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**Oral history interview with Ronald A. Kleemann,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Ronald A. Kleemann on October 11 and 12, 2009. The interview took place at the artist's home in Valatie, New York, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Ronald A. Kleemann and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right. Are you comfortable? Okay. This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron [Ronald] Kleemann in Valatie, New York, on October 11th, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one. Also present for part of the interview is Kleemann's wife Sally [and her daughter Tracey Houlihan].

I wanted to start at the beginning today and ask you about your family, as far back as is meaningful to you.

RONALD A. KLEEMANN: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Your grandparents, if you knew them, where they came from, your parents.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When and where you were born. We will go on from there.

MR. KLEEMANN: All right. I was born on July 24, 1937. My mother's name was Corrine Kleemann.

MS. RICHARDS: Corrine?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: C-O-R-I-N-N-E?

MR. KLEEMANN: C-O-R-R-I-N-E. Father's name is Walter [Carl] Kleemann.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your mother's maiden name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Corrine [Elanor] Falk, F-A-L-K. And she was of Swedish parentage.

MS. RICHARDS: Was she born in the United States?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think - she was born in St. Louis [MO], I think. And just after my grandparents - that would be my grandparents came over here [to America] from-

MS. RICHARDS: The Falks.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Albert [changed from Algot] Falk and his wife [Anna Holmstedt] - I always called her Mormor. That is grandmother in Swedish. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. KLEEMANN: M-O-R-M-O-R.

MS. RICHARDS: Where in Sweden did they come from?

MR. KLEEMANN: Goteborg.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And they came directly to St. Louis?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, actually my grandfather came over here to get a job first before he sent for his wife. And he - I don't know the year that they came. But it was well before I was born. And he was - he stopped at Watertown and worked on a farm there for a while. And then he, you know, kept getting jobs and made enough money, ended up working for in Kenosha, Wisconsin, for a brass foundry, American Brass or something like that. And then he sent for my mother - my grandmother. She came over and then they had my mother, Corrine.

MS. RICHARDS: So what did your grandfather do for a living?

MR. KLEEMANN: He worked where they melt brass down. And he turned those big kettles full of molten brass letting the brass run into the molds where it cooled. [Laughs.] That kind of stuff. A dangerous job.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they live near you when you were growing up?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: We were in Bay City, Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: So they initially came to - they came to St. Louis?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then they moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about your father's side of the family - your grandparents on your father's side?

MR. KLEEMANN: They came from - I guess they came from Germany, you know, getting out in time for the Second World War or something like that or maybe the First World War. I can't remember which.

MS. RICHARDS: But you were born in 1937?

MR. KLEEMANN: Thirty-seven. So I don't want to start lying here. I am just telling a story. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] So your grandparents Kleemann, they were -

MR. KLEEMANN: Who I never - I never knew them.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. But your father was born in the U.S.? Or was he born in Germany?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yes, in the U.S.

MS. RICHARDS: So they got here before your father was born.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. I guess they got out of Germany and stuff was happening there or starting to happen and just thought they had better get out of there.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know where they lived in Germany?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I don't.

MS. RICHARDS: When they came here, where did they first arrive?

MR. KLEEMANN: Bay City, Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: And they had a dry goods store. I don't know - what do you call it? A store, like a regular corner store. And they had five children there - my father, his brothers, Albert and Carl, and two daughters - I can't remember their names - that both died fairly early in their lives. And that is the Kleemann part.

[Kleemann later clarifies that his father Walter and his siblings were adopted by the Kleemann family.]

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So he ran this business and your father grew up in Bay City with his brother. And how did your parents meet?

MR. KLEEMANN: How did they meet? I think they met through a deaf-and-dumb cousin to my father's side of the family, different name entirely, Anna Brosseau.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that - Brosseau?

MR. KLEEMANN: B-R-O-S-S-E-A-U, something like that. And both these people were married, Anna and her husband, Senefile. He called himself Senny. And they were both deaf and dumb. And so they talked with their hands. They sometimes could say things like, you know, but kind of weird sounding when it came out, you know. But I could understand them and my parents could understand them. [Laughs.] So that is that.

How did I get on that? Oh, that is how my mother met my father through those people.

MS. RICHARDS: How did they meet through those people? Why did they meet through those people?

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't remember. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it is probably not important. So they - but they lived in Bay City as soon as

they were married?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. And she came from Kenosha to Bay City.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, you said something earlier about your grandfather [KLEEMANN's great-grandfather was an Italian-trained muralist in Sweden] being interested in art.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And that is your grandfather Falk.

MR. KLEEMANN: Grandfather Falk.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was that - what did you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Not him, his wife was the daughter of the artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Corrine?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, Anna.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: Her father was my great-grandfather who was the artist. [Laughs.] [Inaudible.]

MS. RICHARDS: And he was an artist in Sweden?

MR. KLEEMANN: In Sweden. He was educated in art in Italy. He was taught to do - you know, when they paint the tops of ceilings in - [inaudible] - and stuff like that. He learned how to do that and then he came back to Goteborg and Stockholm and painted insides of the buildings.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you learn about that - about his work?

MR. KLEEMANN: My grandmother told me. She -

MS. RICHARDS: That is Corrine?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, that is Anna.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. I am confused about - who is Anna then?

MR. KLEEMANN: Anna is my grandmother

MS. RICHARDS: Anna Falk?

MR. KLEEMANN: Anna Falk.

MS. RICHARDS: Is Corrine's daughter?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, Corrine I my mother, Anna is her mother.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you learned about this artist from Anna?

MR. KLEEMANN: From Anna. At that time, I was even messing around with drawing and stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: So I had mentioned - I guess I asked you if you lived near your grandparents. But you visited them, so you learned about that on visits.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, we would go almost yearly, maybe two or three times sometimes. Sometimes I would go with my mother on the train to Chicago, then up to Kenosha on the Jitney bus or Jitney train or whatever you want to - and then we would stay there for a couple of weeks and then come back again and then go on again next Christmas maybe. The other way around, too. They traveled to us, also. But she was a nasty woman, my grandmother, because I would draw things for her and I would give them to her and she said you will never be as good as your grandfather. So that gave me something to work with. [Laughs.] I will, I will. So you know, I can even show you. I will just grab a couple of things and show you his picture.

My grandmother was never forthcoming with, you know, the process or anything like that.

MS. RICHARDS: This painting of the ceilings and what they did. Yeah. So going back to when you were born, and your brother, Carl. Is he younger than you or older?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, my uncle, Carl.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, your uncle, Carl.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't have a brother. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: And so your father and Carl [and Albert] grew up in Bay City. And your parents met and you were born in 1937. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you were growing up, did you - at what point did you show an interest in art? What were your main interests as a young child?

MR. KLEEMANN: I would say maybe about six, seven years old, something like that. I used to - my mother used to get *Life* magazine and I would look at the cars, you know, and try and draw them with a pencil and what have you, that kind of thing. And then - not very good, you know. It was an attempt. So I kept doing that for years and years and years. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in elementary school, did you - was art your best subject or were other things of equal interest to you?

MR. KLEEMANN: Art was probably my favorite subject, maybe not my best at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you recognized for your artistic ability in elementary school?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: The class artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, something like that, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any teachers who were particularly encouraging to you at that point?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a third-grade teacher was a friend of the family. I can't remember her name either - Mrs. - oh, well. It doesn't matter. And she was encouraging. Even my kindergarten teacher was teaching scribbling around. That is nice - that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Looking back now, are there things that you did or you thought about as a young child in elementary school that you now think in retrospect were significant or were things that would forecast your interest and your passion about art?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just the thing that my grandmother said that I am going to do this - not in so many words, but I had that feeling.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were growing - so then you grew up your whole life in Bay City - I mean, schooling. Did you continue to feel that art was your favorite subject in school - middle school and high school?

MR. KLEEMANN: In high school, I had a very good teacher. In fact, I stayed in touch with him quite a while after high school.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember his name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Ernest Mauer. [Kleemann later recalled that Mauer came to his first show at French & Company in New York City. In high school Kleemann asked Mauer if he thought he was good enough to make it in the New York art scene and he replied "you can do whatever you put your mind to in that direction." As Kleemann says, he chose to believe him.]

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Mauer?

MR. KLEEMANN: M-A-U-E-R.

MS. RICHARDS: What school was that?

MR. KLEEMANN: T.L. Handy High School, Bay City, Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: A public school?

MR. KLEEMANN: Public school on the west side.

MS. RICHARDS: And why is the west side significant? Was it a different place than the east side?

MR. KLEEMANN: East side was Bay City Central. So Bay City Central wasn't as good as, you know - [laughs]. But it was a good school and there were good teachers.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that in high school - could you see yourself doing something else besides art as a profession? Were you really interested or especially good at something else?

MR. KLEEMANN: Architecture. That is where I would have liked to have gone. But it didn't work out. Couldn't do the work. [Laughs.] But I headed to college. I started out in architecture and design and then took a few courses, just isn't for me.

MS. RICHARDS: What was it about architecture that didn't seem right?

MR. KLEEMANN: The math, the physics - is it physics? I just couldn't - it didn't ring a bell. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school in Bay City or even earlier, did you go to any art museums? I don't know if there were any in Bay City or in nearby cities either on your own or with your friends or with your parents.

MR. KLEEMANN: Not that I can remember.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any idea what it would mean to be an artist? Any example?

MR. KLEEMANN: Only -

MS. RICHARDS: Where did that come from?

MR. KLEEMANN: Only through my great-grandfather because that is all he has pounded into me. You know, like here is a great artist, you know. And I thought well, there must be something there, you know, if I get there far.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you see examples of his work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And did they have art books in the house that you could look at with other artists' work?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, just his stuff. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: In high school, did your high school teacher, Ernest Mauer, show you art books or images of other artists?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. He would give us instruction and projects, you know, to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he give you a sense there was a certain period of art that was his favorite that he would -

MR. KLEEMANN: I could do most things at that time. And -

MS. RICHARDS: Did he just love the Italian Renaissance and show you lots of images from Michelangelo and Leonardo? Or did he talk to you about the Bauhaus? Or did you sense any - do you remember any particular leaning?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. [Laughs.] He was just, you know, do a drawing or something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do anything in the summers on a regular basis or did any trips or activities in the summer turn out to be very memorable for you as a kid in school?

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you always have a job in the summer or did you always go camping or any particular -

MR. KLEEMANN: I just, you know, played in the apple orchard and things like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You lived in the country?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You said you lived in Bay City, but really you lived in the countryside.

MR. KLEEMANN: In Bay County. We lived in Bay City for a while until I was in fourth grade. Then we lived outside Bay City proper in Bay County. I played with the country guys, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever play a musical instrument?

MR. KLEEMANN: I took trumpet lessons for a while, but that didn't last either. Didn't have the stamina.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember as a kid in high school, besides the art classes, doing your own drawings in the evenings and weekends or painting or doing art projects?

MR. KLEEMANN: Drawings. I would sit there and draw.

MS. RICHARDS: And materials, you were using pencil?

MR. KLEEMANN: Pencil.

MS. RICHARDS: Any colors? Any paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: Sometimes pastel. But I made them look like pencil anyway. So I didn't use the pastel as a - I just, you know, make linear stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: And the art classes that you had in high school, was that exceptional to have a good art teacher? Did you feel especially -?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, in high school it was.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were approaching time to leave high school, did he or someone else encourage you to go to study art or you said architecture and help you figure out which place to go, college or art school?

MR. KLEEMANN: This is the thing I was going to say. I had this teacher, Dorothy Mason. And she was an English teacher. She asked me - she was doing theater in the round like Shakespeare stuff. And she had a lot of kids, you know, doing this thing. And there was a big drawing - I did a big drawing in chalk on her blackboard. And it was of the stage, you know. I copied it on a big -

MS. RICHARDS: Copied it from what?

MR. KLEEMANN: From a picture that she had - or not - I can't remember now. She either had somebody build it for her and I copied the picture or the thing itself where the people would be performing. And it was a huge thing on a blackboard all in black and white. And she was impressed by it.

And later on when I was having trouble getting into college, she introduced me to the - what do you call him - you go see this guy to see if you can get into college.

MS. RICHARDS: Admissions officer

MR. KLEEMANN: Admission officer, Clyde Vroman. And she was good friends with him. And she told him about my project and she said you have got to let this kid in because he is good enough and he will straighten out. So that is how I got into University of Michigan - not on my marks because they weren't that good. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Was that University of Michigan in Ann Arbor?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. And before that, I went to junior college to try and get my marks up. I did some of my - [inaudible] - I had a great teacher that taught me algebra finally - [laughs] - Mrs. Ewing. And I am happy for that. That helped me. I took some architecture classes there. Then got to Michigan and decided I didn't want to be an architect. I wanted to be an artist.

MS. RICHARDS: When you got to Michigan - so when you were in junior college, you still thought you wanted to focus on architecture.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were there for 2 years?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When you go to Michigan, how soon was it? Was it the first semester, the first year that you decided you would rather focus on art?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Actually I made that decision quite quickly. I got into - thought I wanted to be a teacher, art teacher.

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think you wanted to - was that a practical consideration that you could make money?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Or you really thought you would love to teach?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I thought it was practical. I really didn't want to teach.

MS. RICHARDS: So you majored in art education?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. And I got - I don't think I got my degree in that. Architecture and design, but it wasn't - I got the paper somewhere, but I don't know where it is. It is probably in the boxes or something.

MS. RICHARDS: By the time you were at University of Michigan and you decided you wanted to major in art, how much art had you seen - real art in museums, in art books? I mean, back in high school, you were saying the only artist you knew was your grandfather.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But by then, had you seen - had you been to Chicago or any other great museums?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think we went to Chicago - the Chicago Institute of Art and I looked at art there.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean at the University of Michigan or before?

MR. KLEEMANN: Before.

MS. RICHARDS: In high school or junior college?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think in high school, probably with, you know, my parents and my grandmother or something like that, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember - was that just one trip or were there many trips to the institute?

MR. KLEEMANN: Maybe two or three.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there paintings there or art of any sort that was -

MR. KLEEMANN: Not that I can remember. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember it being an incredible experience or not so? That was your first major museum visit.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. It was okay. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So when you were at the University of Michigan and you changed to art, did you have a strong sense that at that time, okay, I am going to be an artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I didn't want to be a painter. I wanted to be a sculptor.

MS. RICHARDS: And why? Why do you think?

MR. KLEEMANN: I had this great teacher who came, Joe Goto.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Goto?

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon me?

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

MR. KLEEMANN: G-O-T-O.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. KLEEMANN: He was born in Hawaii and then he taught in - oh, god, I can't remember. There is a school in Rhode Island - Rhode Island School of Design. He taught there. And then he came to Michigan to teach. And he was kind of a rough kind of person, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Was he sort of your - what you imagined a sculptor would be like?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. [Laughs.] That kind of stuff. And, you know, he would say that is not right, you know. Do it over again. One time I was working on a wood piece and he said Kleemann, give me that. He took it away from me. And so I threw it. And then he gave it back to me and I threw it at him. [Laughs.] And he looked like that and the thing went whizzing by his head. And he gave me some respect after that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that usual for you to be that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I have done things -

MS. RICHARDS: That emotional?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What was it about his response that angered you?

MR. KLEEMANN: He said, you know, this is no good. You have got to start over again. I said okay and I threw the thing back at him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you respect his opinion at all?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I loved the work that he did. You know, he would show us some things or he would have us go see some things that he had done.

MS. RICHARDS: How would you describe his work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Welds of steel, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: But this class was a woodcarving class? Or you could use any material?

MR. KLEEMANN: You could use any material. He just wanted to give - he would say if you want to use clay, use clay. If you want to use steel - because we had welders and all that stuff. And that is what I was into, the welded steel.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there artists at that time whose work you admired, artists who used steel, who you would kind of be thinking about when you were making your work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. I had his name. It starts with an M.

MS. RICHARDS: An American artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-mmm. No, it doesn't start with an M. Stankiewicz.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Richard.

MR. KLEEMANN: Richard Stankiewicz. And I was really taken by his work. So I started doing stuff like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You saw his work in magazines or was there some in-person in Michigan?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think he had a show there at one time.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was a very expressive kind of use of metal.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he would make, you know, like animal things out of steel. So I started doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were making sculpture - it sounds like your earlier drawings and paintings were realistic.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like the sculpture was more abstract.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the first time that you were working in an abstract way?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was something your teacher encouraged?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So the piece he threw away - or you threw away - was wood?

MR. KLEEMANN: Wood.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you keep working with wood or did you start using welded steel?

MR. KLEEMANN: Steel. Like those things they stick in cement to make the cement -

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, rebar.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, rebar. I worked a lot in rebar because you could bend it, put the fire on it and you could just bend it with your hands on the ends, so you wouldn't burn yourself. So I got into sculpture and took that to New York.

MS. RICHARDS: So by the time you graduated with a BA - BFA -

MR. KLEEMANN: BFA.

MS. RICHARDS: You felt you were a sculptor?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And using welded steel was your major material.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And were there other artists besides Stankiewicz whose work was very much in your mind? Were you reading about -

MR. KLEEMANN: I liked David Smith a lot, the guy that makes things go around.

MS. RICHARDS: [Alexander] Calder?

MR. KLEEMANN: Calder.

MS. RICHARDS: [George] Rickey?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Calder.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you at the University of Michigan for two years then?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: So when you graduated, did you - what did you think you would do next right after you graduated?

MR. KLEEMANN: Goto again told me, "Kleemann, get out of here. You need to be in New York City." So I went.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, backing up a little bit, how did your mother and father feel about your studying art and becoming an artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I said I have it on good sources that I am good enough to do this, so I am going to do it. And I did it. My dad lent me his 1958 Chevrolet, left him carless. And he had to get to work by, you know, standing in front -

MS. RICHARDS: Did I ask you what he did for a living?

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon me?

MS. RICHARDS: Your father.

MR. KLEEMANN: He was a foreman for Bay City Shovels.

MS. RICHARDS: Bay City Shovels?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, they did earth moving stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about your mother? Did she do any sort of work?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think she had a couple outside jobs, but she never did anything much.

MS. RICHARDS: And neither of them had done artwork?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. My mother had some drawings. I have drawings here that she did. I have drawings that my grandmother did. There are some things.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your mother ever talk to you about her interests, her ambitions to be an artist or to -

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, she had elocution lessons and she was more into acting, you know. So she could - she could do dialects of many different people. You know, she could sound like she is Swedish. She could sound like she is German. She could sound - you know, about anything. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did she actually perform in local theatrical productions?

MR. KLEEMANN: She was in a radio program in Chicago, a soap opera for a while. That didn't last. Then I guess she decided to get married instead. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: But when you were growing up, did she do any of these creative activities?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, she just did - she had these books full of readings and she would do these dialects for me and they would make me laugh, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So anyway, it sounds like they were quite supportive of your choice and your father even lending you his car.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you set out for New York, did the teacher Goto give you any references or people to see?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, one guy, Ralph Iwamoto.

MS. RICHARDS: Say that name again.

MR. KLEEMANN: I stayed with him.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name again?

MR. KLEEMANN: Iwamoto. I-W-A-M-O-T-O.

MS. RICHARDS: You stayed with him. Where did he live?

MR. KLEEMANN: As far as I know, he is still in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember - you stayed with him for a long period of time or just -

MR. KLEEMANN: Maybe three days, three, four - just to get me over the hump.

MS. RICHARDS: Was he also a sculptor?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, he was a painter. He has been in art magazines. I haven't seen him in years and years. I used to go and visit him every once in a while. Not anymore. We just lost touch.

MS. RICHARDS: I forgot to ask you. Were you ever in the military or how did you not - was that an issue?

MR. KLEEMANN: Never was in the military.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't - there wasn't any draft or anything that you had to do?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I had a child for that reason. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MR. KLEEMANN: When Korea was going on. Korea or maybe the other one, Vietnam.

MS. RICHARDS: So is that when you were in college?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you married?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And when did you get married?

MR. KLEEMANN: Let's see, how old would I have been? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you were born in 1937.

MR. KLEEMANN: Thirty-seven. I went to Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: You graduated from Michigan in '61, so you were 24.

MR. KLEEMANN: I spent, I think, 2 or 3 years - 2 or 3 years in junior college.

MS. RICHARDS: Junior college.

MR. KLEEMANN: Then I got out of there, so I was 18, 19, 20. I would say around 23 or 24.

MS. RICHARDS: Is when you graduated from Michigan when you were 24.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that when you got married?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. I was married before that.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were married when you were in junior college?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah - no.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in Michigan?

MR. KLEEMANN: In Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry. What was the name of the woman you married?

MR. KLEEMANN: Susan Beudel.

MS. RICHARDS: B-E-A-

MR. KLEEMANN: B-E-U-D-E-L. Beudel.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had a child?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Son or a daughter?

MR. KLEEMANN: Daughter, two.

MS. RICHARDS: And what are their names?

MR. KLEEMANN: One is Kris. K-R-I-S. And the other one is Wendy. That is it.

[Kleemann clarifies that his first marriage with Susan Beudel lasted from approximately 1957 to 1965. His second marriage with Margaret "Maggie" Gilliam lasted from 1966 to 1977. Kleemann has been married to Sarah "Sally" Woolworth Kleemann since 1979.]

MS. RICHARDS: So it was because of having a family -

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't have to go to Vietnam or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it was in between - 1961 wasn't Korea and it wasn't Vietnam. But in any case, you didn't have to go in the military.

MR. KLEEMANN: I thought they were still, you know, trying to get young kids, you know, in the service. And I didn't want any part of it. That is what I did.

MS. RICHARDS: So after you graduated, then does that mean your marriage ended? Or they came with you to New York?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, my marriage ended before I got out of college - Michigan. I think it was the year before I graduated. So that would be what -

MS. RICHARDS: Nineteen sixty because you graduated in '61 from Michigan.

MR. KLEEMANN: All right, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was 1960.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So then when you came to New York, you were on your own?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you started out staying just for a few days with the artist, Ralph [Iwamoto]. And what happened then? How did you make your way?

MR. KLEEMANN: I still didn't have my sculpture over there. So I went back and got my dad's car. He lent it to me. I told you that part of it already. I took all this stuff. I had it in my parents' backyard at that time. [Laughs.] And I drove it in a van and the car was pulling it. And I went through the [Lincoln] tunnel with this stuff on. A cop stopped me. I told him - I gave him the sob story and they said okay, you know, get out of here. [Laughs.] And they let me go through. I ended up in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you end up in Brooklyn?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, that is the only way I could - I still had to get some money. I worked for a gas meter company in Brooklyn right on the river.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get that job?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just - I went and saw somebody, you know, and I was -

MS. RICHARDS: So when you first came, you brought all your sculpture.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You found a place to live?

