



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

**Oral history interview with Richard  
Kuhlenschmidt, 2014 June 27**

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Richard Kuhlenschmidt on June 27, 2014. The interview took place in Santa Monica, California, and was conducted by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Richard Kuhlenschmidt and Hunter Drohojowska-Philp have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Richard Kuhlenschmidt at the private beach club known as the Jonathan Club in Santa Monica, California, on June 27, 2014 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Here it is. You know, yes. It's this thing. This thing is blocking it. So, I'm going to have to do that whole thing over again. I'm really glad we checked that, though.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: So, why are you wearing the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I was putting it on to see if I was picking you up. But I think, actually, it's somehow, it's blocking the volume coming in. So, I'm going to start from the top. And you're going—basically, repeat that—it's only been two minutes. At least we didn't do 30 minutes. So, Richard.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: One more time. Into the microphone. Tell me the date you were born, and where.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I was born on February 27, 1951 in Cleveland, Ohio.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And tell me your father's name.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Walter Kuhlenschmidt.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And your mother's name.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Helen Kuhlenschmidt. Her maiden name was Voss.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And his—what did he do for a living?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was an assembly line worker for Ford Motor. And my mother was a retail clerk for various grocery stores.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what brought them to California?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, it was a—the possibility of transferring from Ford Motor Company in Cleveland to Ford Motor Company in LA. Actually, it was in La Puente. And he worked there for a few years, and then was transferred to an aeronautical division of Ford Motor Company in Newport Beach called Aeronutronics. But—and that's why we actually—when we originally moved to California, we lived in La Puente and then ultimately, I ended up in Orange County.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Because he was working for Aeronutronics, in Newport Beach?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Newport Beach, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And do you have any siblings?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you're an only child.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where did you go to school when you were in—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Washington Elementary School? [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where? Yeah?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Washington Elementary School in Santa Ana.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, after that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: After that, I went to McFadden Junior High in Santa Ana.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: McFadden Junior High.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And then Saddleback High School.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And at what point in this trajectory did you—did you develop any interest in the visual arts?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think it didn't happen until I went to college. Until I started UCI.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: UCI?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: UCI.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What year did you start at UC—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: 1969.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, that's University of California, Irvine?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And to start in 1969 in Irvine was a very good year, as they say.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It was—college was brand-new at the time. And also, of course, that, you know—at a time of a lot of radicalism on campus.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, were you raised in a—what kind of household were you raised in?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: What do you mean?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was it a political household? Was it conservative? Was it liberal?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We really didn't talk about politics very much. It was just sort of, like, you know, get the food on the table, and, you know, it was just basically—it was a lower-middle-class family.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you get along with your parents?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are they still alive?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. [No –RK].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, when you got to Irvine, and there was this radicalism, did you feel inclined to participate?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I did a little bit, but I was mostly interested in—I sort of studied art history and film history a lot there. I got really interested in that, in addition to, you know, doing the general education requirements. Had a lot of really interesting lecturers. I remember one of my lecturers was Barbara Rose—I don't know if you remember her, but she was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Barbara?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Rose.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, of course.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: She was a writer for *Vogue* magazine, an art critic.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And she brought Michael Crichton to speak that one time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And yes, she taught there on a couple of a different occasions. And what was the revelation for you, as you started to study art history and film history?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, what happened to me then was kind of interesting, because I ended up leaving UCI, because I wanted to study film. And they didn't have a film class there. I wanted to go to USC, but my parents didn't have the money. So, I ended up kind of going around to different schools doing student, you know, art film—art film-making, and ended up, finally, coming back to Southern California, and graduating from Cal State Fullerton, with a—with a degree in sociology, just because that's the—I had more credits in sociology than anything else.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But did it interest you?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Sociology?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what about that interested you?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: About sociology?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't remember. [Laughs.] No, study of people in groups—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —and the interaction of people in groups, which is what interested me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, here—but then you have this degree in sociology, how did you end up going back to your first interest in art and film?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: After I graduated, I had no real job. So, I started taking graduate classes in photography at Cal State Fullerton. And some of my teachers were Eileen Cowin and Jo Ann Callis. And ultimately, I never got the degree, because I was hired by—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where did—this is UC—this is at Cal State Fullerton?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Cal State Fullerton, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I got a job at Bowers Museum in Santa Ana—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —which took me out of college, and I was there for about three years before starting the gallery in Los Angeles.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you graduated from Fullerton in '74—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and then you studied, it says here, from '75 to '77—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —at Fullerton. And then, you wound up at the Bowers in '77.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And it says you were an exhibition designer?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what did that mean?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: We would be, you know—I actually—that's—this is where I met Tom Jancar. We were, you know, given an exhibition. "Here's the space. Here's what—the material in it. Design the exhibition." And so, that would mean, you know, choosing the colors of the—of the gallery. Designing the pedestals, constructing the pedestals. The Plexiglas. Everything around that. The signage.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was Tom doing?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Same thing. We were working together.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you're both exhibition designers. You were full-time?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: In fact, there was one time where we were—we had an exhibition of artifacts from Egypt. And the stipulation of the loan to the museum was that they had to have 24-hour guards there. So, that's when they actually hired us to not only work during the day, but also to work at night. And that's where Tom and I kind of hashed up the idea of opening up a gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] While you were staying up all night guarding the Egyptian artifacts?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Right. Exactly.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, in 1980, you're already opening your own gallery, despite the fact that you—well, it's not true—it's a—I think, just to backtrack a little bit—oh, no, you didn't, it says later. So, you didn't really have any business experience—

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: No, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —when you opened your gallery?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, what did you think would happen by opening a commercial gallery in LA, in 1980?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: I had no idea.

[They laugh.]

We were totally naive about that. At the time, I had just moved up to LA. Tom was still living in Orange County. I had some—we had some mutual friends who were in the construction business. And so, Tom and I were—we were working for them at the same time we were opening up this gallery. So, in addition to building the gallery and my living quarters itself, we did a lot of construction

work for other galleries in the—in the area. So, we built Gagolian's gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We built the Koplín Gallery, and a number of others. So, initially, the gallery was only open on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, at least for the first year. And then, in fact—in that time I would split our, you know, share the time. Like, when, you know, he would watch several days, and I would watch the gallery several days.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Now, this was at the 4121 Wilshire Boulevard—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —which was the location of the Los Altos apartment building, which is a sort of very fancy 1920s residential complex—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —with a lot of decoration on the exterior, next to the Perino's Restaurant.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Next to Perino's Restaurant, where we used to go to the piano bar all the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes, of course.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: The thing about the Los Altos building at the time is, it was sort of in a period of decay. And it became kind of a bohemian hangout. So, there were people that were in the art world, in the movie business, in the songwriting business. You know, musicians. So, it was all—it was a real kind of—real great community to be involved with there. And so, I took over this basement space, and basically, it was an old—where they would put storage—the trunks—the trunks that people would use for traveling. And I converted that into the gallery and my living space.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And who was your landlord? Just that company?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: The Stagen Realty, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Just the—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And then they had some old people over in the office that just kind of, you know, watched over things.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And they didn't really care that you were turning your space into an art gallery at all?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, no. Uh-uh. [Negative.] No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And yes, it was actually quite—who else—if I remember correctly, didn't Phil Garner live there at the time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Phil Garner lived there. Nancy Reese, who did some paintings with Ed Ruscha, lived there. Becky Johnston, who was a screenwriter. A number of musicians. I can't think of

them off—Denise Domergue lived there. Jayme Odgers, and what was his partner's name at the time? The graphic artist [. . . April Greiman –RK].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I know. I know. But you know, that's interesting. It was a very, kind of—it was a hip building, I would say.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: It was a very hip building, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did you know—you must've known that, going in there.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Not really. I knew because—I knew about the building, because I had a girlfriend at the time who was working there for a guy named Al Bunetta, who was an agent for John Prine and Steve Goodman, who were musicians. And so, I became familiar with the building at that time and I was hanging around there a lot. And that's when, you know, I talked to the management, or the landlord, and they told me about the space in the basement.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And you were paying \$150 a month?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: \$150 a month, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was your girlfriend's name, at that time?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: She changed her name a lot, so—

