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Oral history interview with Art Green, 2015  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Art Green on September 17-18, 2015. The interview took place at Green's home in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, and was conducted by Lanny Silverman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Chicago's Art-Related Archival Materials: A Terra Foundation Resource.

Art Green has reviewed the transcript. His 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

LANNY SILVERMAN: Hi, this is Lanny Silverman for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. I'm with Art Green, and it's September 17 and I'm about to interview him forthwith.

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LANNY SILVERMAN: So, Art, I guess the first question is the obvious one. Where and when were you born?

Art Green: I was born in Frankfort, Indiana, in 1941.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And—

ART GREEN: Frankfort, Indiana is the county seat of Clinton County, I think. It was the home of night baseball so I'm told [laughs]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Also a pretty conservative part of the world, yes?

ART GREEN: Yeah, I would say so, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, that leads me to a question in terms of—was art intellectual pursuits and stuff like that something that was uncommon? Were you—did you feel like an outsider in that community?

ART GREEN: Well, I only lived there until I was—until I was about ready to go to school. And I didn't—my father and mother were—my father was a civil engineer, self-taught engineer with the Nickle Plate Railroad. And we moved because he got a job in Conneaut, Ohio, which was also a division point of the Nickel Plate empire.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Ah.

ART GREEN: And so I went to school in Conneaut, and I liked to draw, but my family was not—were not artists. Or my father would generally say, "Sheesh" when [laughs]—when he came across somebody who claimed to be an artist. He called it "Ort." "I don't know why anybody would want to be interested in being one of those damn artists."

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] No, I—I understand from reading some stuff about you that your mom made quilts. Or is it your grand mom?

ART GREEN: It was my mother—I imagine her grandmother did too. My mother was from Alabama and she grew up in—really, might as well have been the 18th century because they were farmers and pretty well self-sufficient, not really part of the cash economy. But they did grow cotton. And they made their own clothes—a lot of them out of feed bags. Or—and she made quilts out of feeds bags, which came—if you bought the right kind of feed, it had designs on the inside that were nice to make quilts out of—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh sure, I've seen stuff like that.

ART GREEN: —and I don't know that they made their clothes [laughs] from feed bags. But she—you know, they—they really—so she continued that tradition. I remember quilting frames in our—in our house as a kid.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We'll get back to that, too, because some of that has influenced your work, I think. Some of the patterning and the Necker cube things. Some of the things that are—show up. But we'll talk about that more technically. So your parents, you said, were not artists, but were they supportive? When did you first decide that you were interested in art, or how did that come about that you got excited about drawing or—

ART GREEN: Well I—you know, when you, when you can draw—because you have drawn. In grade school at a certain point kids start to say, "Draw this. I'll give you 25 cents if you'll draw blah, blah, blah." So, you know, you get a kind of, "Gee" you know, "I'm an artist." But I'd never been to an art museum until high school. And I was planning—because I was interested also in looking at paramecia through microscope and so on. I was really interested in micro-biology. And I thought, well, I'll be a microbiologist. But in high school I had an art teacher as a homeroom teacher, and I didn't like her very much and she didn't care for me. So I never joined her art club and never took her art class. But in my third—fourth year, a—maybe it was my second year—at one point there was a new, young art teacher who was interested in graphic design. And by then I'd gotten interested in it because my dad had kind of print shop on the side and I learned how to—we had an old 16 by—10 by 16—16 by 20? It was an old Chandler & Price letterpress. And it printed—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you were familiar with letterpress, that's why you were looking—

ART GREEN: —Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, yeah.

ART GREEN: So I got interested in that. And I really like this guy because he was talking all about how you could apply your interest in art to something your parents would appreciate. And—took his classes, and that's when I got interested in art. Gradually I got less interested in paramecia. And math, it turned out, wasn't my strong point. And—but I took a year off and worked at the public library—the Allen County Public Library—first as a page and then as a bookmobile driver [laughs], and then as their staff artist. And that sort of set a trajectory. I thought, well I'll be a graphic designer or an industrial designer, something like that. And my old high school art teacher who is still advising me, I said I was going to apply—I said, "Where should I apply?" And he said, "Well, don't apply to Ball State, that's where I went. Go to the best place. Go to the Art Institute." "Oh, do you think I'll get in?" And so anyway, he harassed me long enough that I made up a portfolio, and lo and behold I got in. And after about a year—everyone took the same courses—but after about, actually the end of the first term, I decided I wanted to be a painter. And—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, let's—let's go back a step because I'm really interested—it's interesting that you started out functionally with something that you could—more easily make a career out of. At least coming out of the—I know this from my father and from just growing up in the early 50's—knowing how people—it's the same way now, I guess—career is very tough. And my father would have been an artist, but he had to raise a family. So, you weren't thinking functional? It's just—what attracted you, maybe by way of your dad or something? That fact that you were interested in graphic design even though, you said, worked [laughs] didn't do too much for him. But the practicality, you think—in retrospect—do you think that maybe you started out—this was the hook that got you in the door, but do you think that was because of the times? You know, the thinking functionally? Or do you think that was naturally an interest in graphic design part?

ART GREEN: I think it was—you know, you grow up in a certain milieu and you see things that way. And—I mean I was a staunch [laughs] republican until the middle of my first term at the Art Institute. And I probably had my father's views on what was practical and what was impractical. And so I—yeah, that got me in the door. I walked in by accident [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you were aware of art. You said you didn't see any—you weren't really—there were some—actually the Indianapolis Museum is—is quite an amazing collection. There are places to see art where you grew up, but you weren't particularly drawn to the art world until you went off to the Art Institute? Or—

ART GREEN: Well, I did get a scholarship—a Saturday Scholarship to the Fort Wayne Museum of Art through some life drawing classes. And that was the first art museum, as far as I know, that I'd ever been to. And they did have—I remember being most impressed—it's a small collection at that time—by their Larry Rivers called *The Burial*, which was for me, the start of the collection I really quite like that. And yeah—I forgot what the question was, I went off on the side [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh just—well, I'm not sure where you started from, but I think it had something to do with how you first saw art in terms of, like, in exhibitions or museum and stuff like that. So you've had some—some experience of art, but at that point it was more graphic design. At least that's what you thought you were headed for.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and I—I was—I was a blank slate as far as art history. I remember they had a quiz in one of my classes. Is this a Monet? Or Renoir? I had no—I couldn't tell my Monet's from my Renoirs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Most people don't [laughs]. As a matter of fact, that's probably still the case. Sad as that may be in the area of education.

ART GREEN: I didn't know much about it, and at the Art Institute in my first year, I remember my favorite artist

was Bernard Buffet. I think because of his linear I did a lot of drawing, I liked line. And after a while I got interested in Peter Blume's painting called—what's it called, *The Rock*? Or—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The one with the Mussolini popping out? Or—

ART GREEN: No, it's the one that Art Institute has. The—with the big—the big tree root and a ball and they're rebuilding a culture.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That sounds familiar. I haven't seen that in a while, yeah.

ART GREEN: So I was attracted to Surrealism, actually. And I—I'd—at that time I was writing some poetry, and so I generally had—it was quite dramatic, gloomy poetry [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: I love what—we'll get to this later, but I love what you did with *Found Titles* because I'm very interested in that kind of stuff, too. But—so you actually were interested in a number of things at that point. So you come to the Art Institute, and I guess maybe let's start off with how you—how you switched over from graphic design to visual art at the Art Institute, because that's also a switch.

ART GREEN: I never—for one thing I never—you know, in the first year, or first term, I'm not sure which—you take a variety of courses, so that you're introduced to drawing a little bit, to paintings, some sculpture, a little bit of print making, a little—you know, six weeks, I think in each section, even weaving. But never graphic design or industrial design or anything like that—and more applied things. And—I had a drawing class with Douglas Craft—one of the sessions—and I really enjoyed that. And Elizabeth Ruprecht, I think taught a painting class or color class—introductory. And most of my friends were interested in becoming a—so called fine artist. And I hung around with them and gradually got propagandized into fine arts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I imagine you had encounters with both Whitney Halstead and Ray Yoshida. Were they teachers or—

ART GREEN: It might have been—I might have had—Ray, I think taught a—one of those sessions of drawing. I don't remember it so well, but Carolyn Hoyle, a friend of mine, remembers him ejecting a student bodily from the class who had forgotten to bring his drawing board or his materials—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow

ART GREEN: —and that brought that back to me. But I didn't really have Whitney until maybe the second year when I took a silkscreen course. Whitney? That was Ray I didn't have—Whitney I never took his courses. I'm afraid that I was persuaded not to because there were rumors that you gave a one hour presentation as [laughs] part of the class. And I was adept at avoiding those sort of things, much to my shame.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting because you seem very confident in your work—

ART GREEN: I was not very confident [laughs]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —at that point? Who was though, I guess, at that age? We all were sort of not sure what we were doing. So let's talk about the training at the Art Institute, I guess one of the things I've noticed, apart from, like, the fact that a lot of Hairy Who and Imagist work comes out of the Art Institute, there's a certain feel, a certain kind of sensibility that comes from the Art Institute. What do you think you got from that experience? How would you characterize the Art Institute sort of training and teaching at that point in time?

ART GREEN: Oh, I think it was really good. Not all the teachers—some teachers still—still followed the old rule of teaching by osmosis where they would be in the room with you and you would be painting and they would come by and say, "Hmm." [Laughs.] And you'd sort of gradually—you know—but—I also had teachers like Ray Yoshida in the silk screening course, who I was disappointed at first, I must say, because I thought, well I'll take silk screening, you know, I can print t-shirts or posters, and signs it'll increase my value as a member of society. So I took this course and at first he didn't have us—he didn't teach that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No technique.

ART GREEN: No technique.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs] I read that, I was curious.

ART GREEN: And where he said, "If I'm drawing on the screen with anything—how about lipstick? What would happen if you use mustard to draw on it? How about pencil? So I do these laborious pencil drawings and you squeegee it across and roughly 26 percent of the drawing would come onto the paper. And it was very frustrating. But what he kept emphasizing was, what do you want to do? What interests you? And the—the sky

was the limit. It didn't matter. He didn't say, well that's not art. You know? Oh, you like leg braces. Oh wow [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So he was more interested in helping you find your voice than he was in teaching the technique.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Which is ironic because most people go to art school thinking they're going to learn, they get their chops. They'll learn how to do stuff. But he was trying to get you to see who you were and what you could do with it.

ART GREEN: Yeah, it was like riding a bike. Don't worry about riding a bike, it'll come naturally. Where do you want to go [laughs]?

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the opposite of the way, yeah, most people think. Now—yeah

ART GREEN: A few teachers like that, you know, and—but Ray—and I really liked Douglas Craft at that time. Those were the ones that had the biggest influence right at the beginning, I think.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, were you aware—let's—before we get even into Hairy Who?, into that crowd of people that you fell in with, were you aware of the sort of older generation? The Cosmo Campoli, Leon Golub, the Monster Roster?

ART GREEN: I became aware of them, and I—I saw George Cohen and Ted Halkin and so on, and I can't remember what galleries, but I was really impressed by their work. And also Seymour Rosofsky—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, of course.

ART GREEN: And—and I got to know June Leaf's work later. I met her at—I had a crush on her, don't tell anybody.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's on the record now, too late. Although—

ART GREEN: She didn't know it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Is she still with Robert Frank? I think—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think she's still with Robert Frank, as far as I know—

ART GREEN: They're still—they're still living.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —oh well. The ones that got away. Now, in terms of—I guess we move on to you've obviously become friends with a whole bunch—a cadre of people that have come to be associated with imagist work of Hairy Who?. A lot of different names for it, Karl, Jim, Gladys. How did that happen? Did you just—were in class with them and just they befriended you, or—because your work I would—what was your work like back then when you started making visual art? I'm curious because I don't think your—your explanation goes way back, but maybe not that far—a little bit of that work, but—

ART GREEN: Well, I—I remember—you know, I was interested in learning techniques. I remember having an old roll wallpaper and I thought, "This would be great to paint watercolors on the back of it." [Laughs.] And I did lugubrious scenes of Lake Como or something, you know. And—so my first painting class was [with Andrene Kauffman - AG]. Who was a follower of André Lhote. And she taught—kept emphasizing cubist ideas. And I got interested in that kind of thing and her work. And I was very much influenced by Michael Hurson's big painting "*The Left-Handed Piano*—"*Ballad of the Left-Handed Piano*" or whatever it was in one of the shows—[Chicagoland vicinity - AG] shows. And I started using silk screen stuff to take images off magazines and so on. And then I found some imagery and also I discovered Giorgio de Chirico and Magritte—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow, this is a great scene for Surrealism as we all know in the Art Institute—

ART GREEN: I really was interested in Surrealism and it seems like, you know, there was a—it seemed like all the artists I liked had some connection to Surrealism in one way or another. I was roommates with Bill Grams, who was one of the artists in that show of abstract painters that was held in Madison, or Minneapolis, wherever it

was. And he taught me a lot just from watching him about color, but I never was interested in purely abstract things. So I had developed what I thought was my style and I started putting things around in various shows and I got into some—a show or two at the Hyde Park Art Center. And they had this series of shows, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*. It wasn't a high concept [laughs] curatorial program. But it was a place that serious artists applied to and were shown and also younger artists—

LANNY SILVERMAN: This was Don Baum, I assume.