MR. KLEEMANN: On Bleecker Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, in Manhattan?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the address on Bleecker?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was right across the street from where they played jazz. I can't remember the name of it.

MS. RICHARDS: So right in the middle of the village?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. And I had all the stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was a place to live and to work? Or just to live?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just to live. I lived in a basement. And then I had the whole basement, so I could keep my stuff there until I got a chance to run around to galleries and try and make these guys come and look at it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So you immediately looked for a job?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. And then I moved to Brooklyn. I'm sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, so when you got the job -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You said it had to do with gas meters?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And of all things, why did you pick that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just to get a job because I -

MS. RICHARDS: Did it have any connection to what your father did? Did you feel like there was anything - any familiarity to that kind of business?

MR. KLEEMANN: I guess, you know, a working stiff, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Blue-collar job.

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you got that job, you moved to Brooklyn. Where did you live in Brooklyn? What was the address, the neighborhood?

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what neighborhood it was?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. They had a lot of bakeries. It was in the Swedish part of -

MS. RICHARDS: Bay Ridge?

MR. KLEEMANN: Bay Ridge. You got it. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't stay there very long.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean like a year or so? Or two years?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not even that long. I think I had the job maybe four or five months.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you leave?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, -

MS. RICHARDS: I should say did you get to show your work to any of the galleries that you wanted to?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not at that point, no. I just had the stuff in Bleecker Street.

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved to Brooklyn, but you left your stuff in Bleecker.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you starting to meet other artists? Did Ralph introduce you to other artists? Or did you meet anybody?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't meet anybody at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel kind of isolated?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to exhibitions, museum shows or galleries?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I would go to the Museum of Modern Art and, you know, poke around there.

MS. RICHARDS: See Stankiewicz and other -

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon me?

MS. RICHARDS: See the artists who you had been attracted to earlier?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so you are saying after a few months, four months or so, you stopped?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember why? Why did you make that decision?

MR. KLEEMANN: I stopped painting?

MS. RICHARDS: No, stopped working. You said you only stayed in that first job about four months. Do you remember why?

MR. KLEEMANN: Why I stopped?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: I just got sick of it and I wanted to get back to what I was doing. I had a little pocket money, so, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were able to start working. You set up a studio where you lived in Bay Ridge.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. No, no, I'm sorry, no. It comes to - 89 Grand Street. That was my first studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Not on Bleecker?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, no. That was just a storage place.

MS. RICHARDS: I see, 89 Grand Street, okay. So you stayed in Bay Ridge just for a few months while you were working in that area. Then you moved to 89 Grand Street. And you focused on your work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did that go?

MR. KLEEMANN: Very good.

MS. RICHARDS: What happened? Did you meet people? Did you show your work to anyone?

MR. KLEEMANN: Allan Stone came up to look at my stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Came down, I guess. [Laughs.]

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.] Green Gallery, you know, looked at it, Richard Bellamy. He said he just couldn't handle any more big sculpture right then, you know. So that was that. To make a long story short, I stopped being a sculptor and started painting. I actually started painting sculpture. I would make these things out of wood and I would paint on the wood - kind of sculptures from them.

MS. RICHARDS: When you think back, what do you think were the main reasons why you stopped being a sculptor, as you said?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was too much work.

MS. RICHARDS: What part of it?

MR. KLEEMANN: Getting material. It was not so bad getting pieces of wood, but, you know, dragging steel and stone around, you know. I used to, you know, curl pieces of stone into the stuff that I -

MS. RICHARDS: The rebar?

MR. KLEEMANN: The rebar.

MS. RICHARDS: The rebar, uh-huh.

MR. KLEEMANN: To keep it in there, that kind of thing. And it was just getting too much work to do that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: So it wasn't that you wanted to abandon working in three dimensions?

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Or abstraction?

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: It was the physical nature of this work.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so the - and did you feel - but you were getting some positive response. It sounds like Richard Bellamy had some interest, Allan Stone.

MR. KLEEMANN: He liked the work.

MS. RICHARDS: So that must have been a really difficult decision.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. But it was something I had to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any artists - other artists you saw who were painting sculpture who may have inspired you? Or did this just come to you on your own?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, there might have been, but I can't remember who. The people I lived with at 89 Grand, I believe Lozano. I don't know where she is. She was from Texas. A guy downstairs from me, John Sowaal.

MS. RICHARDS: Sowaal?

MR. KLEEMANN: Sowaal.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell -?

MR. KLEEMANN: S-O-W-A-A-L, something like that. I got friendly with him. He was a nice guy. He was president of the American Crafts Museum [now the Museum of Art and Design] once. I think that is the right name of it. He got canned and he wanted to do his own artwork. But he never did. He just talked about it a lot. [Laughs.] I liked him anyway, you know, have a beer and all that stuff once in a while. And he was very supportive.

MS. RICHARDS: Lee Lozano's work at that time, do you remember what it looked like? Was she making -?

MR. KLEEMANN: Do you know the name, Lee?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MR. KLEEMANN: She was doing kind of - what would you call it - I would say minimal stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: A cross between painting and sculpture?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you started painting sculpture, was that metal? Was that steel? Was that wood? What materials were you -?

MR. KLEEMANN: Anything I could get a hold of. I took a chrome automobile bumper and hauled it home because I found it someplace in the street.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know the work of John Kearney?

MR. KLEEMANN: John Kearney?

MS. RICHARDS: The Chicago sculptor who used stainless steel bumpers?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: John Kearney. Anyway, it was around the same time.

MR. KLEEMANN: I did it before he did.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Of course.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know if I did. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So when you started that, when you made that change, you were still supporting yourself just by the money that you saved? Were you doing odd jobs?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. And later on, I got a job at Cunard Steam Ship Company.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MR. KLEEMANN: After this and, you know, kind of during the -

MS. RICHARDS: In the early '60s?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I would say '63 maybe, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you do for them?

MR. KLEEMANN: I started out in the unpacking room.

MS. RICHARDS: I thought you were going to say you did murals.

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.] No. But then I also - they bumped me up. I showed them some work. I went to work for their advertising department in paste-ups and mechanicals, that kind of thing. And I was there maybe 2 or 3 years, something like that. It gave me enough money to, you know, keep the loft and go on with the work.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was it do you think that you were doing - I think that after you were painting the sculpture, you started doing abstract-shaped canvases.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So your work was still three-dimensional, but it was going more toward painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember when that was and how that transition took place?

MR. KLEEMANN: Let's see. I got another job after Cunard at another commercial art place. I met this cop, George Lippi.

MS. RICHARDS: George Lippi?

MR. KLEEMANN: L-I-P-P-I. He was retired and he just kind of hung around there to - he did artwork, too. He was kind of like a supervisor. I was starting to do shield-shaped paintings at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: How did it evolve in your mind - do you remember - going from sculpture, painted sculpture, then letting go of sculpture and being a painter of shaped canvases?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, one thing - I guess what got me going on it was I got a saw, a table saw. And I found that I can bend wood that way just by, you know, not sawing it all the way through - a long piece and then you can curve it. And I got the curve and I made it, you know, sit up straight. I said here is a shield. [Laughs.] And so why not paint the shield?

MS. RICHARDS: And then you stretched canvas on this?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Rather than keeping it as a sculptural form.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the first time that you were actually doing paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, mm-hmm.

MS. RICHARDS: And when that happened, did you have an identity crisis? Oh my god, I am not a sculptor. I'm a painter.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No, it wasn't? Everything, it was one continuum.

MR. KLEEMANN: I looked at it. It was a very sculptural - the way I painted.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you aware of other artists who were working with shaped canvases at the time in New York?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably, but I can't remember who.

MS. RICHARDS: And at that time, did the people who you were living with in 89 Grand, had that changed? Was it still Lee Lozano and John Sowaal?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, they were still there.

MS. RICHARDS: Just the three of you?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And had you expanded your circle of friends with other artists at that point? Let's say by the mid '60s.

MR. KLEEMANN: I hung out with - John Sowaal was one of them. And Lee Lozano, I guess, was one of that group is Fluxus. There are a bunch of them on Canal Street that lived in one building. Snow, Mike Snow, Paula Tavins, and a couple of others. Actually I wrote them down. I can give you them later.

MS. RICHARDS: I am going to change the disc. Just a minute.

[END CD 1.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron Kleeman in Valatie, New York, on October 11, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

We were talking about what other artists you knew at that time. You mentioned Michael Snow and continued - and you were saying that you also met Donald Judd.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I - well, she brought Donald over to see my work one time.

MS. RICHARDS: Paula did?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, Lee Lozano. And, you know, he looked at it and summarily dismissed it. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: As he did with most every other artist. [Laughter.]

MR. KLEEMANN: But I met the guy anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: You - as you were working, you said you started doing these paintings, shaped canvass paintings. You hadn't done much painting before. How did you decide what paint medium to use and what the imagery would be?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Well, I just knew I could paint.

MS. RICHARDS: And the imagery was abstract.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And was it - what would you say the subject matter of those paintings was?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think -

MS. RICHARDS: What were your questions? What were they - when you were painting those early works, shaped canvasses, what were the issues that you were dealing with?

MR. KLEEMANN: That one.

MS. RICHARDS: What year is this painting that we're looking at?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. I'd have to look that up. Maybe it's on them - maybe it's on me.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's - it's not totally abstract. There's some representational imagery in that painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you started doing paintings like this, which you're looking at a circular painting, how did you decide -

MR. KLEEMANN: They're like -

MS. RICHARDS: Shields.

MR. KLEEMANN: - emblematic.

MS. RICHARDS: Emblematic.

My first question was did you decide to - did you use acrylic or oil?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I used acrylic on those, yeah. It was -

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you decide what imagery to use?

MR. KLEEMANN: What?

MS. RICHARDS: What you would actually be painting. It's not entirely abstract; why not? Did you have it -

MR. KLEEMANN: I just -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you want there to be a narrative, some kind of - were you using these images as symbols? This looks like a telephone.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that's a telephone and an ink bottle turned upside down, but distorted.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there - would you say that you wanted people to read these images together and create a narrative themselves or was there something specifically that you were communicating that you wanted people to -

MR. KLEEMANN: No, not with that particular painting. I don't know why I did it. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say then that the selection was intuitive, that you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you remember these images coming from magazines, from advertizing, from just totally your imagination, from photographs?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, probably the things that don't look like anything are from my imagination and the distortions on the telephone are just distorting real things.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that there was some influence of something like surrealism in those works?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And there's a kind of a collage feeling, there's a certain juxtaposing of different images and different kinds of reality.

MR. KLEEMANN: Lapping over each other.

MS. RICHARDS: Overlapping, yeah, yeah.

Were there other artists at the time you remember seeing who were inspiring, who were empowering to you to give you a sense - I'm going to - this is what I want to do and I can see they're - that's the direction they're taking and that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Who did I like then? I don't - [laughter] - I can't remember. I just did my work and let it go.

MS. RICHARDS: Among the contemporaries who you knew, were there any people who you did regular studio visits with that you really felt were you were close to?

MR. KLEEMANN: A guy by the name of [George] Beauchamp.

MS. RICHARDS: Who was a painter.

MR. KLEEMANN: Actually, he was a printmaker.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember how you met him?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I met him in Michigan. He was in Michigan.

MS. RICHARDS: And then he moved to New York.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Where does he live? Near you?

MR. KLEEMANN: He lived uptown in the '80s. He was a strange guy. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: What attracted you to his work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, the - I'd watch him work sometimes with - I don't know how they get - on steel and he'd gouge things out of steel and then get it printed.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you make prints then?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't. I didn't. But he was a friend of mine and that was - you know, I'd see him every once in a while.

MS. RICHARDS: So these paintings that you were doing in the late '60s, or mid- to late-'60s shaped canvasses, they were kind of like shields or emblems. And there was some kind of surrealist overlapping of realities.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there surrealists whose work - well, I guess in the past or even continuing to work at that point who you felt you were referencing or now you reflect on, you think you were thinking about?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, let's see. Not [Salvador] Dali.

MS. RICHARDS: Or contemporaries like [Robert] Rauschenberg?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Rauschenberg. Yeah, he's a surrealist, isn't he? [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, he used photographic imagery which brings you to the next - so at what point did you start incorporating photographic images as reference, and do you recall what those changes were like, what your thinking was, why you at some point moved to not doing shaped canvases anymore? Did you stop because you were frustrated or you felt it was boring or -

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably frustrated with sculpture.

MS. RICHARDS: So then even the sculptural elements of the paintings became frustrating.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you kept moving more and more toward two-dimensional reality.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And as you did that, how did your subject matter change? Do you think the subject matter pulled you to the flatter format or you wanted the format and you thought about the subject? Which - how did that -

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I could get more out of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you explain that a little bit more?

MR. KLEEMANN: More of what I wanted to do in my art. And I was looking at other realists at that time, you know, like the other movements like Ivan.

MS. RICHARDS: Ivan Albright?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, Karp.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, the dealer.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What other realists were you looking at? This is in the late '60s.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think drove you to be interested in realism? I mean, at that point in time, that wasn't the dominant direction in art. Why do you think you found that was the compelling area of work for you, not abstraction or collage?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I thought it wasn't going anywhere for me, for one thing. And I saw this

movement coming along, you know, the photorealists, the California guys, and I said to myself, I can do this too.

MS. RICHARDS: What about straight realists? There were plenty of realists working then: figurative realists, landscape realists. What about - were you interested in that?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: And if not, why not?

MR. KLEEMANN: That's a good question. [Laughter.] I didn't want to - I didn't want to be a brush-man particularly, you know, like - you know, like use heavy paints and things like that. I just wanted it to look like a picture. And I thought that was enough.

MS. RICHARDS: Like a picture; in other words, you wanted to -

MR. KLEEMANN: Flat.

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't want any kind of a personal expressiveness to be in the painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Not particularly.

MS. RICHARDS: And so the flatness that you were looking for seemed photographic rather than -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so if you think of someone who - let's say Philip Pearlstein, who painted thin but not photographically, but that work wasn't interesting - or Alex Katz, or someone like that.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he wasn't my mentor. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: And when you thought of working flat, you were telling me that - why the photo-based? What was it about using photographs that seemed right to you for yourself?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I just - I didn't want to, you know, like go someplace to sit and paint.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't want to paint outside from life.

MR. KLEEMANN: No. I wanted something still that I could look at all of the time.

MS. RICHARDS: But you could have taken a photograph of a landscape and painted it as a landscape painter paints -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - not having any photographic reality in it.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: But you specifically - did you feel - felt excited about the photographic quality of that kind of realism.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I liked the photograph as well as I liked painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think about just doing photographs?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, but I didn't - that to me would be boring too because I liked the paint, I even liked to make mistakes so I could correct them.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that you loved the process of - creating this other reality from photograph that could be read as a photographic reality but wasn't a photograph.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right. That's a good way to put it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have trouble feeling that you were going to - if you thought that you wanted to paint like these other artists who were photorealists - or were being called photorealists - did you have trouble feeling like you were adopting something they had already come up with. Was that -

MR. KLEEMANN: They were ahead of me, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have trouble with that?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you felt that you wanted to be a part of that.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: It seemed like the right place for you to be with your work.

When you first - and you continued to live on Grand Street, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, tell me when you moved. How did you decide on those first photorealist paintings what the subject matter would be, and where did you find the photographs? Did you - you found a photograph and decided to paint it, or you decided on the imagery and you went to look for the photograph of it?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just liked trucks, and I - so I'd started taking pictures of trucks and that's sort of the way it started.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were taking photographs - was that in Manhattan?

MR. KLEEMANN: On Canal Street.

MS. RICHARDS: What would make one truck something you'd photograph and another truck you wouldn't? What was it about those trucks that you - attracted?

MR. KLEEMANN: Their shapes, their color and what their purpose was.

MS. RICHARDS: And what shapes and what colors did you find that were most -

MR. KLEEMANN: The shape of a - what do you call this - a garbage truck. I did a garbage truck. And the brown truck that - the FedEx truck - not FedEx.

MS. RICHARDS: UPS.

MR. KLEEMANN: UPS, yeah. I did that. But I also stuck other parts of human bodies into the truck and that was my first realism, you know, or photorealism, actually, because I used photographs, and I used pieces of people's arms and -

MS. RICHARDS: And when you were doing those early photorealist paintings, did you consciously decide not to incorporate figures in those paintings, figures that you could see? I mean, you could see the head of a driver of a car. But - and you're talking about arms - not the full figure.

MR. KLEEMANN: No. Pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: Why would it - why did that seem like -

MR. KLEEMANN: They were actually surreal.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was that mixture of realities and the kind of ambiguity that you wanted.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you began then, tell me - go through the process, if you can recall, of those early years, of how you take the photograph, why that photograph - what happened next till you - till you got to the point of starting the painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Why I took the photograph?

MS. RICHARDS: Why that photograph, how you took it, how you decided what time of day, what part of the truck to photograph?

MR. KLEEMANN: Time of the day didn't matter. Of course, neither did -

MS. RICHARDS: What about light? How did light figure into taking the photographs? Did you particularly want it to be sunny, dull? Did you want reflections, did you avoid reflections?

MR. KLEEMANN: When I take photographs, I take a lot of them, and I just shoot them, and then I get the photographs back and see, well, that was a bad one, you know. [Laughter.] Throw it away or keep it or whatever, but not use it as a model. And sometimes I got good ones, sometimes not.

MS. RICHARDS: We'll go back to that process in a minute but I noticed that you actually had a show in 1971, which was only maybe a few years after you started, at French & Company.

MR. KLEEMANN: French & Company. There is - I did a lot of nasty work - not nasty, but, but I did a truck with a penis with it, a UPS truck.

MS. RICHARDS: And why was that?

MR. KLEEMANN: I was just doing that then.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you want to be provocative?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MR. KLEEMANN: Attention. [Laughter.] And it got me attention. They all sold.

MS. RICHARDS: Was the goal to sell or just to show? You said get attention; you didn't say sell.

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't think - I didn't know if they would sell or not but they did, and -

MS. RICHARDS: And those early paintings you said were trucks. As your work was evolving then, the subject matter, the paintings in the '71 show were trucks.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you decide to start painting the racing cars? What was it - why leave the trucks and do the - maybe they were happening concurrently but why did you start with the racing cars?

MR. KLEEMANN: That's a good question. Oh, I think I got an offer to do a painting in Monaco. The name of the painting I think was *Monaco March in May* [1972].

MS. RICHARDS: *Monaco* -

MR. KLEEMANN: *March in May*. And the painting I did was bought by a guy named Stewart Freeman. And he wanted something from Monaco. So he sent my wife at the time - I don't think it was Sally; I'm not sure - anyway, sent us both over to Monaco and -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year that was?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what the year was?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I can probably get it out of here.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So we're talking about *Monaco March in May*, which was 1972. And that was the first or one of the first paintings you did of racing cars.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you continue to do - use racing -

MR. KLEEMANN: This was in the Sidney Janis show ["Sharp-Focus Realism," Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, NY, January 6 to February 4, 1972].

MS. RICHARDS: But that's 1971, so that's a little early even.

MR. KLEEMANN: Or maybe not. Maybe it wasn't that one.

MS. RICHARDS: *Lightning Strikes Twice*, 1971. And here's *Lightning Strikes Twice, Twice*.

MR. KLEEMANN: Twice. So I did it twice.

MS. RICHARDS: You did. And *Flying Scott One* and *Flying Scott Two*. So you did quite a number of paintings of racing cars in 1972. And each one - here's this one has figures in it -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Each one is a cropped image.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were the photographs you took photos of cropped racing cars?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I cropped them.

MS. RICHARDS: You cropped them. What was it about the composition, either as formerly or thematically that made you want to just show a cropped image of a car and not the whole car? How did that work in creating the painting that you wanted to, the image that you wanted to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just - I think it has - it's trying to get out of its picture.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it kind of a power?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Sense of compression.

MR. KLEEMANN: Like, ready to go, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: It would be more static if you saw the whole -

MR. KLEEMANN: Otherwise it's just the car. It doesn't - like this guy could have done the whole thing but -

MS. RICHARDS: This is called *Slingshot*, 1972.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, it's like you pull it back and it changes. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Were these decisions - do you think these decisions were intuitive, the formal qualities, these - the compositional questions, or were you consciously looking to build that kind of power and intensity in the work?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think it's probably more intuitive than the concept of - I knew what I wanted and I thought this was the way to get it.

MS. RICHARDS: There's also a very even - mostly very even kind of light. You said you took a lot of photographs and only after you saw them did you decide which ones worked. So it wasn't that you were after a certain kind of light.

MR. KLEEMANN: Unless it was also intuitive. That could be - I just saw this and it struck me, the light struck me.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something about this subject matter and its non-elitist quality, let's say. Racing cars is something that an average person, probably male, an average person, not necessarily an art connoisseur would respond to. Did you - so was it consciously - was it a conscious decision to select subject matter like trucks and racing cars that would have this non-elitist -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - approach?

Is that something that's you've felt was a specific goal?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was -

MS. RICHARDS: It was conscious effort to use a subject matter, these kinds of vehicles that anyone would - well, and the other question is they seem - they seem of a kind of male world. Was that a conscious decision that that's what you would focus on?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'd say so.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think about why?

MR. KLEEMANN: Strong like bull. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Pardon?

MR. KLEEMANN: Strong like bull.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's a kind of macho sensibility that you wanted to -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Louis [Meisel] uses that about my work a lot. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that was an expression of who you were or an expression of who you wanted to be, or a kind of piece of popular culture that you wanted to embrace even though you may personally not think you were macho but you wanted to explore that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, explore that world, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Not necessarily that you were part of it but that you wanted to understand.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't want to put words in your mouth - [laughter] - but.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that - I mean, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: It's not a world that artists are usually part of.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right, right, but some are, some are. Can I close it?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure, sure. Did you think when you were thinking of these trucks and racing cars, did you think of them as beautiful objects to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. They're like - especially when you don't get the whole thing. It's like a collage itself. It's all done for you, the collage part.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean the decals and the different forms of the trucks.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever try - at the start, did you try using photographs that other people had taken, or did you feel from the beginning that these photographs needed to be ones that you had taken?

MR. KLEEMANN: Both ways. I painted paintings from other people's photographs and paintings from myself, or that I had taken. Like, Tracey [Houlihan] has given me some sources every once in a while.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me go back to one piece of personal history. You were living on 89 - how long were you living on 89 Grand Street? When did you move from there?

