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Oral history interview with Kristina Faragher,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Kristina Faragher on November 12, 2002. The interview was conducted at Kristina Faragher's home in Redlands, California by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funded by the Joni Gordon Gift.

Interview

KF: KRISTINA FARAGHER

PK: PAUL J. KARLSTROM

Tape 1, Side A

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Kristina Faragher at her home, and studio (in the next room,) in Redlands, California. The date is November 12, 2002. This is the interviewer for the Archives in perhaps his last official interview, after a 30 year career, Paul Karlstrom. And this interview is part of a series, a theme series of brief interviews on the subject of artists and models. And Kristina is an artist and was and is a model. So what's particularly interesting, as we will find out as we talk, is this integration of experience and interest. And I'm fascinated to know just how this took place and how it contributed to your growth. So you have the two roles to tell us about. We had scheduled this interview over a year ago?

KF: Yes, I think it was a year.

PK: And I think we scheduled twice and there were obstacles that arose that it didn't work out. But I'm pleased that it finally did. So what I propose we do is . . . it's a complicated subject. I think we should keep it fairly simple. At least have some structure. And we need to know something about you. I know we don't have a whole lot of time but just basically give some idea of who you are. Where you came from. How you came to be here in Redlands, and especially maybe about your art interest and training, because you're an artist. You teach. And I want to hear a little bit about that. And then we can move on to those two other parts - the model and the artist. So an easy way to start - where were you born?

KF: Culver City, California.

PK: And what year?

KF: 1961.

PK: You were there for the famous sixties, but not until the end, particularly to observe. Well, actually that's not uninteresting because the sixties have a sort of image for exploration and liberation, including sexual, certainly the liberation of women. Do you remember being aware? I mean, you were only like nine years old or 10 when we went into the seventies, but do you feel that the sixties had any influence on you and your thinking in ways that you would recognize?

KF: Absolutely! I can speak of the fact that from how I was socialized, hearing, what I heard growing up. Basically, in a relationship to how the sixties impacted me was my folks were very conservative in their thinking and their beliefs. And what I was hearing was their opinions about the previous generation's ideas of sexuality and feminism and all of these different issues. And then I was also hearing, through television and other media, about the counter-culture, or the other opinions and ideologies that were starting to emerge and take place in our culture. So what I remember, which is taxing my poor little brain, but what I can remember is having this, always feeling like a big question about which set of ideologies was the "right one". I was really in the middle. I was like the peanut butter in the sandwich. There was this movement going on. There were my parents that I was growing up with, their ideas from another time. And then there was myself and all the other humans that were born at that time. So, because I hadn't come of age in a sexually or intellectually the thing I remember most is this questioning. I was being given visual images of sexuality, freedom, and different kinds of thinking. My whole family, which is ironic, was involved in Hollywood, which was sort of a free thing, although they were on the technical aspects of the conservatism that was there. So it was really interesting. I'd have to say that I felt very, not stuck, because at 10 or 11 I wouldn't understand that. I remember feeling like there was hope or an opportunity for me to embrace other ideas other than what I grew up with. And I can only speak from my experience. I don't know if every generation or every person feels that they're going to be able to go out onto a new vista and bring new ideas, etc. But there was, especially during that time, because of the radical ness of the sixties there was a very, very strong dichotomy or separation between one set of beliefs and the other. And we were the children to observe that.

PK: So how did you resolve this? I realize that that at age, I think it's unlikely that you were too analytical, too aware or conscious of this, but some of that may be retrospective though. Maybe even at the time you were struggling with this. But how, when and in what way did you resolve this or find your own position? Just where you then decided to come down and position yourself in this, if you will, push and pull between perhaps competing ideas?

KF: I have to try everything. I would vacillate between feeling conservative and very wanting to embrace this idea. Of course, I wanted to differentiate myself from my parents and from other things. I would try this other avenue. So I would say that it led me to live my life in a very experiential way, trying both sides of the coin so to speak, trying different situations. I've tried very conservative thinking. It didn't work. I've tried very, very promiscuous kinds of thinking, and that wasn't quite what I wanted to do. I have tried the range of ideas as being my own. So I guess I was very confused as to what it was I believed. When I landed I'd say where I am now didn't take place until, I'd say my, I really started to emerge into how I felt in my mid-twenties. And that's when my artistic desire, my desire to create imagery, my desire to create, period, was completely on fire, had reached its peak as far as making a life decision of if I were going to follow that as my ambition or not.

PK: So earlier you weren't particularly attracted to artists, maybe as romantic figures or creative people? But you really hadn't had a personal experience involved in making things, in making art and thinking of art as something for you?

KF: Not in high school. There's an interesting way that I came about it. The creativity or the artistic aspect that I was always attracted to was the other from where I was coming. Identity is a huge thing for me. I'm adopted. So basically, forming ideas of self was doubly impacted for me. In trying to find identity as to who am I or in relationship to these creative urges were not necessarily expressed in my immediate family. Now they were eccentrics. My grandfather was very, very creative. My first exposure to creativity would be my grandfather. I don't want to go into that, but he brought Europe to me basically, which titillated my sensuality towards visual imagery and tactile things. We'd go into Bullocks Wilshire and we would pet the scarves. We were kindred spirits that way. So that would be my first experience peripherally to the idea of art or imagery as a way to satisfy this sort of otherness that my immediate family was not embracing. So in a way they were rebelling too, in their own way.