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: She changed her name a lot? Okay.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. Her name was Stephanie Skjold. S-K-J-O-L-D.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how long were you together?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: A few years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how did you—so you and Tom Jancar go into business together, and you continue building these galleries in your part-time. And what was Tom's background, other than just being—

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: He went to UCI, and he studied fine art there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you both were UCI. Now, just to backtrack to UC Irvine—Irvine—Irvine. [Laughs.] UC Irvine, because it was such a hot bed of Conceptual activity in the 1970s. Did you have—do you have memories of anybody else that you met there who furthered your interest in art?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Like Michael Asher? No. Not really. I mean, I knew of them, but I didn't really—I never took any studio classes, or fine art classes. It was mostly history that I took.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, really, Barbara Rose is your primary memory of that time?

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.



HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, getting—so, you start your gallery. And your first show. I'm going to go to this—now, your first show there is Kim Hubbard. Well, in the first year, 1980, you show Kim Hubbard, Susan Rosenfeld, Paul Tzanetopoulos, Jane Reynolds, David Amico, and Lena Rivkin. And I would say, of those artists, really only Paul Tzanetopoulos wound up having like a huge career.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, and David Amico, I suppose.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: David Amico, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I suppose. How did you choose those artists?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We chose those—well, Tom was a friend of Kim's, because Kim went to UCI also. Susan Rosenfeld, we became—as soon as the gallery opened, we became familiar with Foundation for Art Resources [FAR], because Morgan Thomas was involved with that—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —along with Dorit Cypis.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And they proposed the idea of doing the show of—with Susan Rosenfeld.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And tell me about that show?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't really remember that show, to be honest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But you knew about Foundation for Art Resources as a non-profit that did lectures, and events, and exhibitions?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly. Morgan Thomas lived in the Los Altos building, also. Well, she had a studio in the Los Altos building.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And so, as a result of us opening up this gallery—these two guys who didn't really know what they were doing—Morgan Thomas comes down and introduces herself. And then, we got involved with FAR. And the other artists at the time, I think, were mostly contacts with—that we met through Kim Hubbard and the other artists that sort of came around the gallery. We didn't have an agenda, in other words. We didn't have a set list of artists that we were going to show, at least initially. It just sort of happened.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But by 1981, this list becomes considerably more impressive—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I would say—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —because you are—by 1981, you give Richard Prince his first show in Los Angeles. Morgan Thomas has a show. Jerry Brane, Louise Lawler, David Askevold. Artists who've really now—have now really quite extraordinary careers. So, the next questions—one at a time: How did you find David Askevold, first of all? And who shows there in January of 1981?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: David Askevold was a teacher at UCI. And he—I think there was some sort of connection with FAR, also, as I remember. I think that his wife was involved with Dorit Cypis and FAR.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you remember his wife's name?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how about Louise Lawler?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Louise Lawler was—I was introduced to Louise by David Amico. Louise had been involved in a show—and I can't remember the name of it right now—but it was at—it was at LACE [Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions], in downtown. Probably in 1979. And she and David became friends. So, we were looking for artists to show in a gallery, and David suggested I get into contact with Louise. So, I went back and spent a week in New York with Louise. And she, you know, introduced me to Richard Prince, and Sherrie Levine, and Jim Welling, and all of the other people that were involved at that time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, what was she doing in 1981? Louise.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Louise?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What did you show?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We showed little photographs. She did a number of—I guess they're photograms—of record albums. So, in other words, she would have an 11-by-14 sheet of paper. She would take an LP of, let's say, *La Traviata*, or something, and put it on the photo paper, expose it. And then, the resulting image would be this white circle in the middle of a black field.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you showed those?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, we showed those.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, shortly thereafter, you showed those Richard—those —

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Richard Prince, yeah. Those were the—basically the series of images from magazines. From advertising. Three women looking to the left. Three hands with watches.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I think they were \$150.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They were incredibly cheap.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And everyone in LA regrets not buying work from that show. Including me. And the same—and you met Richard Prince through Louise Lawler?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, so, I would—so, here we are, in 1981. This is really early. How did you and—come to decide to show this work, which many people couldn't relate to? I mean, essentially, photographs of photographs were a very—it was, although a manifestation of Conceptual art, to a certain extent, it was also something new and kind of difficult for people to grasp.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did you know?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't know. I just sort of—I really got excited by it. Especially when I went back to New York and spent the time with all those artists and visiting the studios. At the time, nobody was really interested in their work. There were only a few places, like Metro Pictures, that was showing them. Nobody in LA even cared about it. And that was kind of intriguing to me. And it's really—it really, you know, captured my interest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did you have a—well, your interest had been films.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, photography.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, do you think your own interest in that film and photography period that had—enabled you to see the work better?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think so, yeah. Especially since I wasn't that—I wasn't really familiar with painting that much. My background was in photography. So, the fact that Louise, and Richard, and Sherrie Levine, and Welling—they were all photographer—the medium that they used was photography. So, I think that's another thing that interested me. It's interesting, also, the—a side note. The—after the gallery had been open for a while, another gallery opened in the basement space, also. I don't remember the name of it, but it was a photo gallery. Kind of a cooperative—do you know Stephen Cohen?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was involved with that. And they opened down the hall, in the basement of the Los Altos.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I don't have a memory of that, either. And I'm wondering—that wasn't LACPS [Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies]?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Oh, that's where I got introduced to Anthony Hernandez.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At LACPS?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But they had all sorts of locations. But anyway—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —we'll find out. So, that—so you're—we're having this at—now, Tom Jancar. What is his role in choosing these artists? Is he—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: A lot of the initial artists were friends of his that he knew from Irvine. And once that happened, it became sort of organic. For example, Jerry Brane, we met through David Amico. Louise Lawler was through David Amico. And then, you know, we just—it sort of—it sort of grew, from there. And then, Richard Prince and a lot of the artists that I showed later were all friends with Louise Lawler. And we weren't—we were not financially successful, at all. We actually—and that's, I think, what caused Tom to get discouraged and decide to, you know, leave the gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you say you weren't financially successful at all. At what—was it not possible, at that point, to get a backer?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, because nobody—I mean, none of the collectors in Los Angeles were, you know, in any way interested in the kind of work that we were showing. I mean, I guess there could've been a couple people, would I think about it now—that wasn't even in the, you know, the realm of concept, at that time. We were not very good business people.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well, you can only do what you can do, right?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At least, you were trying to do it. Now, how were you supporting the gallery?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We were working construction on the side.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, how long did you do that? The entire time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think until—after—probably until 1983. And that's when I started showing—I started making—actually making some money, with the art that I was showing. You know, I started showing Sherrie Levine, and sold those—the Walker Evans photos. Richard Prince. I think that was when it was the beach photos. The sunrise photos. Whatever they were—sunset? And so, I started selling work at that time. But it wasn't until, you know, after Jancar left that I had some resources that kept me—kept me going in the gallery for a while.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was it easier to run the gallery without him?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh. And why was that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Oh, because I could sort of set my own course. I didn't have to confer with anybody, or come to an agreement with anyone.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And at that point, in that—so, 1982. You closed the Jancar-Kuhlen Schmidt gallery, right after the Christopher Williams show. Christopher Williams, who is now showing at the Museum of Modern Art. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you reopened in the same location. And at that point, that's when I remember writing about this show. The Jim Isermann *Motel Modern* show—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in 1982, at the Inn of Tomorrow. Even now, that seems like such an extraordinary thing for him to have done.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Tell me about the Jim Isermann show, and the Inn of Tomorrow in Anaheim, California.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Okay, this was right after Jancar, but before we go on the Jancar-Kuhlenschmidt, we actually—after Chris Williams, we did a closing exhibition, with all of the artists that we had shown over the past three years. And one of the—Christopher Williams did the recording on the answering tape. He actually had a professional actor record the message that was on the answering machine. And it was about, you know, "This is the final exhibition of Jancar-Kuhlenschmidt Gallery." And so that was an interesting show.