MR. KLEEMANN: Let's see, 89 Grand. I really don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you move after that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Let's see. After that, I don't know if I moved uptown or downtown. No, I didn't. That's another story. The street that goes - not Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: Lafayette?

MR. KLEEMANN: Lafayette, does that go all the way up -

MS. RICHARDS: Becomes 4th Avenue.

MR. KLEEMANN: Becomes 4th Avenue. Hmm.

MS. RICHARDS: East of Broadway?

MR. KLEEMANN: Is it going -

MS. RICHARDS: Bowery?

MR. KLEEMANN: Towards the Bowery, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Houston?

MR. KLEEMANN: Houston, Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, perpendicular to - well, I should say Houston is below Grand. Okay. Same east/west.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you saying that you lived on Houston?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. I think it was Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved - did you get married again after Susan, after your marriage with Susan and you left Michigan? In New York?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know how this works but I left Susan. But I think I got back together with Susan on Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: So she moved to New York.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And your daughters as well?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But you don't remember the address on Houston or what year.

And so when you were on Houston, that was east Houston, near the Bowery.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, on the left-hand side. Does Grand - does Grand go all the way up too?

MS. RICHARDS: Grand goes across pretty far.

MR. KLEEMANN: It might have been Grand. [Laughter.] I'm not sure. It was Grand or Houston. We had an apartment there. And I just remember getting bagels at a bagel place across the street all of the time. And the kids were there and then it all broke up again. Then the kids went back home.

MS. RICHARDS: To Michigan.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you - did you feel like you part of an artist's community at that point in the early '70s in New York?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not really.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there - who were you seeing? Once you became a painter, did your circle of friends and associates change and who else did you hang out with?

MR. KLEEMANN: My friend George, the printmaker. Let's see. I can't remember if I got to know John Salt at that point. What else? I guess that's it.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you end up getting a show at French & Company in 1971, and then you also in '74? How did you - hold on. Let me - let's -

MR. KLEEMANN: Sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: That's okay. Let's start again and go back in terms of your relationships. After Susan came to New York and left again, you became involved in someone else. And what was her name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Maggie.

MS. RICHARDS: Maggie. And what was her last name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Gilliam. G-I-L-L-I-A-M.

MS. RICHARDS: And you got married?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: In the late '60s?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you lived with her on Grand Street, or somewhere else?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, it wasn't Grand Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, well, we'll cover that in -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had a son?

MR. KLEEMANN: Gunnar.

MS. RICHARDS: Gunnar. G-U-N-N-A-R?

MR. KLEEMANN: G-U-N-N-A-R?

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year he was born?

MS. KLEEMANN: Seventy-three.

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-three.

MR. KLEEMANN: Same as Tracey?

MS. HOULIHAN: I'm '72.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So you were married to Maggie when you first showed at French & Company.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And I was asking how did you get connected with them? How did they - who's at the gallery, who saw your work, who is the main person you work with and how did they see you work, come to know it and put it in the show?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, actually that has to do with Ivan Karp.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, how was that?

MR. KLEEMANN: He, again, couldn't take me on and - is that -

MS. KLEEMANN: Richard Bellamy also.

MR. KLEEMANN: And Dick Bellamy.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. They saw your work and they recommended that you -

MR. KLEEMANN: That I go see Nancy Hoffman - or Nancy Hoffman, or whatever the guy's name that owed the place at that time, but Nancy as his right hand.

MS. KLEEMANN: Janis. Wasn't it Janis?

MR. KLEEMANN: Who? Sidney Janis?

MS. RICHARDS: No, he had - Sidney Janis. Yeah. So you brought your work to Nancy Hoffman at French & Company and she wanted to put it in show.

MR. KLEEMANN: She wanted to show it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you - did you - and I was talking about your circle of friends at that point, and you were recollecting what other artists you knew in the early '70s. Why don't we go over that now? Who were they that you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Do we know John -

MS. RICHARDS: John Salt.

MR. KLEEMANN: John Salt at -

MS. KLEEMANN: You knew him I think after. He was with Louis or Nancy - that came through Louis.

MS. RICHARDS: So when - during the years when you were showing at French & Company, who were the artists who you were friends with then, those early years? You were saying - you met Ben Schonzeit.

MR. KLEEMANN: Ben Schonzeit. I was at 508 Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: What's 508 - what was the significance of 508 Broadway?

MR. KLEEMANN: Loft building. We had the second floor.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were living at 508 Broadway.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a place you moved to from Grand Street, then. Or maybe there was something - 508 Broadway. And you had a floor there and so did Ben.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Ben had - I had the third floor; he had the second floor.

MS. RICHARDS: And who else was in that building? Other artists?

MR. KLEEMANN: Douglas [Dunn], he was living with a dancer at - not - [inaudible] - but - I can't remember her name [Twyla Tharp].

MS. RICHARDS: Lucinda Childs?

MR. KLEEMANN: Hmm?

MS. RICHARDS: Lucinda Childs?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: And you mentioned another artist. So did you meet Ben Schonzeit when you moved to that building, or did you move to that building because you met him? How did that

happen?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'm not sure. I think we kind of moved in at the same time and just became -

MS. RICHARDS: And you said that you knew Don Eddy. When did you meet him? Was that because of French & Company that he showed there too?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he showed there also.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were showing at French & Company, did you think of that gallery as a kind of a community that you met the other artists who showed there and that added that kind of positive element to your career that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. That's where I was. That's where I was going.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there - at that point were here - how did you - you welcomed the idea that you were considered a photorealist. The label was not an issue. It was positive. Is that correct?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And at the same time, were you consciously trying to define your work as being different from the other photorealists? Was that an issue that you had to be consciously concerned about?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah I guess because what I painted, the subject was different from the other photorealists. That's about as far as technique goes. We all do pretty much the same thing. Some use airbrush, some - I don't use airbrush. I have used airbrush, and I'm - I could handle it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yu also - soon after you started painting the racing cars. You did an airplane or a few airplanes. What was the - this may seem minor, but why did you think airplanes and then fire trucks? What was the reason to expand?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, the airplane, that was a commission and the guy wanted it - what's -

MS. KLEEMANN: Stuart Spieser.

MR. KLEEMANN: Stuart Spieser. And he wanted us all to paint airplanes. Tom did one and I did one, and I don't know who else was there but they all did airplanes.

MS. KLEEMANN: Charlie Bell.

MR. KLEEMANN: Charlie Bell.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about this being told what to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I liked the subject. You know, it was shiny and like the stuff I wanted to do anyway. So why couldn't - it was an - it was a racing airplane at one time.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was logical. It was -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, there was no - I had no qualms.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't a part of your life walking down the street the way the trucks were,

though racing cars were in a separate reality. Fire trucks were part of your life too.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were - and then was there something - what about the genesis of the fire trucks? Was that something added to - and why not police cars, for example?

MR. KLEEMANN: I did police cars also.

MS. RICHARDS: You did?

MR. KLEEMANN: In fact, I did them before fire trucks. I think two or three paintings. I think I had them in here. Do you want to see them?

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, I recall. You're right of course. And it seems that as the paintings were progressing, your involvement with reflections was changing. How would you describe that? Did you develop a greater interest in reflections and rendering shiny surfaces, was that - how did that part of the painting process and that part of the subject matter change as you went along?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I always loved chrome. If it's chrome, it's got to be - you got to paint it that way or else it's not chrome. [Laughter.] That's essentially it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, the racing cars didn't have a lot of chrome; they had a lot of painted surfaces. The fire trucks have those big windows that you can use the -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, you can use the reflections.

MS. RICHARDS: Reflections.

MR. KLEEMANN: I always say, if it's there, I can paint it, and let it go down - if the total picture, you know, works for me, there is no - there is no reflection in it, it's okay because I'd like - I like it anyway. And if there is a reflection in it, that's okay too. It's even better.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it especially - one result of painting the subject matter that you were painting, which was something that a huge cross section of the population could respond to - was it a specific goal in your mind and did it give you a sought-after satisfaction that viewers who might consider themselves not knowledgeable about art could find something of interest in your paintings? Was that connection to the common man, you might say, something that you sought out, that you specifically wanted?

MR. KLEEMANN: I wanted that. Yeah. I -

MS. RICHARDS: As opposed to some artists who are completely happy with just having other artists and people who are knowledgeable about art be most drawn to their work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I like people, you know, especially people who like my work. And that story of A. J. Foyt -

MS. RICHARDS: What's that story?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, you know, I'm mad at him and I've talked to him a couple of times. He's very abrupt with everybody. And Sally and I were driving away from the track one day and I felt this - somebody bumping into the back of my car and, you know, kept bumping. And I looked and I

couldn't see it in the mirror. And his car pulled around, and I just looked over there, and A. J. Foyt went - and I went like this. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think he did that? Did he know who you were?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just, yeah, he knew who I was because I had a van and it was - it said - what did it say on my van?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It said "Team Kleemann."

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, let's talk about that. Okay, I know you did this - I think it was in 1977. I guess before the Kleemann - the Team Kleemann Conceptual Art Racing Team, before that, you were interested in car racing, auto racing. What was it about that? Was it something from childhood? Was it something that just happened to be near somewhere you lived? Where did that interest come? Or did it come directly from painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: From painting and - I used to sit in my chicken coop and listen to -

MS. RICHARDS: Your chicken coop? Where is that?

MR. KLEEMANN: This is back in Bay City. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: In Bay City.

MR. KLEEMANN: I'd listen to the Indianapolis 500 every year.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your chicken coop?

MR. KLEEMANN: That was my, like, little studio when I was a boy.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't tell me you had a studio.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Well, it wasn't really a studio. You know, it was where I just messed around, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: With art making.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's interesting. So when you were in high school, you had a little studio, a private space that you did art in. Is that something you made all by yourself in the basement or out in the yard, or -

MR. KLEEMANN: It was just an old - an old chicken coop.

MS. RICHARDS: Literally a chicken coop.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was the summertime space -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, and you said you listened to the -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that's where I got - invented - not invented, but became interested in the races.

MS. RICHARDS: You think that's one of the reasons why you used racing cars as one of your subjects?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably, one of them.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this something you wanted to talk about?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It's one of the first galleries with French.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. I have -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Look at the top. [Inaudible, off mike.]

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, gallery 99.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In Florida.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Now I remember that. That's where the -

MS. RICHARDS: Actually I was going to go back, when we talk to galleries to talk about that, and also a couple of other early, early shows. We'll go back to the galleries.

So let's talk about the Bay City. That's fascinating. So you were painting racing cars, and a few years later, how did you come to develop this Team Kleemann Conceptual Art Racing Team, C-A-R-T.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, CART.

MS. RICHARDS: CART. What was that about?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, conceptual art was happening there. There was Donald Judd. He was a conceptual artist, wasn't he, or was he? Or is he a minimalist? And so I figured, you know, like, this is a concept too. And I'm a painter, I'm an artist, so it wouldn't it be fun to make my own team and haul all of this stuff up to Indianapolis and paint a painting in a truck while the race was going on and the practices and all of this?

And so we were there almost all May.

MS. RICHARDS: So you -

MR. KLEEMANN: The whole practice.

MS. RICHARDS: So you not only acquired a truck that you painted as a team car but you equipped it as a studio and made a painting inside.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you invite people in to see you paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had one group, and I can't remember her name - [laughter].

MS. RICHARDS: And it - yes.

MR. KLEEMANN: And I was painting Johnny Rutherford [car] and Maggie went over and tried to talk to him to come to my place and -

MS. RICHARDS: Your truck.

MR. KLEEMANN: Into my truck and see the painting that I was working on, which is the one that I did for him. So I was sitting there painting.

MS. RICHARDS: You were painting a painting for him even though he didn't know it.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. Because you were a fan of his or -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. And he didn't buy it, but the Museum of Indianapolis did, so it's a wash.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was entailed - I know you didn't have your own racing car, but what did you - can you describe the - what components were part of CART, Kleemann Conceptual Art Racing Team. Besides the truck or the van, what else did you invent?

MR. KLEEMANN: What do you mean?

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, were there sponsors, were there decals, were the T-shirts?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What were all of the things that went along with it?

MR. KLEEMANN: There were sponsors.

MS. RICHARDS: Real sponsors who actually gave you money, or just pretend sponsors.

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, one guy - who was - Paul -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The guy from Indianapolis, the department store. I can't remember his last name.

MR. KLEEMANN: He owned a department store in Indianapolis, and he was - through Louis became a sponsor. I think he had, like, a flag on, you know, Paul, blah, blah. So I had my own team.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But he also bought that Rutherford painting. And he's the one that donated it to the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

MS. RICHARDS: I see, I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: He also bought the first woman race driver.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Janet [Guthrie] -

MR. KLEEMANN: Janet, what was it? [Laughter.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: You're talking to two old people who can't remember their own names much less anybody else's.

MS. RICHARDS: You'll come back to it when you see the transcript.

MR. KLEEMANN: It's in here too.

MS. RICHARDS: And you invented - you even made jackets?

MRS. KLEEMANN: They made jackets, yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do -

MR. KLEEMANN: And patches. Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did the jackets say? Just C-A-R-T?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, they had a good decal.

MR. KLEEMANN: CART.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you do this just that one time, that one year, in 1977 as an art project?

MR. KLEEMANN: I went back - I think that the Bay City Rollers came out of that too.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was a conceptual art, thing, yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: But was that the next year or not?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, that was that same year. You had painted that before I knew you, so that was the -

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, that - this is getting interesting.

MS. RICHARDS: We're not up to the '80s yet, so we'll get back to the '70s. So when you - when you had your first show at French & Company, and you - did you feel you were represented by French & Company?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had a second show in 1974.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: A solo show there, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Was that the one that you went to?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No. I was at the '71.

MR. KLEEMANN: The '71?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that when the two of you met?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, no, actually - that's a different - that's another story entirely.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, we won't do that story yet. We will do it.

Talking about your affiliation with French & Company, why did that end? You had two shows there and then it ended.

MR. KLEEMANN: I guess I was unhappy or something. Louis was kind of after me or something.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Louis was the instigator for that - the Smithsonian Museum - what's his name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Spieser.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Stuart Spieser's collection. And Spieser had hired Louis to put this collection together. And he gathered all of the artists together including Ron. And wasn't that when you and Louis first got together, was with - from that Spieser collection?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, you did have a show the same year, 1974 at Meisel.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: As you had a show at French & Company.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right. But before that, Louis had put together this big show, you know, of photorealist airplane people ["Trains and Planes: The Influence of Locomotion in American Painting," traveling exhibition: Sherry French Gallery, New York, NY, May 24 to June 17, 1989; Roberson Center for the Arts, Binghamton, NY, June 25 to August 31, 1989; National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, September 26 to December 15, 1989; Evansville Museum of Arts, IN, January 14, 1990 to March 4, 1990; The Noyes Museum, Oceanville, NJ, March 18 to May 20, 1990.]

MS. RICHARDS: From the collection.

MRS. KLEEMANN: From the collection.

MS. RICHARDS: Stuart Spieser.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And I think that's when he started representing you, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: But you said that you were unhappy with French & Company. Did you - did that have to do with sales or with publicity or with the other artists who were at the gallery? Do you recall what the issues were, if you want to talk about it?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, Nancy Hoffman was working there, right.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And she was not a fan of yours.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, because, you know, of those -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Whatever. Yeah, whatever reason she wasn't.

MR. KLEEMANN: And she was moving on too. She went downtown to get her own gallery together. And I really wanted to, you know, be in her gallery, but she kind of just said go see Louis, so, yeah, okay. There. So I went with Louis.

But before that, I went to another guy across the street. I can't remember his name. [Warren] Benedict.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, I forgot about him.

MR. KLEEMANN: And Audrey went with him too at the same time.

MS. RICHARDS: Benedict. Audrey Flack. And we both left him about the same time. He was - they had new -

[END CD 2.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron Kleemann in Valatie, New York, on October 11, 2009 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

I wanted to ask you a couple more questions about the Indianapolis project. Did you think it was successful?

RON KLEEMANN: I think so, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What would you say your goals for that project were?

MR. KLEEMANN: To see if I could pull it off, and I did - or we could pull it off as a team - Mel [Ramos], Louis [Meisel] and all the other people that, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: And what would be the markers that would indicate that you pulled it off? What did you mean by pulling it off?

MR. KLEEMANN: What did I mean?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he got a lot of attention. He had interviews in the papers and on television.

MS. RICHARDS: So recognition.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And the painting - well, the big painting was sold, and then his smaller paintings, you know, actually all sold too, I guess. Everything did. And I think that was probably what led you into becoming the official Indianapolis artist for -

MS. RICHARDS: So that was an outcome.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did that mean to be the official Indianapolis artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, like I could - I had - I could see anybody I wanted more or less, you know; go to breakfast and -

MS. RICHARDS: You mean go to breakfast with the drivers?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And go to the - access to all of the cars in the pits and -

MS. RICHARDS: So almost like press -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: - would have access.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Exactly like that, yes.

MR. KLEEMANN: At the end of the race I would get - I could go right and be buried in the crowd with the race - the driver and all that stuff, and taking pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: So taking pictures. That was what I was going to ask you. So what you used this access for sometimes was to take photographs for paintings.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you have to go back to the subject of these photographs after you decided that you wanted to make one - a painting of it, to get permission? Did you feel you had to get permission from the driver?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, he was sanctioned by the Indianapolis Racing -

MS. RICHARDS: So the racers knew that if -

MRS. KLEEMANN: If they won, they would be the subject of that winning photo - not photo; it's a print that they do for - they still do them.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so you were taking photos to make a print for the Indianapolis 500.

MRS. KLEEMANN: A lithograph.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: A lithograph?

MR. KLEEMANN: A lithograph, which I guess they sold some too, didn't they?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: This was a photo lithograph.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a limited edition or a big -

MR. KLEEMANN: It was a limited edition. There weren't piles and piles of them, you know.

MRS. KLEEMANN: They were numbered.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And that was in conjunction with Circle Galleries, which in those days was a -

MS. RICHARDS: Where was Circle Gallery?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Their main office was Chicago, and then they -

MS. RICHARDS: So Circle Gallery was a print gallery.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, and there's one in -

MS. RICHARDS: So if that was a great success and you were the Indianapolis artist, did they invite you back to do - or did you want to do it a second year, or did you feel like -

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I did it three years, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Three years?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And did it get better? Did it get more boring? How did it evolve as an experience for you as an artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think after three years I was finished with that particular thing.

MS. RICHARDS: With racing cars as a subject, or with just the Indianapolis?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just Indianapolis.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever feel resentful that you were being used for commercial purposes, or was it really just fun and interesting?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was fun because, you know, I got - I had one groupie and Johnny Rutherford, who brought his pastor, or -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, now you're going back to the initial painting in the truck thing.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do that the next two years or it was just the first year?

MR. KLEEMANN: That was just the first year.

MS. RICHARDS: You had your team the first year.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And that resulted in your being appointed official artist.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But tell the Johnny Rutherford story. It's very funny.

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon?

MS. RICHARDS: The Johnny Rutherford story.

MR. KLEEMANN: Johnny Rutherford. Yeah, he -

MS. RICHARDS: You mean beyond the fact he bumped him in the back.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, no, that was a different -

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He came to visit him in - did you tell this already? Maybe you did.

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: In the truck?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Now I - he came to visit me because Maggie had talked to him and I guess said he'd, you know, stop by, and he did. And he came up into the truck and he looked at the painting, and right behind him was his -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Priest.

MR. KLEEMANN: - his priest.

MS. RICHARDS: Really?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, because those guys are really -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Superstitious, and you know, like for protection, you know, like so his car wouldn't blow up or something because he did something -

MS. RICHARDS: He'd take his minister or his priest with him.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And his priest blessed the painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, and his priest blessed the painting. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: That was the first and last time you had a painting blessed like that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: As your work evolved in the '70s, you were - you were doing more or less kind of simultaneously different kinds of vehicles that you were painting, right? Did you feel, if you remember, that during the '70s and into the early '80s, that there was a certain - that your work was changing in some way that was - you were solving problems, that it was hopefully getting better; there was some aspect that you were perfecting?

Do you recall those kinds of ideas, those things happening, that you were - that your work was - I mean, obviously you continued to make ambitious paintings, successful paintings, and you must have felt that you were getting better and better as you - was there some aspect during those years that you were particularly working on, you felt, wow, I really go that? Is there some part of that, whether it was paint technique or composition or reflections or some conceptual or formal aspect?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. It's hard - do you have -

MS. RICHARDS: So for example, when you got to - when you were doing this - this painting - now, this is called *Dino*, 1982, and this painting is a little bit of a departure because you can see two automobiles in the same painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you've got also a piece of street, of storefronts. Was this -

MR. KLEEMANN: Is that Louis's car? That's Louis's car.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Was.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that this was an experiment that this was something different to - it's not - there's depth.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, you're using depth of field in there that doesn't appear so much - I mean, sometimes it does, like in there, but more often the subject of the painting fills the canvas -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - with just a little bit of sky, a little bit of pavement, but this has got more depth.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was this a direction you were experimenting with that you wanted to -

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think so. I just - because I don't see many more of them like that except maybe these, you know.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was sort of a commission, wasn't it?

[Cross talk.]

MR. KLEEMANN: From Louis?

MS. RICHARDS: A commission?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Didn't he ask you to paint that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, he offered me -

MS. RICHARDS: But you could have painted it any way you wanted, right?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Probably.

MS. RICHARDS: But you have the whole street and you have this other white car.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: That wasn't his car, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. Louis's gallery was right where this would be.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh, that's right. You mean on Prince Street.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, right on Prince Street.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started making these paintings and going into that first period, all of the '70s, can you describe your process from taking the photograph to starting the painting? I mean, did you take slides or prints? Did you project -

MR. KLEEMANN: I projected.

MS. RICHARDS: Walk me through the process of starting a painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: At that point?

MS. RICHARDS: In the '70s.

MR. KLEEMANN: In the '70s?

MRS. KLEEMANN: You took the picture.

MR. KLEEMANN: I took the picture.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, and did you feel that you - when you looked through the viewfinder, that you were selecting - you were photographing what would be a painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: Right. Oh -

MS. RICHARDS: That you weren't going to take pieces from different pictures. That would be the work. You might crop it -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: - but that would be it.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you brought them all into the studio as slides?

MR. KLEEMANN: As slides.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you look at them on a light table or did you project them all?

MR. KLEEMANN: Projected.

MS. RICHARDS: And -

MR. KLEEMANN: And at that point, what I was doing is essentially going up there and making a number painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, okay, but you're ahead of me.