PK: Well, at some point you discovered that you could make a career, a vocation out of art-making. What you describe as kind of a quest or a self-discovery. How did that come about? You mentioned sensuality, which is something that we're going to talk a little bit more about, because you're a self-described sensualist. That's part of what you discovered. At some point you must have discovered that you could study art and that you could make a living. When did you first encounter art, what we would call fine art? You know, made by artists that are dedicated, committed to that activity?

KF: Yes, in my grandfather's house. He collected art, so I was exposed to his tastes. He would bring art home from Europe. And that's what I meant by having this imagery, this visual sort of indulgence in my life. I used to stare at the paintings he'd bring home. They were mainly of Paris. Probably less well-known artists made some of the work with which I would become fascinated. I've always had an acute sensitivity and awareness of color and relationship to other things. I don't want to say overly sensitive, because that's not how I feel. I've always liked to touch things. I used to rub the edge of my blanket when I was little. It was a little habit that I had just rubbing on the edges of the blanket. So I actually was always engaged in some way or another with my senses, visually or tactically. I guess my first art experience, I would have to say, would be at L.A. County when I visited the museum there. And I think it was a classroom trip, because I remember a lot of people being around.

PK: Do you remember what you saw?

KF: Well, I remember feeling small and that all of the paintings and the art that was around me feeling very grand and big and sensual. I still am like this. I go into museums and somebody should really handcuff me because I want to go up and smell and touch and look at it. So I do remember going into L. A. County and looking at these paintings. And I don't have one in particular that I can say, but I have visual imagery in my head and wanting to actually touch them. Of course, I couldn't. I made art as a child in school. I would make these little books of drawings. I would do caricatures of my grandparents mainly of them smoking and drinking because that was the time everybody had their martinis and cigarettes. I was fascinated. So I would draw those weird shaped chairs they sat in and observe them participating in adult sensual activities. I would have to draw them. When I was 17, I first painted with oil paints. I would say that that was when I realized that I had a proclivity for the arts. It was after a very traumatic surgery that I had, which I won't go into details. It's all related.

PK: It's related?

KF: Anyway, during my recovery period - or have you read about an artist who during their recovery period, "I

was presented with my first set of oil paints.” Well, that’s exactly what happened. I had almost died and I got these a set of these paints and from my bed I started painting. I haven’t put it down since then. It was only in my mid-twenties where I felt like I could claim that as a mature...

PK: So you discovered the pleasures of moving paint around and color? Then, did you say, “Well, I want to go study this somewhere”? You just graduated last year, I think, from the distinguished program at Claremont, the graduate program.

KF: Right, with an MFA. I had gone to UCLA and studied sociology. I had gone into teaching severely emotionally, disturbed children. I designed programs for the [Los Angeles County] Museum of Science and Industry for a program they had called “Quake Faith.” And I worked with FEMA in designing educational programs for the public, for schools and public places on earthquake preparedness, earthquake science and safety. So this is all going on. I’ve always had an interest in education and design if you want to call it that. It doesn’t matter what form. I’ve always enjoyed creating something from scratch, from nothingness, and having something happen out of that. So much took place between the time I was 17 and when I decided to study. I had kept painting on my own when I was teaching, and making these paintings. People at work started to urge me, “You should pursue this. You should pursue this. Do your art.” I had that conservative part of me that was like, “I need to make a living. I have to think about this, that and the other”. Well, one day after eight years of teaching in this particular job I gave my two-week notice and told them I was going to be an artist and that I would be leaving. I hand them my resignation and they gave me a gift certificate to Aaron Brothers. I left that profession. Of course, here I am back again in it. It’s in relationship to art now. This is where the artist modeling comes in for me. I went and took a night class at one of the local colleges. I thought maybe I needed to study this. So I went to Valley College in L.A. There was a professor named David Starret who introduced me to oil painting in an academic sense. And I gained so much from him. The next introduction for me was he felt that I would enjoy Sam Clayberger’s evening drawing workshop. After the class was over and I was no longer one of his students he invited me to come out and participate in this drawing workshop. So I went ahead and started going out there. Sam asked me, since Sam was a figurative painter, he sort of said things like, “Oh, you’d be a really good model. I’d like to paint you. Would you be interested?” And the first time, I was asked that question it popped into my mind I thought that might be interesting to see how it would feel from the other side. And so I consented to pose for him. So the first time I was ever on the other side of the easel, so to speak, was for Sam Clayberger. I posed for him for a painting. I enjoyed the experience very much. I think I’ve already talked to you about that in your essay, “Euros in the Studio,” I mentioned that. So I was inclined to do it then.

PK: What did you expect in trying the nude modeling? Were you surprised by your response? Did you have any preconceived notions of what it would be like?