I expanded the gallery in the building. So, during the construction period, I really didn't have a space to show anybody. So, what I—I met Jim Isermann. And I knew of this—having grown up in Orange County, I knew of this chain of hotels around Disneyland that were owned by the Stovalls. And they were all like—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Owned by who?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Stovall, S-T-O-V-A-L-L, I think. They were all kind of futuristic-themed hotels, or motels. And one was the Inn of Tomorrow. And I contacted the owner of the hotel and proposed this idea. So, what we did was, Jim and I went down to the motel and specced out the room. He built furniture for the room. We removed all of the existing furniture in the room. And he put his furniture in, and we had an opening.

[They laugh.]

And I think the show was only open for the weekend.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, my god. I remember those so well. All those—all those wacky chairs, with the webbing, and all that—essentially, he built the kind of furniture he thought should be in the room—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —as opposed to what was really in there.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Instead of all those kind of, you know, sort of cartoony, futuristic, *Jetsons*-type—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —'50s-inspired furniture, right?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, that—with multiple color.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, definitely. Bright, bright color.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: With bright color. Yes, it was quite an amazing, amazing thing. And I didn't realize you'd done it on your own. I somehow thought it was done in conjunction with another organization. But it was just you?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was just me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Best thing about—I don't know if you—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —the announcement was actually—there's a copy of the announcement in there. So, the—you know, all the hotels have their own postcard—and so, we used the postcard of the hotel to announce the show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, great. And you knew him from Orange County, how?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Jim?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Oh, no, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, you knew the hotel.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I knew them—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did you know Jim?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Just being in the art world. You know, he was kind of involved with—he was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were you—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —around the same generation as—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, he's a CalArts guy.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: CalArts guy, right. Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: And I got more and more involved with CalArts at that time. In fact, our next show, Robin Winters, came as a result of Robin actually teaching at CalArts.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And the CalArts connection came about organically, I'm sure, because you were showing so many people who had attended CalArts. At least, you were showing Chris Williams. And I think William Leavitt is with—is involved around then.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: William Leavitt went to Chouinard. So, he was not really a—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was he teaching there, though? Maybe not.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: No, he was a student there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, okay.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: That's where he went to school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But who—but you had—what were your other connections to CalArts? It seems like a logical evolution, in the early '80s—

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: It does.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —that that group comes out of there.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, I know. David Askevold, I think, was a big connection, because his friendship with Michael Asher and John Knight brought those people into the gallery. And I think there was a real appeal about the gallery. First of all, just the gallery itself, because it's such a small little idiosyncratic space. But the kind of vision of the gallery, which is not commercial, really sparked their interest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, Robin Winters showed there in '83. And—no, in '82.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: '82 was the last year, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And ends in '83.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: '83.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But 1983, you start making a little bit of money. And what you're showing that year is—it—are all the sort-of big names, I would say, like Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince. Well, not all of them. But those two, in particular. And then, of course, Tom Lawson—

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —who then ends up having such an—a role in Los Angeles.

RICHARD KUHNLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did you come in contact with Tom Lawson?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Again, it was through my initial contacts in New York with—I guess, Tom was showing with Metro Pictures, at the time. Because I was showing so many artists that were affiliated with Metro Pictures, I became, you know, closer to other artists that were involved with them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, let's talk about Helene and Janelle [Reiring]. Helene Winer, who, of course, had been here as a curator in California.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And tell me about getting to know her?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, we actually had a very good relationship. And, you know, we—it was kind of interesting, because they really wanted the art—their artists to be shown in Los Angeles, and I think they kind of liked what I was doing. So, I was pretty much able to select a number of their artists to show that I wanted. There was actually a period of time where they had offered me a job with the gallery. And so, I would close the gallery here, and move to New York. And I actually had—I think, accepted the job. Went back to New York. Sherrie kind of threw a party for me. Invited a lot of the—a lot of her, you know, a lot of the artists that I was going to be showing, and the artists from Metro Pictures. The one person they didn't invite was Robert Longo. And that really upset Janelle and Helene. And so, we had a discussion about that and I decided to not take the job.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's unclear to me. So, you're saying that she didn't invite Robert Longo to this party that she threw for you, but they got upset about it?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And why would that be?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Because they said that Robert always knows what's going on with the gallery, and I guess they hadn't told Robert that I was going to go to work for them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And he didn't like that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They didn't like the fact—well, maybe he heard about it, and then he was upset with them because—"What do you mean, you've hired, you know, Richard? And why didn't you tell me about this?"

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you—was the job offer rescinded, or you just felt like you couldn't go with it?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I just feel like—I felt like I—you know, their—we had a good relationship afterwards. But at that time, I just thought the relationship wouldn't be conducive to anyone's happiness.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, earlier, before we started taping, we—before—well, conclude that. So, you basically came back and just resumed your work, at the Los Altos building?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now it's—by '83, you say you started making a little bit of



money to keep the gallery afloat. How much money are we talking about? What are the prices around, at this point? You know, sort of, how much money could you make on a good exhibition?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I wish I had a price list from that period of time, because I know that—well, my living expenses were \$150 a month.

[They laugh.]

You know?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Plus cocktails. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Plus, you know, the cheap white wine at the openings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Plus all the booze you had to buy for all your artists and friends. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, and the announcements, and that was it. I was living alone, you know, at the time. Later on, I actually rented out a room in the—in the gallery, because I had taken over more space—to Larry Johnson and Joe Bishop. Actually, Joe Bishop. And Larry Johnson came along as part of the package.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were Joe and Larry living together?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They started living together at my place.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You know, I don't remember them being together, it's so funny. And so, essentially, you could afford to make—did you feel like, "Okay, now my ship's come in. I'm finally making some money. This is really going to take off," or not?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, not really. I mean, I was selling some work. And it was—it was—I was not working. I was no longer working construction. I was—you know. But at the same time, the, you know, the thought of doing something—moving on from this was appealing. And that's why I was initially interested in the Metro Pictures job. And then, kept looking for other opportunities to, you know, move beyond the basement of the Los Altos.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Now, how was your personal life at this time? Were you still dating—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No. That—she left—she became really involved in the music industry, and really kind of right after the gallery opened, we split up. So, I was—I decided to pursue the art world, and she decided to move on with music.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, were you—did you have time to date anybody else during this period? Did you have any other significant relationships? I don't remember. I was there, but I—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Really?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I was busy with my own relationships. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: You know, I had some other relationships, sure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, would you like to talk about them?