MR. KLEEMANN: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So you projected perhaps hundreds of images -

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: - and selected - now, did you select one, hey, this is going to be the painting, or did you select 10 and say, this is going to be my next 10 paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, we just did one at a time.

MS. RICHARDS: One at a time. And so you did all the photography. Did you through away the slides that you didn't want to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: I probably got them all.

MS. RICHARDS: You saved them all?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So you picked the one that, for whatever reason, you decided would be the painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you decide what size and shape canvas - horizontal, vertical, square - you would use?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'd just put it up there and see how much I could get on a canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're projecting it on a plain wall -

MR. KLEEMANN: On canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: - before you build the canvas?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I -

MS. RICHARDS: So you built the canvas first?

MR. KLEEMANN: I built the canvas first.

MS. RICHARDS: So you decided in advance -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - the dimensions and the proportion of the rectangle?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. And so - and then you projected on the canvas -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - the one that you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Picked out.

MS. RICHARDS: - thought was the best, and decided how to crop.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And then, did you do any preparatory drawings or sketches, or would you say these slides were your sketches?

MR. KLEEMANN: The slides were my sketches in the way that I would pencil in - wherever there was a color change, there was a line.

MS. RICHARDS: So the first step was to project the slide onto the canvas with gesso, a gessoed canvas, right?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And to whatever detail - extent that you needed -

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: - you'd use pencil.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you square off the - oh, and did you make a print of this slide to use as you were painting, or did you just always refer to it in slide form on a viewfinder or to project - let's say you did the pencil drawing but you wanted to have the image to refer to.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I usually had the image.

MS. RICHARDS: As a slide or a print?

MR. KLEEMANN: As a print.

MS. RICHARDS: As a print.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So a relatively large print, like 8-by-10 or bigger?

MR. KLEEMANN: How big -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Normally an 8-by-10.

MR. KLEEMANN: Eight-by-10?

MRS. KLEEMANN: That's normal.

MS. RICHARDS: Eight-by-10?

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you initially penciled on -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And -

MRS. KLEEMANN: I just have to say, he isn't telling you - he would sit in a dark room with the image projected onto the canvas in the dark with his pen, or pencil or whatever he was using, and do the line drawing in the dark.

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, you would have to be in the dark.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I know, it was just amazing to watch, though, because, you know, he wasn't - and yet when he'd finish, everything would be there. All he had to do was fill in the colors. Anybody could do it. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you did quite an extensive drawing with pencil, and did you then - when you a print to work from, did you work from left to right? Did you finish one area completely before you continued, or did you paint in layers the entire canvas at once?

MR. KLEEMANN: Sometimes.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your technique?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'd go all over the place.

MS. RICHARDS: So did - but did you paint in wet on wet, did you paint layers -

MR. KLEEMANN: If I had to mix - if I had to have something, you know, shiny in between two colors that weren't shiny, then I'd, you know, mix it until I got what I wanted. I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: Let me say this question differently. When you finished doing the pencil drawing on the canvas, put the lights on, you're going to start to paint. What's the first thing you would do?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Pick his favorite spot.

[Cross talk.]

MR. KLEEMANN: Mix the paint.

MS. RICHARDS: And you've been using acrylic most of the time or oil most of the time, or have you been - I think you've been going back and forth, which is really difficult.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, because you can put oil on acrylic but you can't put acrylic on oil. So if I start something in acrylic - I think I did a lot of this stuff in acrylic, the early stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: The early stuff.

MR. KLEEMANN: It was just easier to work with at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Except for the fact that it was easier, though, did you prefer the way the oil paintings looked?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And at some point you -

MR. KLEEMANN: I changed.

MS. RICHARDS: - you changed to oil painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do under-painting or was it directly painting the objects as they would look first?

MR. KLEEMANN: I did some under-painting. If it's just - you know, doesn't have any - it's all black or all, you know - but if it wasn't, then I'd, you know, just do what I do.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, your under-painting is your sketch on canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That's his under-painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: It's essentially - the under-painting is -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you use any glazing techniques?

MR. KLEEMANN: Like dryers and stuff like that?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, it could be. It could be layers, and so you'd put on several different transparent paint in order to come up with a final -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - color that would have a depth and sort of luminosity.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that's what I'm doing now is - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you also do watercolors?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: And have you - did you start that in the early years, in the '70s, or is that more recent, in which case we'll talk about it later? Were you doing watercolors in the '70s?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, but in the '80s I think he would have.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. There's one right there.

MRS. KLEEMANN: A couple of them.

MR. KLEEMANN: We're all in that. Louis [Meisel] is in that.

MS. RICHARDS: I think, when I look at your paintings, I see that there is quite a bit of brushwork showing, and there's a certain thickness of some of the paint, especially the whites. Was that something that you were really after, that kind of combination of realism and expressiveness in the brushwork, or did you want to have a very smooth surface? Did you want the brushwork to show or not? Did that evolve, change?

MR. KLEEMANN: It can and can't, you know, like if I put a highlight on to make it look like chrome - it's not really chrome; it's white. It's a white point and it makes the whole thing, you know, look like a piece of chrome, and can, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were painting - we were talking about that - were there certain old masters whose works you turned to for inspiration or for ideas in terms of painting techniques as you were honing your own abilities? I mean, you were dealing with realism. It isn't something that contemporary artists deal with so much. Maybe you needed to look back at some -

MR. KLEEMANN: The Dutch - I don't know who, but the Dutch guys are pretty good at that stuff - very good at that stuff. I've looked at them a lot. I can't, you know, force names. I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were taking the photographs - as you were finishing a painting, did that, at a certain point, prompt you to say, okay, I better go take some more photographs? Or do you just take new photographs on a continual basis, not because it's -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: - you're going to need it in a month?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Is taking photographs a part of your routine all the time or only when you're about to need one? When you're about to start a new painting, you realize that you want to have something decided.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, well, I have something to paint. Is that what you mean?

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, let's say you picked - you took hundreds of slides and you're working on a painting and it may take weeks or months, do you want to know what - I guess there's many questions here. Before you finish painting number one, do you want - before you actually finish it, do you want to know what you're going to be doing next, or do you tolerate a gap in between when you finish a painting and you don't know what you're going to do next, and then you start looking at

slides or then you go out and take photographs.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He has probably thousands of images.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it doesn't matter -

[Cross talk.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: Ron was constantly photographing.

MS. HOULIHAN: Always photographing.

MS. RICHARDS: You may have - so you have lots of photographs.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And constantly collecting - if something comes up, it goes - we go and photograph it, and it may never come into a painting at all, but there is always these photographs of things that -

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So when you do finish a painting, is your first step to look at the photographs you have and pick the next one?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: What's your first step?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably to take a new painting. [Laughter.] Take a new photograph.

MS. RICHARDS: Make a new photograph.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He's always -

[Cross talk.]

MR. KLEEMANN: You know, there will be - I have just boxes of stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: And you're always selecting one at a time? You're always doing one painting at a time?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah - maybe two.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that depending on because you're using oils and you want one to be drying or you like to see two paintings next to each other and -

MR. KLEEMANN: I like to see - but if I have to - say I have to paint two paintings in a certain amount of time -

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: - I've got to be doing two things at the same time.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Like a commissioned work and a non-commissioned work.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. So one can lay there for a while and I can do the other one but I need -

MS. RICHARDS: If you had the ability to keep recent or even not-so-recent paintings in the studio while you're doing your new paintings, would you like to? Would you like to reference those? Would you like to have older paintings visible while you're working on your new work?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You'd just as soon get them out of the studio?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, either sold or stored.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know why?

MR. KLEEMANN: I guess they're not exciting anymore, at least for me. I mean, I have my favorite paintings but, you know - they're around the house but I don't need them in my studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you been able to consciously keep your favorite paintings, just say, after you finished, you know, I'm not going to sell this because it's my favorite? Or the ones you have are the ones that didn't sell?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'll sell anything.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, how do you -

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't - you know, I don't know. There are a few things I wouldn't mind having back, but they're gone.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of having things back, do you have a difficult - is it challenging to decide when the painting is done, and once it's out of the studio, do you ever want to get it back in because you see something you wish that you had -

MR. KLEEMANN: No, it's done when it's done, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You follow a process and -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. You know, I go back and forth, you know, and see if every little speck - because sometimes the paint doesn't, you know, get through and I've got to just go -

MS. RICHARDS: How have you been dealing with the demise of slides and slide film and slide projectors?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'm fine. I'm fine with that.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He's digital. He's more digital.

MS. RICHARDS: So you take digital images and you convert them to slides so that you can project them? I see; you have a digital projector?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. I have a digital - I have a digital canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: Why don't you explain that.

MR. KLEEMANN: It's a process. You go to a lab and you tell them how big you want - you give them the -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Dimensions.

MR. KLEEMANN: - image and they put it on canvas for you.

MRS. KLEEMANN: It's giclée.

MR. KLEEMANN: Giclée? Is that what they call it?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Giclée.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're printing the photograph onto canvas.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And he does it in a very - it comes out looking like an under-painting. It's a very -

MS. RICHARDS: Giclée. I mean, it's just one color.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, he does it in full color but he does it in, like, 50 percent -

MR. KLEEMANN: Fifty percent saturation.

MR. KLEEMANN: So it's very light.

MRS. KLEEMANN: So it gives him his under-painting, basically.

MR. KLEEMANN: It's not any easier than the other way. It sounds like it could be but it isn't.

[Cross talk.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: And you still have to make it look, you know, like a photograph, what it's supposed to look like.

MS. RICHARDS: Then, are you there - how do you decide how to crop the image, then? How does that technically work? You bring the - you've already cropped the image on the computer.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you print it - give it to the photo studio.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. What I do is measure the photograph and then, you know, bump it up like - if this is eight inches, I can make it into 16 inches, I can make it into, you know - and get a huge thing like that, and the ratio stays the same, or almost.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you done any drawings as finished works or -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he does little drawings.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And do those come from photographs also?

MR. KLEEMANN: Some do, some don't.

MRS. KLEEMANN: You mean, does he do them freehand?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Is that what you're asking?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Not really.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Like doodles.

MS. HOULIHAN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you kept - I know you don't do sketches for paintings because you're using all the images, but speaking of doodles, do you keep diaries or sketchbooks? Have you for many, many years?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And is that something you started at a young age when you were first starting as an artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: And were those sketchbooks that you took along with you when you were traveling or sketchbooks that you used in the studio? What function did those sketchbooks have?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just practicing drawing or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about ideas?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And?

MR. KLEEMANN: Some worked and some didn't. Most of them didn't work.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever use those sketchbooks when you went into museums to sketch images you saw?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So they're working - they're sketchbooks in the sense of working out ideas.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you ever include in the sketchbooks a verbal description of your thinking about something - you know, this is not working because, or, the next painting is going to have a lot of blue in it?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's text -

MR. KLEEMANN: Not necessarily that but, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: But there's text as well as the images?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so are those important parts of your studio practice, you'd say, the sketchbooks?

MR. KLEEMANN: Now they aren't but they used to be.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I think your camera is your -

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon me?

MRS. KLEEMANN: I said your camera is your sketchbook.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: You know, that's a very good point because I think the reason he takes so many photographs is exactly that. He's working out the ideas, visually.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. I just want to ask you one more question at this moment. What about titling the works? What approach have you taken early on and even to today with coming up with a title for your paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: I kind of like to make titles that are kind of not even part of the painting.

MS. RICHARDS: So not just a descriptive -

MR. KLEEMANN: They're jokes and things like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Not just a descriptive - "morning in Indianapolis"?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: So for example, there's a painting called - in 1982 called *Cultivating Washington*.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So how did that title come about? [Laughter.] Do you want to - let's pick a different one.

MR. KLEEMANN: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: There is - there's a painting -

[Cross talk.]

MS. KLEEMANN: - how you work through it. He goes through several processes while he's naming - he'll name a painting several -

MS. RICHARDS: Just a second.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: We're talking about titling the works. Do you want to describe how that sometimes goes, and we can -

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, sometime I'll see something in a painting that will -

MS. RICHARDS: I want to get an early example.

MR. KLEEMANN: Like *Draggin' Sculls*. That's a taxi cab and Scull's - Scull's Angels. He used to own a -

MS. RICHARDS: Taxi fleet.

MRS. KLEEMANN: A lot of taxis, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, Robert Scull.

MR. KLEEMANN: Robert Scull. And I sent him a letter and I wanted him to take a taxi cab and make it a drag racer. And -

MS. RICHARDS: Make it a drag racer in the sense of painting it like a drag racer -

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: - or actually changing the engine?

MR. KLEEMANN: Changing the whole car into a drag racer and creating a team and going to drag races with his cab, but he wouldn't do it. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Were you surprised?

MR. KLEEMANN: I was disappointed because I think it would have been a great idea and he probably could have had fun with it.

MS. RICHARDS: So the title *Draggin' Sculls*-

MR. KLEEMANN: *Draggin' Sculls*.

MS. RICHARDS: - was hopeful that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Right, and that's the kind of humor I like to put into the titles of these things.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about this *Stars & Stripes Forever* [1977]? Now, that seems pretty literal -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: - because the truck has stars and stripes. So that can happen too. You can make it literal.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I can -

MS. RICHARDS: And *Manhattan on the Hudson* [1979] -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - does it -

MR. KLEEMANN: That's pretty literal too.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. *Sextruck* -

MR. KLEEMANN: *Sextruck* [1992].

MS. RICHARDS: - 1992.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know why -

MS. RICHARDS: That's kind of hard to see because you have Mickey Mouse images there. [Laughter.]

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know why I -

MS. RICHARDS: What about *23 Skiddoo*, 1973? I mean - yeah, *23 Skiddoo*.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know why I did that either. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So if you're thinking about -

[Cross talk.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: The *Madonna*.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, *Madonna*.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The title.

MS. RICHARDS: You did a painting called *Madonna*?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, *Madonna*. I wanted to do a painting of Madonna. I also wrote a letter to her people -

MS. RICHARDS: Of - you wanted to do a painting of a person? That would be a huge departure.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How would you take that on? Would she be in a car or would she be just -

MR. KLEEMANN: No, she'd be descending a staircase.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow, that would be different.

MR. KLEEMANN: What I wanted to do is, you know, give the people that handled her - whatever she was - her handlers, I should say - give her a - what was I going to say?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was going to be Madonna descending the staircase at the Hard Rock Cafe.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, at the Hard Rock Cafe. After - who the hell is the guy?

MS. RICHARDS: The painter, the famous one; the Madonna - Duchamp? No.

MR. KLEEMANN: Duchamp, yeah. Duchamp's *Nude Descending [A Staircase]* [1912] - I based my idea on that for a painting of her descending the staircase at the -

MS. RICHARDS: Hard Rock Cafe.

MR. KLEEMANN: - Hard Rock Cafe, thank you.

MS. RICHARDS: But she declined.

MR. KLEEMANN: She declined.

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't proceed to find another person that you could paint.

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't care.

MS. RICHARDS: It was an idea that either lived or died. That's it.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. I was thinking about coming back with that. Maybe she would listen to it this time. We never know until I -

MS. RICHARDS: All right, well, we'll stop for the day right now.

[END CD 3.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron Kleemann on October 12, 2009 in Valatie, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

Ron, I wanted to go back a little bit to the early days in New York when you were in the studio on Grand Street and ask you a bit more about your neighbors, starting with Lee Lozano. Tell me what your relationship was. Did you talk to each other about your work? What was she like? What work was she doing that you remember? Just anything you can remember about Lee at that point.

MR. KLEEMANN: Okay, well, she was - I think she was in a gallery with - I mean, Green Gallery. Richard Bellamy - or, no - is it Richard? - yes, Bellamy, and she was painting very large canvases and kind of like minimal things, you know, like not a lot of color but very muted kind of color and it just kind of melted into each other - very nicely done. And she just kept doing them. It wasn't my thing particularly so - I appreciate it but it was nothing that I would be doing then.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you talk to each other about - did you talk about your work? Did you go to her studio or did she go to your studio?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, she came to my studio and she liked what I was doing. And I was afraid she wouldn't but she understood what I was doing, or trying to do. And she was always supportive. She wasn't nasty or anything like that.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about when you were in her studio? Did she talk about her work?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, she didn't. She kind of just backpedaled.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean by that?

MR. KLEEMANN: She didn't say much about it. She just, you know, said, do you like this? She didn't really try to tell me what she was doing. She probably sensed that I didn't understand it anyway, so

-

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any friends in common - mutual friends?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, just the gang that I talked about, the Fluxus gang - you know, Paula Tavins. And we'd all get together at the end of Canal Street sometimes and -

MS. RICHARDS: Where do you mean, at the end of Canal Street?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I can't remember the cross street that - [inaudible]. There was Grand Street and then the street that went into Canal Street, which I can't remember what it is. But anyway, there was a big loft there that most of these people lived in.

MS. RICHARDS: A building on -

MR. KLEEMANN: A building, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - on the street between Grand and Canal.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, at the - where Canal Street ended, that street that went to it.

MS. RICHARDS: Where Canal ended, you mean on the West Side or the East Side?

MR. KLEEMANN: It would be the south side.

MS. RICHARDS: Canal runs east-west.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. East-west, yeah; I see what you're saying.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you mean where the street connecting Grand and Canal hit Canal?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I see, so not at the end of Canal but the end of that other street -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - that hit Canal.

MR. KLEEMANN: Hit Canal. The building -

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. I don't remember 89 Grand is, what the cross street is there.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, so there was a building there. And who lived in that building?

MR. KLEEMANN: Paula Tavins, Mike Snow, and some - well, gee, I can't remember the rest of them, but there were a whole bunch of them that were in that group that I wasn't in.

MS. RICHARDS: But you socialized with them.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You weren't in with them artistically but socially.

MR. KLEEMANN: Socially, yeah. I liked to listen to them but I just couldn't - you know, what are these guys talking about? Because I was just - you know, I wasn't doing anything groundbreaking, I didn't think, like they were - minimalists and - well, Judd went there a couple of times but, you know, I never got to know him.

MS. RICHARDS: Your wife at the time, was she an artist?

MR. KLEEMANN: Now, that was Suzie. No. She might not have even been there. I think she was back in Michigan, then she came up, you know, later and she was in the loft with me for a while and then we moved to the Lower East Side.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you moved to Broadway, or someplace else before Broadway?

MR. KLEEMANN: Going down - not Grand. Yeah, going right straight down Grand to -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, the East -

MR. KLEEMANN: - down there. We moved down in there.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, and that was before you moved to Broadway.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall how you came to move to Broadway, that 508 building? How did you end up finding out about that space and moving there?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I found out about it through Ben.

MS. RICHARDS: Ben Schonzeit.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet Ben? That's hard to remember, I'm sure.

MR. KLEEMANN: I think we were both looking - there was a Jewish gentleman who owned the building, and he had a dry goods store down on the first floor. And I think he had a sign out, something like "loft for rent," or something like that. And I think Ben and I just happened to bump into each other there, looking at the building.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. KLEEMANN: I think that's the way we met. And we looked at the spaces and he took the second floor and I took the third floor, and - well, not -

MS. RICHARDS: That was a rental?

MR. KLEEMANN: A rental.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Now, around that time, in the early '70s, that was - was it after you had your first show at French & Company?

MR. KLEEMANN: French & Company. Yeah, I think it was in the '70s.

MS. RICHARDS: I understand you - that around the early '70s you bought a building upstate near the Hudson.

MR. KLEEMANN: That would be the mill.

MS. RICHARDS: The mill.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you - why did you decide to do that, to spend time upstate and to in fact buy a building, and why in that location?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I just wanted to get out of the city. You know, I thought I could do better up there.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you imagine living up there permanently or just going up there for weekends?

MR. KLEEMANN: Permanently.

MS. RICHARDS: Permanently. And how did you find that particular place, and why that location?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'd go up there on weekends and look around at that -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you still have the '58 Chevy that your father had given you?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, no. I had either rented a car or I might have had my own Chevrolet at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: You sure it was a Chevrolet?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, well, actually I think what I did is I went up there by train. I bought a car up there from the Chevrolet dealer, which is, I think - I remember a green Chevrolet. I can't remember what the date was particularly. So I had a car then.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you have any other friends - any artist friends upstate?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So you imagined living up there without any friends around.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And that kind of isolation seemed like a positive thing or -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, you know, I had the building to work on -

MS. RICHARDS: But, I mean, how did - I'm talking about before you bought the building. You were thinking of buying the building. You thought, I'll buy a building and live there by myself?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you remarried at that time or you were on your own?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I was married to my second wife, Maggie.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you, in fact, bought the building, what town was that in?

MR. KLEEMANN: That was in Stockport - that's Columbia County, near Hudson.

MS. RICHARDS: In what state was this building when you bought it?

MR. KLEEMANN: New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it in good shape? No, I don't mean - in what condition - [laughter] - what condition was the building?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was pretty ramshackled. It was just like - [inaudible].

MS. RICHARDS: Now, I want to ask you again, what was it about living in New York that you wanted to get away from?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just felt, you know, shut in, you know? I mean, just so many people around all the time, you know? I just wanted to get away.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it more of a personal feeling - if you can separate these - from a sense that your art needed to be - you needed to be out of the city to think about your work better, or was it more that you just physically didn't want to live in a city; you wanted to live in the country?

MR. KLEEMANN: I wanted to live in the country because I grew up in the country, more or less.

MS. RICHARDS: So your work was going fine in the city.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you bought this building, you moved out of the city permanently. Did you go back often to visit people, see galleries, museums?

MR. KLEEMANN: To take work down there, just like I do now.

MS. RICHARDS: But did you go back to the city to see other art or artists on a regular basis?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't need that kind of -

MR. KLEEMANN: No. Every once in a while I would pop in on Ben.

MS. RICHARDS: Ben Schonzeit.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. And that stopped too. And the next time I saw him I think it was - I hadn't seen him in such a long time, when we all went to Berlin [in 2008], and I haven't seen him since then. I know where he is. And we're still friendly, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you moved up into that building and you settled in and you had a studio, did you - did you meet other artists in this area and feel that there was some kind of community, or have you always - or has it always been a kind of a positive experience to be isolated, in a way?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I'm a loner.

MS. RICHARDS: So you like that feeling.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: It's a positive feeling.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, except for my immediate family, you know. You know, I'm not totally a loner. I like people but, you know, I don't like - I don't know. It's hard to explain, because you get a lot of friends, you get a lot of phone calls; it gets busy, you know, and I'd just as soon not deal with that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a feeling of competition in the city that you wanted to get away from?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No. It was more distraction?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, distraction. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you got up here and you started living here, did it affect your work? Did you notice that your work was changing at all, being in the country?