KF: Probably, because I think I have preconceived ideas about anything they’re going to try to do. I’m trying to recall what I expected or thought of that. It crossed my mind in this sort of position where the artist and the model are engaged in one activity. In other words, that I am drawing, but I am also being drawn. So there was that relationship. And as far as I was very interested in if it would feel, I think what my preconceived notion is I wanted to know what it would feel like as being objects, but also as being the one that was being drawn and what my contribution to the artist was by me being drawn. Because then when I’m drawing I also get to understand what contribution the person is making and of course, I’ve moved into other things. The amount of participation or amount of creative energy is being shared. I was curious about what that exchange was going to be about. Is this exchange going to be about just I give something and the artist takes? Or is this exchange going to be sexual? Is this exchange going to be erotic or purely a job, a function, a necessity? So I did ask myself these questions. What I found it to be were all of the above. I think I was thrilled to be able to embrace all of those aspects of the experience, because being an artist I am required to embrace many experiences and break them down into a vision. So without the multiplicity of experience I couldn’t have a unified vision for myself. There’s sort of the yin and yang but they’re dichotomous.

PK: Did you pose just for Sam?

KF: At first I posed just for Sam, and then one night for the group when the model didn’t show up. I almost felt this responsibility to the group of artists, as somebody who had, because I was an artist. I also understood the necessity and the essential part that the model played. I remember what I was wearing, a bright pink T-shirt and Levis. I mean, that’s how significant the thinking was that was going on about should I or shouldn’t I. I know that sounds very bizarre, but I remember things in color. So I remember what I was wearing. The model still hadn’t shown up. Was I or wasn’t I going to take my clothes off in front of more than one person at a time?

PK: Your colleagues.

KF: My colleagues. Sexual encounters for me up until then had been one person at a time. So there was this idea or familiarity with being naked with one person, but there was something about making that transition to a group of people from one artist to a group of artists.

PK: With a group of people that could have very different implications, possibly making you uncomfortable. Is that right?

KF: Yes, mainly about that these were my peers. These were my colleagues and also like my artist friends and people that I associated with. Of course, I was still in the learning process of art also. What I mean is that I considered them my teachers or mentors. Sam ultimately became a mentor of mine, but there was a slight discrepancy and I was more the student. At the time I was one of the more inexperienced draughtsman. But when that time came, and all my experiences afterwards I can compare to the group experience as a model and the singular experience as a model. Especially, it was almost more frightening taking that stance with people, who were also artists that I knew than when I went into situations where I was anonymous as an artist and I was perceived only as a model.

PK: Now where would that be?

KF: Otis-Parson Art Center.

PK: So you actually then became a professional model?

KF: Yes, with various artist workshops throughout the L.A. area.

PK: Do you remember, what is her name?

KF: Nancy, she just retired. She is a great gal.

PK: I wonder if you thought about why you would feel more comfortable posing for a class where you are the model. You don't bring with you necessarily the artist's role.

KF: I don't know if I'd separate the two so strongly but I understand what you're saying.

PK: I'm wondering if the hesitation, or the concern, or the apprehension in posing for your colleagues had anything to do with the fact that you felt that you would be seen by them in a different way, along the lines of what we were discussing.

KF: Absolutely! I don't know that if at the time I thought this all out in this way that we're talking right now, but looking back and just recalling the actual feeling, which was hesitation – should I or shouldn't I. I've got this responsibility. I'm an artist. What will they think of me if I pose?

PK: Less professional?

KF: Right. Now will I be treated as a sexual object or will I be respected as part of the creative process. There were just a lot more to consider for me as far as how I would be perceived.

[Tape 1, Side B]

PK: Interview with Kristina Faragher. This is Tape 1, Side B.

KF: What I was saying was that I had made the decision to pursue art as my only career. And so there was no turning back for me. And once I posed for the group there was just the unknown. It's just the unknown. I was afraid of how I would be perceived. As usual, with my independent spirit, I decided that it was an experience I wanted to have. There were three things that could happen for me with this posing with groups and/or private artists. One, I would constantly get to be around other artists. Therefore, my education would be increased because I would be around artists, who had more experience than I. Two, they paid me. Income is always nice, especially if you have an expensive habit, like art. Three, it did lead to this also, three being the more important of the other two, was that there was this incredible discovery of identity through this experience of posing, being literally stripped of any external disguise. There was a word I'm looking for. Oh, it's some intellectual word. But it's a good one for this. But I'll remember it another day. Being taken to the most vulnerable point was this peeling of layers, was a very good place to start also as far as constructing and understanding my identity as a human, as a form.

PK: So did you really think about that as it was happening? Or is this, again, retrospective?

KF: Oh, when I was up there posing, when I was undressed in front of people these thoughts were going through my head. I was thinking about what it meant to be human, what it meant to be naked, what it meant to be nude, what it meant to be a woman. This seemingly simple act of removing one's exterior clothing became an intense emotional, spiritual and psychological unfolding. So for me the experience continued to grow into a very valuable one. And that's why when I said I don't know if I can separate them, being that I would have to separate myself in a way from the act of art-making. Part of me has been discovered through the process of

other humans making art out of me. I know that might sound a little strange but there are a lot of things going on.

PK: From what you've described, you talk about the activity of posing as part of your curiosity as to what is the contribution of the model. But the way you describe it, up to this point anyway, is really in terms of yourself. It's pretty self-focused. It's very self-referential, this unfolding. You're looking at yourself, the way you tell it now. In retrospect do you feel that that was the case? Or was there at the same time a sense of this contribution? And what was the connection between the two?