[They laugh.]

Did you have a girlfriend, at the time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I'm trying to think about—I mean, you know, I dated Nancy Reese for a while.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Claire Dishman, who was a student at CalArts. That was a—[laughs]—had a lot of—a lot of—lot of different girls that I was dating, at that time. Like, through the mid-'80s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's the '80s. You're young, and you're expected to do that.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Does it—did—was—did—at one point, Nancy Reese winds up being married to Phil Garner, doesn't she?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, Phil becomes a woman. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. He was actually—when I was dating her, she was married to Phil. But he was living in another—they had kind of separated.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because he decided to transition to—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, since like way before that. They just had no chemistry. I don't know what it was, but they decided to split up. I never got into that—that side of, you know, what was involved. Another woman that I dated at the time was a friend of Richard Prince's that he introduced me to. Shelly Mills. That's all I can think of right now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I just was—going to—wanted to make sure you were having fun while you were—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —running the gallery.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Sure, sure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It was fun for me. I remember.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was also very fun when Joe got involved, because that kind of brought a lot more people from CalArts down, who would just hang out all the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Tell me about that. I just remember him being such a lively and fun person. And tell me about how he got involved, in terms of—he had rented a room from you, and then—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He rented a room from me, yeah. And then he—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Joe Bishop. What was his involvement with the scene at that point?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was—you know, he had just moved from, I think, New York. Because he was writing for *REALLIFE* magazine. And I don't know exactly why he came to LA. But he ended up in Los Angeles, and the gallery was kind of a magnet for him because of all the New York artists that I was showing. And then, you know, he needed a room. And I rented out this extra room to them. And then he became kind of, like, you know, an adviser. We would talk. We would, you know, sit around, talk about art. And he became more and more involved in the gallery, as sort of an adviser. And it's interesting. I don't know if you've read the—Howard Singerman's book, about Sherrie Levine?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I haven't.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: The acknowledgment is interesting, because he talks about how impactful it was to be sitting around my gallery, talking with me and Joe, and Larry, about Sherrie Levine's work, and what an impact that made on his life. So.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's fantastic. I'll have to go back and look that up.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: When I think about these people—the people that I showed. At least, initially, they were all kind of my peers, too. I mean, we were all around the same age. We were all—we were all in our early 30s. And that's what made it kind of different from other dealer-artist relationships, where the, you know, the dealer's an older person. And there's not a real friendship there. We all—we had a very, very close friendship. And I had a very close friendship with all of these artists.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And as you said earlier, before we started our recording, we talked about this being a pivotal moment in the LA art world. And I think we talked about how we were so lucky to be a part of it, because it really is the time when you see LA become a much more international and sophisticated—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —art scene.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, that's when MOCA, you know—when did that start? When did MOCA actually open?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: 1984.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: 1984. So, it was right then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right then.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right at that time of—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And it was such a celebration to open in the Geffen—well, what we now call the Temporary—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: The TC.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —Contemporary—the TC, in a warehouse. Frank Gehry doing the interior of a warehouse. And it was just—it really felt like it was—it was the beginning of something. And it was the beginning of what LA has become.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And I mean, you were there.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I was there, yeah. And, you know, a lot of—I think back at some of the shows that they had there—like the *Forest of Signs* [MOCA, 1989] show, where—no, this is much later on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's much later.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think, '87, but still, most of the artists that I was showing. But there were so many artists that I had shown in the past.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, *Forest of Signs* was later than that. *Forest of Signs* was like—maybe it's—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: '88, or something.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is it that early? Yeah, *Forest of Signs*. And that was, really, all those people, you know, really, that you showed. Absolutely.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right. *Avant-Garde in the Eighties* [LACMA, 1987]. The Howard Fox show. A number of artists in that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, here it is, you're showing all the right people in the right time. I should ask about—you have a—let's move on to 1984, since we're talking about the opening of the—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Let me get a glass—another water.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, go right ahead.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Would you like some?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'm okay for the moment.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Okay.

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Thank you. Do you need a break? We're talking about 1984, and the sense of possibility in Los Angeles. Do you remember having conversations about that? I mean, what did people feel about Los Angeles, at the time? What did they feel LA offered them that wouldn't be possible in New York? Or was there anything like that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, I mean, I think—I think prior to that period of time, Los Angeles was sort of insular in that the art that was being shown was primarily Los Angeles-based. And that

period of time kind of opened up the LA art world to the rest of the world, especially in New York. And later, Europe. But that's when a number of other galleries from New York decided that it would be interesting to open up a space out here.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who were some of those—what were some of those galleries?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, it's actually later on, when a number of galleries—so, I can't really think, right at the moment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, I understand. But you're right. It is true that the New York galleries start coming. I mean—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And I think artists—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —Luhring Augustine.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Luhring Augustine? But that was later.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That is later, yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Luhring Augustine. I'm trying to think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Pace.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Which is, you know, sort of interesting. But let's backtrack. It is—it is sort of a time when you feel as though LA is really opening up to this—to a more European and a more New York—like, that the relationships between LA, New York, and Europe are becoming much more flexible and activated. You showed Mitchell Syrop in 1984.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And again, how did you find him? And what did he show?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mitchell? I forget what we showed at the very first—he was doing a number of works. Paper-based works that were based on advertisements.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And did you find—how did you come in contact with him?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was a CalArts student, and he was friends with other artists that I showed.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then Tony Hernandez—Anthony Hernandez—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —who shows his Beverly Hills pictures with you in '84.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right. He was, you know, again, he was involved with the gallery down the hallway in the Los Altos building and just proposed an idea for a show. And actually, this was the last show before I moved to Melrose. So, it was kind of a time where I was wrapping up the