MR. KLEEMANN: Let's see. Well, it changed somewhat. I can't really tell you, you know, how it changed, but -

MS. RICHARDS: It didn't change the subject matter, though.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, because the photographs you took, you didn't necessarily take them near where you lived.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So does that mean that you went into the city regularly to take photographs, or you just went and traveled around?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think by the time I got out of the city I wasn't taking photographs in the city anymore. I could find some of the same kind of things in Albany or anywhere else, you know? A truck is a truck is a truck, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you - I want to go back to the discussion we were having about the gallery and ask you - I know we talked about your showing at French & Company, and starting - we didn't quite talk too much about your showing at Meisel, and I wanted to ask you, in terms of that,

did you, when you started out, feel that your goal was to support yourself as an artist?

I mean, I know you had other jobs, but did you imagine that you would be always doing some other job and that you wouldn't support yourself as an artist, or that in fact you soon felt it was a real possibility you could support yourself and that was one of the key issues when you thought about what gallery to show at, would be who could sell your work the best. Is that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I thought I could support myself as an artist, and Louis kind of promised that to me. You know, he said, I'll get you to - in his own way said he'd get me to where I was going, help me get there.

MS. RICHARDS: How important was it to you, or still is it to you, for the gallery to represent you in terms of increasing your visibility to critics and art historians and museums as opposed to just sales?

MR. KLEEMANN: That was important too because he was - he did all of those things for me. If he had somebody important that he thought I should know, he would introduce us and, you know - I can't think actually of who, but somebody would come into the gallery, and he'd say, Ron, I want you to meet so and so. And I got friendly with some of those people.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you, from the start, have an agreement with the gallery that you would have a show on a regular basis every certain amount of time, or did you go to him and say, okay, I think I'm going to be ready for a show next year, or six months from now? Or did he come to you and say, okay, I want -

MR. KLEEMANN: He said - we telephoned each other and said, you know, how are you doing, and can we have a show? You know, we needed a show maybe once every three years, something like that, and carry on like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he ever talk to you about what you were painting, I mean, in the sense of telling you what he'd prefer you would do? I mean, was -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I think he wanted me to do the same thing all the time, but sometimes I changed and he had to deal with that because I wouldn't change what I was doing. It wasn't always, you know, total photorealism, or the subject matter of the photorealism that I was doing. You know, like he maybe didn't like the fact that I changed from one thing to another, but he - and then some of those new things would sell and he'd just kind of change his mind. So we've been doing that ever since.

MS. RICHARDS: When you've had shows there, are you the person who picked the paintings to put in the show or did he - and in terms of also the arrangement of the paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: I usually - you know, everything I had to show I'd bring down there and he'd put them up and show them. And the ones that he didn't think fit, he'd put down in the basement. He'd probably show them every once in a while if somebody didn't see something they wanted - well, wait a minute; I've got something else downstairs and, you know, go along like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you involve yourself in the decision of what painting or paintings to put on the announcement, the opening announcement?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he usually asked me which one I wanted, and then after a while he just did it, and I just trusted him. It worked out.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you basically felt that you wanted to have a relationship with the gallery where you would bring the paintings in and he would do everything else? Or did you want to have some say in who might buy the paintings or what the written materials would say, or any of that kind of involvement?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, just -

MS. RICHARDS: Wanted him to take -

MR. KLEEMANN: Do the whole thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever wanted to put any restrictions on the sales of your work in the sense that you only wanted it to be purchased by a certain kind of person, or that you wanted to have income if it was resold, kind of a resale agreement? Did that ever come up?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: I noticed that you had a number of shows with Meisel. Did you stay with - did you stay with Meisel Gallery all throughout, from 1974 to the present -

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: - or did you ever leave the gallery and come back?

MR. KLEEMANN: I left.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you remember when that was or which gallery you went to when you left? Or did you go to a different gallery?

MR. KLEEMANN: Did I? Where did I go?

SALLY KLEEMANN: Katharina Rich Perlow.

MR. KLEEMANN: Katharina Rich Perlow.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did - did you go directly from him to her or leave the gallery because you just wanted to leave and then find a new gallery?

MR. KLEEMANN: I went directly to her.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did that happen, and how did that happen?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I went to French & Company and she was in the same building as they were.

MS. RICHARDS: When you showed at French & Company?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. So I just walked in there one day and introduced myself to her.

MS. RICHARDS: While you were showing at Meisel?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I'd left Meisel by that time. I completely left there.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so why did you leave Meisel? Do you remember what year that was?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Artistic differences.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, be more specific.

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was 1982.

MS. RICHARDS: Nineteen eighty-two you left Meisel.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And can you be specific about why you left? I mean, you may prefer -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Do you want me to be specific about it?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah, please.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you come closer?

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: This is Sally Kleemann speaking.

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was because you and Louis - you were painting the balloons, the Macy Thanksgiving Day balloons and Louis was not happy with that, and Ron wanted to paint them, you know. So they sort of had a - not really a falling out. I mean, they just sort of agreed to disagree. And, you know, it was like, okay, I'll find someone else, and he did, although it didn't last very long.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But he did find someone else.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 1982. Wow, I didn't realize the balloons had started that early.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, the original ones. And the only reason I remember that is that that's when you sold the painting to Judith Kaye.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And that was when I first started at the court.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That's why it sticks in my mind.

MS. RICHARDS: So you and Lou Meisel decided to part ways because he didn't want to show the paintings you were painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Basically, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you were painting those paintings, you were painting them exclusively; you weren't also painting trucks or racing cars or -

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You felt that that was a change that you wanted to make.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I wanted to make it.

MS. RICHARDS: And he felt strongly enough that he just didn't want to show them.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went to Katharina -

MR. KLEEMANN: And she took me on.

MS. RICHARDS: - and she took you on and I guess gave you a show.

MRS. KLEEMANN: You know, I might be wrong about that - about the balloons. It might not have been the balloons. It might have - because that was the Hard Rock Cafe and then you were painting the Grand Central paintings. Maybe that was it.

MR. KLEEMANN: I think it was the -

MRS. KLEEMANN: But whatever it was that you were painting, he was not -

MS. RICHARDS: There were some paintings that weren't totally photorealistic.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right, and I think he felt that Ron was taking another path. You know, he - I don't know; I think -

MS. RICHARDS: Away from photorealism?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, I don't know if it was away from photorealism, but away from what he thought he could sell. And, you know, again, it wasn't - they didn't have an argument. You know, it wasn't that kind of thing. It was just like, you know, I don't really think I can deal with this; well, I want to do it, kind of thing. [Leaves to answer phone.]

MS. RICHARDS: And how was the relationship with the new gallery?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was very good, for a very short time.

MS. RICHARDS: What happened?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, I better wait for my coach.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, and you don't have on your bio a show - and one-person show at that gallery.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't? I should have.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, Meisel doesn't put it on.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, this here - okay, now it's coming. A friend of - actually, a friend of both of ours, Norman - Norman, Norman, Norman [McGrath] - he's a photographer. I still have to wait for my

coach.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So Norman -

MR. KLEEMANN: He was a - I painted paintings that he had taken pictures for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you do that? Up until then, all the paintings were based on photographs that you took.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And here you were doing paintings based on photographs he took.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I asked him to do these photos.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't remember. She'll know.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. KLEEMANN: I think they were some of the balloons that - he got me started on balloons.

MS. RICHARDS: I see, and it would be very hard to get in the position to take those balloons -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, and he had access because he was, you know, a pro -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: And he had contact with, you know, people that would let him through anything -

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: - to do his work.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, to get the right angle of those parade balloons would be challenging.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. Whew.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So you took - he took the photographs and you were doing the paintings -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - based on those photographs, but you never - and you changed galleries officially. Does that mean you took paintings away from Lou that he had in his storage?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I just left them there.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. KLEEMANN: You know, the ones that he thought he could move.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: I mean, we weren't at war or anything, just didn't disagree. And when I came back, I think he sold - that's why I came back; he sold something and said, Ron, you've got to come down here. And he had a big check for me, and I said - and then I moved away from Katharina because she was - I don't like the use the word - [laughs] - she was difficult to deal with.

MS. RICHARDS: So you actually never had a show there. She said she's represent you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, but I did have a show there. I'm waiting for Sally to come back.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: And it was a show of the Macy's balloons, or maybe something else?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, it was Macy's balloons and then *Superman* - I did *Superman* there. He wasn't really a balloon. It was shot at night and the guy was laying in the street. You know -

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, where there -

MR. KLEEMANN: - the night before, that was -

MS. RICHARDS: That's right. So that was actually - well, maybe they were earlier. I had noticed that you did *Superman* in 1985, '86. We were talking about the early '80s and that you did the inflated parade balloons in '87.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, okay, that's the difference, the inflated ones as opposed to the ones that were laying around and stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: And so, since then, when you went back to Meisel, you've had a consistent relationship with him.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you also had a relationship with a gallery in a different country, any other -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Sally, we were talking about the fact that someone named Norman someone had access -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, Norman McGrath.

MR. KLEEMANN: Norman McGrath.

MS. RICHARDS: McGrath.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. That's where some of the balloons came from.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he took pictures. He actually lived right on West End Avenue where there were blowing up the balloons the night before, and so he got up at like 5:00 in the morning to take

pictures of some of the blow-ups and stuff, which was really neat, and Ron painted a couple of those.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And he had as show with Norman.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, and he had the actual picture of the painting.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Ron had the painting and then -

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that?

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was at Meisel. That was at Katharina's?

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, that was Katharina.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Was it Katharina?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, okay; you're right.

MS. RICHARDS: But in fact, the show with Katharina isn't listed on your bio.

MRS. KLEEMANN: It's not?

MS. RICHARDS: Unless it's under group shows.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, that would be a solo, I'm pretty sure. And that would have been in the '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's continue. So we'll go back to those kinds of issues possibly later, but let's go back to talking about your work. And as you were going along, in the early '80s I think that you did some experimentations - I think that I had '83 - with subject matter and changes in scale, and did a painting called *Cultivating Washington*. Do you want to talk about those changes and how maybe politics or political issues entered into your work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, the way I got into that, I heard over the news or something that this bunch of Texas farmers were coming to Washington and driving tractors all the way to Washington, and I said, this is made for me, you know? So I got a plane ticket, went to Washington and took all these pictures of these - like the painting, the guys sitting on their tractors smiling and getting their way, you know? And that's why I named it *Cultivating Washington*. They came here to cultivate Washington, and I love that painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do others in that -

MR. KLEEMANN: It stopped there. I still have photographs of that stuff and they're - I have some great shots of other things I could paint in my lifetime, and hopefully I'll maybe get a chance to do it - you know, things burning that shouldn't be burning in Washington. You know, they've set fires and all kinds of stuff there.

MS. RICHARDS: This painting, this particular one, there are figures in it. You have much more of an involvement with the figure in this painting than in others.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That was a new piece.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that was new.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that continue in other paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a little bit. I just put racecar drivers in the painting and, you know, show their faces and stuff like that, but not really because they're people, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like the political engagement of these farmers really didn't have much to do with the subject matter of the painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: What you went - well, how would you describe the subject matter of this painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know what you mean.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the -

MR. KLEEMANN: The purpose?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, why did you make that painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just liked what they were doing. They were moving.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it the political aspect or the visual aspect?

MR. KLEEMANN: The visual - the visual aspect.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was - it could have been that they were protesting something that you either didn't believe they were right or you thought they were wrong. It didn't matter whether they were right or wrong, in your mind, in terms of what they were doing. It was the visual -

MR. KLEEMANN: The visual, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - reality of tractors in Washington.

MR. KLEEMANN: Tractors in Washington.

MS. RICHARDS: The incongruity of it.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you speak to any of them when you were taking the photographs?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't get a chance to, really. They were busy with their thing and I was busy with mine.

MS. RICHARDS: And at that time also, you did some night scenes, and that was a departure - some night scenes at country fairs.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you before, why were all - we talked about light a little and a kind of a bright, even light. And what made you want to paint night scenes? And I don't know if there were too many of them, so how did you feel about the ones you painted? So first of all, what made you want to do that? That was something you hardly done, if ever.

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, every year the fair would come to town and I'd be at one fair or another, just for the fair itself. And I'd say, well, why not paint it?

MS. RICHARDS: What was it about the fair that you enjoyed?

MR. KLEEMANN: Honky-tonk - you know, the people and the barkers and all that, trashy kind of stuff, you know. I just liked it.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did you decide to take photographs for paintings there?

MR. KLEEMANN: I like the - you know, all the lights and the -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The colors.

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't say chrome because there's no chrome there.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The colors, all the colors and -

MR. KLEEMANN: Bright colors and a lot of activity - energy, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you, at that time, think, oh, my god, I'm going to be - this is going to be a challenge to paint a night scene, or no?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't think so.

MS. RICHARDS: But you hadn't done that before.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, but I always - if I can see it, I can paint it, you know, even if it's black because it's not all black.

MRS. KLEEMANN: There's also that - one of those fair paintings was commissioned, remember? Louis -

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, yeah, Louis got a commission for it.

MS. RICHARDS: For specifically for you to do a fair?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, I guess they had seen one of the others that he did, and they liked it and they wanted him to - they asked for a specific image, remember?

MR. KLEEMANN: I can't remember the image now. I probably -

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was one of the rides. It was a carnival ride.

MS. RICHARDS: So I think this was in 1983 and '84, so maybe you did the first ones in '83 and the commissioned one was '84.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Could be.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about being told what to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think I was told what to paint; I think I had -

MRS. KLEEMANN: He was told the subject, you know, the -

MR. KLEEMANN: I showed them a picture and they said, yeah, we'd like that one, that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: You showed him the slides.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The slides.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I think they were prints, actually, but yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You showed him prints -

MRS. KLEEMANN: From the slides.

MS. RICHARDS: Presumably all the prints you showed, you would have liked to paint.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And this collector, or purchaser, selected the one he wanted you to paint. Was that the first - no, that wasn't the first time that that happened to you, right? And that's something that you welcomed?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, because I didn't really care if I took a picture or not, but I did take a picture, and that didn't really matter to me just as long as I liked the picture. If I didn't like the picture, I wouldn't paint it.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you took a different direction again and you did interior paintings of the Grand Central Terminal. How did that come to be? Why did you just like to do that?

MR. KLEEMANN: That one right there.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah? Well, that's not inside Grand Central, but you did some paintings inside.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And actually, you're correct; you're pointing at a painting outside but in the same neighborhood. That is a departure too -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - because it doesn't have any of the vehicles. It's night scene in the city.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: A cityscape, in a way. Do you recall how you decided, why you decided to -

MR. KLEEMANN: To do that?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, to make that change in your subject matter?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I always loved Grand Central anyway, and I'd always look around and I'd look at all that stuff, the stars that they had up on top -

MS. RICHARDS: Even before it was restored.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right. And I said, well, why not do Grand Central? So I did. I had a big party there. As a matter of fact, that watercolor, that's in Grand Central.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the occasion for the party?

MR. KLEEMANN: Tracey?

MS. HOULIHAN: What?

MR. KLEEMANN: Why did we have that party?

MS. HOULIHAN: The Grand Central party?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. HOULIHAN: Mom, what was that show?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was a show at Louis's.

MS. HOULIHAN: Which one? Do you remember?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, but we have the invitations around somewhere.

MR. KLEEMANN: It was my night out for -

MS. HOULIHAN: Yeah, it was a show at Louis's that -

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was an opening [December, 1984].

MS. HOULIHAN: An opening show.

MS. RICHARDS: I see, and for the opening party, you had the party at Grand Central.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right, at Grand Central.

MS. RICHARDS: And I suppose - I assume that this show included the paintings -

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: - of Grand Central.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were painting the interior of this building, which didn't include any vehicles and was completely no racing cars, no fire engines -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - did you feel excited about it and look forward to continuing that direction of painting interiors?

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't even think about that. I didn't know if I'd go on with that or not. I think I did a couple more. We were taking dance lessons, Sally and I.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of dance?

MR. KLEEMANN: Ballroom. And we got our dance - and I had a new name at that time.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right, Ronald America Kleemann. And then the paintings from Grand Central weren't done until after the party and after the party and after the show, so that's when he started the watercolors.

MS. RICHARDS: Wait. Okay, this is new information. So in 1984 you had a show -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Celebrating Ronald America Kleemann.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had this painting - obviously this painting of 230 Park Avenue in it. And when you say - this announcement card says "Ronald America KLEEMANN." What is that supposed to mean? Is that supposed to communicate that you actually changed your name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm, I did.

MS. RICHARDS: And you did.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You officially changed your name -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - on your drivers license and everything, and Social Security.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't do it on my Social Security, though.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you do it?

MR. KLEEMANN: I did that -

MS. HOULIHAN: I think pretty much almost everything. Mom, did he change -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: And why did you do that?

MR. KLEEMANN: I really don't know why I did it. It was a silly -

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, it was like a publicity stunt?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: So it was legally changed.

MS. RICHARDS: What made you think you should do that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Everything I - I thought everything that I painted was kind of very American.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, why change your name?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think it was a stupid thing to do. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. And how long did you continue to show - you didn't show any more saying your name was Ronald America KLEEMANN.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did you show with that name?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, less than a year I think.

MS. RICHARDS: It was a very short-lived change.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you had that show in 1984, the exhibition at the gallery included what kind of paintings? Were they paintings in Grand Central or they were paintings of racing cars and fire engines and other paintings that you were doing at that time? Because just now we were saying that maybe you took photographs in Grand Central after the party.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that's the dance thing.

MS. RICHARDS: How does the dance thing fit into this?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I can't remember if they were there or not. We started taking dance lessons and then we had another party. Where's my help? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Sally?

MR. KLEEMANN: Sally?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yes? Sorry. Yes?

MR. KLEEMANN: We're in Grand Central and I can't figure where a Lorraine [Muller] came into this thing, you know, the Grand Central paintings, because they were -

MRS. KLEEMANN: She wasn't at the party.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: She had nothing to do with that.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, but I did a painting -

MRS. KLEEMANN: You did the Grand Central series after that. Remember, that's how we got permission to use that whole area because we had used the café for the party, and so we talked to the manager and they let us use that balcony area for the shots -

[Cross talk.]

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, and she was dancing.

MS. RICHARDS: And who was dancing?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Lorraine, our dance instructor, and her husband were dancing on the terrace at Grand Central.

MR. KLEEMANN: The top one right up there, that watercolor.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And he did a series of paintings of them dancing in Grand Central on the terrace, down in the lobby area there with, you know, the light coming through the windows and the big clock. That was in the days when they had the big clock. It was a nice series.

MS. RICHARDS: But it was just - this show was the only show you had with your name Ronald America Kleemann.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I think so.

MS. RICHARDS: This show December 10th, '83 to January 7th, '84.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that sounds right.

MR. KLEEMANN: And that's at Louis's.

MS. RICHARDS: That was at Louis's.

MR. KLEEMANN: He wasn't too happy about that either, was he, that Grand Central stuff?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, I think that's when you guys had your differences.

MS. RICHARDS: Because it wasn't cars and trucks and -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right, it was different stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: - the classic subject matter.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he was never real supportive of that. And, you know, rightly so. It didn't sell, particularly.

MR. KLEEMANN: Except the one that I did for those people.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, well, I think that was a different - I don't know what year that was.

MS. RICHARDS: So then you did these interior shots in '84 and he wasn't happy, and then you did, I think, the *Bay City Rollers* project in '85.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So we're going to take a quick detour back in time -

MR. KLEEMANN: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: - to 1979 when you did a painting called Bay City Rollers.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there more than one Bay City Roller or just that one painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: There was more than one painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, there was just one painting.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, sorry. So how did you end up doing that painting? It was just, again, an image of four figures?

MR. KLEEMANN: I got interested in - how did I do that? I -

MRS. KLEEMANN: You saw that they were the Bay City Rollers -

MR. KLEEMANN: The Bay City Rollers were playing. I was at Indianapolis [for the Indy 500 race] and they were at the fair at Indianapolis, and there happened to be a fair across the street or somewhere, and the Bay City Rollers were playing there. And I went to the fair office while I was still doing Indianapolis stuff and asked the people there if I could go backstage and meet the Bay City Rollers to see if I could do a painting of them.

And they agreed to help me do that, so I got backstage with them, talked to them, told them my idea, and asked if they would come to - they were going to go to Bay City anyway -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Michigan.

MR. KLEEMANN: - Bay City, Michigan. That's where they got their name. They put a pushpin in a map and it landed in Bay City and that's how they became what -

MRS. KLEEMANN: You should backtrack. I mean, the Bay City Rollers, for Archive purposes, are a Scottish rock group of the '80s. They were very popular in the '80s. And that was why they caught Ron's attention because of the Bay City connection.

MR. KLEEMANN: And so I got on a plane and got back to Bay City, and when they landed in Bay City, I took the picture and had lunch with them. And after that, we went to town hall and I was going to be up there on the podium with them. And a friend of mine, the mayor at the time - I went

to the same church with this guy - he called me into the office and he said, Ron, I don't want you to be up there. That's not your place.

And I said, they asked me to be with them and I'm going. And he said, okay. And he gave me a slap like he was part of the Mafia, you know, and out the door, but I stood there with them anyway. And it was a funny thing, really a strange thing - [laughs] - that he cared so much about something like that. But I did the whole thing anyway. So that's the Bay City Rollers story.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, you had the idea also of the frame around the painting. Remember that? You were going to - that was another one of your concept pieces.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Do you remember the - you're going to put a frame around the painting -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: - of canvas, a big, wide canvas frame, and then have people sign it?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, and that never happened either.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, we didn't do that, but that was one of his conceptual ideas.

MR. KLEEMANN: That was probably - I probably introduced that to him too and he said, no, he can't do that because he would have had to help me do that.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The mayor, you mean.

MR. KLEEMANN: The mayor, but he wouldn't - he didn't want to get into that. It would be too much attention to me and not enough to him. But if he worked it right, it could have been something for him too, but he was too stiff. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you show the painting to the Bay City Rollers once it was finished?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know if they ever saw it. I can't remember.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But Louis was not thrilled with that painting, right? It wasn't one of his favorites. And so Ron gave it to me. You know, it was like my painting, and I loved it. I used to - you know, we hung it in our house and I really loved that painting.

And finally one of Ron's shows came up and Louis wanted to use it, and he was just around the time that Ron had painted *Cultivating Washington*, which I also loved. I've always thought that was one of his very, very best paintings.