KF: One of the things that I would consider or think about is what I would like to draw. But then again, here we're getting back into self and it isn't everything. In a weird strange way, all I can share is that sort of thing. However, what I would anticipate is, for example in taking poses, unless I was specifically required to do a particular pose, and then the model still has some input on, of course, the shape of their body or how they would like to do that. I would visually imagine what it is I would like to draw, or what an artist would like to draw, or my relationship with the space around me, my body in relationship to other objects around me, or the space around me. It was almost like I was making little living compositions just as an artist makes sketches or I have made sketches of other models. When I played model or when I was in the position of model I also would still be continuing visually in my mind composition. So I was still drawing even though I was modeling. Even though I was the object, I would think of myself sitting on the other side and looking at something. So I would perceive the slight twist of the head, the expression on my face, the angle that would be interesting if I bent a little bit this way or that way, how would that change the composition. Those were things that were very much a part of my experience modeling. The idea of standing still in a certain "posed" position and what that pose meant as far as what psychologically, the pose brought to the artist, but not only to the artist but to me. What that did to me psychologically. So I would always be behind thinking of this development or what I was getting from the experience. The weird thing for me was I was thinking as artist and model simultaneously in a strange way because I felt like actually the posing became a performance for me and dramatic, sort of theatrical, which later comes up in my performance art.

PK: It becomes very clear that you could internalize this activity or transform it into an artist's statement. That it was in your nature, and maybe I would think that your own sensuality would have a lot to do with this. It would seem quite natural to think of yourself in terms of images, of colors, and this visual world which so interested you. .

KF: I took it the step further and included it later on. It informs. Sensuality, whether through body, or color, or texture, it informs my work, but specifically the experience modeling - and who knows which came first - my interest in object and even body as object, or body as a material thing to be projected into an image. I don't know what came first. Either my own sort of obsession in what body is, even in relationship to identity because of my own experience of not having anything visual in my whole world that looked anything like me. It could be my self-obsessed search for the image of me in something. Hey, why not? Art's good. We'll substitute that for parents. So I think everything informs the other. When I started to bring the body into my work, I studied figuratively for a long time. I studied with Sam. I studied life drawing. I liked making imagery of actually the female image.

PK: You said your own figure work that you basically preferred drawing women to men. This is a preference.

KF: Yes, yes. And I do have that preference. Now, I've had thoughts about that but they can be contradicted immediately because men also seem to prefer - not always - and it's different in all people's individual cases - but it seems to me across the board men and women do enjoy drawing the female form, since those are the images we have most. Most of our images are of the human body, anatomically.

PK: Well, there's one exception, for the most part, and that would be homosexual males.

KF: Well, that's why I said it's individual. I understand in a weird way, I'll speak for myself, I understand why they would prefer to draw the male, because I understand why I prefer to draw the female, even though we could go on and on about this whole subject. What I was going to say is there is a lot of self-portraiture in when a female is drawing a female or using a female body as object in their own work, or using another female body as the imagery in their work. There is a voice that it can be expressed through that. Now, I can't speak for men's desire to draw mainly women, but I can speak for the idea that most women I talk to prefer to draw women, unless it's just because that is what is most available, that we go to a studio and most of the time women are modeling. We have been in awfully sexist studios.

PK: It's worth pausing just for a moment here, because it's something that is assumed, taken for granted but never really examined. I like your idea of self-portraiture, because that seems very, very right to me. Look at the magazines they read. They look at pictures of women in fashion magazines, women in various clothes. But what I know about women, which is a little bit, is that you can tell by the types of magazines that are produced.

Magazines for women show women, but sometimes they're pretty sexy. Look at the cover of Cosmo [Cosmopolitan] for instance. So it's just like what you described in the studio that what you want to look at or draw, we're talking about heterosexual women seem to prefer women. Men seem to prefer women. What happens to the idea of self-portraiture?

KF: Well, absolutely. Well, that would go along with what I was going to say to you. There are a lot of different opinions as to why this is. One of them is that we have been constructed, our society has constructed us to view the female in a certain way, and that extends over to females. In other words, women are taught to look at themselves even as objective outside of themselves in imagery. Now, there's a ton of controversy and many books being written about the argument over "Is it the culture that has imposed this, or would this have evolved all by itself on its own because of our natural inclination for whatever reason that we know or don't know, to express ourselves"? There are thoughts that I've had that possibly men turn to the female model or want to draw the model outside of the idea. But yours is probably closer because -- you're a man and you're speaking from that perspective -- is they see themselves as the one that desires the other. Women also -- I'll speak for myself -- I can still get caught up in the idea that I am the object in this culture, or the sex in this culture that is to be primped and to be coiffed and modeled, so to speak, into the object of desire. So there is that. Then there is also the idea that in all of human things that there is always more than one thing contributing and the other thing that I have thought about is that it is possibly a man's way of expressing femininity; the male body encasing the animar and the female body encasing the animus. One could argue that possibly that males can present the feminine aspect of self so you could say that it was self-portraiture through using imagery of a female form. Now, that would cause another problem. That is why when women want to paint or draw males to express their opposite or their animus, through the male form. But, like I said, it's possible because we've been conditioned to also see ourselves in imagery or externalized, that we also embrace that as a way to express ourselves. I think a different psychology goes into it because it is also a self-portrait, but in a different way.