ART GREEN: Don Baum.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And he was a very important in Chicago. Very important.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and I—I think during the *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* show or during the Phalanx series of shows—there were a couple of shows at IIT—I got to know Jim and Gladys, although I think I probably had seen Jim at the Art Institute. He was older than I, or he was in an earlier period than me. And I knew Karl Wirsum because as I walked to school I'd meet him in the mornings. He lived nearby, walking to school or going to the subway. And I never wore a hat during the winter and he would always recommend that I wear a hat because steam was coming off the top of my head.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Literally and figuratively.

ART GREEN: And I—but I—I really—and I saw a show of Karl's work at—I think the Sedgewick Gallery. It was a little gallery right where the L train turns on Sedgewick on the second floor. So when you're in the gallery you see the train coming and then it turns at the last moment. It was a very dramatic space.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah. It's a sound—it was a gallery with sound installation, too.

ART GREEN: Yeah, it was a—it was a—it shook me up, this show. But it was his early work and I loved it. And so I probably knew him best, but Suellen and I sat next to each other in Vera Berdich's class and I admired what she was doing. And Jim Falconer I think I knew. So luckily for me, Jim and—I think it was Jim and Jim Falconer went to Don Baum thinking, well it's fine having one piece or—in the shows—wouldn't it be nice to have a show of four or five people, each would have four or five pieces. And Don agreed and then he suggested—along with the five of us, Suellen, Jim Falconer, Gladys, Jim and myself, to include Karl Wirsum. And for some reason Jim hadn't been aware of his work. [Now I hear that he was aware of it. – AG]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Really?

ART GREEN: And this was a—a great catalyst. Actually, the energy of—of everybody combined. I wasn't that energetic in the whole thing, I have to say [laughs.] But it was—that's how it came about.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that's how you met them? Let's go back just to one little detail that I'm curious about, which we'll talk more about when we—maybe tomorrow when we talk more about technique and process—but I'm curious to clear something up. You mentioned Vera Berdich as a teacher. And my understanding is that—you were talking about the transfer technique—my understanding that the technique that Rauschenberg used—was he ever at the Art Institute or something? Someone had told me—I don't know if—someone who knew Vera or someone told me that that came from—that Vera was doing that very early. Way before anyone else.

ART GREEN: She—she very well might have been.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I—there's a really beautiful piece that was in the show we did that actually was one of my favorites that was a transfer piece. I can't remember the date, but it was before Rauschenberg was doing that. But you don't—you don't know—she was doing that very early on, but—

ART GREEN: I've never heard about him being at the Art Institute, but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Maybe not. I know Walt Disney was, but—

ART GREEN: —word gets around when someone discovers something, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Maybe I—I don't know why—maybe that transfer—the transfer—maybe that was just anecdotally told to me but maybe it had nothing to do with him being here, maybe he just was—I don't know how he would have been aware of—

ART GREEN: Now, in some cases it looks like he had photographs put on silk screens and silk screened it on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: But others, you know, the drawings in particular, obviously are transfers.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, my wife's actually working on stuff like that now from computer stuff—computer print-outs, and actually it's not always that easy to get the stuff to come off properly—doing that technique. And that there was somebody who was doing it—a famous artist—who was doing it with Play-doh. I know there—the waste of transfer with George Condo, I think. Maybe way back. That's way, you know, like 30 years ago he was doing that. But—so that transfer thing—but—I know that she was really wonderful at print making. So did you learn print making technique from her?

ART GREEN: I did. And she ran a—a nice studio. It could be difficult to deal with, because she tends to get paranoid about things. But what I loved about her class was she would sit in the corner working on her plates. And she would get these plates from R.H. Donnelley and Company. She had some confederate who worked over there who would give her the plates that were made to do the page proofs for *Life Magazine*, or *Saturday Evening Post*, or *Time*, or whatever it was that printed. I think *Time* and *Life*. And she would scrape away parts of the image and leave parts there and then put in her own personal ideas around it and change it all into some amazing tableau. And she would also distribute or sell these plates—or give them, I think—to the students. And sometimes she'd say, "Well, scrape everything off." So it would burn in all the [laughs] the drudgery of the process, but also she encouraged, you know, if there's an image in there maybe incorporate it. And that got me started—I always liked news magazines. My father always subscribed to *Saturday Evening Post*, which was more of a general purpose magazine. But I loved—I liked that sort of thing and I—I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you came upon either images-based work or pop-based work or so-called vulgar low art stuff. You came upon that by way of your background—it was independent of maybe, you know, the Hairy Who? group that you've mentioned. But you were already interested in magazine images and all those things that—that sort of—so you had some things in common with them.

ART GREEN: Yeah. That was the only magazine we subscribed to. We had no books. My dad had a few engineering books. I had children's books, you know, but we didn't—I mean we could go to the library and get books out. But I always was happy waiting for the *Saturday Evening Post* every—this is—every week. Every week? Or month? I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think it was every week, but it's now been so long I'm not sure either.

ART GREEN: And—Murray Simon, that was a roommate of mine, gave me a stack of *Time* magazines about a foot deep at one point. And it was when I was searching about for things and I—I got used to doing that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you mentioned that you were in shows already as a student? So you started to get some response to your work.

ART GREEN: Yeah, it was toward the end of my fourth year, really, that I entered—first it was for the Chicago Arts Festival in the basement of McCormick Place and I brought—I had four or five of these transfer drawings, and I sat at a card table in the basement and no one came by [laughs.] That was my first show.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] The first wake-up call in terms of what the art world is like. Welcome to the art world, right?

ART GREEN: Hmm, this is not going to work out [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, in terms of—I'm curious—going back a little bit, although I think this is [laughs] relevant to that, did you ever think—when did you decide that you wanted to be an artist? Because you saw—you know—your dad was an engineer, lived in a part of the world where art wasn't necessarily a—a thriving commodity—

ART GREEN: Wasn't a first priority.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah [laughs], thank you for lack of a better way to put it without sounding too snooty. But when—did you have any other back-up plans or did you—graphic design probably, is what you start out with.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I—I was winging it. I—you know, it was a period when it wasn't that difficult to get some kind of work. And rents were low enough that I was at one point working four hours a day at the post office, standing on LaSalle Street, I think in the Rookery Building while these lovely secretaries would put things into the bags and I would direct them to which bag to put it in. And then I'd carry the bag out the front, I'd pick it up and I'd go home. And I made enough money to live—you know, I paid \$17 a month for my part of the store-front rent. And I was flush. I had all I need. I couldn't afford a bicycle or anything like that. And I thought, well I'll—I'll go on like this and see how it works out.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And basically—

ART GREEN: Time have changed.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Times have changed, but basically yeah, one of the secrets of—better kept secrets to Chicago—is that rents and living expenses are very reasonable.

ART GREEN: Yeah, they are.

LANNY SILVERMAN: For a big city, as a matter of fact, it's one of the—one of the easier ones to live in. Forget about—

ART GREEN: Don't tell anyone that [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —yeah, forget about going to New York City. You didn't have any dreams of going off to New York to be a—

ART GREEN: Well, my friends, Cynthia Carlson and Bill Schwedler, who—who was a roommate for a while and who really influenced my work from watching him work and so on—they went off after art school to Pratt, to their MFA Program, which is—and they were encouraging me to do it. I foolishly had missed a couple of the University of Chicago courses that you take in order to get a degree. I got a diploma at the end of my fourth year. And I wasn't particularly qualified to go off. And—so by the time I got my diploma, or my degree at the end of that next year, I was starting to show some work and at about that time—anyway, I went to New York, and I thought it was wonderful, but I was still attached to my family who were in Fort Wayne and dependent on them for certain things. And I had a girlfriend who was happy where she was, so I just stayed in Chicago.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's interesting, too, because, you know, at that point in time and, I think, still, Chicago has this second city mentality. And making it in the art world usually meant—at that point in time, now it's totally different because now everything, you know, people sell things online, everything is changed—but at that point in time, that was how you set your—you know, if you were serious, that's what you did. But Chicago had its own thriving art scene, and what's amazing is that it was very vital and very under-looked. You know, you were just now in that show in New York, finally you were starting to get—Chicago's starting to get some revitalized interest historically and people that were very important. And even before that, you know, there's always been really a vital art scene here, just it didn't get very much—there weren't very many writers, I guess. You know, Alan Artner, there were people—and Dennis Adrian—they were writers, but there really weren't many magazines—*New Art Examiner*—

ART GREEN: Well, you know, about the time that Hairy Who? started, by then Whitney was writing for *Art Forum*—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's right.

ART GREEN: —you know, which had a Chicago column, for heaven's sakes. And that—why, you know, every art student in North America would wait breathlessly for that [laughs] next issue of *Art Forum*. I remember one issue I opened it and it showed Frank Stella's new work and underneath in the caption is said, "Tape not yet removed." You know [laughs], so—so this is before he removed the tape. So you're really in on the ground floor.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I've seen the process. So, you didn't—

ART GREEN: But most—sorry, back to the question of moving to New York. Most of the—we were not the hot shots, the Hairy Who?, I don't think any of us—maybe Karl—I don't think any of us got a traveling fellowship, which was the stamp of approval for—when you graduate. There were five or six of them. You know, one big one then some smaller ones. Neither one of us were thought of as "Oh boy, these guys are really going to go somewhere." We'd [laughs] —

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's funny that you say that because we'll—I guess we'll talk more about that later in terms of success in the art world. Because I think of—one of the lovely things about Karl is that he was not as aggressive a marketer or didn't get the attention—

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —nationally or internationally—that Ed Paschke got or Roger Brown or Jim Nutt, who deservedly so—anyways, but I guess you're saying at that point, the fellow—the traveling fellowship was a mark of success and he was doing well at that point. Because I see him as maybe being—overlooked more.

ART GREEN: I'm not sure. I know that he and Suellen accompanied was it, Ray and Dennis? Or somebody to Mexico and spent some time in Mexico, which was a big influence on Karl for sure.



LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And Suellen as well. And I wondered if that was part of the traveling fellowship. But I—I think I've heard Jim say none of us were the stars of—and I—I didn't feel like a star, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well this is—yeah, this is at a time before—I mean, it's a while before, I think, *Hairy Who?* and imagists became locked in as the signature style of Chicago, which is kind of weird.

ART GREEN: Well it certainly was far before that [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Some people are still trying to fight against it, as a matter of fact.

ART GREEN: Well, yeah it was—I think it was some confluence of, you know, I think the idea of *Artforum* having a Chicago correspondent who was interested in what we were doing was a big thing, you know, and it was a—you know, Dennis was at the *Daily News* and—I think—and it just was a point at which things—suddenly there was more media attention and there were more galleries that were—you know, Marjorie Dell opened her gallery and then Phyllis a little while later.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Phyllis is a big important part of it—and that's as I say, too—before we were on tape, I was saying that's how I found out about Chicago Imagism. Actually, that Roger Brown poster on the corner came to me at the Cleveland Museum of Art. It's like, wow, that's wild and I love that the building is screaming—people running out of the buildings, they're flying out of buildings. And I saw that. I said, "What's that?" And then I look it up and found out a little bit more. But—so this is in Cleveland, which isn't that far away from Chicago. But it didn't make its way to Cleveland very much. As a matter of fact, in New York I saw her gallery and I went to check it out. I was amazed by Jim Nutt's work and I found it wonderful. It fit in with my sensibility a lot, and actually one of the things that's very interesting, I think, that distinguishes, Imagism from maybe Pop is there's no sense of irony. There's a sense of real—there's—it's not a critique. It's not—although you could say that, you know, Andy Warhol loved this stuff too. He was kind of hard to read, he's all over the map, but—there wasn't a sense of irony. And you talk about Surrealism a fair amount. There was a lot of that in Chicago, too. Chicago is kind of a really interesting hotbed of stuff, and yet it didn't get—it really didn't get much mileage outside—I hate to say it, but I mean it—it—and there were—there were people like Jim Yood and there was the *New Art Examiner*. There were ways for it to get out, but it really didn't get out beyond Chicago nearly as much as it deserves.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I was thinking about, you know, Pop Art—people have said, "Well, all you aware of it?" Of course we were aware of Pop Art. We saw it at the American shows, we saw it in books, so you couldn't avoid knowing about Pop Art. And I, you know, I thought it was breath of fresh air. Very interesting and so on. But when I think about it, it seems more corporate. You know? Clean imagery, advertising imagery, *Mad Men*, you know, it's—it seem—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It doesn't have the funk. Chicago has the funk [laughs.]