So Louis and Ron decided they were going to put the *Rollers* up for sale, without consulting me, by the way, so I had a fit, you know, and threw a tantrum and said, okay, you can put it up for sale but whichever one - if the *Bay City Rollers* sells, then I want *Cultivating Washington*, you know, in its place.

So they reluctantly agreed to that, and Malcolm Forbes came into the gallery during the opening day of the show. And he saw the *Bay City Rollers*, pointed at the airplanes and he said, oh, those are just like my Pipers, or whatever they are, in Tahiti, on my island in Fiji, or wherever it is - you know, wherever he has his island. They're identical to my planes. I'll take that one - because he

wanted to hang it in his house in the South Sea Islands.

MS. RICHARDS: Didn't care about the *Bay City Rollers* at all.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Couldn't have cared less, but he bought the painting and I got *Cultivating Washington*, which was fun.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, it worked out.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Skipping ahead now, back to the '80s, and we were talking about Grand Central Terminal, and then you also - then you started - how did you start being interested in the inflated Macy's day parade - I mean, I know you first did the paintings when they were not inflated. How did that subject matter come into your view? You were living upstate. You're not in Manhattan. Do you recall?

MR. KLEEMANN: I guess just the fact that the others weren't inflated.

MS. RICHARDS: No, but I mean, you chose to paint that rather than fire trucks or other subject matter that you had been painting, or continued painting Grand Central or other interiors.

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, they - all the balloon paintings sold very well.

MS. RICHARDS: But before you started doing them, what made -

MR. KLEEMANN: Before -

MS. RICHARDS: - you start doing those balloon paintings, starting with the ones that were not inflated -

MR. KLEEMANN: Good question.

MS. RICHARDS: - but I think were -

MRS. KLEEMANN: *Superman*.

MS. RICHARDS: - *Superman, Peckerheads* - I mean, all those - or maybe that was the inflated one, but what brought that subject matter to your attention? Was it a matter of being tired of painting something else and looking for a new subject matter.

I don't want to paint anymore fire trucks, I don't want to paint racing -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that probably had something to do with it.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you recall why you settled on the inflated balloons?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just like the way they looked.

MS. RICHARDS: But, I mean, what even brought you to that spot to see them? Were you a regular attendee of the Thanksgiving Day Parade?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to it every year?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, but I will make a guess. I mean, I was there and my guess is that it was the Thanksgiving Day Parade on television before the football games. I'm sure that's what caught his eye.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you ever been to that staging area where they prepare the balloons to be blown up?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Now we have, but not then.

MS. RICHARDS: But before then?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Just -

MS. RICHARDS: - just on a hunch -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - drove to New York and took pictures of the process.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, we were lucky we had a hotel that we could look out the window and see it. It wasn't -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The first year we were right on Herald Square -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: - watching the balloons come at us, so we had a perfect vantage point.

MR. KLEEMANN: That was before they clamped down -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The security.

MR. KLEEMANN: - and security wouldn't let us in. After three years of this or so, they wouldn't let us through.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Since 9/11 they've -

MR. KLEEMANN: And we have to take picture like this.

MRS. KLEEMANN: - barricaded off all the accesses so that you - you know, you're -

MS. RICHARDS: The high accesses, the hotel rooms high up?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, not that so much but anything on the ground - you know, you can't get to Herald Square without a special pass. You can't get to any of the real vantage points anymore without, you know, special passes. So we've done it a couple of years, just fighting our way through

the crowds. But the best pictures we got were the first year, when we just had completely unlimited, free -

MR. KLEEMANN: Free access.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And we were lucky, you know - very lucky.

MS. RICHARDS: At the same time as you were making those paintings, you were still doing fire trucks and other vehicles, I believe.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, we were.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, it seems kind of consistently throughout. Did you always assume that you would continue doing all these paintings simultaneously, the subject matter? It wasn't an issue? That's something that you -

MR. KLEEMANN: It wasn't an issue. I wasn't really thinking about -

MS. RICHARDS: Were you doing it because Lou Meisel said he wanted you to keep doing fire trucks, or you didn't want to stop doing that even though you were starting the balloons?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Probably a combination.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, just didn't bother me to do either one or the other, and things were going pretty good then, so -

MS. RICHARDS: In terms of what? Your paintings were going well or -

MR. KLEEMANN: Sales.

MS. RICHARDS: - or sales?

MR. KLEEMANN: Sales.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any particular - was the reason that you would do a painting of any of the Macy's balloons for purely formal reasons that you liked the form and the color and the shape and the spatial relationship, or did you have particular favorites for the subject matter that you wanted to paint Superman or you - because of what that figure would mean in the iconography to people? How much value did you place on those different pieces to make a decision about which painting to paint?

MR. KLEEMANN: *Superman* I painted flat on his face on the crown, and that's what Superman meant to me. He wasn't a super man; he was just balloon.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, do you mean that you were trying to - but the others are up in the air.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, and, you know - is that Woody? He belongs up in the air. And Woody Woodpecker was turning the corner. I just liked the way that they're up there floating, you know.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And there was that beautiful sky.

[END CD 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron Kleemann on October 12, 2009 in Valatie, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc five.

We were talking about the Thanksgiving Day balloons. So I was trying to understand the reasons why you picked particular photographs to paint. What were the elements that you were looking for, whether it was the meaning of the subject? What does Superman mean to people or Bugs Bunny? Or was it purely formal reasons, the color and the forms and the space? Or was it a combination?

MR. KLEEMANN: I would probably say color, forms and space because I don't care if other people like these or not or entertain - I like them.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have any - were there ones that you had a personal emotional connection to?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No, okay.

MR. KLEEMANN: Donald Duck, but they never did Donald Duck, I don't think.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Donald Duck is your favorite?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. [Laughs.] I don't think there ever was a Donald Duck balloon. Maybe they wouldn't -

MS. KLEEMANN: He was Disney. I'm saying Donald Duck was part of the Disney, you know -

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. That's it. I have a big thing with Warner Brothers, too, about these things, selling them. They didn't want me to sell them. What was it? I could sell a balloon, but I couldn't -

MRS. KLEEMANN: You could sell the image and the painting, but not any further images. Couldn't make prints, in other words.

MR. KLEEMANN: Couldn't make prints.

MRS. KLEEMANN: To sell.

MR. KLEEMANN: Just one sale.

MS. RICHARDS: You could make a painting, but if you turned it into a print of an edition of 50 or whatever, that wasn't allowed. Did they actually write you a letter - a legal letter?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, they did.

MS. RICHARDS: Louis did.

MR. KLEEMANN: And it is probably in the archives, that letter.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, I think Louis got -

MR. KLEEMANN: He has it?

MRS. KLEEMANN: They would be with him.

MS. RICHARDS: So as you were painting, you continued to go back to painting a fire truck at the same time as the parade. Did you feel that you wanted to be seeking new subject matter on a continual basis - that it was something that gave you a sense of being recharged? Or was it a matter of refining what you were already doing and that the fire trucks would continue to interest you and all the other types of vehicles. Or did you feel that you needed to bring a new subject matter to your practice on a regular basis?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think bringing new subjects in, continuing that process. It makes it more exciting.

MS. RICHARDS: You started a series at some point of NASCAR - the NASCAR series, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: That was in 2000-something?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Two thousand five, four, five, three?

MS. RICHARDS: There is a painting - I guess, 2003. Am I missing something important that you want to talk about between - I mean, because the Macy's Day balloons continued to the late '90s, right?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you end up doing the NASCAR paintings? Why that subject matter? I mean, obviously, you had painted racing cars.

MR. KLEEMANN: Because there must have been - did I stop painting at that point for a while?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, you stopped painting for about 10 years.

MR. KLEEMANN: Ten years?

MS. RICHARDS: And that is why I was struggling. There was a gap and I didn't quite know if it was a gap in my knowledge. What were those 10 years about? I mean - I don't mean that. What were the 10 years - the dates?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It would be around '92 to 2002.

MS. RICHARDS: Ninety-two -

MR. KLEEMANN: That long?

MS. RICHARDS: And there is a painting from - well, a bunch of paintings from '93.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Okay, so those would be things that he was probably finishing up. But yeah, sales were not going well. And so Ron decided he was going to work. And that is when he went to COARC. Remember he was talking about the ARC.

MR. KLEEMANN: The ARC that I worked for.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The county association for - it used to be retarded children, but now it is just for mentally disabled. And he was a counselor for about 10 years.

MS. RICHARDS: So let me understand. You decided to stop painting because they weren't selling and take a different job. So what it sounds like it means is you were living off the work. You didn't have a choice. You couldn't just keep painting and not care they didn't sell, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, literally, he could have [stopped painting] because I was working.

MR. KLEEMANN: Sally was working.

MS. RICHARDS: So he could have-

MRS. KLEEMANN: Literally, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Literally.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But he wasn't [painting]. [Laughs.] So if he is not going to paint, he has to work. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So it was your choice. It wasn't - you would rather not reduce your living standard. In other words, you could have reduced your living standard and kept painting and just lived on less.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah. I mean, literally for what he brought in, it wouldn't have made much difference if he stopped working.

MS. RICHARDS: So was there some other reason that you stopped painting for 10 years besides the fact you just wanted to earn -

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably I really liked what I was doing. I liked taking care of those people.

MRS. KLEEMANN: You mean once you go to COARC.

MS. RICHARDS: No, before.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But she means why did you stop painting?

MS. RICHARDS: Then that is very dramatic. You had been painting for 30 more years and had achieved a level of success. You felt you were an artist. Why stop because sales stop because sales stop in artists' careers all the time. Why did it mean to you that you had to stop painting? Why did you think that meant you had to stop painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. I have no idea why. I was tired maybe.

MRS. KLEEMANN: You got depressed.

MR. KLEEMANN: I got depressed. I wanted to go a certain way.

MS. RICHARDS: So for you, success meant sales. Or was it more than not having sales?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I think success meant sales.

MS. RICHARDS: Because at that point in time also, there weren't too many exhibitions of photorealism. Maybe the art world wasn't interested - wasn't looking at photorealism. But that had been happening for a while and that didn't seem to discourage you because as long as you were selling, it didn't matter. I'm making this up, but -

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, but you are right.

MS. RICHARDS: It didn't seem to matter.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, because selling affirms, you know, his work, his worth.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, some artists may never sell and they keep painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: And they love to paint.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess they are compelled.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: They have nothing else they can do or feel that there isn't anything else that they want to devote themselves to.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he basically was that way, too. I mean, I kind of forced him to get a job because he was very depressed and hanging around the house and, you know, was really not healthy at all. And if he wasn't going to paint, then he had to do something.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point in time, I imagine that there were other painters, other photorealists who were experiencing the same downturn in sales.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever talk to them and discuss the situation and kind of support each other in a way?

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't. I don't know if they had a group that got together and supported each other. I wasn't part of it.

MS. RICHARDS: So as a healthy response to being depressed about the situation, you decided to take a job.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And it turned out to be something you enjoyed?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said you did that for 10 years?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That was local here?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you during that time continue to do some artwork?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I messed around.

MS. RICHARDS: What is messed around to you?

MR. KLEEMANN: Drew or something like that, you know.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, I think there are some paintings from that period, too.

MR. KLEEMANN: I probably took a lot of photographs.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, I know you took a lot of photographs.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were anticipating starting to paint again?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, but didn't for 10 years.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have conversations with Lou Meisel about this? He must have been disappointed or surprised or supportive or in some way, hopefully, understanding.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He was definitely supportive. I mean, he understood what was going on. And he was very supportive in terms of, you know, whenever you are ready, let me know. And there are paintings from that period. He did do some things, but very little. And I can't bring anything to mind. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you maintained your studio? It was there?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. He had everything there.

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't use it much? So what changed - what happened to cause you to stop that job and begin painting full-time again?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, one thing I did do, I brought a busload of my people - I called them my people - down to Louis's one time to see the gallery and show them what I did or, you know, where I worked and brought them in the gallery. Louis was shocked. Susan [Louis' wife] said can I give them candy? She brought out a fistful of candy and, you know, we walked around and looked at the paintings and stuff.

Then we left. I think I decided to go get started working again after that episode. And I don't know what my first painting was after that. But it is in the book here somewhere. I talked about the time I took the busload down to Louis's.

MS. RICHARDS: And that seemed to be an important step toward beginning to work again?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I would say so. The NASCAR project was sponsored by COARC. Did you tell them?

MR. KLEEMANN: That is right. I promised - in fact, the painting is at Louis's still. One of the first NASCAR paintings I did - and when I retired from COARC, I was working on their painting. I donated it to them. And they would get the profits from it. And in return, they financed my trips to NASCAR and -

MRS. KLEEMANN: To four races.

MR. KLEEMANN: To four races. And having them as sponsors kind of helped me get through all the NASCAR baloney, photographer who they don't know, to let me in and do what I had to do. So I used my people in that way. And they got something back for it, too. And Louis still has that painting. And when it sells, it is their payback.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And in the meantime, Ron got a series of paintings for several shows, you know, some of which were sold.

MR. KLEEMANN: And NASCAR has been good.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had a show at Meisel in 1997. And then the next one was 2005. So that represents that gap.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But by 2005, you had a show of the NASCAR - actually, I'm sorry. It was a show at the Butler Institute.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, right. Well, that had been after - Louis had a show of NASCAR first. And then -

MS. RICHARDS: And then it was at Bernarducci.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Bernarducci, right, I'm sorry.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Bernarducci, first NASCAR show. That moved to -

MRS. KLEEMANN: To the Butler.

MR. KLEEMANN: The Butler, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And then it went to Paris last year to Trigano Gallery in Paris [2008].

MS. RICHARDS: Spell Trigano.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, T-R-I-G-A-N-O. Patrice Trigano.

MS. RICHARDS: That gallery in Paris seems to specialize in realist, right?

MRS. KLEEMANN: He seems to, yeah. I know he had a show - Tom's [Blackwell] work, the year before, so he seems to be a supporter anyway. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: I had asked you a while ago about watercolor and that you had been doing watercolors. Do you approach doing watercolors the same way as you approach doing paintings, where you take an image and you project it on the paper and you make pencil sketch, et cetera? And so it is the same except you are using watercolor and not oil.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Is that particularly difficult doing that on such a small scale?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, it is not bad. Small brush -

MS. RICHARDS: Have you done watercolors consistently throughout your career or only at certain -

MR. KLEEMANN: Certain points. I haven't done -

MS. RICHARDS: And why do you choose to do watercolor?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Size, maybe?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, the size. It's very fast.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you decided you wanted to do a small image.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a small painting.

MS. RICHARDS: And is that because that particular painting image wouldn't look good big?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. It would take a longer time to do.

MS. RICHARDS: And why wouldn't you want to take a long time to do that image?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just needed to get something done very quickly. [Laughs.] Just for satisfaction.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MR. KLEEMANN: You kind of slash dab, but it doesn't look slash dab. And a lot of the so-called watercolors are -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Acrylic.

MR. KLEEMANN: There are a couple of other mediums that are not watercolors.

MS. RICHARDS: Gouache?

MR. KLEEMANN: Gouache. Some of those may be gouache. I can't remember whether they are or not.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you do gouache or watercolor work of an image that you also did a painting of?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think I have -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yes, you have.

MR. KLEEMANN: I did?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Dancers in Grand Central , peckerheads, Betty Boop, for instance.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, the one up on top. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So that was an example you did both.

MR. KLEEMANN: Both, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Would one always come before the other? Would you always do the watercolor first or the oil first?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I would - in that particular - I think I would do the - if I was going to do a watercolor and an oil, I would do the watercolor first.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find that that was kind of a test? Do I really want to do a big painting of this work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Maybe an exercise just to loosen up.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. Did you ever do a gouache and then decide no, I don't want to do a painting. I thought I wanted to, but I don't want to do a painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I have done that.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you learn to use watercolors or gouache or that kind of technique?

MR. KLEEMANN: Self-taught.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there particular watercolorists in the past or the present who you look at and feel are important - were important to your learning how to do that?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't look at books. I mean, how did you get - how did you teach yourself then?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just attacked it like I attacked oil paint or acrylic. I just put the image on the paper and just, you know, do it. I had a - what do you call - projector - projected it out and kept the projector on there.

MS. RICHARDS: But there are certain techniques that you need to learn to use watercolor, for example. And I was wondering where you learned the technique in watercolor, which could be different than the techniques you would use to do an oil painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. Well, essentially the same. I found it so.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But you paint - the way you paint -

MR. KLEEMANN: In fact, I painted on a table like this.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean a very high table?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I mean, it is not like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean a table that is slanted?

MR. KLEEMANN: It is not slanted.

MS. RICHARDS: A flat table.

MR. KLEEMANN: It is just a flat table. I made a thing that I could put the projector up on the ceiling and project it down to the image.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did that work better than projecting it horizontally?

MR. KLEEMANN: Because the colors wouldn't run. You know, they would stay where they were.

MS. RICHARDS: But you wouldn't normally have the projector going when you were painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I thought the projector was going while you were making the pencil marks. You turn the project off and then you paint.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, not in the watercolors. I didn't have any pencil. It just was like drawing right over the projection or painting right over the projection. Very quick. I mean, obviously, they are not as tight as the paintings are.

MS. RICHARDS: Do Lou Meisel sell the watercolors and the gouaches?

MR. KLEEMANN: He may have. I don't know.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think so.

MS. RICHARDS: You never bring those to the gallery?

MRS. KLEEMANN: He might have brought them. But I don't - you did the race car ones, you know, the lime rock ones.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, the ones -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Those didn't sell. I don't know if he has ever shown them honestly. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think about having - creating a different way of showing those works on paper?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he did. You have your palette paintings.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. But that doesn't have anything to do with what we are doing here.

MRS. KLEEMANN: So I guess no. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Over the years, have there been other contemporary artists whose work has inspired you and you felt that you were in kind of a dialogue with or that prompted you to - that affected you in any way - other artists' work - not personally, but their work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not that come right to my mind.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that your work has been influential on other artists? Have you been contacted by artists who said that -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, e-mails.

MS. RICHARDS: E-mails.

MR. KLEEMANN: How do you do that?

MS. RICHARDS: Do you respond?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Students, you know, asking questions.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you respond to those?

MRS. KLEEMANN: We do respond to them. And depending on the questions - if they are factual questions or questions that we can answer - you know, how you do it really is not answerable. But questions about technique or focus or how do I get a gallery, you know, he answers as well as he can. [Laughs.] And mostly it is kids, students.

MS. RICHARDS: You have done prints of various kinds. Or am I mistaken? Have all the prints been photographic - photo lithographs? Or have you done actual prints on - original prints on - lithographs or etchings?

MRS. KLEEMANN: You have done all of those.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How have they related to your paintings? Are they a completely different subject matter or the same? Are they images that only exist in the prints?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So for example, could you talk about some of the series of prints of a print you did and the circumstances of that?

MR. KLEEMANN: That one [points to serigraph of Soho Saint]

MS. RICHARDS: And what medium is that print?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It is a serigraph.

MR. KLEEMANN: Serigraph, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And that is a photographic medium, isn't it?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But there is an original painting of that.

MS. RICHARDS: But it is a photographic image of a painting turned into a print.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: But were there prints that you have made that only - the images were only in the

print, there were no paintings of that image?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you made the -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The Indianapolis ones. They are only prints.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And those are photographic - those are serigraphs, too?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, those are lithographs, weren't they?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, lithographs.

MS. RICHARDS: Photo lithographs. So you are not actually working on the lithographic plate, though.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he does.

MS. RICHARDS: You do? So you projected on a lithographic plate and did the same process that you do to make a painting?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that was the Mylar - it wasn't stones. I mean, you know, but yes, it is all hand done for the original and then the prints are made from that.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you do the prints, do you discuss with the publisher the size of the edition of what you prefer?

MR. KLEEMANN: Or what he prefers.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was entirely up to the publisher?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a sense or did Lou Meisel have a sense that it was good or bad to make additional prints? Was he supportive of that idea?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he was supportive.

MS. RICHARDS: But he doesn't sell them, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. I guess he got some to sell if - didn't he have a pile of them, too?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he had them, too.

MR. KLEEMANN: And who was that guy? Jack Solomon?

MRS. KLEEMANN: That is the Circle Gallery.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Circle Gallery.

MRS. KLEEMANN: They did others besides Indianapolis also. He did a series of Texas - remember we went to Houston, took pictures in Galveston and Houston? He did -

MR. KLEEMANN: Tugboat.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Tugboat, helicopter.

MR. KLEEMANN: And did I do an ambulance or something like that?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, that was a different one. That was a painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a white fire engine. Did I do that?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a white fire engine. That was Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: And those were prints you are talking about?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Those are all prints. That is all part of that.

MS. RICHARDS: Question that has to do with all these - you pick an image and you project it and you start working on it. Is it always exactly the image that you have photographed or do you change things? You know, I want that a different color or I am going to take that piece out and put something else in because it is not working. Or do you always totally adhere to the photographic image?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mostly I adhere to the image. But if something doesn't work, I have rearranged things.

MS. RICHARDS: Rearranged things -

MR. KLEEMANN: No, not in that total sense, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just corrected something.

MS. RICHARDS: Like the shape or a color?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about if something - if the whole thing is not working or you make a big mistake, what happens? Do you -

MR. KLEEMANN: Throw it away.

MS. RICHARDS: Throw it away.

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So if it is not working, you throw it away.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you don't paint over it and start again.

MR. KLEEMANN: I have painted, you know, just put more - oh, what do you call it - the white paint -

MS. RICHARDS: Gesso.

MR. KLEEMANN: Gesso over it.

MS. RICHARDS: Start over?

MR. KLEEMANN: Start over again, even with a different painting underneath it. I have done that at least once.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever think, you know, this isn't working, but maybe if I wait. Let me put it aside for a year or so and look at it again.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Does that happen? Or do you just say okay, this isn't working and I am painting over it and doing something -

MR. KLEEMANN: Painting over it and -

MS. RICHARDS: You don't put it aside and wait a year and bring it out?

MR. KLEEMANN: Maybe put it over aside for 10 years and it is still sitting there. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. So you do sometimes put it aside.