PK: Is it true that desire is the engine that at least to a degree runs creativity?

KF: Well, think about it. Anything that comes out of your hands, my hands, starts in my mind as an idea, as a desire -- now that's where I always feel that mind and body are very connected and they aren't compartmental, they're not compartments. Mind gets idea. Body then has the physical desire to create. I think that whatever creation comes out of anything that's materialized outside of our body that is not, for example, already here, plants grow and trees, etc. or mountains, tables, chairs, pictures, these are objects that are popping out of us.

PK: Microphones?

KF: Microphones. Look at that thing. That looks like a penis and it even gets plugged in. We are so self-absorbed. We imitate ourselves all the time. We reproduce, even if we don't have children we're constantly reproducing ourselves. The chair is for our ass. So everything really has to do with body, if you think about it. Desire stemming within and then our physical desire to absorb what we put outside of ourselves back into ourselves. We're complete pigs.

PK: That is one way to look at it. It seems to me that you acknowledge sensuality and sexuality as the central ingredients to this whole process, to the creative process, at least to your own experience. What I really wanted to talk about was how you experienced the modeling. What you learned about yourself. We have to talk a little bit about the experience with Sam and the erotic sketch book. As I remember your account earlier, that was also pretty much your creation. Is that true? Are you the one who brought up the idea? How did it happen? Sam has his beloved erotic sketch book and you were the first one. So he says.

KF: I think we had both been talking about the idea of erotic drawings. We both looked at Toulouse Lautrec. We had been looking at all of the sorts of artists that and many of them have done erotic drawings. I was interested in, not only in posing for erotic drawings, but also drawing erotically. So again, I wanted to be on both side. I told you earlier in the interview that I had to experience everything in order to understand. I continued in my life, even up to the point of to the erotic sketch book wanting to be on both sides of that experience. We were in his studio and I had been posing for Sam for several years on and off. And so our working relationship had been established and developed over time. I wanted to explore my sexuality. It's weird because exploring my sexuality in front of the artist or the other, but it was the fourth wall that was there. There was still a curtain between my experience of it and the artist's experience of it, because we were separately experiencing the same thing. Does that make sense? We were not sexually involved. We were both artists, Sam was drawing sexually explicit drawings, and I was posing for those sexually explicit drawings. The experience remained without bodily contact. I can talk about my own exploration of seeing what it was like to be sexual in and of myself. It's weird because when I was posing, and I doubt anybody will believe this, but my thoughts were not on things like, "How am I going to turn this guy on or am I going to excite him if I take this pose or will he like this one better." I was a little self-centered. I wasn't thinking a lot about him, as far as what he was going to get from it. What I was experiencing was how I felt about my sexuality or my exposure. How I felt psychologically about having my legs open in front of someone and what that meant on several levels. It became very interesting to

me. It was almost like I was a voyeur also. I was also watching myself. Please don't think I'm an egoist to death or something, because to me this is all very connected to this spiritual part of it too. I don't know what to call it other than spirit, but this other aspect of it, this mystical aspect of art or what have you. I'm just being honest about what my experience was instead of trying to tell someone, "Oh, I was trying to turn this guy on." Or even myself on.

PK: It makes it more interesting, in fact, removes it from the arena of pornography.

KF: Yes. That was how I was able to use my body and my own videos in performances.

PK: It simply removes it because you're providing poses. It's to observe something that's even more intimate. That is this process of discovery and learning about yourself and your sexuality. However he internalizes that or responds to it has to do with what's going on in his mind. It's very interesting, don't you think?

KF: It's fascinating. It's using the word self a lot. I felt like I was watching myself experiment with my own idea of what sexuality, what it means to be a freaking animal. When you don't have your clothes on and you've got your legs spread, and your hands are going all over, this is what it would feel like if I were to run around the planet like an animal. So I really get in touch with the primitivism of animals.

PK: I think this is very interesting. But it makes it much more evident what you were up to. I never thought that it was something trivial and that it was just a sex game. You don't think that because that rarely happens. It takes a little bit of work to pose and work to draw.

KF: Actually I have only been sexually involved with one person that I posed for and I posed for hundreds of artists.

[Tape 2, Side A]

PK: Continuing this afternoon interview with Kristina Faragher. This is tape 2, side A. We were talking about the erotic sketchbook, and that whole experience, phenomenon in Sam Clayberger's studio is quite interesting. I think of it as a laboratory situation almost where there's something that's been waiting to be examined and then said, "Let's do it" and you did it.

KF: That's a good comparison.

PK: I have a much better sense now than I even did before on what it meant for you, and no doubt for him. One of the things that struck me is that we're taken back to the whole notion of what is the model's contribution. How does it come about? What forms can it take? I like to think of you in this particular case as certainly a collaborator, but almost an agent. You were basically taking charge at least of one aspect of this and in some ways almost the more important one. One could argue that when you finally end up with a drawing, and you say, "Well, you know, that's Sam's part of this." You were making compositions. Remember when you were posing earlier? Well, this is making, in some ways more compelling, or more potent, evocative compositions.

KF: I would say so. It's the third thing that results out of the two of us. For example, out of Sam's hand, what I've taken from it and applied to my own art. So the third thing that comes of the experience leads to a lot of metaphor.