ART GREEN: —it's always the funk. And it seems like it's the conscious and Chicago is—draws on the unconscious.

Mr. Silverman: Which is what interests me so much about it.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And—there was a bit in that film, *Hairy Who? and The Chicago Imagists*. Where someone was talking about Roger Brown's paintings and talking about Chicago being a surreal—the architecture being surreal and dreamlike, you know. Like, you know, why did they put that top on—you know, it's—and I thought that was—that was interesting. Anyway, the—yeah, New York seemed to me a place to go if you wanted to "make it." I didn't think I was going to make it. I—I mean, my parents and anybody who cared about me probably thought I'd thrown my life away. You know, and here I was—when you throw your life away and you're able to live on four hours a day of work—of not very demanding work—and, then you're free. I've already thrown my life away, I might as well do what I want.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, something you learned early is that you followed what you wanted to do and—and figured out the means—I think sometimes that's a really good procedure because so many people are miserable and trying to work the other way around. Trying to support themselves and then thinking, "Well I hate this" after 50 years [laughs.] Whereas you just decided—I know this is kind of like a parallel to my career—somehow or other it all works out. I don't know how that is, but we survived and we're here [laughs.]

ART GREEN: Yeah, you've got to follow your—you know—and I mean, not that I didn't have self-doubts. That's what I'm made of. But there was enough momentum from my schooling at the Art Institute to keep me—keep me on track, I think, more or less. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess—I guess it might be worth getting a little bit into—I mean, well let's talk a little bit more about the—the Hairy Who? group. So these were not just your colleagues but they became your friends. So you hung out with these people—this was a tight group of people, which is a—an interesting thing, too, because the art world, as you well know, can be very competitive and it can be something where people are not very honest or very friendly, but they may, you know, put out that front. But these were people where there was a real sense of camaraderie, and that's true with Don, too, who was also an artist, of course—Don Baum.

ART GREEN: Yeah. It was—it was a great opportunity. Some people have said, well, what is collective? I mean, that gives the idea that you're—have meetings and you write down—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or that there's a similar style, but you're all so different.

ART GREEN: —we'd have no manifesto, and we—I think that was important. If we'd all been doing the exact same thing it would've probably would've fallen apart.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think that helps, because actually when you're competing in the same area—I've had this discussion with my wife—some people are very competitive or very weird with her and I think it's because there—the same—there isn't that whole lot of room for—[laughs] for success.

ART GREEN: —you've stolen my palm tree [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, even if you hadn't stolen it, you're trying to succeed in an area that's my—this is my turf—but you had enough distinction—so you think that had something to do with the success of the friendship?

ART GREEN: I think it—I think it helped. I mean—you know, we got through the first show on the strength of "We're going to have a show and gosh, we're going to have a catalogue and it's going to be a comic book and what do we name it," and all that. And that had such an unexpected response. You know, we thought we might get a little notice in the *Daily News* or the *Tribune* and that'd be about it. Maybe a few sales between us. But it was, I mean, we didn't sell that much, but it was—it really made a big splash. And so, you know, naturally you want to continue it. And we remain on good terms today.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, what was it like to get response to your work once you started to exhibit and become part of this group and have a certain kind of success? I mean, there's—limited in some ways. But I guess the question is what was it like to see response to your work? What did you—

ART GREEN: Well, it was—it was great. I mean, at first, you know—it's unalloyed wonderful. Oh my gosh, you know. I'm a new—you know, the world is my oyster, whatever. You know, you think, "Gee, where is this going to lead?" You know? [Laughs.] And—but I—I didn't have much idea what I was doing at that time. It was still a work in progress to say the very least. And—so I had insecurities about what I was doing and after by the time the third show came around, you know, there was a little restaurant called Wing Yee, up on near Diversey and Clark I think.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, it's not too far from here, actually.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I went in and—you know, I like to go there—eat their food. And the waiter said, "Oh, you're Art Green. Would you sign my menu?" And I said, "Oh, you're Art Green. Will you sign my menu?" [Laughs.] And—but, no, it was wonderful. I mean, we wouldn't be sitting here today talking [laughs] if it wasn't for that show. And it—it was a great event in my life. But I—I can think of several other people who would have perhaps been more suitable in my place [laughs.] I feel very lucky.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sometimes it's not that—you fall into the right place at the right time or in the right—but it seems like, as we were saying, it's a very fertile period in Chicago art history, and there's—that alliance between people is quite magical and actually still sustains—you're here today to, you know, for tomorrow or Saturday or whatever, to give a talk about the history. It's maintained, it's—it's gone on for quite a while.

In terms of the Art Institute, anyone else that seemed like an important influence to you? What—the influences to your work. You mentioned, of course, Surrealism. We'll get a little more into that as we—we're going to come to style and to how you develop that—but at your period of time that you were at the Art Institute, any other people—I mean—

ART GREEN: Sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —influenced you or artists/famous ones that—things that you saw at the Art Institute collection? You mentioned some already.

ART GREEN: Just suddenly thought of the Frances Bacon show that was there during probably my third or fourth year, which I really quite liked at the time. But, other teachers, I mentioned Vera Berdich, Doug Craft, Thomas

Kapsalis was—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I know Thom. Sure, yeah.

ART GREEN: —a teacher. And his—his work tends towards the abstract, of course, but he was very open to all kinds of things and encouraging students who seemed interested in something. He would shyly, quietly say, "Perhaps you'd like to look at this." You know, it'd be something like—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Very unassuming guy.

ART GREEN: Yeah, very unassuming. And he—he had such interesting—it was a third year drawing class, I remember. We had a model who was a—I think a failed or a former ballet dancer who was no longer—body was no longer fit to ballet dancer mode—and she always wore a tutu [laughs.] And she had a little squeaky voice and whenever she'd get into a pose she'd describe—and Mr. Kapsalis would be standing nearby with his suit and tie and she'd be describing, "Now this pose I'm going to be putting more of my weight on my left foot. It was popularized by the dancer blah, blah, blah. And she'd go on [laughs] for, like, three or four minutes about this pose. And then Mr. Kapsalis said, "Today, class, I'd like you to think about furniture. Heavy furniture." [Laughs.] And one day he started a class by passing out crackers and he said, "de Chirico drew on crackers." And I was [laughs]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That sounds great.

ART GREEN: He was—he was, oh—and my roommate and I, we really liked him. We invited him over for dinner. And we didn't invite his wife, we just invited Mr. Kapsalis, figured he's like us, you know? And he graciously accepted and we got some frozen crab meat and some snow peas and made a grand dinner and we thought, "Well, we'd better get some wine. What kind of wine could we get? Well, we'd better not get Ripple wine. How about Mogen David?" [Laughs.] So we—we bought a bottle of Mogen David. Mr. Kapsalis, we poured him his wine and he says, "Oh, Mogen David, I haven't had this for a long time." [Laughs.] He was really wonderful.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Down to earth and—

ART GREEN: —and I—I think he and Ray and Vera Berdich were probably the ones who were most influential.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, you mentioned abstraction, which is interesting. Chicago abstraction is peculiar to me in that it seems very based in images. Some of the people that I'm thinking of are Evelyn Statsinger and Bill Conger, who I've done shows with—

ART GREEN: —I love his work, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and actually, did you know them at all?

ART GREEN: I didn't know them.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Like you, your work has elements of abstraction and about perceptual sort of games and things like that that have to do with process. But it's rooted in images. And I think that's where you started from and you mentioned Surrealism and things like that. Their work is also a mixture of abstraction. You knew them, but you didn't know them well.

ART GREEN: I—I didn't know Bill Conger's work until I started seeing in magazines. And when I'd come to Chicago I saw a few of his shows. But I—I always admired him. And Evelyn Statsinger—work is very interesting. And I—I met her only a few years ago.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so these weren't—

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —at that time they weren't people that you were either influenced by or aware of?

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Interesting. But there's something that comes out—you had shared some things with them in that you work as a sort of a blend. It doesn't—it does have elements of abstraction, one of the things that's interesting about Chicago, at least a lot of Chicago art, not entirely. There's people that are contrary to this, but the Abstract Expressionist, big hit of the late 50's/60's of New York, didn't seem to make as big—one of the things that Chicago is the center of a rejection of that by way of having image-based work, having funk and having things that are more emotional and unconscious, as you say, coming from the unconscious. That wasn't in your—you weren't fighting—what did you make of Abstract Expressionism for that point in time?

ART GREEN: I tried—I tried to become an Abstract Expressionist when I was flailing about for who I am—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] You mentioned Cubism and Dubuffet. Dubuffet and some other things, too, so—

ART GREEN: The German painter who taught at the Art Institute whose name escapes me—he taught Oldenburg as well.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

ART GREEN: It'll come to me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did he teach up at the Evanston Art Center?

ART GREEN: No, no. He was—oh dear. Anyway, I'll think of it. And you can fill [laughs]—He was an abstract—abstractionist and used to—I liked his class—used to sit, we'd sit like little school kids on the little floor while he'd hold books and talk about various artists, you know. And I tried—I was—And I would have loved to have done Abstract Expressionism. And I tried my darnedest. But often people would say to me, "You're not painting." And I said, "Well, what do you mean I'm not painting? I'm covered with paint?" "No, no, no. You're drawing." And I'd say, "Oh, come on, I'm using a brush." And I was always interested in lines, you know, and—rather than areas, I guess. And so I did a few Abstract Expression paintings, and I felt that the signature was a big part of it. And I would try to—Art Green—and somehow it just looked flat. Like, terrible.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It wasn't working for you.

ART GREEN: Wasn't working for me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, it's funny because your father was an engineer, and we'll talk about—I mean the bridge stuff that you did, some of your vocabulary reflects that, directly or unconsciously or whatever, but I sense about your work—and you mention that you weren't that successful with mathematics or whatever. But I sense—especially as you—after Nova Scotia period—I sense that there's a large sense of structure and of—almost engineering painting. I don't mean just engineering in the literal sense, but I mean, there's a sense of fitting the pieces together and making something—do you think that was an indirect influence from—

ART GREEN: I think so—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —or genetic influence from your dad?

ART GREEN: From—possibly both. But yeah, my dad used to work on engineering drawings on our dining room table—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so you definitely saw stuff like that?

ART GREEN: —and he had all these tools, and calculations, and tracing paper, and all this stuff. But I—I—I always suffered from, you know, in relation to Hairy Who?, Jim could happily put an image on—on the page and not have anything supported.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was going to talk about that.

ART GREEN: —I always had to have a support [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, you talked about floating, that the imagists in general had a fork that was floating. As opposed to yours, where it was always—it was not—

ART GREEN: I had to figure out what's holding this up [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's an example of what I was talking about—this engineering [laughs.] You needed to figure out the engineering.

ART GREEN: I'd probably taken to my dad, just looking at it. "Well, I don't know, what's holding that up? It looks—kind of shaky."

LANNY SILVERMAN: That word is just floating nowhere.

ART GREEN: Yeah. My dad, you know, he would see some drawing—I think I showed him some work of somebody or other of old buildings. He said, "Why in the hell does somebody want to draw this tumbled down building. Why don't they draw a nice properly built shack? You know, straight up and down, that's a pride to the person who built it." [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's like that thing with the elephant, when you're in that field, that's what you see.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You feel the trunk, you think the elephant is one thing. In his world, that was the way things were. You wanted something well built, well-engineered, and to fit.

ART GREEN: My problem in those days was that I wasn't very good at painting and I look at some of these paintings and I think did I actually tie a brush to my toe and paint that darn thing?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well you've learned a lot.

ART GREEN: And—but coming from Indiana, the car culture and, you know, people didn't admire cars that were falling apart. Everything had to be ship shape and you get the wiring all lined up and everything is perfect. And there's sort of that kind of Midwestern—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's another thing about the Midwest, very practical, very pragmatic, and very no nonsense. None of the pretensions of the so-called East Coast. I come from the East Coast. I guess I'm allowed to say that. But it's more like just make something and make it work.

ART GREEN: Right. And also I remember thinking I don't want to do—not during that period, but I have thought I'd like my work to be accessible. Now some people would say accessible? It looks weird. But in other words, it doesn't necessarily depend on you knowing something about the theories of Conceptual art or the theory of Abstract Expressionism—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or art history or all that stuff.

ART GREEN: Or the picture plane. You know, you can look at it, you can apply that to it if you wanted to but, you know, somebody could look at it and as long as they weren't clouded by the idea that this is art and I'm not going to enjoy this, you know, they could look at it and think what they want. That's my theory. I know it all fits within the art world and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well the thing is, there's a lot of pretense in the art world and sometimes that makes it difficult because things are supposed to—there's a certain language and there's a certain pretentiousness about what art should be. So you also mentioned somewhere probably in your little condensed history of your life, you mentioned your ideal audience is somebody whose like looking at wallpaper, and this is very relevant to what you're talking about, and just keeps looking and looking. And I found that with your work, I warm to your work the more I saw it and entered into it. It's the kind of work that it gains from second and third views.

