a sense of human values. What's three and four?

JG: Actually, okay, three and four, I'm actually going to give you four. The first is the A and that's authenticity. That painting or sculpture, whatever it might be, has to be the watermark of the artist. Otherwise it's a forgery or a copy. It has to be absolutely authentic to the very life and style of that artist. So that's a number one value.

PK: Not drawing?

JG: No, drawing certainly is too, but I'm discussing it on another level right now.

PK: Oh, okay.

JG: Four compass points. A, Authenticity. B, beauty. I am innately drawn to beautiful things. C, clarity. D, discipline.

PK: So those are cardinal points.

JG: The cardinal points.

PK: But different from, or somehow including maybe these other things you were mentioning.

JG: Yes, those are the shadow cardinal points.

PK: These are the shadow ones. Okay. Well, we don't have to turn out to be three, four or five, but I just want to make sure that . . . basically your requirements, those things that you are looking for. Now, how . . . I'm going to turn this tape over now, but maybe be thinking about the question for a minute as I turn it over, but here are the points, here are the values. How do you recognize these in individual artists? Maybe you can talk about some of these artists.

JG: Oh, I'd love to. Yes.

[SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

PK: Once again, continuing the interview on September 23 with Joni Gordon. This is tape two, side B. So why don't you pick up where we left off. I could sort of restate the question or give you enough of it so that you remember, but I'm very interested as a matter of fact, because this matters so much to you, and you're taking pride in it, I think. And you've described qualities if you will, requirements in terms of what you would expect, in works of art or maybe in the individuals. Maybe in the whole package. And how do you recognize these? How does it emerge that you feel that yes this fits for me, that I can believe in this, and therefore I can sell it?

JG: Your questions are really the most important part of this, because I remember Man Ray once said in a lecture that if he were a teacher he would grade students by their questions and not by their answers. So I'm in a very curious profession. It's not a business. It's a profession. And that is because if you look at the configuration of what it is, the funnel, let's say, of art versus the funnel of business, they're in reverse shape. The funnel of art is the classic funnel shape. It's wide at the top where all the art comes in. And it's very narrow at the bottom where it drips out. And I'm the person who holds that funnel, taking in as much evidence, which is the art, as I can and then seeing how it's going to register with me. Now, first of all, I never look to understand art. I don't need to solve my life problems or my daily difficulties through art. Art is more of a breath line for me. It is constant and faithful. Art never leaves me. I'm never disappointed in art. And I don't judge art on rational terms. I judge it as a well-spring of goodness of life. It's not a product of an art school. It's the collective consciousness of a society and a community that transcends all time. Therefore, I don't have to have the burden of understanding art, or having to qualify it in terms of its position in society. It's as natural as breath to me, or natural life. So I don't

wear my four compass points into a studio and say, "This is what I'm looking for." It all happens out of mystery when some kind of relevancy or problem strikes me as so attuned to ancient human concerns. What do I do? How do I get there? Today I'm alive, tomorrow I could be dead. You know, all those deals. I don't need to go to cathedrals or anything to have the art. The art is free. I just collect it for a little while in a structure called an exhibition and let it do its work. People are moths to the flame. You can't sell a work of art. It sells itself. I have news for everybody, if somebody wants something, hell or high water is not going to keep them from it. My job is to guide the principals, to make it easy for people to have beautiful things, and to help them with the transition or payments of something. I'm just a practical person. But literally I'm just a passage. The art flows through me or the gallery.

PK: It's a conduit.

JG: It's a conduit, that's right. I am between the rock and the hard place. The rock being the artist, and the hard place being the buyer. So I always see art as a problem that fascinates me.

PK: What do you mean by that?

JG: Well, who knows what an artist really is saying or has in mind. The need is stronger than the meaning. The need to paint or to make or to do is far beyond and of much greater value to me than what a painting means. I don't believe a painting means anything.

PK: Well, that's a big issue.

JG: Yes.