PK: The theme of the model's contribution. Something that interested you in the very beginning when you first . . .

KF: Oh, in the little light picture.

PK: Well, to get on the other side and get first-hand information about how the model can contribute, it would seem to me that the erotic sketch book and the erotic poses are stepping beyond. That is stepping over a kind of line in the studio that brings something new and something just loaded with energy to this artist/model encounter. It would be sort of an extreme example or dramatic example of the model's contribution. That's all. I'm wondering if you felt that as well, aside from what you took away from it for your own art.

KF: I would have to say that the contribution in the erotic sketch books would be my vulnerability. But in my vulnerability, I discovered later on that that is where the power is, in a strange way, in the vulnerability. A lot of people would argue with me, but they're not inside thinking like I'm thinking and embracing that term. It's normally considered a negative term in the English language -- "vulnerability" -- an openness and an awareness that is unavailable to an individual who is not willing to become vulnerable. I'm not suggesting that everybody go find somebody to pose for and take erotic poses, but in whatever area of life where do we learn most about the nature of ourselves? In my experience it's been when I have been most vulnerable, and not in a negative sense. I'm not speaking of it in as like giving myself as a piece of prey to a predator. This is not the way that I'm

talking about vulnerability. That would be semantically an error on the listener's part to think that. I am speaking of the human experience that the more open we are, whether it be our genitals or our heart or whatever it is. there is an exchange that can go on that is impossible when our body is shut down, tight, and closed, whether it be our ears, eyes, nose, pussy, whatever it is. Anything that's closed tight is not receptive. I'm speaking in a lot of literal, but also metaphorical terms. So in relationship to the erotic sketch book, I would say that what I brought to that was a willingness on my part to be vulnerable, but not just to Sam, even though that was my contribution, it was to myself also. Now, of course, a safe environment would be optimal.

PK: All of that, of course, the studio was on your terms. That is an important thing to remember. I think that's a key concept to keep in mind. That the model, it's consensual, and it goes beyond that, it's creative. In the case where you're talking about this is very much your doing and thinking.

KF: Posing became very much like a meditation. I actually learned how to meditate posing. One of the things is clearing my mind. Part of it was when a pose is painful or uncomfortable this lifting oneself out of body and away so that I could sustain this composition for the artist and myself. I learned the art of meditation, which also led to deep thinking about what is a body and what is the social constrictive sex, and all of these other things.

PK: Now these presumably are questions or interests then that inform your recent work, your performance work? We're moving away from pictorial representation, in that sense, painting and drawing and so forth. At some point, maybe during graduate school at Claremont, it seems to me you chose a way to investigate these ideas that took you away from what you had been involved with in Sam's classes. So you made that shift.

KF: Absolutely!

PK: And I think we should talk about that because it's key. I wonder if it would be useful just to talk directly about the video piece.

KF: Orange Crush.

PK: Orange Crush is what it's called? What is the position that you and your work are occupying in contemporary art?

KF: I've done a lot of work, but I would say that in that piece I was able to reach a particular directness that I am still actually processing in some ways, because it's a lifelong sort of inquiry. So this is a part of the puzzle that fell into place as a result of all of my experiences, really, in life. And came very clearly focused in this one particular video called Orange Crush where in the video, it's a two minute loop, it is a very close-up view, a gynecological view of a vagina. Of course, the legs are spread, and I'll just talk about it. It's me in the video. However, if I'm not present it's an anonymous person because it is a giant close-up. There's very little else besides the vagina, except for the idea that there are legs coming out. In front of the body, there is placed a pile of crayons, literally in the video, and also in the viewer's space. So the crayons become a part of the viewer or the viewers' space, which makes them a little bit implicit in the video, in other words, they can become uncomfortably a part of the video. What's going on is I am reaching down into the pile. You see a very large hand come down, and I project it on, I think, the last projection I did of it was a 32 foot wall in an industrial space. I had thousands and thousands of crayons spread in front of the viewers' space in front. I include crayons in the viewers' space and in my space in the video. It's that same idea of artist and model. In other words, who's in whose space? Is it the voyeur that's participating and making the piece real? Quantum physics deals with this all the time. Are they placing the little points of light in certain spots to make that experience from their point of view, or alter it from their point of view, or is the video from the artist's point of view, informing the viewer? I've always been interested in this coupling of viewer and voyeur, the artist and viewer and the interchangeability of that. There really is, depending on what point of view you come from, an interchangeability to it. Now, what I am doing in the video is I am inserting the crayons, I pick them up individually and I show the viewer the crayon and the color that the crayon is. So it will say green. Then I insert it into my vagina. Now, all you're seeing is the hand and the vagina doing this repetitive motion. It is not done in a masturbatory way where there is any sort of pleasure being derived out of it. The way that I set it up is very mechanical. So it's almost like I'm doing this procedure. I am performing a task. And what happens after I get more than enough crayons in there . . . Don't try this at home without your doctor's permission.

PK: How did you decide what was enough or more than enough?

KF: Visually? It turns out to be about the size if you hold the stack of crayons and you put them all together. This is so funny talking about how I did it because I had to be very careful. They didn't all fit in and I kind of tucked them. You have to see the video. I did cheat just a little bit for comfort, because of the task aspect of it. It wasn't like I was using lubed crayons or something. They were just what they were -- crayons. I almost deconstructed the darned poor crayons, but this sort of task of placing these crayons -- and I'm doing it to myself. The viewer is not doing it to me. The viewer is watching me perform this task.