ART GREEN: Hopefully.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Hopefully. So this is your idea of the audience, almost like an invalid who's sort of like stuck looking at the wallpaper and therefore they start to see things that weren't there.

ART GREEN: My ideal audience, a person suffering from maybe a long, non-life-threatening, or a long lingering death or whatever who got tired of figuring out the repeat of the patterns of the wallpaper, which I often do when I'm laying there with a fever, or critiquing the ads on the TV, you know, like what are they getting at, what are they trying to do here.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And then finally turns their attention to my painting and looks at it the same way with suspicion and looking for patterns and trying to figure out the layers and so on and so forth.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. I guess maybe we can transition to actually what your work is. I think one of the things that interests me is just your style is an interesting one and it is distinct from any of the other images. I mean one of the things I think of the certain vocabulary that repeats throughout and you've gone and churned them over and over again, the thing that stands out the most is the ice cream cone. That's the prototypical one before I knew more about you, and the flame. I guess that's a fairly—you conjoin them sometimes.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you've hit upon certain kinds of vocabulary. I have even a listing of some of them. Flames. You've got that KISS postcard that I guess Karl and Lorri Wirsum sent you. You've got disasters. You've got shoes. I did a whole thing of shoes, too, so we have that in common.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I love old shoes. And tires. Again, the Necker cube which has to do with something with—we'll talk about that. So you have this vocabulary. Let's get started with the ice cream cone because that's pretty early. I think one of the things that got you a certain amount of success and maybe attention in the early shows. What landed you into that particular choice?

ART GREEN: Before I found the ice cream cone, I like old books and I often visited the Salvation Army in Fort Wayne and bought books and I was interested in old line cuts and advertising, old advertisements and *Saturday Evening Post* and I particularly like the kind that had idealized images. But I also collected—I found myself collecting books on dermatology with terrible skin conditions and I started thinking, I've got these things that either people—catatonic at the end of their lives or idealized images, you know. I was stuck in the middle somewhere. And I used to live on—for a while, I lived on Halstead Street and there was an ice cream stand or hot dog place that sold ice cream down the street and I often went down to get an ice cream cone, a soft freeze. And they had an image on the wall of this ice cream cone that was—and I'm standing there in line and I'm seeing the ice cream cone image and then I see people carrying away their ice cream cones. The ice cream cone image was like the ice cream as God intended it. It had form, shadow, three-dimensional feel. It was like an icon. And the things they carried off were terrible blobs. No one held it up—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And they're melting this reality—

ART GREEN: —and say "Wait a minute here, I've been had!" And so it was just hanging a piece of paper up there and I asked the guy, I don't know what gave me the courage, if I could borrow it and as I was a long-term customer, he said, "Yeah, I've got another one. Bring it back. How long do you need it?" I said, "Well, maybe a week or two." So I painted that and I unfortunately didn't paint in the middle of the canvas and I thought what am I going to paint on the other side. Then I thought oh I'll put something less attractive so I had a book on dermatology and varicose veins which to a 22-year-old, you think boy, that's the end of the world. Varicose veins.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now we're in a whole different world.

ART GREEN: Yeah. It doesn't bother me at all. So I had this leg with various varicosities and then there was a picture of the six-day war or the seven-day war, however long it lasted, or a burning truck and there was a fantastic flame coming out of it so I had that coming out of the corset at the top of the leg. So I got interested in these oppositions which—and I had been reading a book called—by Wallace Fowlie, a book on Surrealism.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That sounds about right.

ART GREEN: He emphasized bringing together the waking and the sleeping, you know, the conscious and the unconscious, and I thought gee. So I gradually started collecting images of idealized images which happen in advertisements a lot. And these tires, I found Firestone tire ads in old 1940's magazines which I got down on Wells Street. You know, they had color cascading down the tire, reflected as though it was made of chrome or something. And no one ever brought back their tire and said, "No, no, no. This is a poor—what are you doing here?" So I started painting those and I looked for other items, like the little images of nibs on this candy called Nibs.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I like licorice a lot so I'm very fond of Nibs. They're harder to find these days.

ART GREEN: Mason candies, particularly, appealed to me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, the dots.

ART GREEN: And then those little cherries with chocolate on top where they pour in the chocolate onto the cherry. They're all perfect and they're all quite improbable.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So let's go back to the ice cream and the flame. I think one of the most interesting things about that, which has in common with what you're talking about now, is the idealized form, the static. I once thought of doing a flame with a top of a steel, you know, when you see the steel mills, you know, the flames that flicker?

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's something that happens that sort of oscillates. That's something kind of perceptually weird. But to try to capture something that's in motion or that in reality is melting or flames that are never really static, but to make it static and to make it iconic and sculptural, very sculptural, both of them, is that part of what attracted you?

ART GREEN: Yeah. A three-dimensional flame made out of metal.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, right. That's kind of interesting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So is that what attracted you about them? Trying to capture?

ART GREEN: I remember the flames when I would sometimes take the train to Fort Wayne from Chicago and you'll pass the mills in Gary and the refineries in Whiting and these flames, you know, it's like going through hell.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. It is a weird part of the world.

ART GREEN: Yeah. It's a weird part of the world. And my dad used to take us to the shops where they repaired steam engines in Conneaut, Ohio, and they'd have hundred-ton engines hanging from the ceiling and it was terrifying. And I think that terrifying aspect—I mean, you internalize all that as a kid. My dad thought we're taking these kids out for a lot of fun. It was let's get out of here.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And sometimes what you think is kids' material can be really frightening.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Some kids are really frightened of clowns, for example, or whatever. Sometimes what the culture thinks is kiddie material is really—and you look at early Disney stuff and that's really very frightening and unconscious.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And I think in a way—particularly that big painting with the ice cream cone with the flame, probably the ice cream cone was as frightening to me in a funny way as the leg. You know, this sort of idealized where am I in this world? I'm not an ideal. And there's something about that. But I psychoanalyze.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, that's interesting. And so some of these images are—one of them, I don't know if I mentioned, the bridge occurs a lot and that obviously came from influence of your dad. Some of these things are—this gets into the interesting issue for me of you try—you sort play the—dance the dance of not wanting to call your work symbolic but it has a lot of personal symbols and things that some of these things—that's what I'm getting at, this vocabulary of yours, which you've mulled over for many years and gone back to, which I find interesting, seems to be a very personal vocabulary as well. It has some formal kinds of attractions that we're talking about. But some of them are kind of personal like the bridge, there's a broken bridge which is kind of a sort of curved bridge. Some of these things are very intermingled with personal memories and things like that.

ART GREEN: I think so. The bridge appealed to me. It was the Bayonne Bridge under construction and it's similar to the bridge in Australia, you know, the famous Harbor Bridge in Sydney, I think.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sydney, I think. Yeah.

ART GREEN: And in fact in the Sydney Bridge, they started out from each side and they had cable tiebacks holding the bridge so there was no support in the middle and it met in the middle.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow!

ART GREEN: Talk about Conceptual art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's amazing.

ART GREEN: It's probably one of the greatest sculptures ever put together in a way, you know, in a sense. Just the nerve, you know, or going in—but the idea of opposition—but you're right. If I think of what something might symbolize before I paint it, I like to change the idea because I don't want to present that kind of—I like to think well afterward, you know. Of course, I've done a lot of paintings of bridges and I use it over and over. But the first time I used it, or one of the first times, was in this picture that had a painting of the bridge in a mirror and then above this was an empty mirror and my father had just died and our daughter was just born. So you could look upon it as this is my father and this is my daughter, blank slate, you know, in a sense. But I'm glad I didn't think about it in the beginning.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was about to say, that could really put a—

ART GREEN: Because I'd think, oh, that's too obvious.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or it might be too—if you tried to make it mean certain things.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So these meanings and things come to you afterwards or people point them out to you.

ART GREEN: Well I like it when they come to be afterwards. Sometimes they come to me when I'm in the middle of it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well certainly since you've rehashed—

ART GREEN: And then I think, "Well, I better muddle on."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well when you've rehashed things obviously you're very aware of the meaning.

ART GREEN: I try not to do the same painting over. I did the same painting over a little bit during the 70's, I think. But I try to make each one feel to me, you know, and sometimes I think, "Oh my gosh. No one is even going to know this is my work."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, your work changes over the years.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: One of the things that intrigued me was to look at the development of your work as I started to do some more serious looking at it is that it changed quite a bit when you went to Nova Scotia which is a conceptually-based college.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I visited there. I know actually something about them and actually the stuff that you were doing, let's start off with what maybe was your signature work when you were here. It tended to be—

ART GREEN: I did those things on Secretary McNamara.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah. I was going to ask about political art, too. And I guess—and you mentioned Leon Golub. Political art, you know, is tough in the art world because it tends to be that it doesn't get very far. There are very few Hans Haacke, Leon Golub.

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The art world is very suspicious of politics in art.

ART GREEN: And often the politics of the owners of the art is opposite from the politics—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Chuck Walker, who I mentioned there, had a piece about South Africa. It was a black woman in a courtyard, and I guess it had some sort of inscription, and the Embassy was about to buy it but I guess they told him they'd buy it if he got rid of the inscription.

ART GREEN: Oh sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's probably not something—I shouldn't probably be on the record for that. That's the story I've heard. It may be totally an apocryphal story, but yeah, so you were doing pieces with McNamara. I had my questions, too. And Watergate too, you had a piece or two.

ART GREEN: Yeah. There was a particular issue of *Time Magazine* that had Robert Strange McNamara on the cover, and then it had a picture of him in his office and underneath it said, the article was called "Design and the Dilemma," which appealed to me right away, that name. And then underneath it as he's pondering the war in Vietnam, presumably, it says, "Consider the facts, examine the options, apply the logic." Which in a way, I must have related to my dad in some way who was, "Well let's take three steps here and know where we're going to end up."

LANNY SILVERMAN: The rational mind.

ART GREEN: Yeah. The rational mind. So I wanted to put him in an irrational environment.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And look where that landed us. Both in Vietnam and a lot of other places.

ART GREEN: We see how that worked out. And so that was before I found the ice cream cone, but it had that opposition I was interested in and you asked me some question. I'm like a politician who answers with their own soundbite and I can't remember—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well we started to talk about politics in art. I'm not sure where we were with that.

ART GREEN: Oh, it was about symbolism.



LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. A ways back. I may not have followed up on that but in terms of there being personal content in your work, at a certain point it seems like you got really interested in the perceptual. Maybe this has to do with Nova Scotia, too, or with the structure of building a painting and actually almost like Escher-like things where they're puzzles that like to be figured out. Like what are you looking at? Are you looking at a painting—this happens with some shape canvases and things like—

ART GREEN: Yeah, an object.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Is a painting an object? Are we looking at an object? Are we looking at a perceptual illusion of objects? You started to get more involved with that. That came about from your teaching in—

ART GREEN: Well, the Nova Scotia thing came about as a surprise. I had—after art school, I worked for the post office. I finished up my diploma and I got a job as an art teacher at the Bond Upper Grade Center at 70th and South Main, which was a trial by fire. At that time, teaching was considered an essential job and I must admit I was not interested in going to Vietnam, so I became a teacher.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I've been there. I went through that same thing. Not with teaching, but other—

ART GREEN: Yeah. So I taught there for a year and that's when I did the painting of the ice cream cone and the fire. I had to take, just to keep from going nuts, a day off every two weeks. I'd wake up one morning and think, "I can't do this." I was not a very good teacher and did not practice very good class discipline in my first term and then when I became very disciplined, I didn't know what to teach. I was not helpful.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Teaching art is a tricky business to begin with. There are some people that say you can help people with technique, as you said, but it's not that easy to really teach, being an artist.

ART GREEN: No. But then I got a job teaching at Wright Junior College, and then Ted Halkin who had been teaching, I was in his Cubism class, I would start in MFA in a Cubism class, and he was leaving his job at Kendall College. He ran the art department there and he said, "You should apply." So I applied. Well, I got the job. It turned out to be five courses a term. I ran the art gallery.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's a lot.

ART GREEN: Two art history, one seminar, a drawing, and a painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow! You got thrown into the fire.

ART GREEN: I got thrown into the fire, and I had to liaise with the women's committee as well for \$7,000 a year.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Welcome to academia. Very little money, lots to do, and craziness.

ART GREEN: Yeah. So I did that for a year, and didn't feel I was doing the job justice, but anyway, it was an interesting experience. And then I got, out of the blue, a letter from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design offering me—it was from a guy named John Pearson who had seen my work at a show of Chicago Imagists at Northern Illinois University when he was doing his MFA and he was teaching it. He worked on a series. He was interested in serial art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

ART GREEN: And he thought I would be an addition to the painting department and invited me to come for an interview and they paid \$8,000 for two courses a term, 15 students max, no committees, no women's committee.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Pretty easy choice.