gallery in the basement, and there was an opportunity for him to do a show there. And then, I actually got rid of the basement space and moved up to a—I guess a bachelor apartment in the building.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, it's in—it's 1985.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: 1985.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Late '84, I moved from Wilshire Boulevard to 9000 Melrose.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In late 1984?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let me do this for us.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: So, the opening show for that was the Allan McCollum show, *400 Surrogates*. This happened—this was kind of—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, here. I'm sorry. Here you are—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —it's just—it's right here. I'm sorry. Okay, *400 Surrogates*.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: This was after I had turned down the job in New York. I was looking for—actually, what happened was, I had done a show with Bill Leavitt. And Joan Simon came into the gallery. She bought a piece of his. And we got talking. And she was, you know, at the time—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: She bought a William Leavitt from you?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. And she had the Functional Art gallery, which I guess was in transition, and she was thinking of opening up another space. And I was thinking, "Well, if you have another space, I would love to, you know, move in with you, or share a—part of the rent, you know, so we could have two galleries in the same space." And that's when she found the 9000 Melrose space. And I moved over there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, so—is that—that was your first meeting with Joan Simon?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, she had been at the gallery other times.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Now, Joan Simon, for the record, was actually Joan Simon Menkes. She'd been Joan Simon, and she had married a doctor, Dr. Menkes. And she was an art collector. And she had the Functional Art gallery, as you said. And she was an interesting woman unto herself. She had come into the art world through her affair with Wallace Berman—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —of all people.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, how was your relationship? I remember her being a very lively, kind of eccentric woman.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We were kind of opposites, in a way. I mean, I was, you know, kind of reserved and cool. And she was like hot and fiery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But she's older than you, by quite a bit.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: About 20 years, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And she was funded by this doctor husband. So, was she—did she become a backer, for your gallery?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: A backer, in the sense that I had, you know, a reduced rent.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you share profits?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Not until later on, and that's when the gallery actually changed into—from the Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery to the Kuhlenschmidt-Simon Gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And that was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's not for a while.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No. That was not until late '85.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, it is—oh, here, I'm sorry. I've crossed this out. I'm wrong. I'm not reading correctly.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: That's okay. See, it's same space, different gallery. Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I see. So, you really were operating at a reduced rent for basically a year. And look who you show during that year. You show Martin Kippenberger.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was that like?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, you know, Martin Kippenberger is Martin Kippenberger. What can you say about it? That was a very exciting time. I mean, if you look at all of the artists that I showed—Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, Raul Guerrero. Tim Ebner, that was his kind of coming out show, where he did these huge brushstroke paintings. Remember the yellow brushstrokes paintings? And then, I had this little—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wow, that's right.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —contained space behind a wall that he did this huge, like, 20-foot long painting. It was called the *Kuhlenschmidt Painting*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was black and white. Again, brushstrokes. Jim Casebere—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because he did the—the brushstrokes, I can't—were they—were they silk-screened? Were they actually—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They were actually wax relief. So, in other words, he would paint—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: They weren't painted?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —he would paint the background color. Then, he would paint on with brushes—wax. And then, he would paint the next color.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, he took the wax off?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I wonder where those paintings are. Those were great paintings.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know. I wish I still had one. Then, of course, I did the Joe Bishop AIDS Benefit, which was, you know—as a result of Joe dying of AIDS, I, along with Larry Johnson and Howard Singerman, organized the show of friends of Joe's, because he was—had a lot of friends in New York and LA, to put together this benefit. And the money went to AIDS—the LA AIDS Project.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It was so early, too.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did his death affect you, personally?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We had kind of separated, personally. So, I was not that close to him when he died. It had been—I think, once I moved out of the Los Altos building, he of course had to move too, which was, you know, not a fortunate situation for him, because he needed to find a new space. So, we kind of lost contact with each other.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, how much—do you remember how much money you raised for that AIDS benefit?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't remember, but I know that we have the price list here somewhere. And the work was, you know, pretty decent. And all of the money went to—went to the AIDS Project—APLA.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: None of it—the artists didn't receive any money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wow.



RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I didn't receive any money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes, that was a big year. So, this one year where you're like, getting reduced rent from Joan Simon, you had to do the AIDS Project. Then you showed James Casebere, whose work now looks so prophetic. I mean, since everyone's building models and photographing them.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And that's what he was doing at the time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, that year, let's see. Allan—I started off the gallery with Allan McCollum's *400 Surrogates*. Then, Richard Prince was the—I think those were the cowboy photos. Sherrie Levine were the watercolors that were based after, you know, artists. Tim Ebner. Jim Casebere with his black-and-white photographs. And Mullican was incredible. Exhibition of his work, huge paintings. That's when—you know, things were going pretty well at that time, financially, for me. That's when Robert Rowan came in and bought, you know, half the show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Bought half of the Mullican show?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I was going to back up a little bit and say, who were your collectors, at this point? And Robert Rowan's a good one to remember. And Joel Wachs, I remember was—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Joel Wachs, of course, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —you know?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Joel Wachs. Boy, I hadn't even thought about putting a list of those together.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's always interesting to know who was supporting your gallery at this—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —at this transitional time.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Alan Hergott. Duke Comegys. Karen Comegys.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Marsha Kleinman. Robert Looker. The Spences [Judith and Stuart]. That's all I can think of right—at the moment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And okay, so back to—we were about to talk about the Mullican—the Kippenberger show. And what was that experience like?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What did he show, and—what was the opening like?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: There were paintings from the—from Metro Pictures. And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did he—was he here, at the time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was here—he wasn't living here. He came out for the show. I—to be honest, don't remember that much about this show. It wasn't very successful because, as you wrote in some of your articles, we discussed, you know—the dilemma of being an LA art dealer in the LA art world is that most of the collectors that were interested in his work, at the time, were affluent enough that they could fly back to New York and buy the cream of the crop. So, that work actually was not that successful for me to show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes, so—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And he was a very hot artist, at the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He was already hot at that time.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And the—that's an interesting question, as you've been selling work at these moderate prices. The artists' work is getting more and more expensive. It's going up in value. Are you finding that the LA collectors—you're saying some of the LA collectors stepped up, but some of the LA collectors would go back to New York?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right. The artists that I was successful with, like Allan McCollum, and Matt Mullican, and Sherrie Levine, they were producing work specifically for me because of our long-time relationship.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: So, it wasn't like there's a New York gallery that was, you know, commissioning the work to me. I was, you know, basically the original recipient of that art. So, it wasn't like somebody could go back to New York and buy, you know, some of these pieces, because they were being made specifically for the show here. And because of my relationship—prior relationship with a lot of these artists, I wasn't paying any commission to their New York gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's interesting. And that's interesting because of the artists sort of standing up for you, in that regard.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right. Yeah, definitely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, that they were willing to sort of say, "No, Richard's been in the trenches for us for a while, and therefore, he doesn't pay."

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: "He gets the work."

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, it was incredible.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's a nice—it's a nice gesture of—it made it kind of an astonishing gesture of loyalty, by the standards of today's art market. [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know. I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You probably wouldn't get that treatment today. But you might. Tell me about the 1985 show, *Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch...* with Tim Ebner, Mitchell Syrop, Jim Isermann, Jill Giegerich, Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Jeffrey Vallance?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, I thought there was a lot of really interesting work being done in LA that wasn't getting the recognition. Of course, most of these artists, or a lot of these artists were being showed either by Margo Leavin or Rosamund Felsen. But still, I thought there was something very cohesive about the body of work. And so, I wanted to put together a show, just to kind of show this group of artists who were around the same age. And, you know, give it kind of like a platform, I guess.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: An identity or something?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That platform. Good. And you're a believer—you're really doing it like a curator—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —standing up as a curator-dealer. Now, in 1986, you've become Kuhlenschmidt-Simon. And you have—and now you have this really expansive space on Melrose and Almont [Drive]. Really kind of a posh location—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —if I remember.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We were right down the street from Dan Weinberg.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yep.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Asher-Faure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And that's an interesting—that's a good thing to remember. So—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Margo was pretty close, too.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's right. It's when West Hollywood was really a center of