PK: Because there are a lot of people that agree with that. And I'm writing something right now where I'm going back and forth with that very notion in connection with a particular artist whom we mentioned earlier, Roland Petersen showed at Esther Robles. But on the other hand, I guess then, and my making a comment about that remark, you've also said earlier that you don't know what an artist is after or wants or something like that.

JG: But I'm willing to toss my luck with them. It's a gamble. Commercially it's all a gamble.

PK: Right. Well, probably we should talk about a couple of specific examples of artists. Because generalities are really slippery.

JG: Oh, absolutely. Go ahead.

PK: But I am interested in this notion, because, partly because you have this kind of relationship, this relationship also, I think, with people. This is my sense. And that it's very difficult to set them aside. That doesn't mean that you have to love the person, I guess, to really like the art work. But are you interested in, do you see the artist, the person in the work of art? This is the question that interests me.

JG: Yes, because the overriding issue becomes style. This is the defining style of the artist in motion, let's say. It might change six months from now two years, 10 years, but the style is that unique thumb print of each artist, some of whom are doomed to success, such as the Picassos and Warhols and the de Koonings and so on. And I say doomed to success because success brings with it so much calamity, but I'd rather have success than not have success.

PK: You have to have some success to continue.

JG: You have to have some success, exactly. But style is the richest thing in the world. And very few artists understand their style. Today the problem is that style is used for itself and not because of evolvment or personal truth.

PK: In other words, operates on the surface, is that the idea?

JG: Right, right. But that's the trick of today. That's the deal. And that's why there's so much appropriation. There's very little creative art going on. But, like T.S. Eliot said, "Culture runs in peaks and valleys," and we're just kind of in a valley right now. I'm hoping to see our way into a peak because there's some awfully good painting out there. For instance, I went to visit one of my artists eight weeks ago. Four paintings in four years this artist has done, only four paintings in four years. And this will be his second exhibit. Now, most dealers could never tolerate that. I can tolerate a great deal. Much, much more than most of my fellow dealers. I just do. I'm very, very patient. Anyway, he opens up the door to his studio/garage and puts the light on. And I walk inside. There's three white paintings and one black painting. Which I was told there would be that. They are seven feet by five and a half feet. All of a sudden, Paul, I just started to cry. I was so moved by the extraordinary style or need to paint these paintings. It was so evident to me that this artist's truth resided in his paintings. And that it would be evident to everybody. You didn't have to be a rocket scientist or a painting professor to know what

beauty is.

PK: Ineffable.

JG: Ineffable. That's right. You go to the County Museum when they're having a blockbuster show and every single person, whether they're plumbers, truck drivers, I don't care what they are, to giants of industry, to the best in their professions, lawyers, doctors, educators, whatever, all walk to the same paintings. They all know. They're drawn in by beauty. They can't express it.

PK: Art that expresses, I think this is what you said, or that interests you, expresses the inexpressible.

JG: Inexpressible, yes. And why am I interested in that? Well, of course, that finally becomes my definition of my style. But I'm interested in the eventual bonding of our humanness with the inexplicable.

PK: The mystery.

JG: Yes. And absolutely, a painting makes a proposition. It can be an intellectual proposition. It can be emotional. It can be a combination of both. But if the underlying issues aren't deeply integrated into artistic skills and into a spiritual personification or energy, let's call it energy, then all is lost.

PK: I'm inclined to agree. In the time left to us, let's see if we can, your choice, I can suggest a couple of artists, but maybe two artists who, and maybe one who has been with you a long time. We could do Martha Alf, but I was thinking of an older artist who you're showing now for her first gallery show, Connie Zehr. And which I, of course, was astounded that that was her first gallery show. But here's somebody you've been watching for many years. What I want to get at in a way is, I think you even have a reputation for finding younger artists, being attracted to them and their work, and when you make a decision then you are supportive.

JG: That's right, Paul. That's how it is. Your perception is right. You maybe didn't know that I'm also involved in so many great resells. Maybe you did know that.