ART GREEN: Pretty easy. So I flew out there with my bride-to-be, Natalie, and we got married six months later. And I thought—I was feeling completely like a big fraud because my work—you know, I had done a certain amount of work—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Hardly conceptually based in terms of that kind of—

ART GREEN: Yeah. And I was running out of steam. I didn't feel very certain about what I was doing, and I thought it would be good to be away because there was a lot of Hairy hoopla going on at the time. And it was the end of the shows, at any rate, and I thought it would be good to get away and spend a year or two, get some perspective on what I was doing. So I took the job. It worked out fairly well in terms of getting work done, but at that time, it was in a Conceptual academy period. And painting at that time was considered something that was a good stepping stone to something more serious, frankly.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well there's always people that say painting is dead and then they have the latest, greatest gimmick or whatever.

ART GREEN: Right. But a lot of the things that went on there were very interesting, very funny openings of Lawrence Wiener show where he shot a bullet in the gallery wall and poured a quart of oil in the gulf stream, and I joked, "Was it Gulf oil?" and they looked at me like I had just farted in the funeral home. And interesting—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, they were very serious about this stuff. This isn't like the Chicago—

ART GREEN: You couldn't joke around. No joking. Gary Kennedy is a very, very lovely guy. We had him over. He was president. We were standing around in front of one of my paintings and he said, "Well, have you got anyone interested in what you're doing? What is it you call it? I mean it's not art." I said, "Gary, you hired me!"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah really. What was that about?

ART GREEN: Yeah. So I wasn't really a good fit and I remember one of the last straws when they had a big meeting, they were going to turn the school into two divisions. We've got all these separate silos. Let's have two divisions: the mind and the hand. Well you can imagine what this would cause. They had a weaving department. Well, you're the hand. What really got them to was Jack Lemon was painting was the mind, for some reason.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know Jack.

ART GREEN: Jack Lemon was teaching print making and they want to put him in the hand department. Well he blew up. And if you know Jack, when he blows up—sorry Jack, he's got a temper.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well that's a very weird division because the art world was so much about breaking down those divisions. In these days, it's like—at Hairy Who? time, it was the difference in pop art, high and low was breaking down. But craft and art and all those things are merging together and now you look on TV and like Target ads are probably the best of use of art in a way, and high-tech art at that, and so it's very weird to try to make some old-fashioned kind of divisions where they're breaking apart.

ART GREEN: Yeah. It's almost like a class system or something. That's how people saw it. But anyway, it was a very good thing to do and I had applied for a Canada Council Grant. Someone said, "You should apply for—"Well I'm not going to get it. "No, no, you're eligible." So I applied and a guy named Greg Curnoe was, I found out later, was on the committee, and he's a guy who was in London, Ontario, a very interesting artist. It he had been in Chicago, he would have been in the Hairy Who?, I think, probably run the thing. But he was on the jury and I suspect that he may have voted for me because he was going to put on a Hairy Who? show at an alternative gallery that was set up there—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it was making its way up to Canada.

ART GREEN: It was. Through the magazines, I'm sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So the magazine thing didn't work.

ART GREEN: But when I went—we never talked about all the things that nobody stopped talking about in Nova Scotia, like the picture plane, or formal qualities. I think we had ingested unknowingly a lot of stuff. I remember standing in front of the exhibition painting by de Kooning and, I forget who it was, Stegeman maybe, dissecting the push-pull.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, the Hoffman kind of push-pull thing, yeah.

ART GREEN: And Hoffman's stuff and so on. And it was interesting. But I never really gave it much thought.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It didn't do it for you.

ART GREEN: But, you know, I must say after being in Nova Scotia for a while, and maybe it would have happened anyway. I always used sort of stage sets that were kind of parallel to the picture plane.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I was going to say that about your work. It may not be floating, but it does have a lot of stage set. Some of Jim Nutt's work has a little of that too.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —but a lot of your work is based around—that's the engineering. It's a stage set.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And the artisans, you know, you're making a picture here and it doesn't exist so it's like a

little stage, you know. But I got more interested in that kind of thing. Anyway, I got the Canada Council Grant of \$4,000 which allowed us to stay another year, and then it got renewed, and we moved to Vancouver and so on and so forth.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well I think there's certainly a change in your work. Looking at the structure and looking at the perception, the gaminess—whatever you want to call it, the game aspect of your work and the theatrical aspect of it seems to get inundated with looking at the actual—I mean, you did some funny things early on. Like I remember you put a vent on a piece and you actually—I remember reading about the tar-like substance that framed your work. There's some things that make things realer, thinking about the object and shape canvas as you may have been doing before you got there. There were some things that actually took apart the illusions of the painting from the very beginning, but it seems like you're taken over with looking at the process more when you're up in Canada.

ART GREEN: I think it may have had to do with becoming a little more mature and when I was teaching at Kendall College, I didn't have all that much time to paint and when I was painting, I would be thinking, "Well, I should be teaching or figure out what I'm going to teach," and when I was teaching, I'd think, "I should go home and paint." I wasn't fully engaged, whereas at Nova Scotia, I had few enough students and they were smart and serious but they needed teaching.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You didn't just want to sit in the corner of the room like—

ART GREEN: I'd sit in the corner of the room and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Say, "Here, here's how you do it."

ART GREEN: I wasn't all that good at first. I was too prescriptive. But I gradually learned how to teach, and I think getting married and moving away from my family, you know, I probably just somewhat matured. But I think that was part of the change that happened in that work. But—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think your work also changed—maybe—this is a postulate, and maybe you can shoot it down or not. But it seems like you got more sophisticated in your color. Did that come about from teaching color theory or stuff like that? Did teaching make it so you didn't—because your early work seems to be more pop-kind of colors, less modulation, more bright—which has to do with its source. There may be very valid reasons for it. But then I see a more sophisticated kind of color mixing occur.

ART GREEN: My color was not very sophisticated and we didn't—I don't believe we ever had, you know, a palette management course or, you know, we had materials and techniques, I think, but that was mostly exotic materials. Let's do silverpoint. Let's do tempera. It wasn't like really—I remember Weighardt, Paul Weighardt was the—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, and he did teach—that's the one I'm thinking of.

ART GREEN: He did teach Oldenburg, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He did teach up in—because my friend Edith Altman who did that piece, she's somebody I think studied with him and I believe he had something to do with the Evanston Art Center, too. Anyway.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And he was—as I said, what I loved about his course was he'd sit us down like school kids and he'd show us a lot of German Expressionists or Paul Klee, you know, and so I'm painting a lot and all my colors are muddy and I didn't know why and he said, "Too much purple." He looked at my palette and he said, "Oh, your brushes are not clean." I'm wondering what's happening. I'd be dipping it in the red and dip it in the blue and it's kind of a brownish purple. And he said, "Clean your brushes you dumkopf." You know, and so gradually I didn't necessarily take it to heart but then I started teaching color classes and I realized that gee, there is such a thing as—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So the Art Institute never gave you like Albers or color wheel stuff?

ART GREEN: We had Albers but it was all done with paper, you know, paper.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Color papers. Oh really?

ART GREEN: And I quite enjoyed that but it was difficult to translate what you learned.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's different when you have mixing paint than it is—

ART GREEN: Yeah, it's funny, you can't just—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And light is different in paint, too.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Colors in light. So you never really—so teaching actually—

ART GREEN: I had to research it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: By researching for teaching, you actually changed your work.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think that happened somewhat structurally. You always had, as you said, engineered puzzles or—there was always structure to your work but it becomes more elaborate and I guess the term might be almost deconstructed. It almost becomes about the process of looking. I think if you're like that invalid in the room, there's stuff to figure out.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did that change, you think, because of any particular experiences?

ART GREEN: One of the first things—I mean I was interested in mysteries of perspectives about how the moon, you know, if you hold a pencil at arm's length, it covers the whole moon which seems completely nuts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Things that we take for granted but if you start to examine them, like what?

ART GREEN: Yeah. And you start to wonder, where are we here? This happened later but I was sitting waiting for my daughter who was having a piano lesson, a little girl, a very young child walking along the sidewalk and it was right next to the road. And I kept an eye on her. I was afraid she'd dart into the road or fall and break her head or something. And I look back and there's a mother with a baby carriage with somebody else in the thing about 100 feet back. So I kept an eye on it and this little girl after a while turned around and looked back at her mother and turned bright red, dark, beet red in the face and started screaming. She said, "Mommy, mommy! Why did you get so small?" And I'm thinking gee, we all must have gone through this.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. This is the basic wisdom of kids.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And we are in a very odd situation and so this sort of idea of what the world really looks like.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually, I think we construct the world so much I don't think we realize it. I think if we saw—if we had like Zen enlightening and we were living really in the moment and pure perception, I think we need our egos and our mental processing is really—

ART GREEN: Yeah. We live in a little stage set that we've constructed ourselves.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely. So you got very involved in taking that apart and looking at it piece by piece and that's almost like it seems like you were teaching yourself how to build paintings at a certain point.

ART GREEN: Well, a certain kind of painting, anyway.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. But a lot of it has to do with what you're talking about, like perspective. That's such a game, that one-point or two-point perspective, to try to make something look real and you got involved with trompe l'oeil trying to make something look real is not at all—it's not reality at all. Not only is it flat, but there are games you play that are not particularly, you know—

ART GREEN: At one point I was interested in painting broken glass and rather than thinking well gee, I should look in the art history book and see how people paint broken glass, I remember going down with a great sense of occasion. I bought four eight-inch square pieces of glass from the local hardware store and with a great sense of occasion, I dropped them from the same height to see what they would look like so I could paint broken glass. You know, I wanted to paint a piece of broken glass as if a stone had hit it but it had shattered but stayed in place. What a dumbbell. Why did I—so of course, that just fell in a million little shards. I thought oh my gosh, this is not going to work. So then I looked at Peto, you know, the trompe l'oeil painters, the 19th century Americans, and there was one painting of his which was not discovered until long after his death. They left his studio and there was an old frame up there with an old print inside with broken glass and they pulled it down finally and it was not a print with a broken glass. It was a painting of a print with broken glass. And he developed a convention for breaking broken glass.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Again, the operative word is convention—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And glass is hard enough to paint as it is.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And the same thing with flames. Flames don't look like my flames. In fact, I was having a show in Stratford and a good friend of mine, an artist, came by and he's looking at this painting and he said, "By the way, I've always wondered, what the hell are those things? Are those leaves flying in the autumn wind?" I said, "No, those are flames."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well there's a beautiful abstract—that's what I was saying, it's a moving—it's a time-based kind of perception. That's what I was saying and film captures it differently. I think I did do a film of—this was in Cleveland. This is in the flats in Cleveland probably as opposed to Fort Wayne or whatever the stuff is here. But yeah, I was mesmerized by what happens when you start to—when you capture it in time-based thing, it's still not the same thing as it's not real, but it's different than when you do it in 2D because it's flat and it becomes a pattern. It becomes a decorative thing. Whereas here, it—it's almost like pixilation. Something happens when you—I think Bill Viola or somebody else has done it so I couldn't really do much with my idea. It had already been taken. But I guess—oh, going back to the flame thing, I meant to ask you. When I was researching that that image that you were using of the flames, my memory of that is it's the cover of Leonard Cohen—

ART GREEN: That same photo?

LANNY SILVERMAN: That one with the woman by the flames.

ART GREEN: Oh that, yeah right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think it's the one that has "Suzanne". I think that's a famous album from the 60's or 70's.

ART GREEN: Oh yeah. That's right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But I was trying to figure out where that came from because I was curious about your sources. Turns out, I think it's a religious image from Mexican—

ART GREEN: Portuguese or something. There was—I lived at one point up on the third floor on Milwaukee Avenue just north of Division Street above a place that sold flowers and so on. And it was a loft for—it was 2,400 square feet with 12-foot ceilings, you know, for \$65 a month. I pretended to be the New York Art Company and I slept under a—I had a crate that covered all my belongings because you weren't supposed to live up there. But across the street, there was a Puerto Rican herbalist who sold magic charms and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, and candles maybe.

ART GREEN: Until she forbid me from coming in, because she could tell I was just buying them for their aesthetic appeal. I was not believing. But she had love potions and I bought a few love potions. I never tried them out but, you know, and there was one that had a finger with a little angel balanced on top of the finger and she had those posters. I think I bought a few of those.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it's Latina. I thought maybe when I was looking for it, it's funny because it's hard to find exactly where it came from. I suspect that if I go back—next time I go to a record store, I'll look for the Leonard Cohen thing. Maybe he gives credit to what it was or maybe for legal purposes.

ART GREEN: Yeah. It's a great—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But yeah, it appears a lot of places. I think it's a religious image, definitely. So that brings me back. I guess we're coming around to your process. We're going to start talking about your art and we already have. What—you obvious look at magazines. You mention magazines and stuff like that and you have a vocabulary you go back to and reclaim and alter.

ART GREEN: I do try to add to it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You add to it in terms of the process and the way that you work the painting and the colors change. But what do you get your ideas from? Do you get some from dreams? You mentioned magazines and from books and things like that. What starts you on a painting? Your process begins where? I mean, you're sitting in front of a blank canvas and then what.