the art gallery—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —of the art galleries. And don't we wish it were still that way?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Remember Trumps? [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes, of course. Of course. Trumps. I mean, it was really—that was—it was—that was really quite a wonderful period.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Just go to Trumps for drinks after work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We remember it well. And yes, I remember Trumps. It's where we had a birthday party. My—there was a surprise birthday party for me, and they—Mike Kelley was the guy who helped—happened—as it—he apparently had agreed to do an interview with me at Trumps. And we were there, having this interview, and then all these other people came in. And it was a surprise birthday party for me. So, I always remember Trumps fondly. And I—a lot of us remember Mike Kelley fondly.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Anyway, that's about me. Back to you. So, to what extent do you think the gallery changes in 1986 after you have this official association with Joan Simon?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was a lot of conflict. You know, basically, it was kind of a forced situation for me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what's that—and what's this—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Financially, it was, you know, like, "Okay, well, you're making money now." She really wanted to—I think she saw this success that I was experiencing, and she wanted to take more—be more involved in that, and—including curatorial control. And that was very difficult for me to accept. Because our aesthetics were so different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes. I'm sure that's true.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And it caused a lot of conflict with the artists, too. Once I—once I became, you know, involved with her in this way, a number of the artists that I had long relationships with, you know, left the gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Can you give me an example?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did they discuss it with you before they went?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, they did. But it was basically—they made the decision. Allan McCollum was also very uncomfortable. So, it was a very, very difficult time for me, just to keep up the momentum, at the time. Although, if I look at the shows that I did, I mean, there's nothing that I'm really, you know, not proud of. It was a pretty solid group of exhibitions during that period.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you showed, you know—I didn't realize it was so—it went

a long time. You were with—it was Kuhlenschmidt-Simon from '86 to '89. And during that time—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, late '88, right?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Late '88, anyways. So, and you continued to show Matt Mullican and Bill Leavitt, and Louise Lawler, and, you know, Larry Johnson. In fact, I think you start showing Larry Johnson in 1987.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Doug Huebler.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Doug Huebler. And so this, you know, certainly a—Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Certainly, a number of people who are very exceptional. And would it be true to say that, at that point, at the point Prince and Levine's work was so valuable, or had already increased so much in value, that the bigger dealers were really able to—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They were, yeah. They were kind of—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —step in?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —picking them off, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who did they start showing with in LA, after they—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: [Daniel] Weinberg.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —left you? With Weinberg?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then—and as you become—became more and more successful as an art dealer, what did you learn about the art world? And about being an art dealer?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, you know, it was really, of course, hurtful for me when, you know, Sherrie and Richard left the gallery. But then I finally, you know, after talking to a number of friends about it, I came to the realization that that's what business is about. And, you know, it's about business. It's not about friendships. And I think at that time in the LA art world, it became much more about the business, especially because I was growing up and getting into bigger spaces. Big museum shows, and big collections. And it wasn't the little space in the basement of the Los Altos building anymore. So, I mean, I—that kind of woke me up to the reality of the business side of the art world.

I also remember one collector, Bob Gersh, was—we were talking about it one time, and he mentioned that, you know, he had initially been an—he was a Hollywood agent. And he had initially been an agent with—for Harrison Ford for a number of years. And they were like friends. And then, all of a sudden, you know, he got picked up by a bigger agency. And that was, you know, kind of the same experience that I had, once he became big.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did it help, to know that it happened to other people?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. And you start seeing it all over, too. I mean, you know, there were artists that were getting picked up by a number of the bigger dealers in town, at the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, yes. It's really the art world—and of course, the art world is so—making—the people in the art world are making so much money at that point. Now, all is well, though. And you're showing this—really, your core group of artists, I would say —

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and until 1989, when—

[Audio break.]

—something happens, and you and Joan Simon part company—

[END OF CARD ONE.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, interviewing Richard Kuhlenschmidt at the Jonathan Club in Santa Monica, California, on June 27, 2014, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number two. So, Richard, we were talking about that you were married to Betty Jo Tilley in 1989. She starts working in real estate—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —eventually. And you're off in Europe, selling art. So, all is—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: She came with me quite a bit. [Laughs.] It's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —all is well. Oh, she came with you? Good. So, you're both enjoying it. You're both traveling around Europe selling art.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We had no children. We were no—you know, it was no pets. And so, it was a lot of fun, for those three years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how did you find that work, that interaction with the European dealers? How—did it introduce you to another level of operation, on a commercial level, or—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, I think most of the dealers that I was talking to, they were—they were, again, pretty young dealers. I guess I consider myself—was pretty young, a young dealer, at the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who were you dealing with, at that time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, Tanja Grunert was certainly one. She was, you know, representing Matt Mullican at the time. Some of the other ones—I'm—actually, I can't remember their names, right at the moment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And Tanja Grunert, how's her—what's her—how do you spell her last name?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: G-R-U-N-E-R-T.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did—was that the name of the gallery?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. And where was she?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: She was in Cologne. And she was showing Matt Mullican. And she kind of introduced me—we became friends, and she introduced me to a lot of the other European dealers, like Monika Sprüth. God, I can't think of the names of some of them right now, but a number of galleries from London and Italy and Austria, of course. Krinzinger and nächst St. Stephan.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, did you—so, this is a period of time—how would you say this differed from what had happened before? You're doing large scale installations. What's changing, in the way that you're operating as a dealer, and in the way that you're showing your art, at the 17th Street location?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think the whole art world, at the time, was changing. LA had kind of established itself then as an international art scene and things were getting bigger. And it was a period of real—I don't know, bravado, that the galleries were showing. And it almost was like a one-upsmanship, where you had to show, you know, bigger and flashier things at the time. Which worked great until the market crashed, but that's another story.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, did you see the habits of collectors changing, at that time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, I certainly was selling to a lot more collectors at that time than I was earlier, even from—on Melrose. I mean, the Barbara Bloom installation—the entire installation—was bought by Peter Norton.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where do you suppose it went?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was—it was reconstructed in the—at the San Jose Museum [of Art], but I don't know what happened to it after that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And who were some of the other big—what were some of the other big moments for you, in your—in your dealing, at that time? In terms of what I would call tough sales to tough collectors?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Wow. Well, you know, there's one thing—I'm actually looking through this list here, and I don't see—I think I left a show out. Which is when I was on Melrose. And yeah, I think it's not there. I'll have to—I'll have to go back and—it was a show of Stephen Prina, Chris Williams, and this other artist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, they were in the group show—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in 1990.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, you did something after that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, I think—I need to look that up, and see when it was. And plug that into this time frame. Yeah, it was a show that were—where they were both doing photographs at the Huntington Garden. So they were doing botanical photographs. And they found this—the *LA Times* had this *LA Times Sunday Magazine* every—that would come out every Sunday, of course. And they had a photo contest. And so, they picked the winner of the photo contest [John L. Gramh –RK], who was also doing a botanical photograph. And they included him in the show. And so, it was the three of them. It was a three-person show.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's really funny.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And in a way, it was kind of cruel to this poor guy, to win the contest. But—because he didn't know what was going on. You know, "Who—what is this art world?" He was just this guy who took a photograph and submitted it to the *LA Times*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's so funny. That really is a funny idea. Okay.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I mean, at the time, I was starting to sell more to museums, too.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you sell—who were some of the museums who were willing to buy from you?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: MOCA. Newport Harbor [Art Museum]—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Which—what curators were you working with then?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I was working with Ann Goldstein a lot. Kerry Brougher, also. LA—LACMA—Howard Fox, working with him. Hugh Davies, down at the La Jolla museum [Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego]. Paul Schimmel, at Newport Harbor. God, do you remember that? Wow.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Of course I do. And what were—what was their response to what you were showing? I mean, these are important curators, and they obviously saw what you were selling as being important. Tell me about that whole relationship, in terms of its making your galleries more successful, or better regarded.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, it did. I mean, obviously, just having them, you know, it was basically, you would have—they would have to come and see, you know, shows that I did, just because they were interested. So, it enhanced the reputation of the gallery. And of course, them purchasing work for the museums enhanced the status of the artists that I was showing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When they bought work for the museum, did they buy it outright, or did they get a collector to buy it for them?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Both.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Both?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Can you give me some examples of things that they bought