PK: So the viewers are becoming one with the crayons.

KF: They are. They could be. People would steal the crayons from the installation. They would ask me or they would ask each other, because I could be a voyeur too because my face wasn't involved in it. I could stand in the room and listen to everybody talk. And they would ask, "Do you think those are the crayons she used?" The responses I got were fabulous! A very wide range of responses from intellectual to downright . . . I don't want to say stupid, but downright thoughtless. Of course, this raised a lot of controversy and it angered some people. They felt like they were, because it was done in a task-like manner, they had the crayons, but they didn't have the pussy. And that goes back to the ownership. Whose body is this really? And they asked that question pretty clearly, because the viewer is unable to insert the crayons except in their own orifice. So they have the crayons there in the space with them, but they could not penetrate the video. Also I described it as one of the things that I say is "colorful penetration into the art historical camera," hence, from where all art flows.

PK: Well, you started off talking about your interest in sensuality is something that you responded to when talking about your grandfather. You saw yourself in sensual terms, especially, with color. When I heard about this crayon piece, this is one of the assumptions that I made, that this was a comment or a declaration of the importance of color to you. You're a redhead. You're colorful. Color is what to you?

KF: Color is primitive in the form of crayons and the animal is primitive in the form of body. Again there are all of these color, is it external or internal?

PK: You're the one who can tell us that.

KF: Well, I can, but there are many arguments that our brain is set up to process color for some of us. Some of us are color-blind. It's all a paradox, and I love it. That's why I love it. It will always contradict itself. They're both everything. They're both true. Color exists outside of me and inside of me. And metaphorically the animal exists outside of me and inside of me.

PK: Finally it is about Kristina again.

KF: No, because when I'm speaking of myself right now I would apply that to other people also. I can only use my own experience, but I can then also, if I want, apply that to my experience to others.

PK: This is obviously an unusual piece. It's slightly sensational. I haven't seen it. But do you have a video of it?

KF: Yes.

PK: I gather this isn't the first thing done like this in your performance art, video performance.

KF: Well, I do not do that live in front of anybody but the camera.

PK: Maybe it's a semantic thing, but I think it's performance in the sense, whether or not it's a public performance. I would describe it as body art. What do you think? How you would describe what you do? It's a video but it's not just that.

KF: No. It's a lot of things. There're a lot of layers to it. It's a visual exploitation. I am exploiting color in its basic form, like we talked about. That's how kids find out, besides their first purely visual experience then they have the actual form of crayon in color. I'm using all of these colorful images. Visually the video is very stable, it almost becomes iconographic because when it's blown up on a wall the vagina becomes something else. There aren't 32-foot vaginas visually. So I'm abstracting also. I am using some of the formal elements in art. Color and abstraction, as far as the form goes, but there are a lot of things going on, politically, emotionally in the statements I make.

PK: But it is a vagina. You made a choice as artists make choices.

KF: Absolutely it is. It would have to be.

PK: It's far from neutral no matter how big or little it is.

KF: And it's mine.

PK: It's interesting that you don't insist upon that. That isn't mainly what it's about, I gather. It's anonymous. So what are some of the, what are you fishing for, looking for in terms of response? What are you hoping with the piece to evoke?

KF: To share?

PK: In response or evoke?

KF: Once you put a visual piece of artwork out there, it is the viewers' prerogative to interpret it the way that they see it.

PK: That's true.

KF: Now, coming from the experiences I've had to make, the video had to do with the idea that many times women artists, as artists or just sensual beings, are minimized. So the crayons have that layer going for them in that they - and I'm not suggesting children are minimal - but there is for the most part, art done by kindergarteners and crayons representing a lesser form than fine art. So there's this idea, I have to take that into consideration, the kind of materials I'm using when I'm doing that. I'm inserting crayons not prism color markers, which are referring to the status of art, the form of art. Normally Crayola Crayons aren't a material chosen in this day in age we use just about anything, but normally they are associated with a lesser form of art, a sketch, a drawing, something that is not going to be an exhibition piece or put in a museum, or a gallery, or in the art historical cannon. Spreading my legs like that and in task fully inserting crayons is the repetition of me doing that. I take them out. I lay them out in front of me very deliberately and I started all over again. Then I put them out and I insert them again and take them out again. And that is the whole piece. So there's this repetition that's taking place, this repeated idea of minimalizing women as artists, or even minimalizing them, if they choose to be sexual in their art, or choose to be whatever they want to be. There have been many artists that have done this, but this ignoring of the importance or the voice of the women artists. So the demeaning of women artists, obviously that's pretty basic. A vagina is female and crayons are a minimized form of art materials.

PK: Is there something, possibly some suggestion of infantilism. I think of this for two reasons, one is the birth, the suggestion of birth, but also the preferred instrument of crayons for children and lesser work.