MR. KLEEMANN: Put it aside, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said that you usually don't work on more than one painting at a time.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever let accidents change - accidents or intuition or, you know, something - you make what you think is a mistake, but actually then it turns out to be a positive - you turn it into a positive and say, you know, that actually might work out better than the original idea.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah. Not that I can think of.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. When you are creating your paintings over all the years, have you always thought about archival images - that the materials that you were using would be very long lasting - that you were using canvas, the kind of canvas and the kind of paint and that you were conscious of those kinds of archival issues.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, try and use the best materials that I could get.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a certain kind of paint that you have always used, a certain brand?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, not really. I have been using Williamsburg and there is another one that I haven't used yet called Mary - Mary something or other. But I have had good results with Williamsburg.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Questions about your studio practice. Have you - and you can talk about whether this has changed over the years about your routine. Do you always work from a certain time to a certain time and certain days of the week? Or do you work and then take

breaks? Do you work in the evening? Do you have a certain routine? Could you describe your studio routine?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably my best work in the evening.

MS. RICHARDS: So how many - what does that mean about the time of day that you work?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably about 2:00 to 5:00.

MS. RICHARDS: In the afternoon?

MR. KLEEMANN: And then maybe 8:00 to 12:00 at night or shorter than that.

MS. RICHARDS: Has it always been that way that you worked in the afternoon and evening?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What would you do in the morning?

MR. KLEEMANN: Get ready to work that routine. You know, walk around the house and do whatever else I have to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you always want to keep - what about the light in the studio? Have you always wanted to make sure it is consistent? Or in the daytime, you are painting with daylight; in the evening, you are painting with artificial light? It didn't matter? How did you control that?

MR. KLEEMANN: I just paint with artificial light all the time.

MS. RICHARDS: So that means in the daytime, you closed blinds.

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I just don't - places that I paint in don't have that much light coming in anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: But you don't shut it out to make it consistent with night?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, not particularly.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you always use the same kind of artificial lights?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: What kinds are those?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just a stand with a light on it that I can push over to any -

MS. RICHARDS: So not fluorescent, not - just standard incandescent bulbs.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So there isn't a question of warm and cool or whatever.

MR. KLEEMANN: I would say it is pretty warm light.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you - and this is, again, if it changed between the '70s, the '80s and the now, let me know - did you always paint with certain sound in the studio? Music or talk radio or TV or

silence? What kind of atmosphere sound-wise did you find you preferred?

MR. KLEEMANN: Music. Right now I am listening to just classic music when I paint.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about in the past?

MR. KLEEMANN: I would listen to rock and roll and, you know, a lot of drums and stuff like that, but not anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were listening to music, was it on the radio or did you have record albums or prerecorded tapes?

MR. KLEEMANN: Radio.

MS. RICHARDS: So you would just put up with all the commercials?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, it is public radio, classical station.

MS. RICHARDS: But when you were listening to rock and roll, was that the radio, too or was that records?

MR. KLEEMANN: Radio.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that your studio needed to remain a private place and that you wouldn't want anyone visiting - except Sally - visiting while the painting was in process?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I didn't want anybody in there except Sally.

MS. RICHARDS: So if someone wanted to visit - another artist or a friend - and you were in the middle of a painting, you wouldn't let them in?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, yeah, he would let them in.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I would let them in.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But not while he is painting.

MS. RICHARDS: I meant - I didn't mean while you were painting.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, okay. Yeah, then yes.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, did you feel that it was okay to have people look at your work before it was done?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. I have no qualms about that. If they want to try and do it, go ahead.
[Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have an arrangement with Sally here that there are certain times when she can come in and not others? Or she could come in anytime?

MR. KLEEMANN: She can come in anytime.

MS. RICHARDS: You weren't distracted?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. Sometimes she helps me.

MS. RICHARDS: How is that? [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: I am his worst critic.

MR. KLEEMANN: She is a good critic - not my worst - she is my good critic.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever have your dealer come over and see paintings in process?

MR. KLEEMANN: Who?

MS. RICHARDS: Your dealer, Louis.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, he has done it. He doesn't do much of that, I don't think. Not if I was closer to him, he would, you know. But he has never been up here.

MS. RICHARDS: Has technology - I mean, we talked about the change from slides to projectors. Has there been any other development in painting materials or any other aspect of your studio reality that has been affected by technology and that has changed the way you work?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, digital.

MS. RICHARDS: The photography?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm, yeah. The paintings are stretched and you can see what it is right away. But it is not any easier to paint, even though you have all that help, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I guess you have always worked in the same places you have lived.

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: And has that been a conscious preference or just a coincidence? I mean, you always wanted to live and work in the same space?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in your previous residence, what town did you say that was in?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Stockport.

MS. RICHARDS: Stockport, the big -

MRS. KLEEMANN: The mill.

MS. RICHARDS: The mill. When you were in that mill, how did you - you had a separate whole floor for a studio?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just another tiny little place.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I was going to ask you to take about the preference - that was a huge space, right?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was enormous. And he had this interior un-windowed tiny little room. It is even smaller than the space he is in now.

MS. RICHARDS: So maybe eight feet by eight feet?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Something like that, yeah.

MS. HOULIHAN: Yeah, it used to be mine and Gunnar's [Ron's son from a previous marriage] bedroom.

MS. RICHARDS: So of this huge space with the windows and everything - I can see - we talked about you didn't care if there was daylight - but why such a small space? And so there is only room for one painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: It is cuddly. It is like being hugged all the time. [Laughs.] By my room.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously, it wouldn't allow too many people to come and visit.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That is true, too.

MS. RICHARDS: That was a conscious or unconscious positive -

MR. KLEEMANN: Either way - [laughs] - it could be conscious and unconscious.

MS. RICHARDS: Was your studio before that on Broadway also very small?

MR. KLEEMANN: On Broadway, I had the whole - it was like 80 foot.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you use a big part of that for your studio?

MR. KLEEMANN: I would say maybe two-thirds of it. And the rest was living.

MS. RICHARDS: And on Grand Street, you had a large studio space?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, similar.

MS. RICHARDS: So somehow when you got to Stockbridge -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Stockport.

MS. RICHARDS: Stockport, you made a tiny studio. There was a substantial change.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, just a change. But we had to live in the other part, too. We had to live in the other part in the other one, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah?

MR. KLEEMANN: We had a larger living space.

MS. RICHARDS: You had three floors in Stockport?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, there were two finished floors and one -

MS. RICHARDS: And each floor was about 6,000 square feet? You said 80 by 80?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was 80 by 80 originally. We cut the back half off because it was deteriorating, so it became 40 by 80. And we lived in 40 by 40. So you know, we lived in half of that. So there was a whole other half unused of the mill that he could have built, you know, a room or two in, but never did. So he had his little -

MS. RICHARDS: So the studio was in the - but the studio was in the 40-by-80 foot living space?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, not the living - it was in the living space.

MRS. KLEEMANN: In the living space.

MS. RICHARDS: So what did you do with the other half?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, the bottom half became a garage and storage space, which we put everything for 30 years that anybody ever could purchase or buy or think of or whatever. And then the top floor was a totally empty space that we called our ballroom. [Laughs.] And we occasionally had a party or something there. But it was unused. I mean, there was plenty of room. There just, you know -

MR. KLEEMANN: Then there was an attic with bats and pigeons. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you confined the size of your paintings to the size of the wall in that tiny studio?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: And did you ever - so I assume that you never wanted to make a bigger painting?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he did some pretty big paintings - seven feet.

MS. RICHARDS: But I mean larger than that room, which is small. I mean, you could have done a 10-foot painting.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he moved. Remember him painting in the den area?

MR. KLEEMANN: I never had the need to paint that large.

MS. RICHARDS: So the studio and the painting were in sync.

MR. KLEEMANN: [James] Rosenquist couldn't even get in the door, you know. [Laughs.] He paints huge stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think about painting elsewhere, moving, vacation? Or did you ever take a trip where you wanted to paint in a different location?

MRS. KLEEMANN: We took paintings on vacation with us.

MS. RICHARDS: So then you did paint in different places outside the studio?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Motel rooms.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you take a painting? In the car? Or was it rolled up?

MRS. KLEEMANN: We had a van. At that point, we had a -

MS. RICHARDS: And what would prompt you taking a painting on vacation?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Insanity. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You needed to take a vacation, but you didn't want to stop painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you not want to stop painting? Or did you feel that you wouldn't be ready for a show if you stopped painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: Probably that. I wouldn't be ready for a show.

MS. RICHARDS: You could have emotionally taken a break.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But you felt like you didn't have time.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. But then I didn't paint anyway. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: On vacation.

MR. KLEEMANN: On vacation.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So you took the painting, but you didn't paint. It is like taking a book and not reading it.

MR. KLEEMANN: It is like sucking my thumb or something like that. [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: He had it with him, his security blanket.

MS. RICHARDS: So where you went didn't affect the painting that you painted. You didn't paint a different painting in a different location. It was the painting you were working on.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take any trips that were important to you artistically either because of what you saw turned into a painting or just nourished you visually? Maybe other art or nature, anything? Were there any travels that you -?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not for that reason.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, we have always taken pictures. I mean, he always sees things and, you

know, certainly we have images that he has taken.

MR. KLEEMANN: I was talking to a friend I just got in touch with. He remembered I saw a field of 1958 Chevrolets, all the same color and all the same model, parked in one field. And Tracey found the slide to it. And I hadn't seen that in years. And I have always wanted to paint that. So things like that I have seen other places that I didn't know I was going to see. It happened. But they have never been painted.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you had an interest to teach at all?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: It just hasn't been something that you have wanted to do. What about lecturing about your work?

MR. KLEEMANN: I did a lecture to a ladies group. That was kind of fun.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about college campuses?

MR. KLEEMANN: I have been thinking about that because, you know - I have been thinking about getting a hold of Michigan again because I maybe could do something like that. But we'll see.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about critical response to your work. Have you felt that when critics wrote about your work that they understood it? That they talked about it in the right way? Did they get it? Or have there been -

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I don't know. I think Hilton Kramer said a few things about me that I didn't like. I can't really remember what they are anymore, you know. But the critics didn't seem to like me too much.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that affect you deeply?

MR. KLEEMANN: I kept painting, you know. I didn't like the critics as they didn't like me.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever try to speak to a critic or talk - have a conversation?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think I wrote back to him or something because of something he said about - and I never heard back from him. The other guy, John something or other -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I am trying to remember, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Russell?

MRS. KLEEMANN: John Russell. That is the one you wrote to.

MR. KLEEMANN: John Russell?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah. But I think that more than about Ron, in particular, it was photorealism in general that was so irritating.

MR. KLEEMANN: But there was one woman who liked it. I can't remember her name. Vivian or -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Barbara Rose, maybe?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. It started with a V.

MS. RICHARDS: There was a critic at the Times, Vivien Raynor.

MR. KLEEMANN: That is who - yeah, she said some good things about my work once.

MS. RICHARDS: You have had your work in shows in different countries.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: In Germany and elsewhere. Have you had a chance to see the reviews of those shows? And if you have and if they have talked about your work, have you found that the response to your work is different in different countries than it is here?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: How? Is it worse? It is better?

MR. KLEEMANN: It has been better outside the United States.

MS. RICHARDS: Have critics specifically talked about your work?

MRS. KLEEMANN: In Paris, they did. And Germany -

MR. KLEEMANN: About my work.

MS. RICHARDS: And why do you think they have responded in a more positive way? Was this at the same time or different? Well, why do you think they responded differently?

MR. KLEEMANN: I guess maybe just because of their particular culture. They see more.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, they are not so bound, I don't think, in the tradition of the old masters and the impressionists and, you know, the abstracts.

MRS. KLEEMANN: They are more open to all kinds of art, you know, not just certain. And so they can welcome something like photorealism because it is new and fresh like they welcomed the graffiti artists. You know who they are.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When you have had shows outside the U.S., have you had a chance to go there for the opening and talk to people who are at the exhibition? And if so, how did that differ or was it the same as the feeling you had at an opening in the U.S. at a museum? Was the crowd different?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Much different.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. They are very happy to be there and very happy to, you know, have us there.

MS. RICHARDS: If you could take out the very recent - this is excluding the Guggenheim. But over the years, there have been a number of group exhibitions and so let's say, for example, there was a huge exhibition, Contemporary American Realism Since 1960. And it was a traveling exhibition in '80-'81. I don't know if you got to go to any of the European venues.

Or there was a show in 1982, "Photorealism: The Last 10 Years" at a gallery ["Photo-Réalisme 'Dix Ans Après'", Galerie Isy Brachot, Paris, France, January 13 to March 6 1982].

MRS. KLEEMANN: Where was that?

MS. RICHARDS: Galerie Isy Brachot in Paris.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Or Brussels, there was a show - a group show. Anyway, I just wondered if your experience as the artist standing in the gallery, talking to people about your work was different -

MR. KLEEMANN: That was a long time ago.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah. But did you talk about that at all? He was in Monaco in the late '60s.

MR. KLEEMANN: Late '60s, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: With a gallery owner was it there or just a collector?

MR. KLEEMANN: An owner. His first name was Pierre something.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But he was obviously enamored of Ron's work.

MS. RICHARDS: The late '60s before he even had the show in New York at all?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right. Is that true?

MR. KLEEMANN: I think so.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Before my time.

MS. RICHARDS: That was when you were doing the collage-like images?

MR. KLEEMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Before you were really doing the photorealism?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: So would it be the late '60s or the early '70s? When you did the Jackie Stewart?

MR. KLEEMANN: Jackie Stewart, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was part of that. What year was that? Let's see if I can find it.

MS. RICHARDS: While you are looking, let me just ask you. We had talked about the tractors in Washington. Have there been any other times when you felt that social or political issues came into your work? Or did you purposely not? Did you consciously not want them to enter into your work?

MR. KLEEMANN: I did some photographs of Obama's inauguration, you know, the parade. I was going to do something with that, but I never got to it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that was pretty recently.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think you will?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. Maybe if I get a chance, I will.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't get the picture I wanted.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. If you did those paintings, would you imagine that it would be an issue to your gallery again that you would be not painting your traditional subject matter?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. Because it would have to deal with his face looking out the window and there is no - and a nice car. [Laughs.] Just call it inauguration or something or Obama - no political meaning at all, except to the person that looks at it. If they don't like Obama, they will say well, what did you do that for? But I happen to like him.

MS. RICHARDS: So that is one thing that you might do in the future.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I might.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you talk about the painting that you are doing now in the studio? I mean, I know we are not sitting in the studio. But talk about the subject matter of that painting.

MR. KLEEMANN: That is 6 foot long and 4 foot wide. And it is a racing type painting of a pit crew attending to their jobs of filling tanks with gasoline and then - [inaudible] - trying to make this be a winning car. And it has got these huge guys in blue uniforms bending over and looking kind of ridiculous in what they do. But they are not ridiculous. [Laughs.] It is a very complex and going to be a very unique painting. I can't wait to have it finished and shown somewhere.

MS. RICHARDS: What is going to be unique about it?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just the energy that I see in it. I think I have really got it locked in there. And it is going to go - like it could move itself.

MS. RICHARDS: How long ago did you take the photograph for that painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: How long what?

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take the photograph for that painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: How long did I?

MS. RICHARDS: Is that based on a photograph you took recently or that you found in your archives?

MR. KLEEMANN: It is quite recent. I got it in Monaco.

MRS. KLEEMANN: A year ago.

MR. KLEEMANN: It is part of the Monaco thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Ah, I am going to ask you about that.

[END CD 5.]

This is Judith Richards interviewing Ron Kleemann in Valatie, New York, on October 12, 2009 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc six.

You were talking about where you took this photograph for this painting you have on the easel right now, and you said you took it - could you talk about where you took it?

MR. KLEEMANN: In Monaco.

MS. RICHARDS: In Monaco. And what brought you to Monaco?

MR. KLEEMANN: All the photorealists went there.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Not all, just eight.

MR. KLEEMANN: Eight, eight photorealists.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did they go?

MR. KLEEMANN: We had a gentleman who wanted to buy a painting from each one of us, a collector. And so we all did our shots of whatever we were going to paint from Monaco, and not all of them were racecars. I was probably the only one who did a racecar.

MS. RICHARDS: It was the Grand Prix.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right, Grand Prix. And they came there to do this painting, and then went home and did it, and something happened.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went to Monaco and you took photographs. And you came home - is this the painting you were doing or is this a second painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: This is not the second painting from Monaco?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, it's the only one from Monaco.

MR. KLEEMANN: Jackie Stewart.

MRS. KLEEMANN: But that was in 1971.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay, so from this commissioned painting, you're doing this painting. How did it work that, with the collector? Did you show him photographs and he picked which one he wanted?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yes, and that was the one.

MS. RICHARDS: And so when you finish it, it gets shipped off to the collector.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And where is it going to be, in Monaco?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know where he'll have it.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He's based in Berlin, so - or not Berlin, in -

MR. KLEEMANN: In Hamburg.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Hamburg, thank you.

MS. RICHARDS: Is he going to have all those paintings together, those eight paintings?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, his goal is to amass a superb photorealist collection, or contemporary art collection. It's not just photorealism, but he's got a lot of photorealists. And he took this same group to Zurich the year before, and they all painted paintings of Zurich.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you paint in Zurich?

MRS. KLEEMANN: The trolley.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I did. I painted a trolley. He has that now.

MS. RICHARDS: What's his name?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Torsten.

MS. RICHARDS: T-O-R-S-T-E-N?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Right, Prochnow. P-R-O-C-H-N-O-W.

MS. RICHARDS: T-O-R-S-T-E-N -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Torsten Prochnow.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think there's going to be a third city?

MRS. KLEEMANN: I don't know. I think he got kind of hurt in the economic crash - [laughs] - so we don't know what the future will hold.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that - it must have been a lot of fun.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, it's wonderful.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah. Cars taking us everywhere, anywhere we wanted to go. [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was quite a trip.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the first time that you'd been? You were there together, the eight of you. Was that the first time that you had been able to really socialize with some photorealists as a group?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, I mean, we'd met them all at parties and stuff. I mean, we all knew each other, and, you know, we've known Tom and Linda for - well, Ron's known them since -

MR. KLEEMANN: Since Sidney Janis, you know, we had the first photorealist show there.

MS. RICHARDS: But was it particularly significant or meaningful or gratifying to be together?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, it was - I think everybody got a lot out of it. Some of the group was - the younger people, you know, who -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so they weren't all first-generation photorealists?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Not at all, no. Yeah, Tom and Ron were the only first-generation people there.

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you suppose that is?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, they were all Louis's people, for one thing.

MS. RICHARDS: So it wasn't his selection; it was Louis's selection?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No - well, I think it was, yeah, Louis and Torsten.

MS. RICHARDS: Because why didn't he pick photorealists from other galleries?

MS. KLEEMANN: Well, if Louis is doing the choosing, why would he? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, I mean - so Louis did the choosing, not the collector.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he and Torsten did it together. I mean, Torsten - if he had wanted someone else they would have been invited. And Louis has always included others from other galleries in situations.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, [Richard] Estes is not -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Estes comes along to -

MS. RICHARDS: Ralph Goings?

MRS. KLEEMANN: If ever he can, yeah, join. I mean, he's always been included.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So I was imagining your having a reunion with the original photorealists, but that wasn't correct.

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, that was true in Germany, in Berlin. That was our reunion.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, for this - I wanted to talk to you about that. Before that, so in Zurich and in Monaco, it was this mixed generation -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Basically, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Mostly younger.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah. And that was a lot of fun. So it was very nice, actually. It was a lovely trip - two trips. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Once you're finished with this painting, do you know what you're going to be painting next?

MR. KLEEMANN: Next one, hmm. I'm not sure. Oh, yes, I am sure. Did you see those three -

MRS. KLEEMANN: They're stretched canvases.

MR. KLEEMANN: - leaning against the wall?

MS. RICHARDS: No, I didn't.

MR. KLEEMANN: Backwards, so you can't see what they are.

MR. KLEEMANN: They're unfinished NASCARs, so I have to do those. I've got to get those out of here.

MS. RICHARDS: They're due for a show?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not really, but they're due to be done. [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: He's also - are you going to do the designer heads, too?

MS. RICHARDS: What is that?

MR. KLEEMANN: Those little paintings I showed you in there, that I - what did you call them?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Designer heads.

MR. KLEEMANN: Designer heads, they're designer heads. The earrings, the -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah?

MRS. KLEEMANN: The jewelry and pretty faces.

MR. KLEEMANN: I might do a series of those, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did - that's quite a departure. How did that come to be?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I've been looking at fashion magazines forever - you know, at some of the ridiculous things that people wear. And I just want to, maybe, make them a little more ridiculous.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just because, I mean -

MS. KLEEMANN: For fun.

MR. KLEEMANN: For fun, and that needs to be done.

MS. RICHARDS: And you're making them look ridiculous by simply putting a piece of jewelry on their head, but you're not changing the fashion?

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you need to get permission from the photographer, the fashion photographer?

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't know. We'll see. Maybe I'll have another lawsuit on my hands.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, they're collages, too, so -

MS. RICHARDS: So those will become - the small images in the studio will become larger paintings.

MR. KLEEMANN: I don't think I'm going to make them any larger, unless something happens that forces me to do it - like, sales.

MS. RICHARDS: So those would be an unusual series of very small paintings. They look like they were about 11-by-14 or something like that. Is there a dream project that you hope to do that you haven't done yet?

MR. KLEEMANN: Not that I can think of.

MS. RICHARDS: Something you've always wanted to do?

MR. KLEEMANN: I'm dreaming - I'd like to have a dream of maybe living to 120 so I can do everything I want to do. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think keeps you working now - keeps you working very hard, and to a high level?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just to finish it. To finish everything I start.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you enjoy the whole process, or do you - what part of the process do you enjoy the most, if you could divide it up into maybe three things: selecting the image, actually doing the work of painting and seeing the finished painting. Which part of that do you enjoy the most?

MR. KLEEMANN: Doing the work, because that's where I get my most - I was going to mention this, I almost forgot - getting a rush. Like going to a parade, when you get that tingle, I know I'm on the right track.

MS. RICHARDS: When does that happen?

MR. KLEEMANN: Maybe five or 10 times in a painting.

MS. RICHARDS: During the process of painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: During the process of painting. And I know it's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have that sense when you first start, and say, I know this is going to be a terrific painting?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I've got to - something's got to work like clockwork, and then, ooh, I'm in the parade again. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: And you talked about the moment when you're done. Is that a, kind of, oh, okay, I've finished; now I want to get to the excitement of starting a new painting? Or do you feel, wow, I kind of wanted to -

MR. KLEEMANN: Sometimes, when that happens, I get a rush, but not all the time. It's a feeling I've had all my life - even at parades. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: So that must have been very hard during those 10 years when you weren't painting, to not have that.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: During that time, did you always feel that you would go back to painting at some point? Just, you weren't sure when.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: He did organize a show with the COARC people. He taught some of them or encouraged some of them to paint.