from you? Anything like—any moment that leaps out at you as, like, "Oh, my gosh, that's going to MOCA's collection?" Or—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, I mean, some of the art that I was—that I was showing, like Doug Huebler, was not an easy sell. That was pretty difficult work to sell to any collectors.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think the Spences were probably the biggest collectors of his work, as far as like private collectors. So, selling the work to the La Jolla museum and—was pretty significant for me. And they would buy some—you know, they bought some major pieces.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, that's the—that's one of the fascinating things about San Diego and La Jolla is that it also is like the seed bed of Conceptual art—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —which is—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —is not nearly as well-examined as the LA situation.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I mean, Eli Broad collected work from my gallery. Frederick Weisman. Of course, that was—it was really the relationships that I had with Nora Halpern, from the Weisman Gallery—or Foundation. And Shelley De Angelus at Broad.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, some of these—these were some of the beginnings. Well, not Weisman, so much. But certainly, Eli Broad's collection was a very young collection—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: And Patrick Lannan, and Peter Norton.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Who was the curator for Patrick Lannan?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And Peter Norton was—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —just Peter.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Just Peter. Peter and Eileen.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, all's well. And work now, it's—let's choose an example for—let's try to find an example for, let's say—I mean, the—[inaudible]—would obviously be very good. But 19—let's move forward in time. Let's move to, say, 19—let's go to 1991, and you're showing Jack Pierson in 1991. He would've been a younger artist for you, I suppose?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, he was. But I really—I loved his work. He was staying out here, at the time, staying at the Château Marmont. And, you know, I made a studio visit with him. And a number of the collectors that I was friends with—including Joel Wachs and Marc Selwyn, who was a

collector at the time—were really interested in his work. And so, I showed—I got, you know, became very close friends with Jack. And I mean, we did the signs. His sign pieces. And also his drawings. I mean, his drawings were just flying off the shelves. It was incredible how well they sold to, like, all kinds of collectors that, you know, came in for that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—but these were very inexpensive, surely?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, they were. Sure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At that time. Those were the new thing.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: As opposed to Matt Mullican's work, who must have been fairly expensive at that time?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I can tell you that I think the—I think Barbara Bloom's installation sold for \$80,000. So that gives you an idea of—you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, that seems like nothing.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know, I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But at the time—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —of course—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —it was a huge amount of money. Also, in '91, you did a Los—a very important show—called *Los Angeles 1970-1975*, in which you included photo work by—well, some photo work—by Bas—Bas Jan Ader—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Bas Jan Ader, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Bas Jan Ader. Baldessari, Robert Cumming—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Ger van Elk.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ger van Elk, William Leavitt, Alan Ruppertsberg, William Wegman. I mean, that's a very important—interestingly, it's a very important group of artists to work with in the 1970s, and people never understand that moment in the history.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Exactly, exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—but you did. [Laughs.] And tell me about that show. How did that come about?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I want to—I wanted to put some context into the later generation of a post-Conceptual artist that I was showing earlier. So, it was basically to give a context to what was going on in the '70s, which so many collectors were not aware of. I mean, most of these artists—except for Baldessari, Wegman, and Ruppertsberg to a lesser extent, and Leavitt—but most of these were pretty unknown, at the time, to most collectors. So, I wanted to give a context to that period of time in Los Angeles history. And because they were very influential, and very supportive of the gallery in its early stage.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how did you happen to be so knowledgeable about this period?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I just studied it. I just talked to them. I just, you know, I remember going down to Al Ruppertsberg's studio and just, you know, sitting around, talking with him about the '70s. And then of course, you know, I had a close relationship with Baldessari, and Leavitt, of course, was one of my artists. So he, you know, talked to me a lot about what was going on then. And I was also very interested—I mean, before—you know, I guess—go back to the very beginning of the gallery. There were some galleries that were—kind of preceded me in showing tough art, like I was showing, including Morgan—the ThomasLewallen Gallery, with Morgan Thomas. And Claire Copley Gallery. And a number of these artists had shown at the—at those galleries, at the time. So, that got me interested in the '70s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you never saw that, those shows?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you might have seen ThomasLewallen, or not?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They had closed.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: They closed.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: They had closed, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. So, you'd never seen them. But you had just heard about them.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And heard about these artists and their relationships.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Michael Asher and Claire Copley. You know, where he took down the wall separating the gallery from the office space. I mean, those were, you know, pretty seminal shows. At least, as far as my history goes, my, you know, connection with the art world. And certainly, Baldessari is being, you know, such an important artist. Back in the '70s he really wasn't being recognized. And then, of course, all of the influence that he had on the generation of artists that I was showing, because of his involvement with CalArts. And Michael Asher, also.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, so really, at this point, you're able to sort of step back and say, "Okay, now we're contextualizing what I am showing."

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, really—because this, by 1991, you've already been in business 10 years. And the historic nature of what you're doing has become apparent. And—but you're really doing a lot of—not as many individual shows. I mean, in '92, you showed John Knight, Cindy Bernard, and William Leavitt. And then, just a drawings show—Jack Pierson. So, not quite as many shows—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in 1991.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is this a result of the shift in the economy?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. It was, definitely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, what happens in the—in the early '90s that causes this dramatic contraction?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, there was so much going on. We had the recession in general, in the economy. The art market kind of crashed, at that time. There was—you know, the art prices were just plummeting. Collectors weren't buying. So, it became more and more difficult to maintain the gallery. So, I had to cut back. In fact, I think it was at this time where I had in the—in 1990, 1991—I had actually expanded the gallery. Added another space to it. And then in '92, I had to cut back and close the larger space and only operate out of the smaller gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, in—late 1992, you closed altogether.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was your intention, at that point? I mean, did you—did you think you'd become a private dealer, or what did you think you would do after that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I—it was a—it was a transitional period of my life. I mean, I—had all of a sudden—we had—we had Jack, my son. So, I had this new responsibility that I had never had before. And at the same time, the economy was so bad that it was—became increasingly difficult for me to just maintain the gallery. It became difficult for me to pay Barbara [Steffen's] salary, so she actually left. We left on good terms, we're still friends, but she went to work for Thomas Krens for a while. So, it became just too hard to maintain. And so, I closed. It was a very, very difficult decision, of course.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How much was your overhead, at that time, do you think?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't remember. I really don't remember. I remember the landlord saying, "Well, don't you want to stay open in December?" Because, you know, I closed in November. And I said, "My lease is up. I'm out of there." He said, "Isn't December a great month to sell art?" I said, "No, it's terrible." You know?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh. And what do you—do you remember what the rent was there?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It must've been a very difficult decision. And so, what did you think you were going to be doing after 1992?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I don't know. I wanted to kind of move on with my life, and thought about, you know, getting into different areas. Getting a real job. But I still dabbled in the art world for the next couple years, doing the show *Loose Slots*, which was in a space in Las Vegas, of young artists from LA. And I had actually—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where was it actually held?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: It was in a—at a space called the Temporary Contemporary Las Vegas, which was sort of a—like a LACE in Las Vegas. It was an artist-run space.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And why did you want to do that show in Las Vegas?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I became real interested in—I think just the whole aesthetic of Las Vegas has always appealed to me. And I thought that, you know—I had originally thought about opening up a project space in Las Vegas, where I would have people, you know, show there. Their work would—not necessarily be for sale—but it would be kind of—it was—it was a place where everybody really loved. I mean, Las Vegas was sort of like a mythical place at the time. And so, it really appealed to me. I never ended up doing that, but then, in '95, I went—worked with Jack Pierson again. And we went to the sign graveyard in Las Vegas, and picked out signs—letters for him to create a piece called *Paradise*, which was later displayed at the Bergamot Station, on the outside wall. We had backing, at the time, from Tom Patchett who paid for the signage. I think the price list was actually in the files. It was pretty inexpensive. I think the whole project cost about \$3,000. And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did he end up owning the sign?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, it was actually—Luhring Augustine was involved, also. And ultimately, it ended up in, I think, the [MOCA North Miami]. And I guess it was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was that the first time he'd used those found letters?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No, no, no. He had used found letters before, but not on such a grand scale. I mean, these letters were huge. These were, like, you know, six-foot-tall letters. We had letters from places like, you know, the Sands. So, they were really, you know, these were the signs that were up—you'd drive down the strip, these were the letters that, you know, they burnt out. They weren't working, so they replaced them with new letters. It was an amazing place, just to go through the graveyard.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were they free, or did you have to buy them?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: We bought them. But it was, you know, like, basically they were kind of selling us—at scrap metal prices.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what was it like working with Jack Pierson so closely on a project?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: He's a great—he's a great, great artist. Great person to work with. And we still, you know, have a good friendship. Now, I loved his piece, at the Regen Projects. The