KF: Well, I'm not making a comment either on children's art or on adult art. But by using crayon or Crayola, I was speaking of the fact that I feel that as a woman artist that I am minimized still, even in this period of time. All I have to do is go to a local university and sit in on an art class and 95 percent of the talking is about male European artists. So there is a strong political intent in the work through using those two images together. But you asked me an interesting question, because this other thing of owning of, inserting the crayons myself, so there's almost a masturbatory or ownership of what I choose to put into my body. I'll choose how I want to put things into me, because nobody's doing it to me. I'm doing it to myself. So in a weird way I'm also commenting on what we spoke of earlier in posing for the erotic sketchbook. It is to me that I am doing this. So in a way I'm also owning my body's molecules as they belong to me, and I shall do with them as I please regardless of political correctness or not.

PK: It seems to me you're doing two things here. Number one, you were talking about being vulnerable. To be truly vulnerable, you have to open yourself up to others. Vulnerability, unless you have a really active imagination can't be totally circular in that sense. We can't be totally self-focused. So you have that as a virtue that you mentioned on the one hand in the posing for the erotic sketchbook. You went on about vulnerability as a positive force that as you're describing part of what you may be trying to convey in the video is a distancing from that and a denial of that very vulnerability. Even though you've got your legs spread and so forth. So there is that aspect of vulnerability.

KF: I have. I'll tell you about it. Earlier I said there's power in vulnerability.

PK: So this then is an imaging or reification of the idea of the power?

KF: Yes.

PK: Through art.

KF: So I guess I really am posed in that power of true art.

[Tape 2, Side B]

PK: Here we are with this interview session with Kristina. This is tape 2, side B. One of the things that I feel that I have to ask, how you see yourself within various developments in contemporary art, because that's very much, the way you describe it is very much a feminist statement. What proportion of the art then would be political? At the same time I'm wondering then who do you feel are affinities with in performance, but also in concern with these issues as a woman, as an artist?

KF: Well, I have been influenced by Carolee Sheeman's work. Annie Sprinkle fascinates me, and Karen Finley. There are several artists that have gone before me. A generation of, and that are still working some of them, but

a generation of artists that have brought into art the political issues of being a woman in the culture that they are making the art in. I'm not going to divide that video up into portions for you of what portion is political because I can't. They go hand in hand. In context to contemporary art today I believe that, yes, many viewers are going to understand that there are political implications in the video, or that I am speaking in a feminist voice. What I feel that I am doing is I am being an authentic human being, as a woman on the planet in this period of time. The experiences that I have had are so vastly opposite. Growing up and having both these points of view existing in my life has come to this culmination of the period of time where I am visually exploring the ideas that sort of come together, my feelings about life and imagery. Look at the hesitation in my voice right now, I feel like everybody is so freaking afraid to talk incorrectly about gender or sexuality or feminism, that it makes me want to puke. So I'm going to stop being afraid right now and just say what I think.

PK: Just say it. It's for the Smithsonian.

KF: It is such a strangling topic at times as far as being afraid that other women will be misunderstood me. What's funny is I worry more about being misunderstood by other women. That shows you how successful everybody has been in getting women to really battle against one another. In contemporary art what I'm seeing more of it in my peers and colleagues is this integration, the ability to embrace both.

PK: You mean of mind and body?

KF: Yes. As far as I am seeking to go beyond and not forget where my sisters have come from as far as feminism goes and not forget the struggle to find a voice. I like the idea of exclusivity. I like the idea of I do not want to annihilate either the male voice outside of me or the male voice inside of me. I do not want to be annihilated as a female voice inside or outside of myself. So what I am seeking are new images that will bring the idea of wholeness and that this piece is more than about myself or a political statement, but it's about the vulnerability of being human, of being material, of being planet, corporeal. I am opening myself up literally and metaphorically in this video and in my work as a way to look at myself differently. I'm interested in understanding myself as a human being. So I would like to say that it's more along the humanist lines that I'm seeking that I want to speak. I want my voice to be heard, rather than just a "feminist" or a god, I don't know, name it, sexualist. I think my contemporaries are doing the same. If those who are being honest with themselves are seeking imagery that will represent this sort of un-cocooning of a new way to be with each other on the planet. We better think of a new way to be with each other, I'll tell you what. Or we won't be here to be with each other. But there's this longing all stemming from desire to bridge that gap. I don't desire to create one but to bridge one and to share, to be whole, but also to give. So there's this inner-dependence and it's just endless. What I enjoy is that I know I could investigate it for the rest of my life and it's okay if it never gets answered. It's the question that keeps me moving. It's the questions that keep me coming back here and I could talk extensively about this, and we have.

PK: Your statement was very compelling and it seems to me humanist is an appropriate term. I would think of your art within the terms that you've expressed it as ideological rather than political, basically that world-view or aspirations for a new world, a new level of interacting.

KF: Starting with our favorite thing - self!

PK: But we have to. The notion that this is certainly not like the old feminist, but it is truly a humanist approach. There's still work to be done with women for women. It seems to me there're both a demand, but also an invitation to be taken seriously and understood as a counterpart. I sense that there's a shared kind of affinity in this, that we have lost sight of the fact, we've set up false differences.

KF: Yes.

PK: This seems to me one-way to help break those down and to dissolve them. That's where the answer lies. If we don't recognize the duality of ourselves then we can't really relate.

KF: The duality exists within us, not outside of us, and I think that's where all of us become confused.

PK: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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