PK: But before we run out of tape I want to get you to talk then about . . . just think about what it is in these individuals that you choose them. And one of them, somebody you've admired or are so happy to have come for the show that you have now that you've described them as wonderful. That's Connie Zehr. And then I would also like to know about your history with Kristen Leachman.

JG: Oh, I'd love to tell, yes.

PK: I mean, those two just as examples, not that they're the only ones. Can you do that?

JG: Of course. The two women could not be more opposite in how they came to the gallery. Let's do Leachman first.

PK: Okay.

JG: I must receive 20 packets of slides a month. When business is good and the economy is flush and all of that I maybe get 40 or 50. You know, people sending in their slides with a self addressed stamped envelope. Leachman was one of those artists who sent in a packet of her slides. In 27 years I've only taken on two artists from slides. One being Kristen Leachman and the other being a sculptor by the name of Wade Sanders. He's in New York. That's it. In 27 years, two, of all those submissions.

PK: That's quite a distinction.

JG: Yes. Well, I mean, is it because the photographer just happened to take terribly good pictures, or did these people just jump right out of the 35 millimeter frame and say, "Hey, I could be yours." Leachman immediately had something, profound skills wrapped in an inordinate complex of narrative, the early first narrative paintings. Her puzzle paintings were her first. And it was a raging success. And speaking of independent people, I mean, she adores her Pasadena friends.

PK: She has some good friends over there.

JG: She has really found herself. She's an extraordinarily beautiful girl, both inside and out, she's so giving. She is blessed with a once-in-a-lifetime talent. And it's not going to burn out. She is truly endowed like a great opera singer. You just get better and better and set yourself higher and higher standards to take on bigger themes. And now, of course, she's working on a complex of ideas that have to do with traditional arts and crafts. And also she's informing her paintings with revered crafts of American culture. And she's painting, for instance, the weaving of a rug. But it's the weaving of art and craft. It's the weaving of the tradition of everything. Her themes are large and executed with the most unbelievable talent. I haven't really seen a painter as natural as Kristin

Leachman.

PK: Did you recognize quite early on?

JG: Immediately.

PK: This thing that you saw. Even from the start, you saw something. Wow! Something is here!

JG: Yes, immediately. I bought that painting in the living room right from the slide, even though it was in the first show. Immediately it just said to me, this young woman has "it". Whatever all this "it" is. If I were looking for a movie star quality or longevity, first of all, she's emotionally so well put together. But she's just a natural great, great artist. I expect her to go very, very far.

PK: Now she's extremely ambitious.

JG: Oh, extremely. In the best sense of the word.

PK: Sort of honorable way.

JG: Absolutely.

PK: And I gather, it's not my business to comment on this, but I gather then that these are the values. This also attaches itself in this case within the, I suppose, ethics of an art practice, if you could use that term.

JG: Yes.

PK: This attaches itself to the overall notion of the values.

JG: Well, it does, but she has an abundance of these qualities. I have artists that will abandon their work at the doorstep like their child, and are so shy and can't meet the public, can barely attend an opening. I mean, it's so painful for them. Kristin flourishes in a social situation. She is the most adjusted person I've ever met. Well, she talks, she's so verbal. Most artists are not that verbal. If they were so verbal they would probably write. And she can't write.

PK: No, I don't know about that. But she admires writing though.

JG: She does, she does.

PK: But this really interests me because in a way you're beginning to describe, if you painted a portrait, created a series of qualities that would come together to make a successful artist the one with principles.

JG: Oh, yes. She's perfect, a poster child. She truly is. She works the room unbelievably. She has these, I mean, she's just wholesome, I guess is the word. If she were my daughter or something . . .

PK: You probably feel a little bit that way about her.

JG: Well, I have a daughter that looks like her a little bit. But I cannot get over the range of her natural gifts, her talent. This new painting, it's 19 feet. It is positively a brilliant American painting. And I qualify it by saying American, because it could never have been done anywhere else. Never. Constitutionally it is made up of an American ethic and painterliness that just inhabits American art.