recent piece, *The End of the World*. So, he's a great guy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you stayed—so, when you were working with these artists—so, you had good relationships. Did you not think of becoming a private dealer, or a curator, or some other—or had you just burned out on the art world?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think I had burned out, to be honest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What part—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I think I really—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —of the art world burned you out?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: One thing—you mentioned that the shows were—less and less shows. I mean, I think I had run out of the ability to show the kind of art that I had wanted to show. And the competition—I didn't have the money to, you know, put up artists in hotels for weeks, and pay for the production. So, it became a different—on a different scale than what I could compete with. And so, I would end up doing shows for a longer period of time, because there's only so many times you can show, you know, Jack Pierson and Matt Mullican, and, you know, all of the artists that I had relationships with because, you know, they just aren't producing that much work. They're doing other projects. And so, it became a period where I got—I got kind of burned out on the art world, and decided to try something different. And at the same time, trying to keep my foot in it, for a while, at least.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what was it that you went and did? Because I was looking at your—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —C.V. that you sent to me, and I didn't really know what had happened after you left the art world, to be honest—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —because, of course, you end up losing touch with people if they aren't around the art world anymore.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, then there wasn't Facebook at the time, either. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: There was no Facebook, that's right—[laughs]—and it was harder to keep in touch with what people were up to. But you, quite wisely, decided to go work in a soft—in software.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I went to a work for a software company, and—which, fortunately for me, was located in the same little town that I live in, Pacific Palisades, which is an odd place for a software company to be. But I worked there for, I would guess, about 10 years. And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how did that happen? How did you end up being able to do that?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I just—I mean, I was always kind of interested in technology. And for a

while, I worked for—I worked for a very short time—for a company that was making children's software, Davidson and Company. And because of Jack, my son, we were playing a lot of computer games. You know, educational games on the computer. So, I became very interested in that. Worked for Davidson for six months, until I couldn't stand the drive to Hawthorne again. And then, found this job at GoldMine Software in the Palisades, and worked there. And kind of worked my way up until I was finally Director of Product, at the end of my tenure there. The company was then sold to another company, who was basically moving everything to Colorado Springs. And then there was a period of time where I had to work a week—one week per month—in Colorado Springs. And Betty Jo and I had our house, our family. Grace was born at that time. And I just wasn't going to, you know, uproot everybody and move to Colorado Springs. Especially, you know—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, I don't think so.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: —the ocean here? Yeah, no. I'm no skier, so there wasn't much there for me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: So, they moved the company to Colorado Springs. I quit the company, along with a few other people, and we started a startup—an internet startup shortly after that, which was successful. And we ended up selling it to another startup. And we'll see—for basically equity, not real cash, so we'll see what happens.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. And what's that called? That's the Famundo?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Famundo, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. So, do you have any regrets about leaving the art world when you did?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I do now, I think. I think more now than I did during the period where I was, you know, involved with the software industry. For that period of 20 years, like since I've been out of the art world, we were very involved with—not only work, but our family. And that was my focus. So, instead of going to, you know, art galleries on the weekends, I was, you know, going to soccer games and softball games. And so, I got—we got very involved with our kids.

And now the kids are gone. And, you know, Jack just graduated from Vanderbilt, and Grace is a sophomore at Skidmore in upstate New York. So, we're—we all of a sudden find ourselves in a position of going, "What do we do now?" And, you know, it's kind of funny, because we've been going to openings now. And it's really kind of refreshing, because it's kind of like we never left. You know, because there's people there that, you know, they haven't changed. They still look the same. And it's actually been very warm and accepting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you've been welcomed back—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I think.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah. It's nice. It's a very nice feeling.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: People are happy to see you.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: They were happy—and I was happy to see you again. Because I thought, here's—because, you know, people do just disappear—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and sometimes, they never come back.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But certainly, your history is such that the very people you supported now have become phenomenally successful.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: I know. I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you know, and all of us are like, "Why didn't I buy more of that stuff?" [Laughs.]

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Well, you know, that's true. I mean, you look back, in hindsight, going "Why didn't I buy more?" Because I couldn't afford it. Because, you know, I was putting all my money back into the gallery. So, yeah, I wish I could've bought, you know, Richard Prince's show out. But wasn't able to do that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, nobody—and everybody has that hindsight about buy—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —about they—there's no point in having that conversation, because it's just too depressing.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: [Laughs.] Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you're back in the art world now, in terms of being a—not a participant—but a—

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: An observer, I guess?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —observer, or I guess a participant, but not on a commercial basis.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because, do you do any—have you gone back to doing any dealing at all, or not?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: No. There was a period of time where I was selling some work. Like I said, to pay for tuition. Private school. But it was through—you know, it was working with Marc Selwyn and Margo Leavin. So, that was my only involvement. But now, you know, I'm becoming more—I went to the Hammer Museum to see Tony Green's work there. And, you know, of course, the Mike Kelley show. You know, kind of introducing my kids to the art world now, too, which is kind of fun.



HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are either of your kids interested in art?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Grace is, yeah. My daughter is. She has, actually—because she is going back to school in upstate New York, a lot of her friends live in Manhattan. And so, during Christmas break—one of her best friends' father is actually a dealer. Has a gallery in Chelsea. James Cohan Gallery? I don't know if you know it. So, she's kind of gotten, you know, interested in artwork.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How fun.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you never know.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: You never know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your history here? Our history? That you haven't—that I've forgotten to ask?

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Let's see. I'm sure there is, but I can't think of anything right now. I'm sure when I get home today, I'll remember a lot of things.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, what will happen is, you'll get this transcript back. And if anything else occurs to you, you can add it.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Okay. And if I find anything else—I mean, certainly, you know, if I find any more documentation—is there an address that I could send it to you?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Of course. Of course. Thank you, Richard Kuhlenschmidt, it's been a pleasure.

RICHARD KUHLENSCHMIDT: Thank you, Hunter.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]