ART GREEN: Usually it's to do something that I want to look at. You know, and you can't visualize what it will be like. If I can visualize it, that means I've probably already done it or it's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you want to discover something.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You don't want to just—there are people that work the opposite way, that do exactly what you were saying. They have a very clear notion of what it is they want and then they just try to make—but when you get there you probably find some things that are different.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you want to find things all along the way. So in other words, you want to be surprised from the beginning.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I want it to entertain me to some extent.

LANNY SILVERMAN: If you're going to work on it that long and that obsessively.

ART GREEN: And I like to get into a pickle.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You like—you set yourself challenges?

ART GREEN: Yeah. I think can I do this, you know, and then some of them don't work so well. For example, though, I had a dealer in Vancouver when we lived there. I was going to get a job driving a bus because you could have a split shift where you get up at 4:00 a.m. and drive until rush hour and then come back and drive the—and nobody wanted to work that way. I thought well that'd be all right. I'd be up. I'd have all the time in the middle and then make a lot of money. And so I was going on the way but I thought I'd drop off in this gallery in Vancouver, the Bau-Xi Gallery, and the guy said, "I'd like to see your work." He drove me over to my place and he looked at the work. He said, "I'd like for you to be in my gallery but none of my artists work for a living. They just paint." I said, "That lets me out." He said, "Well, what would you need a month." I said, "Well, \$600 would allow us to keep going." He said, "Well why don't I give you \$600 a month and when you have enough work for a show, let me know, we'll come over and I'll pick out some works at your price and then we'll have the show." I said, "Gee, are you kidding me?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great. I think Castelli worked that way. There are some people that did that but those days are gone. Long gone. That's an amazing arrangement. I've heard of people having those arrangements.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And that I did for about 18 months. But after a while, after my first show, he said, "You're a good artist but you don't do enough work." I was doing a whole lot of work then compared to what I do now. He said, "Don't do more. I have a brother who's a wonderful painter and you'll give me your drawing and he will do the painting and two weeks it will be done." I said, "Paul, I don't work that way because the drawing I do in the beginning is just an idea and I don't know where it's going to go. I start off with something in the middle maybe." He couldn't understand but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I take it he was—was he Chinese?

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's funny because you go to the Chinese markets, I don't know if you've ever been there, you can buy an Andy Warhol. There's 10 of them in a row and they're dirt cheap and they're awfully well done.

ART GREEN: And I thought it would be interesting to have a show of my big hits from the past all done by Chinese artists, because they would do this ice cream cone that's 10 feet tall and for \$1,800 they'd do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, it's a deal.

ART GREEN: I thought that would be interesting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But that's not you. You're about the process.

ART GREEN: I am. And like an example, our daughter was five or four and our son was young, and we had a little set of these blocks that you put together and they make six pictures.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, I remember those.

ART GREEN: And there's a little bit of each picture on one side and you put them together and you make six pictures. But the interesting thing about that is all those pictures are there but you can't see them until you make it. Once you see one, you can't see the other. And so I decided to make a set of blocks that would do that as well, because it sort of ties in with the idea of once you see things one way, it's hard to see them the other

way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the thing with the Necker cube, it's hard to sort of organize. That's the thing about perception. It's sometimes hard to see two things at once or that famous—there's that illusion of the old woman. It's tricky—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. Once your brain—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Your brain is very weird about that. It makes up its mind, and that's that.

ART GREEN: And I remember my mother made some quilts like that with the Necker cube and when I was sick I'd be looking at them. There's a certain effort to get it into the looking up at it and then you look down at it, but you can't will it right away.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's like those pictures, too. Aren't there those books of those pictures—

ART GREEN: Yeah, those things where—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I had trouble with those. It takes a while to get them but once you get it it's like whoa.

ART GREEN: Yeah, whoa. Anyway, I thought—I had a thing with Necker cubes all over it and I thought I'm going to close one eye and wait until—this is the idea of the right and left brain—wait until I'm looking up at it and once I'm finally looking up at it, I'm going to close that eye and wait until I'm looking down at it. I did it for 30 minutes, and by the end of the 30 minutes, I was really kind of scared because I thought I'm going to open both—because when I open this eye, immediately I'm looking up, immediately I'm looking down, immediately I'm looking up. I thought, uh-oh, there's going to be a circuit burnt out when I open both eyes. So I opened both eyes and for this shining moment it felt like I was looking at both of them at the same time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

ART GREEN: And then it faded away. I gave a talk about this and some scientist said, "Nope, it didn't happen." I said, "What do you mean it didn't happen?" "The brain doesn't work that way." I said, "Have you ever tried it?" "No, I don't need to. I know how it works."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well they don't know so much about the brain, and they change their minds about so much stuff.

ART GREEN: Yeah. So anyway, I did this set of blocks that, you know, and I wanted to explore that. And it seemed to me—and I did a painting of a hypercube, which is another one of those things where you see one and then you can't see them all but there's 16 cubes instead of one so I layered this whole thing and worked on it for a whole summer and felt like maybe I'd done maybe the best painting in the whole world, because I could see each of these things. In turn, I was so familiar with it I could just go—like doing a rosary or something. This, this, this, this. I could see them and I thought, "What a painting." This is going to draw them into the Louvre. Nobody is going to be able to stand being away from it. And I'd draw the curtain so people wouldn't be blinded by the brilliance in the street. And finally I showed it to a friend and I talked to him for about 20 minutes about it, all the features of this painting, and he turned to me and said, "Well, you know what you got there? A nice spot of color."

LANNY SILVERMAN: I saw that in your text that you had. That's a letdown in terms of your audience. But the thing is, I think your work requires a lot of looking, and that's one—I know that painting, it requires—

ART GREEN: Nobody is going to spend the time in figuring out—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's very intricate in terms of just the way you even build the image and hypercube is not the simplest thing for people to figure out. So despite you saying you weren't that involved with mathematics as a kid, you've managed to—

ART GREEN: I like geometry.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You've figured out a way to incorporate a lot of—those are very sophisticated concepts, hypercubes, and some of those. Those are things that are not the simplest things for people to get.

ART GREEN: I think my colleagues at the university, fellow teachers, were shaking their heads. "Too bad about old Green. He's fallen down the hypercube black hole. We'll never hear anymore."

LANNY SILVERMAN: So your daughter inspired you in terms of just seeing that sort of—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So sometimes you get just a notion from seeing something out there in the world or from an image.

ART GREEN: Well, like Natalie and I were walking in Vancouver down the street one evening going to the movie theater and there was a search light pointing to the sky, probably a carpet warehouse or something opening. And it happened to be making a moon shape just the same size as the moon right next to the moon and there was a cloud and there's the moon from the search light and there's the moon.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you've used that image.

ART GREEN: And I thought wow—I don't know if I turned around and said, "No, we're not going to the movies," but I started doing painting—this idea is what we see actually there—is the meaning actually there or is it something we project on it?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Again, we've constructed our meaning.

ART GREEN: Like a painting. Is the meaning there or is it something the viewer brings to it? What do they see?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or even how we see the moon, that whole man in the moon or all that stuff that's like—there's certain—or romantic notions of the moon. Even the Méliès from that film. If you want to anthropomorphize, you make—we were talking about faces.

ART GREEN: Right, right, right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You see faces in things. Or how do you make it—and there are all these romantic associations. So sometimes it's a perception of just you see something out in the world, and it grabs you and then it's like oh, I've got to do something with this, and then you take that for a ride.

ART GREEN: And a terrible newspaper, the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* and the *Mail Star*. But they had this doofus photographer. Every week he would have a photograph in with the old business of, you know, they'd have a pigeon flying by and the wing tip just seems to be touching the top of a lighthouse, which is two miles away.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh so it's set to scale.

ART GREEN: "Pretty big pigeon." And every week there'd be one of these dumb photographs and I got interested in maybe making pyramids or towers of these improbable juxtapositions.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that has a lot to do with scale which involves me with my tableaus, because sometimes I have to get a toy that's just the right scale.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Your mind wants to make it right but if it's off, there's something that isn't quite there and so when something's really off like that, that's a little like the head and Necker cube in terms of you have to sort of play with—do weird stuff to in terms of—

ART GREEN: Yeah. All of that stuff that was in between you and the image and making up the story to make it make sense.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, let's see, in terms of—your work has developed. What made—you mentioned something, and before I even get to that, here's a question for you. You mentioned like sometimes you like setting yourself problems and maybe one that are not always that readily, you know, solvable.

ART GREEN: I don't know how they'll turn out. Although, I don't like to abandon a painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I was going to—do you rework things? That's the question.

ART GREEN: I usually find some way. For a long time, I had a rule. This is my dad looking down on me.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Famous rules.

ART GREEN: I had a rule, I will not repaint anything.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh really?

ART GREEN: And that made it kind of like a game with increasing stakes as you went along.



LANNY SILVERMAN: So you really put the pressure on?

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you said you very rarely abandoned them. So what happened to—let's face it, no matter how wonderful you are or were or whatever, there's got to be ones that are successes and not.

ART GREEN: There are some I didn't finish, but I tried not to do that and then as I grew in maturity, I thought there's nothing wrong, Art, with making it right. You know, so I do now repaint things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well you mentioned de Chirico. You know that about 50 years after—40 years after, he wasn't happy with them, and he repainted them which irked a lot of collectors. I don't know if he did it—I think they were ones in his collection. I don't think he went to people's homes and did that. I think that would probably really irritate a collector. But on the other hand, there are people that are never satisfied.

ART GREEN: That's true.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you looked back on your early work and you said, yeah, you weren't much of a painter when you started, but you learned as you went. So this for you, I guess the art making process is as much—it's an investigation. It's a way to sort of play through a whole bunch of learning curve things—

ART GREEN: It's still interesting. If I didn't come up with some ideas that seemed new to me, I probably would limit myself to documenting my earlier work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well there are some artists. There's one in town I won't name and you probably know who seems to have painted the same painting thousands of times, but let's take a more famous one that's safer to mention. I remember seeing Jasper Johns retrospective and thinking this is a very lovely show—probably the Guggenheim or MoMA. But there seemed to be only about four ideas here like numbers, flags, you know, whatever they are. The four ideas he had. Some of that has to do with marketability.

ART GREEN: Yeah

LANNY SILVERMAN: That can hurt you as an artist if you change too much.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You mentioned Nova Scotia. I met—well, the woman that I did some work with, Mary Legris, that I live with who is step-sisters with April Gornick.

ART GREEN: Oh yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I met Eric Fishl up there. Peter Schjeldahl was about to come and do a studio visit. Were you there at that point in time? This was in the 70's.

ART GREEN: I was there—I left before Eric came. But I was a visiting artist there in early '78 and the spring of—at the same time that Eric and four or five other people all quit. They always were having the deal where they hire a bunch of people, they'd stay for four or five years and then they'd all quit at a high—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: But yeah, I met Eric and I really admired his work a lot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I really liked April's work too.

ART GREEN: And April as well. We had them over at the studio—or he had us over at their studio and they're friends with June Leaf and Robert Frank.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well what was interesting about April though—what was curious to me about her work is that she was doing complete—she was an amazing print maker and then when I went up to her—we were staying with her. Eric was very nervous because he was having the visit from Peter Schjeldahl, but she was changing over to—she did these wall sculptures that were like Minimalist Donald Judd kind of things—

ART GREEN: Really?

LANNY SILVERMAN: But they were more feminine and Matisse like in terms of curvy, and sort of not so platonic. But then she, you know, at the time that we were up there—for a living, she was making postcards of the Nova Scotia scene, and that's sort of—

ART GREEN: What morphed.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Morphed into her—people like that—artists like that to me are always fascinating. People that are—put challenges in front of themselves and change their work, but they don't always succeed quite as well. She probably got—it helped a lot that he was a great schmoozer and he got into Mary Boone and all that stuff. It probably helped her career a lot. But it also has to do—

ART GREEN: Yeah. I won't talk about Eric—his work at that time, I thought, was—he was doing those glassine overlays, constructing relationships between people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's the stuff that I'm—that was more primal and—that's the stuff that really did it. But that's the thing about careers in the art world and some of that has to do with sexism in the art world too. He was a very good schmoozer, very charming, and she was very much more shots of—when we get into the thing with Carl, shy and less aggressive. But the people that are more dynamic and that go out there and press for their artwork. And then, I guess, the way this came up though is just talking about having—well now everything has turned into marketplace after Koons and people like that. It becomes almost like a meme. It's about branding and fame, and it's about having a signature style, whereas there are a lot of artists working today that don't even have a particular medium they work in. They work in whatever means necessary.

ART GREEN: This has almost become a signature style not to have a style.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not to have a style, yeah.