MR. KLEEMANN: And they did some great stuff. I mean, there's no limit to what they can do, because they don't know what they're doing.

MS. RICHARDS: So they don't have any self-censorship.

MR. KLEEMANN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me go back to this show you've mentioned for a second, this show in Berlin: the big show of photorealists in the Deutsche Guggenheim. What was the experience of going to that exhibition?

MR. KLEEMANN: Well, I was scared to death.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MR. KLEEMANN: Because I had to speak, and all that - I was asked to speak, and I didn't do such a good job.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you scared to see your paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: No. I was looking at it the whole time I was speaking. I wasn't speaking to the people; I was speaking to the painting. [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, when you were interviewed for the television thing.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. That television thing was good, but when I had an interviewer, I do much better than I do by, you know, just trying to go cold turkey.

MS. RICHARDS: How was it to see - those were early paintings that were in that show, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't have anything to do with the selection of those paintings. How did you feel about seeing them again? Had it been many years since you had seen them, those paintings?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Very many years.

MS. RICHARDS: So was that -

MR. KLEEMANN: It was satisfying to see them where they were.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the audience? How did you feel that the response was, of the viewers in the museum?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was terrific. Everybody was excited about it.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Not only that. We were in the gift shop, and some people recognized Ron, and asked for his autograph on their programs. That was really - [laughs]. It never happens in the United States. Pretty exciting.

MR. KLEEMANN: It was exciting.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that - did you read the texts that the authors wrote in the catalog? What did you think about some of those ideas that one of the writers was throwing out about photorealism, and the relationship to culture? Did you think that he was correct in his assumptions?

Well, for example, one of the things that he said was that he thought there was a relationship in the early '70s, mid-'70s, between cinema vérité and the TV programs, the very first TV program - "A Loud Family" on PBS [*An American Family*, first aired in the United States on PBS in early 1973. The twelve-episode show chronicled the experiences of one family, the Louds of Santa Barbara, California]. The camera being there, the reality, and photorealism, which was a moment of American reality. He was looking at those two things happening at the same time, and pondering whether there was a relationship. Did you feel that that was meaningful to you? I mean, did you think that that idea made sense?

MR. KLEEMANN: I didn't really think about it at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think that there was a - he also imagined all kinds of, wrote about all kinds of conceptual issues that he thought the artists might have been dealing with, which may or may not have been true. So I wondered if that rang true for you or not.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, Ron is really a realist. He sees what he looks at and he looks at what he sees, and he paints that. That's exactly what he paints. He's totally visual. I don't know how to explain it - I mean, it's foreign to me - but, you know, every little brushstroke is part of that reality to him, on the image.

MR. KLEEMANN: It's true.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I mean, it is. I mean, it's really literal. I guess that's what I'm trying to say, it's very literal. So the image and the painting - he's a perfect photorealist, because the image and the painting are the same, you know, for him. And that's really what it's about, it's that image: the colors, the light, the shining.

MS. RICHARDS: Other than this Guggenheim exhibition, have there been other exhibitions that you remember - that are really important to you?

MRS. KLEEMANN: The first Guggenheim, the New York Guggenheim, that was a biggie.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, yeah, at the - where they brought my, what's the name of that -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Bigfoot.

MR. KLEEMANN: Bigfoot.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The big, red truck, which was the one that was the first Guggenheim.

MR. KLEEMANN: My baby.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. And having that exhibition -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, that was big stuff to me.

MS. RICHARDS: That was early, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was in the early '80s, I guess. Oh, and the Smithsonian, the [National] Air and Space Museum, that was a wonderful -

MR. KLEEMANN: Again, I was highlighted.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, the Guggenheim show was in 1981, and the Air and Space -

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was in the '70s, I think: '79, '80? Around in there, it was similar.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was a great one.

MS. RICHARDS: Have there been times when you felt that you wanted to control the context that your work was seen in? So that if a curator contacted Meisel and wanted to do an exhibition of fire trucks - maybe it wasn't photorealism at all, maybe it wasn't realism, maybe it was - or something that could possibly cause you to say, no, I don't want my work to be seen in that context? I don't know, did it ever come up that Meisel called and said, do you want to be in this show, or that you said to him, I want a voice in what exhibitions I'm in.

MR. KLEEMANN: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No, it never happened. Is there anything, as we wind up, is there anything else that we haven't touched on, that you'd like to -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Oh, did you talk about meeting President Reagan?

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh yeah, I was going to talk about that yesterday, and then I forgot about it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh good, well, let's do that now.

MR. KLEEMANN: How did that happen? We were in Washington -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, that was the sports show.

MR. KLEEMANN: Oh, that was the sports thing, that -

MS. RICHARDS: But what year was that?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, let's see. Reagan was president, so it would have been mid-'80s? Does that sound right?

MS. RICHARDS: In Washington, a show?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, at the Kaplan. Wasn't it?

MRS. KLEEMANN: It was in the White House. You went to the White House.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, in the White House.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And he honored sports art.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Lord knows why - [laughs] - but he did.

MR. KLEEMANN: A group of us were all doing some sports -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, you were doing - your Indianapolis stuff, I think, was in there.

MR. KLEEMANN: And the football one.

MRS. KLEEMANN: The football one. Oh, he was also the official artist for the NFL for one year, so he -

MS. RICHARDS: How did that happen?

MRS. KLEEMANN: That was in 1983, and Louis Meisel got us.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to the Super Bowl?

MRS. KLEEMANN: We went to the Super Bowl; it was at the Rose Bowl.

MR. KLEEMANN: And you were sitting behind who?

MRS. KLEEMANN: I was sitting in front of Wonder Woman [Linda Carter].

MR. KLEEMANN: [Laughs.]

MRS. KLEEMANN: I sat in the 50th row, 50th seat, on the -

MS. RICHARDS: Luckily not behind, because she's tall.

MRS. KLEEMANN: - the 50-yard line, and she was behind me. [Laughs.] I mean, and Ron was on the field, literally, on the field taking pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: Did some paintings come of that?

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, a lithograph.

MR. KLEEMANN: A lithograph, yeah.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Miami Dolphins and the Washington Redskins.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was the occasion for meeting the president and going to the White House?

MR. KLEEMANN: He was celebrating that -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Sports art. For some reason.

MR. KLEEMANN: And Louis said, well, you're going to go see the president and give him this book.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Well, he got an invitation to the White House for this event. And he told Louis, and Louis, you know, Louis said, give him this book - one of his books. So he did.

MR. KLEEMANN: So I shook his hand, and gave him the book.

MRS. KLEEMANN: And that was - you were right in back of Andy Warhol, and -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I met Andy Warhol. Let's see, I had a limo and Andy was in the limo ahead of me, and, you know, he was doing - he had the top open, and he had his head up. You know how the -

MRS. KLEEMANN: - president will wave. [Laughs.]

MR. KLEEMANN: The president looks out of the window. He did that, all the way to the end of the doorway there, waving his hand. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: I think I see 1981 to '82, "Champions, Heroes of American Sport," The National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian. ["Champions of American Sport," National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1981].

MRS. KLEEMANN: That's it, yeah.

MR. KLEEMANN: That was fun.

MS. RICHARDS: The painting of yours that was in the show - is it owned by the National Portrait Gallery?

MRS. KLEEMANN: I don't know. Well, you know, it was - the lithograph, right?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. It wasn't a painting. You mentioned that.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I don't think it was a painting. But the National Gallery - no, the Hirshhorn Museum owns, I think, one of those.

MS. RICHARDS: Fire truck.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, a fire truck, and of course Air and Space owns the original of the airplane [*Mustang Sally Forth*, 1973].

MR. KLEEMANN: And I met Bryant Gumble there too.

MRS. KLEEMANN: At that reception?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. He shook hands and took his hand away real quick. [Laughter.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you shake hands with Andy Warhol?

MR. KLEEMANN: No, I didn't.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet -

MR. KLEEMANN: No, never. I've been close to Andy Warhol a couple of times in my life.

MS. RICHARDS: Physically -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. You know, like at a bar. You know, like, maybe a seat away. And we just, you know, looked at each other. And he was at where I was making lithographs.

MRS. KLEEMANN: His guy was.

MR. KLEEMANN: His guy, but he'd stop in every once in a while, and give his - what do they call a guy that helps show a lithograph?

MS. RICHARDS: Printer?

MRS. KLEEMANN: No, his assistant. I can't remember -

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, an assistant. I can't remember. But he'd stop in every once in a while, turn around and go back out again.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that print shop?

MR. KLEEMANN: It was in Lower Manhattan.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Was that Norman Lassiter's?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, Norman Lassiter's.

MRS. KLEEMANN: Yeah, it was on - 4th, was it on? I can't recall the street, but it was in downtown Manhattan.

MR. KLEEMANN: Again, south of Canal Street, but running the same way. It's somewhere down in there.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there any other story that we've left out?

MRS. KLEEMANN: I'm trying to think. Well, probably many, but - [laughs] - I can't think of any, can you?

MR. KLEEMANN: I've got a paper up, if you want to hear some more stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, a paper?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I wrote down things on paper that -

MRS. KLEEMANN: To remind you?

MR. KLEEMANN: Just to have in my hand.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, please, please. So there's another story that you wanted to talk about.

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah. John Avildsen -

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. KLEEMANN: A-V-I-L-D -

MS. RICHARDS: A-V -

MR. KLEEMANN: I -

MS. RICHARDS: L-D -

MR. KLEEMANN: - S-E-N. I met John through a cab driver I know. And he knew this guy who produced and directed the first -

MRS. KLEEMANN: Rocky.

MR. KLEEMANN: Rocky. And John needed a place in a loft one time, and that's when I was at 508 Broadway, to do some photography, you know, for a film. I don't know if it was for that or not. No, it must not have been for that, because he was gone by then.

But he was doing something else, and he needed a space to take shots for whatever he was doing next. So he came there and got all the shots, and I met him. I gave him a painting, and so he has one of my paintings. But it's not a realistic painting; it's one of the shaked-canvas paintings. And he has it till this day. I haven't heard from him again, ever, so - but it was a fun thing to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever imagine doing a painting about boxing?

MR. KLEEMANN: Pardon me?

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever think about doing a painting about boxing, because of this Rocky connection?

MR. KLEEMANN: Yeah, I've thought about it. But I've never, really, gotten into it. So that's all the stories I have.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So if there's nothing else, shall we end?

MR. KLEEMANN: That's okay.

MRS. KLEEMANN: I can't think of anything either.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

[END CD6.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

ADDENDUM TO INTERVIEW

"My Life and Times as an Artist"

By Ron Kleemann
Speaking to the Hudson Fortnightly Club
February 24, 2006
Redlands, CA

Hello everyone. Thank you for having me. I've been asked to talk about my art and how I became an artist. Public speaking is not exactly my forte, so I'll be reading this. I'll do a brief overview, show some slides of my work and we can talk about them.

Both my mother and grandmother told me that my Swedish great-grandfather was said to have been appointed by the King of Sweden to paint murals on the interiors of major public buildings. He was the original artist in my family. My grandmother said I wouldn't be as good as *mor far* [great-grandfather in Sweden]. That stuck in my raw, and as I got closer to getting my education, I said to myself that I wanted to be better than *mor far*. I'll be far, far more!

Maybe because of that, I gravitated to art courses in college, beginning in architecture, then going into art education, then switching to sculpture, and ending up with a B.S. in design with a major in sculpture and a minor in painting, from the University of Michigan. I finally got it figured out!

Towards the end of my college career, my professor advised me to go to New York City to try my luck as a sculptor. Most of my pieces were huge metal, welded steel and had received a certain amount of attention while in college. One of my welded steel pieces (show slide) - this one - was accepted in 1961 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Annual - my very first show. So I thought I had a shot.

I managed to put together a 4-wheel trailer and my father's '58 Chevy, lent to me for the trip, and after a successful stop in Detroit, I made my way to the city. I say successful, because Mrs. Barron bought five large pieces at \$500 each, a fortune for me at the time, which gave me a stake to settle in New York. I've always wondered what happened to those pieces. But that's pretty common in the art world.

Back in New York, Bellamy, while not able to represent me, continued to offer his friendship and help, by steering collectors my way who were looking for avant garde work by new, that is, cheap, artists. He was immensely influential in keeping me afloat in the art world. Ultimately, I can thank him for giving me my start as a painter, as well as the minor successes I enjoyed as a sculptor.

After fighting the logistics of making sculpture in a city like New York for about five years, I finally decided to try painting. From the first I could see this was the way to go - no welding equipment, heavy steel, lifts, special rooms, special doors, special floors - all the things that large metal sculptures required. Painting was portable and fun. If it was a choice of staying in New York or leaving, I was staying! New York was the place to be in the mid-'60s. The art world was booming with excitement and possibilities!

I started out painting non-objective forms on variously shaped stretchers. Many of them were patterned after American Indian designs - others were from my imagination, or abstractions of various items. I painted in acrylic and used bright and aggressive colors (show three slides). They attracted a small amount of attention and were shown at Rider College in 1971 - the only major solo exhibition they were ever in. I still have a small collection that we hang when we don't have anything else available.

While using my camera in the city to take photos of subjects for my paintings, I became interested

in realism. I liked the way things appeared through the camera lens - especially shiny objects. My wife tells me I'm part Magpie. It occurred to me that painting the images exactly like the camera saw them would be more interesting than what I was making up - trying to perfectly reproduce the reflection and glow would be a real challenge. It also seemed to me then, and still does, that Americans in particular have a peculiar attraction to shiny objects - our vehicles, jewelry, buildings - they seem to adorn our lives. I called them American icons, and they attracted me, too. (McDonald's slide.)

Malcolm Morley, an end-of-pop, beginning-of-realism artist from England, had been experimenting with painting like a photograph for awhile - I was aware of what he was doing, but I wanted to do it my way. He did scenes of post cards: cruise ships and waterfronts, among other things. My first realist paintings were about vehicles. As you'll see, I have a long history with vehicles. Through Dick Bellamy I met Ivan Karp. At that time, Ivan was with Leo Castelli gallery, but he now owns OK Harris Gallery in SoHo. He was one of the early promoters of photo-realism and liked my paintings.

At the time, photorealism, new realism, hyper-realism or sharp-focus realism, as it was then variously known, was dismissed by early critics, but championed by collectors and museums anyway, as a fresh view of contemporary life. We were on the cutting edge of a new way of portraying objective art. As an artist, there was a double challenge: the original image must be unique to the artist's vision; and the painting of the image must be faithful to the photograph while still allowing the artist's style and technique to come through. Ivan recommended me to French & Co., an established gallery. They took me on - a true thrill for a young, struggling artist. (Show Leo's Revenge.) My first and second one-man shows in photorealism were at French in 1971 and 1974. A year or two later, French & Co. had closed.

Karp liked my paintings, but couldn't use me in his gallery, since he already had a full stable. I continued showing my slides to dealers, and for a short time I was with the Warren Benedek Gallery, which folded after a couple of years. I was still searching for a home.

Then I found one. My biggest break, and the one that has put me where I am today, wherever that is, was through another gallery owner, Nancy Hoffman. She let Louis Meisel know I was looking, and the rest is history. He's been my dealer now for the past 32 years. Louis has seen me through the good and bad times and, as a good dealer should, supported my painting even when we disagreed with what I was doing.

There have been many different paintings I've presented to Louis over the years, from racing cars to fire engines, to Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloons, all in the photo-realist style. I can honestly say that he hasn't liked them all, but he has always shown them and sold them as if he did. A good working relationship with a dealer is hard to come by, and I've been very lucky. It's true that I'm the artist, but he's the one that has to sell the stuff, whether he likes it or not. And luckily for both of us, he's been able to sell most of it!

One of the perks of my life has been my brushes with celebrity. Most recently, although I didn't know it at the time, Sir Paul McCartney donated a painting of mine [*Soho Saint 33 and 4 Score*, 1974] to the New York City Firemen's Association, in memory of September 11 and of his father, who was a fireman. The story was on all the wire services, in newspapers and on television and the internet all over the world. I found out when a neighbor came running across the street waving a sheet he had downloaded, yelling, "Is this yours?" I looked at the sheet and recognized the painting, of course, and was really amazed. I didn't know McCartney owned one of my paintings. I read further down the story, eagerly looking for my names as the artist, thinking what a great break this was. At last I'll be famous! Much to my chagrin, the name of the artist given was Ron Kleinman! They had

spelled my name wrong! So much for fame!

I started painting fire engines in 1974 because in my vision they epitomized the American icon - a revered symbol, and of great fascination to all children and most men. Besides, they're everywhere and they're always clean! I've painted them throughout my career, and have ended up with a variety of colors, styles and models. Emergency vehicles in general have always attracted me. I've painted an ambulance rushing to a call, emergency helicopters, police cars, and police motorcycles.

Besides other artists, I've run into a few big names: In the mid-'70s I was appointed the official artist for the Indianapolis 500 race, for three years in a row, and through that met some of the drivers: A.J. Foyt, Johnny Rutherford, Gordon Johncock, Mario Andretti, and Janet Guthrie to name a few. I met actress Myrna Loy in Indianapolis at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She complimented me on my painting of Janet Guthrie and her car that was hanging there at the time of her visit. Janet Guthrie was the first woman driver to ever drive the 500. I also had lunch with cowboy star Guy Madison, who was friendly with my driver.

Once, when I was at my dealer's loft to talk about paintings Barbara Walters dropped in to look at art and I met and had a brief conversation with her. Johnny Carson bought my first oil painting of a Red Apple cement truck. He was living in Malibu at the time and I guess it reminded him of New York. The late Malcolm Forbes bought the painting of the Bay City Rollers rock group, not because he liked their music, but because the airplanes in it are like the ones he had on the island he owned in the South Pacific. Judith Kaye, the New York State Chief Judge, owns several of my paintings, the major one being of the Hard Rock Café in New York.

The little watercolor I did of Paul Newman at Lime Rock Racetrack in Connecticut was not welcomed by him - I guess he didn't want any publicity. But I would have taken the photo no matter who it was - maybe! Needless to say, we didn't meet. In 1983 I was chosen as the official artist for the NFL Superbowl XVII where I met a few of the players. Indianapolis and the Superbowl resulted in a series of lithographs that were sold under the sanction of those organizations. They were fun to do, and what I'm about in my paintings. But I've always preferred paintings to prints.

I'm sure it's because of my sports orientation that in the '80s I was invited to the White House for a Presidential reception with a sports theme sponsored by Philip Morris. There were a number of sports figures there and some artists, among them Andy Warhol. But the thing that impressed me the most was shaking hands with then-President Reagan. He was every bit as gracious as everyone says, and, it seems, a true sports fan.

I've always liked racecars, of course, because they're bright and shiny and because they command some of the biggest audiences of all sports - another American icon. In the late '60s I was sent to Monaco by a wealthy businessman to cover the Gran Prix race. I was hosted by a French art dealer, a contact of Louis Meisel, who invited me to stay at his apartment in Paris and his villa on the Cote d'Azur - an all-expense paid first trip to Europe! What a way to go! That trip netted me one of my most famous prints - of Scottish driver Jackie Stewart in his car, and also a couple of other paintings. Later on that year, I met with Jackie Stewart at the Plaza Hotel to present one of the prints to him.

Probably the biggest irony of this is that while I have access to these racetracks in ways most of the public doesn't, I'm not really a race fan, unless, like at Indy, I have the credentials to get into the winner's circle. I hardly ever stay to watch the race. I get my pictures and get out!

I get my ideas from everywhere. In the '90s I painted balloons from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day

Parade. I got that idea from a photographer friend who lived on the West Side overlooking the area where the balloons were being blown up the night before the parade. I took some shots of those and made some paintings, then decided to do the fully blown balloons themselves. I also took some liberty with one of them. There is no MAC balloon. The title of the painting tells it all: Big MAC Double Whopper!

I've painted many subjects in many mediums. I've used acrylic, watercolor, gouache, ink, markers, color pencil and oil, while painting fire engines, race cars, parties, dancers, buildings, balloons - you name it. I don't like being stuck in one genre. The paintings have ended up in some pretty exceptional places: this airplane is part of the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum's permanent collection, a big truck belongs to the Guggenheim's permanent collection, and this truck - it carries the racing cars - MoMA owns. The McCartney fire engine will end up in the New York Firemen's Museum after a tour of the firehouses in the city. I was proud to see Betty Boop used as the advertising poster for an acclaimed show in Aarhus, Denmark, called "This is America: American Photorealists." I have been lucky enough to be part of major collections all over the country and in museums and galleries around the world, and to have my work shown in exhibitions, even when it's not selling. It might not always be lucrative, but it's always interesting!

It's been a lot of fun, and a lot of work. In the early '70s I moved to Columbia County with my ex-wife and young son. By the mid-'70s I was back in New York City and single, where I met my current wife. We moved back up here in 1979 and have been living in a factory mill in Stockport that I bought in 1973, where I alternately paint paintings and work on the building. Because of the demands of an old building, I sometimes end up doing more work on it than on painting, but I never give up entirely.

In the '90s the contemporary art market took a real nosedive, so I got a "day job" at COARC where I ended up spending 10 rewarding years, first as a floating counselor, then as an assistant manager at one of the houses. I met wonderful people there and gained probably more than I gave. I never regretted a day of it, even though I didn't paint for all that time, until I retired three and a half years ago.

My most recent show was of NASCAR - not just the cars, but images of things at the races - the trucks that carry the cars, the colorful ads and logos on the cards - lots of reflections all shiny and bright - that magpie again! With COARC as my sponsor, I went to four NASCAR races in West Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Watkins Glen, New York. The NASCAR tour was great - I completed eight paintings for a show, one of which I donated to COARC in appreciation of their help. After the show at Bernarducci-Meisel last winter, the entire NASCAR show was featured in an exhibition at the Butler Institute of Art in Youngstown, Ohio for the spring through summer season.

I've been thinking about painting jewelry - very shiny. I have some very non-objective small paintings I'm intrigued with, and chrome wheel nut covers are teasing my brain. Just about anything bright, glowing, interestingly-shaped or just plain interesting will do. The world is my inspiration. But before that I have two very important projects: first we are selling the mill and downsizing to a smaller, more maintenance friendly house, and second, I have a knee replacement operation coming up this spring, which will take some time out. I certainly intend to keep painting - all I need is portability and health! By the way, if you want to see more of my work and some of what you've already seen, they are available on . That's two Es and two Ns.

Thanks for your attention. I hope you're still awake! Does anyone have any questions?

ADDENDUM END

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