PK: That's said very well. Earlier on you said, or maybe it was during a break, that you didn't feel you had the capacity for writing. But what you just said could be set down and would be beautifully expressed, beautifully written. So I think that makes it pretty clear what you see in that particular example. Kristin Leachman. What about Connie, who is older? I mean, how old is Connie?

JG: Connie is in her sixties.

PK: Yes. So it's maybe 30 years.

JG: Oh, at least.

PK: So that's generational.

JG: Oh, sure.

PK: So what about, tell me about Connie and what appeals to you?



JG: Connie also came from a farm. So did Kristin. In fact, many of my artists came from the farm. And it's something I always wanted myself, was to have a farm, a ranch. I like horses. I do. And I think that their common quality, what qualities they have in common is that they each understand the edge of their work and take their work over the top of that edge. They go over things carefully. They scrutinize. They don't have the angst of why they do something or how they do something. They're both profoundly naturally gifted. Mechanically and eye-to-hand, all these things, and intellectually they are wonderful. But they take their work on to a new expression, over the top. They go around the corner of space to perfect that. To bring out its, well, we call it well-crafted. But that isn't really what we should be saying. I mean, certainly it's beautifully finished and so on. But those are conscious painterly decisions that an artist either has that or they don't. If they don't have it they have to understand why they don't. And what they're trying to say in not having that. But if they do have it, like Connie and Kristin, it should be acknowledged and celebrated. Because that's part of their being. That's just part of it. Kristin's native abilities astound me. I try not to say too much about it because it is so breathtaking to me, the scope of her talent. Fortunately, she doesn't have to teach. But if she were to teach she would be really something. Maybe one day though she'll be a visiting teacher.

PK: Well, she's a good communicator. You know what strikes me, tell me just a little bit if you would. Oh, with Connie, and this isn't necessarily comparing one against the other, but with Connie's show, which I'm looking forward to seeing, you describe something that, just the way that you described it sounded very exciting. And it suggests this continuing movement, if you want to say over the top, or always seeking. But it seems to me that it's like within a basic framework, a set of ideas. She continues to mine that. Is that what you feel?

JG: That's fair. And that's how they both are. Both of these women are natural to themselves. They're comfortable within themselves.

PK: And perhaps they found something.

JG: That keeps giving and giving.

PK: Yes. I mean, they made a right choice. They encountered something.

JG: Yes, that's part of their character too. Substance. And I, of course, I love Kristin's character. I truly love her personhood. She's just a wonderful human being. And I want everything for her.

PK: Well, I think that show will be . . . I think both of these shows should . . .

JG: They're back-to-back.

PK: Yes, back-to-back. I mean, that's one of the reasons I wanted to look at them because at this moment that means a lot to you as their dealer. And you're opening up a season of one, two.

JG: And I have a three.

PK: Oh, who's the three.

JG: One, two, three punch here. My third is David Grant who is doing some of the most exciting American sculpture anywhere in the world right now. And he's a friend of Connie's. And he's going to be in Michael Duncan's big new show that he's doing at the San Jose Museum. Are you going to come up for the opening?

PK: Well, yes, probably.

JG: There's going to be so much excitement about the show.

PK: When is it?

JG: November 22, I think. It's going to be a knock-out. It's just so juicy. So full of Michael's kind of energy and commitment.

PK: Well, he's a good critic.

JG: Oh, boy, can he write well!

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

NOTE BY JONI GORDON:

I must add the FOUR mantras that have sustained me:

KATHAN BROWN: "The problem with art is to be right  
(Crown Point and truthful at the same time."  
Press)

CHRIS BURDEN: "The Church of Human Energy."

RICHARD DIEBENKORN: "If it sells the price is right."

RICHARD ARMSTRONG: "You will have to invent the whole  
Thing: yourself and Newspace."

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *May 19, 2005*