ART GREEN: You know, you try to escape the jaws of death, and they get you anyway.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And then there's people that, you know, young artists that just hand you a disc and there's one thing for having fabricators but they're not even involved in the process. They just—you make it, here's the idea. You make it. But you're the old school of wanting to—speaking of the hand and the brain, you're the one that wants to figure stuff out as you go, and that's what the reason for doing it is.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I like that process. It makes me feel like I'm involved in it and I'm not sort of just filling in the blanks. Although my paintings, if you watch me paint, it would be like I am but I don't know what's going to go in the blanks before I start, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that's interesting because your work seems so formally rigorous and it's very organized like an engineer's son would be, but it has a formal structure to it but you don't have—I've seen some of your drawings, too. You have ideas but as you say, they change and morph as they go. That has something to do with —

ART GREEN: Yeah. Anybody looking at it would probably think I have a signature style, and I do and it's a style that came about probably due to my limitations as a technician. I'm not a natural-born—you know, I'm not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well who is. I mean, you learn this.

ART GREEN: I never learned it in that way. I didn't spend very much time with pure painting, you know, putting paint on the canvas and experimenting with textures and possibilities. I was constipated, let's say. That would be—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, it's a tighter style. I know this very much because this is sort of my dilemma. I always admire like a Matisse or somebody who has that flowing sense of just natural—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —that's not us.

ART GREEN: Whenever I did that—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I guess it's my mind or something that takes over but it's very structural. I guess I'm a curator that's why. I mean that's why I'm probably a curator is I have a lot of sense of organizing like you and that's why I did a lot of grid-based work and actually even the photography, the one piece I did with Mary Legris in the other room is very much about structure and even—it's organized. It makes like a film-like storyline thing or formal sort of element. So you have a formal sensibility, but in terms of color and paint—feel for materials, that's something you had to teach yourself.

ART GREEN: My paint is about this thick [demonstrates thickness between thumb and forefinger].

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that's something you've learned but still your natural tendency is more about the formal

structure and about—

ART GREEN: I think my paintings to me always look best in a really great photograph. You know, in a way, I don't—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It flattens them out in a way.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and maybe it's because all of the materiality is gone and, you know, you start to look at "Gee, I should have sanded the canvas a little more carefully before I put the put images on it."

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's the problem when you go—if you're a perfectionist, it's very hard to stop. It's very—it's a never-ending game. Because you can't really make it, as far as trompe l'oeil or as far as reality, it's just—you can get caught. And speaking of a black hole, what I was going to ask you is something interesting. It just occurred to me when you were talking about that. Have you seen Bill Conger's where he plays off of—sometimes he's got these planes but he gives some texture and some sort of—you tend to—you were talking about flat and doing fairly flat plane. He sometimes throws in some sort of textural elements or trompe l'oeil indications of reality coming through, even though that's a game. Have you ever played with that sort of contradiction between depth and—you're not so much of—you're definitely not thick impasto. You're definitely, like you say, a thin layer of paint but have you ever played with contradicting? I know you did some things with mirrors and that kind of illusion, but how about with the flatness of the paint versus something thick that you're representing?

ART GREEN: Yeah. What I thought of when you said that was sometimes I have screwed on panels of Masonite, which could be like you have a painting and then this Masonite represents a piece of paper over the painting, which is transparent and shows the painting through it or shows some aspect that may or may not be there underneath the Masonite.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And that's what I was thinking about creating—having a tension between the real and the represented.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And thickness in 3D and even the Masonite, how this is this and how—there's something flat on it.

ART GREEN: I tend to do in a flatfooted way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You do it in a flat way but you represent 3D and you've added some—I mentioned the vent that you put on a real vent, you attached some real objects that sort of fusses with your notion of what's real or what isn't or what's really a painting or not or sculpture or whatever you want to call it.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm just thinking—

ART GREEN: You know, I think—I like that saying—that you have to change to stay the same. I—after a while, you just get tired of thinking. It becomes too evident what the next painting's going to look like, and what's going to be the problems and you've already solved them to some extent or played with them long enough, and at that point, I'm just always—I like to look at magazines or old books or whatever. I don't read art magazines much anymore because I've never been too interested in—unless they're writing about me, and theoretical commentaries on this or that. Unless they're artists—I love Ray Johnson and I'll buy any book on Ray Johnson.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I have just about everything, including that North Carolina one which is wonderful.

ART GREEN: I got a copy of *The Paper Snake* for \$65, one of the original ones.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you have one with the little moticos in it? I got one and they had original pieces of art I'll show you in a while.

ART GREEN: Oh, I don't know. No, I think I did. [I don't have it. - AG]

LANNY SILVERMAN: For a birthday gift, we were in Madison, Wisconsin a couple years back. It's not my favorite of his things, but I always kind of liked it. They were selling it and they didn't realize that it had not only—it had a postcard in it, it was a limited edition, and it had actual little, he called modicoms, I think, and they didn't realize that it would be worth a lot more. I was definitely—ignorance is bliss for the right picker. So yeah, I got a copy of that. Ray is a real—since I did language-based work a lot when I started out, I was very interested in him and I was a huge fan of his.

ART GREEN: Also in Chicago, I love Ivan Albright's work—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course.

ART GREEN: And the unbelievable—he was free to spend as long as he wanted to on his painting because of his wife's fortune, I'm sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That helps.

ART GREEN: That helps. But his work is amazing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's an interesting example of something that blends sort of an expressionistic sort of painterly style with a very image-based and a very personal content-kind of based work, which is very Chicago in a way, I think.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And also Stanley Spencer. We spent a year in England.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think I read that, yeah.

ART GREEN: I was on sabbatical and I got really interested in Stanley Spencer. He's kind of a crazy artist in a way, because he's one of the best artists and one of the worst all at the same time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sometimes there's not much difference.

ART GREEN: He had like three different styles, that personal style of home life with Hilda, and then his portraits which are very straightforward and he does some landscapes like that, and then people with their arms on backwards, you know, for no particular good reason. You know, and just the story of Stanley Spencer and his, you know, they did the *Horse's Mouth*, which is supposedly based roughly on—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I love that movie. I didn't realize that was based on him. Oh my god.

ART GREEN: Well, it's not quite like Stanley but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, yeah.

ART GREEN: —the chaos surrounding him—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's a bit romanticized to begin with, but it's a wonderful—what's his name, Alec Guinness is incredible in that.

ART GREEN: And he has this chapel in *Burghclere*.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think I went there when I was—

ART GREEN: Yeah. Isn't that amazing?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: When we went there were two little doors. You went on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to the one door, and Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to the other door and each little identical cottage in which—supposedly, I think, identical old ladies lived who were keepers of the place, so we went to the Tuesday cabin, and paid 10P each and we got an enormous key and she said where the light switch was and we went in. Turn the light off when you leave and lock it. Stay as long as you like. And this incredible thing, you know. I really like his work, too.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well going back, that just reminds me in another sort of sense, I know one of the hallmarks of Chicago art, particularly by way of the Art Institute, I should say, by way of Ray and a couple other people were very interested in folk art and picking—speaking of picking, you've got Maxwell Street and crazy art Ted Halkin also collects some stuff. He had some really fun things in his house. I had not really met him before, but that notion of collecting. Did that—I mean your images come—they're more cleaner iconic images that come from advertising. You mentioned a little bit of picking before. Do you ever go trashing or picking?

ART GREEN: I do. I'm not as in my art—I'm probably not as disciplined as I should be, and I'm not a disciplined picker, but we always stop at antique warehouses and you know, I've gotten some—I found a book, *15,000 Useful Phrases* by Glenville Kleiser, which is the most insane book.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's your title.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I don't always use it, but it's been an inspiration.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I love that actually.

ART GREEN: It's just—you can get it online for free if you poke around.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Everything's online.

ART GREEN: It's completely nuts. But yeah, I have collections of things, mostly paper stuff and books and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Going back to the titles, I'm amused by that, too, because that's almost like a Surrealist game, picking a title. So sometimes you mention that you discover the piece as you go along and sometimes you realize what it's about, like about the death of your father or some other things like that. You don't always think about that ahead, but you go through your phrase books or your things like that and you find a title, but again, that might come from the subconscious. It almost seems like a Surrealist game finding the—

ART GREEN: Yeah. I like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So just playing with or maybe it's random. Some of the titles—maybe you just like the sound if it and then it makes sense?

ART GREEN: I usually try to have some connection in mind, but not too obvious if I can help it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. So you prefer to have a little bit of a gap between the language and the image or some sort of—like again, a puzzle to figure out.

ART GREEN: Yeah. Not that I haven't answered the puzzle, but you know, it's sort of a—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well that's interesting too because it seemed like when I first started reading what you had to say about your work, you were a little hesitant to put meanings on your work. You wanted people to complete it as if it was a puzzle. But on the other hand, you're very forthcoming about the personal and other content.

ART GREEN: I think in the beginning I was embarrassed to say what they were about.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, you didn't want to just be that obvious.

ART GREEN: They were probably about things that you're supposed to outgrow by the time you're a mature male in the society. You know, sexual stuff and so on. My folks were very conservative people.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I figured, from what you were saying.

ART GREEN: I mean, my dad drank and so on, but they were just average people in Fort Wayne, Indiana in that time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And, you know, you didn't talk about stuff like that, so I skate around things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think you were also probably, and you still are probably, a little shy and not as—I'm a right out there kind of person and Karl is that way, too—a little less forthcoming with just throwing it all out there for all the people. And some of the people—like some of the wildest work could come from very polite people. You'd be surprised. Sometimes the stuff that—I mean, well Francis Bacon who you mentioned and who I love is—his personal life is pretty intense and crazy, but sometimes a very shy and unassuming person can come up with something really just—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's how they live it through.

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So maybe there was a little bit of that, too. It's not something that you necessarily were—and that's a male thing from that generation, too.

ART GREEN: Yeah. The strong side. The gentleman never explains.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, never talk. Don't explain. Right, exactly. Well I want to leave some stuff for tomorrow, I guess, and we're getting into some really interesting material about your work. Let's just leave

some more for tomorrow, and actually that's probably pretty close to two hours.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

[END OF green15\_1of2\_sd\_track02.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: This Lanny Silverman representing Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, September 18th at my home and I'm interviewing Art Green.

[END OF green15\_2of2\_sd\_track01.]

ART GREEN: So, my mic is working all right, is it?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yep, everything's good. So, I guess I wanted to follow-up why you came in for the [laughs]—for the art fair, Art Expo. What did you make the Art Expo? I wanted to talk to you a little bit about being a Chicago artist in Canada and how you felt about that and your re-discovery or re-assessment and all those kinds of issues. So, what did you think of the art fair in general in terms of art trends and—?

ART GREEN: I couldn't—I couldn't figure out if there were any particular trends, but I mostly saw Jim, Gladys, and Garth. And saw John for a while—Corbett— [Corbett and Dempsey Gallery, Chicago - AG]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

ART GREEN: And Suellen was there and Jim Falconer.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, it was more a get together.

ART GREEN: It was more a get together. I find it very difficult to—in that kind of situation to stand around very much to look at art because I'm always—I don't know. It seems like there's so much going on. It's—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I have a hard time looking at it.

ART GREEN: It's hard. It doesn't seem like part of the same business as I'm in [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's an interesting thing in terms of getting into the business you're in. I guess I wanted to follow-up on that. This might be the lead in into that. We talked a little bit about success in the art world and about—one of the things I admire a lot about Karl's, he's held course and not really paid much attention to art trends.

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Speaking of which, in terms of trends and there's so many fads and things that come and go and so forth. You—and you talked a little bit about, you know, the Matthew Marks show. What do you think about this sort of reassessment or looking at—it seems like Chicago is getting—Chicago historical art from the '60, '70s and Hairy Who? and that stuff is getting reassessed and looked at again. What do you make of that reassessment?

ART GREEN: Well, the reassessment seems to be going our way, so they're not saying, "Oh, my God, what a horrible state that was."

[They laugh.]

ART GREEN: Did they buy? Yeah. Who knows, but it's—I think—I think after the art world's various bubbles have popped, they finally turned to artists who they overlooked perhaps and who have a paper trail of some sort and [laughs], you know, to what extent this is driven by, you know, there was a while when hot MFAs seems to be the way to go and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The discovery.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and at this point, they've gotten back to the '60s. So it's really nice. I mean, I think of the ups and downs of life and like, if you're on a well-designed slide, you know, there are little—you have a slow climb up —

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —and then you have the inevitable gravity that takes place, but a well-designed slide would give you a few little thrills along the way and at the end, rather than just plowing into the dirt, it'd be nice to have a little—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It has to go out on a positive note.

ART GREEN: —uptick at the end. So, I—that's the way I see it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you're happy and it sounded from talking to you yesterday that you weren't in this for love and applause and tons of money. That wasn't it. You just wanted to be able—you're happy to just—you've survived and you weren't looking for, but there's a lot of young artists that are looking for it. Like Warhol and Koons and all the stars or Damien Hirst, but you weren't in it for that reason.

ART GREEN: No, there was no concept when I was in art school of it. Whether there were art stars, I guess, but you didn't go to school to be a star.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: You had to—went to art school because you couldn't help it or you couldn't get in anywhere else or, you know, you loved it. And I remember, you know, the Art Institute has the old names of the great artists in the past carved in stone and that was sort of the idea. We're not going to be carved in stone.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: And this is what we want to do and I just shudder to think that these kids—it's probably not their own money, but spending a quarter of a million dollars—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, you almost have to be an art star to pay back the loans. I mean, that's basically—

ART GREEN: Yeah, they're making a pretty high stakes bet.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's a high business. It's a high risk business now. Quite honestly, it almost seems like it makes more sense to give your—if you have a kid just give them the money and—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —have them do start-up.

ART GREEN: Do something.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do something with the money. Yeah, well, that's another story.

ART GREEN: Figure it out.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess part of what I'm asking about is also this reassessment of Chicago. Yesterday, you let—maybe it was off the record, but you were talking a little bit about you still feel like a Chicago artist even when you're in Canada.

ART GREEN: Well, yeah, I—when I moved to Canada, it was basically to get a better job and also to get away from the arts—even when I lived in Chicago, I liked living in little neighborhoods. I lived in Wicker Park which in those days was a Polish/Puerto Rican neighborhood, mostly Polish. And down the street was one house where the woman had made the front room into a bar and you get a beer for 10 cents.

LANNY SILVERMAN: All right.

ART GREEN: Her son, who was hugely overweight, would always be sitting on one bar stool [laughs] watching the TV. I mean, it was just a neighborhood where there was no concept of art. In fact, when I—when I ran this little storefront next to Club Lucky, I was cleaning the place up and somebody came by and said, "Oh, are you going to start a church here," you know, [laughs] and I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —started to consider it. Oh, was this—to me, my paintings had a religious feel to them. But I like to —being away from it and I'm very susceptible, unfortunately, to the allure of stardom—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

ART GREEN: —Or, you know, who's in the show and who's not in the show and I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You do follow—you said the thing—you do follow sort of some of the art world to that extent or most of your friends—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or most of your friends and—

ART GREEN: But I, you know, it's too—it plays with your head, you know, if you're in the show or you're not in the show and then you start to get your better angels disappear and you're thinking, "What the hell? That guy is worse, blah, blah, blah." And I really like living away from it all. It's as I said, it's like a different business. You know, really.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you're away from any real power centers in terms of art, although Toronto had a pretty important scene, I think, at a certain point. Vancouver is kind of interesting. So, there's stuff happening, but you're liking being away from where the politics—the politics is something none of us miss in terms of the art world.

ART GREEN: No, I—well, I was thrown into another kind of politics at Nova Scotia. It was brutal. It was the most political place I'd ever seen. You know and I didn't like that and I quit after two years and we went to Vancouver and it had a very—in fact, it's art scene reminded me a little bit of the camaraderie between people of Chicago when there was not no golden ring that anyone was going to grab.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And Conceptual artists would come to landscape painter shows and landscape painter's—well, maybe not landscape painters, but [laughs]—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's a little bit—

ART GREEN: —you know, there was—there was a more supportive, you know, it was a small scene and I taught part-time at UBC (University of British Columbia) and people were very nice. We moved to Toronto and Toronto had a—they—Toronto has a sort of—it's the biggest city in Canada now and it wants to have some respect, but at the same time, it has the second city mentality because it's not New York.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And the artists for a while tended to follow the Cedar Bar model of macho guys with motorcycles and bar fights.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, God, yes. That's the part of the art world that's really hard to take. Not just the power play stuff, but the male—the male part of it where it's, I mean, it's just very strange—too much testosterone.

ART GREEN: And I had a gallery and I was in a gallery, I told you about the guy who paid me a stipend and he had a gallery in Toronto, which wasn't nearly as—they had 50 or 60 people in their stable and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a lot.

ART GREEN: If lightning struck and somebody sold something, they'd be happy to take the money, but, you know, and they had two-week shows to try to get everybody in. And they had an upstairs show and they had a downstairs show. It was—and one time, I got a call and said, "Art, Art? Somebody's interested in your work. Can you come in and tell them what it's about? We don't know what to say."

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: What the hell? So, drove 80 miles and had lunch with the guy. I'd drive back. And, you know, "Art, great. You sold it. We'll send you your—" I thought, "Where's my commission?" You know, and so I got out of that gallery because I was in Phyllis' gallery by then and I had all I could do to do that. So, I haven't really been involved in the Toronto scene. I was in a show at a decent gallery in Toronto. They had a great opening. It was a show they have in January where they have people who don't currently have a gallery in Toronto and filled the gap in January. And the woman who was partner made a great opening. She would bake stuff. They had wine flowed freely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's pretty—

ART GREEN: So there were like 200 people there. So, I'm one of six artists and I had one corner with four paintings, you know, and I turned around. I was looking out of the front and I turned around and the place was wall-to-wall, shoulder-to-shoulder. Everybody drinking their wine, eating their pastry and there was one square that was totally empty. Nobody wanted to be near my paintings because they didn't know what the hell they were—



LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —and they didn't want—it was if, you know, when you're in a party and someone farts. You want to get away from that in case somebody thinks it was you.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you've had a mixed reaction to your work. Because you mentioned this before at a certain point where people were—where the bit of color comment that you made yesterday—

ART GREEN: Well, I mean, I was just deluded. That was—I drank my own Kool-aid so much—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Well, there's intention and there's—

ART GREEN: —I couldn't see the painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —your feeling about the work and then it's how it's perceived. That's kind of what this conversation is starting with.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Was like, the world's response to your work and you've managed to maintain a certain equanimity about fame and about response because, like you say, it's a roller coaster and if you get too involved, you can really just drive yourself crazy.

ART GREEN: You become a monster after a while.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there are a lot of monsters out there. Trust me. But I mean, you manage that, but at the same time, you're aware of the fact that you have very little control. I mean, as much as you have your ideal viewer who looks at your work, but there's a lot of people who either misunderstood—

ART GREEN: I have my ideal viewer.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You have your ideal viewer, but in reality there are people that misconstrue it or put it in a different context and now it's getting revaluated as being—I mean, it's not just New York, but, you know, Corbett Dempsey. There's people starting to look at some things that were overlooked. Things—it's just like clothes kind of fashion.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Everything has its moment and it comes and goes.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: If you wait long enough—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —maybe it'll come in whenever you're doing.

ART GREEN: A stopped clock, you know [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, so you've managed I guess—well, how would you like your work to be perceived? That's a question I was going to ask later because that's usually my final one, but for in the future, let's say 30, 40 years from now. Let's say, you were talking about those things to people, names in stone, 50 hundred years from now when someone's looking at your work, what would you hope they would see in your work?

ART GREEN: I have no idea. I think it'd be good on the 10 dollar bill, let's say.

[They laugh.]

ART GREEN: No, I have no illusions. It'd be nice if people—if people still had it and were still looking at it and still thought of it as something. You know, the whole idea of high is in jeopardy anyway. If my art is high or low or whatever it is, you know, the idea of an object that—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, an object is already—I mean everything's on screens.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: As a matter of fact, you talked about your work being—the good news is when it's flattened

out, it hides some of the, especially, the early work, some of the maybe perhaps not the excellence in painting—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —but it makes it—and that's one of the things as a curator, you almost have to look at the original work because—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and that's what kids don't understand. The screen—pixels are very different. Not just in terms of light or perception, but also it just—it's not the same thing.

ART GREEN: It's different material.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Different feel and there's different being in front of something, but your work may look good [laughs] on a screen. I guess, what do you make of this whole—I was going to ask you this too, we're going out of my order, I guess, but we're coming to that anyway, this sort of art and technology. I guess, let me start the question with the art and technology question. I noticed you talked about getting away from using the grid, which my dad taught me how to reproduce things—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I did that as a kid. And using an overhead projector, that was kind—

ART GREEN: Yeah, it was like a big, you know, a big struggle with morality in my—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You were cheating you felt.

ART GREEN: I'm going to the dryer side here. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah [laughs.] You were not doing it the old school way.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I always felt—I tried—I said in that thing something about trying to balance the drudgery. So, now, I've gotten rid of all this drudgery. Now, I've got to make work more complicated, so I can barely do it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, the drudgery from what you said yesterday is very much part of it because the process is where you discover things. You pose yourself a problem—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and that's what it's about. It's as much about that. So, you're not really about solving the problem as quickly or as efficiently as possible.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, how do you feel—I guess that leads into how do you feel about, do you use computers or technology?

ART GREEN: I do. I have Photoshop and I use that to—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I saw that.

ART GREEN: —put things in perspective and it's very useful, I must say.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you stretched out that image of the postcard image from Lorriss and Karl that you used a lot over the years.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, there's things you can do. So, you just look at it as a tool. You're now more comfortable with the "cheating."

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You see it just as a tool that—to do things with.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I don't have any online presence except if somebody puts a picture up. Then I'm very—I got on Facebook and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You could spend your whole life.

ART GREEN: —I realized that, you know, because I just got on to see what it would be like. Who was on—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: —and so, I made Lorri a friend because she was on Facebook. She said, "You should get on Facebook." And then I—people do me these friends requests and I thought, "I'm going to spend my whole life—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: You—it's a black hole you can sink into.

ART GREEN: —manicuring this thing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I don't—I have Facebook page and even my friend Chuck has some stuff. I feel bad because I don't even respond to things. My wife is sort of my liaison there. I don't know, but I guess I feel like you. I don't want to spend my whole life just dealing with that. Even though I have tons of time—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —it's not how I choose to spend it.

ART GREEN: I started a blog called, *A Great Disorder*, you know, from the line—anyway, *A Great Disorder* is an order and—no, anyway—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Is that Wallace Stevens or something?

ART GREEN: Yeah, something like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And what I was putting in were things like 15,000 useful phrasebook and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —this guy who made a machine for focusing on things—it was like a diver's helmet with—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: —oxygen coming in with little slits. You'd only read one line at a time of a book.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: You could imagine what could possibly go wrong with that. But anyway, I haven't done any of that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you don't spend much time with one line. I noticed you didn't have a website. That's why—

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I was glad for memory stick with the sort of the work that was encapsulated. But technically speaking, I guess here's the question that goes along with that, now that you're—I could have asked this of a lot of the artists because they're of a certain age and do you feel like some limitations—physical limitations in terms of the painting by way of age? And do you feel like some of these tools that we're talking about are good things to have at this point? Or has your painting—

ART GREEN: Probably, it would have more useful if I had them earlier, but no; I've tried to start to use lighter materials. A lot of the shaped canvasses I would make them on three quarter inch—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: MDF, which is really heavy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: MDF is really heavy.

ART GREEN: And, you know, it would be seven feet tall and weigh—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you worked big in the past. So, I was going to ask you have you gotten smaller in scale? Some are actually going smaller.

ART GREEN: A little bit, but the last painting I did, maybe five or six feet tall, but I started using—what is that? [inaudible] and plywood that is three eighths of an inch or something like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, well, I'm not sure which one that is, but yeah, so it's not really—

ART GREEN: It's a lot lighter. It's just the material—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You still—your ambitions are still there. You're still working big and you're still—

ART GREEN: I hope so, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —painting away and that's great. And do you have any like, problems you've set yourself or things that you see upcoming in terms of future work as far as—

ART GREEN: I don't know. I got interested in knots recently—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

ART GREEN: —as I got to find a book on knots at a flea market and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I think I saw that.

ART GREEN: Using knot as a template and then replacing the fabric with shaped mirrors that go in and out as if they were a knot, but it's not a knot. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: And I've done two paintings like that and I'm working on a third and I'm getting kind of used to it. So, I'm looking around to see what comes up. And I don't want to do 20 of them, I don't think, unless I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: We talked about that yesterday. You like the idea of—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and so, how do you know enough is enough when you've worked on a theme, speaking along that—those lines?

ART GREEN: I don't—it's usually when I find something else. It's not so much that, "Well, I'm sick of this and what am I going to do?" It's just, if you keep your eyes open, you usually find something that seems—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, something else supplants it and then you just move on.

ART GREEN: Seems compelling, you know. I was going to say something about Canada and the U.S. When I was with Phyllis, she never made a big point about, by the way, Chicago artist who has not lived in Chicago since 1969 [laughs].

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] I wondered about that because she did sort of—

ART GREEN: She sort of skated around that. She said, "Oh, don't worry, no. Your work is fine." Blah, blah, blah, "Don't—" you know, and some people said I was probably a draft dodger. I didn't exactly volunteer, but at the time, I taught and so I wasn't eligible for the draft and then I got married and we weren't eligible for the draft, so I wasn't doing that. I did leave at a particularly toxic time in America and it was very—Halifax was—Oasis—when we landed in the airport in Halifax, I said, "It's so quiet."

[They laugh.]

ART GREEN: What's going on? And we really quite liked it and as I said, the Canada Council gave me a lot of support for a couple of years. And in 1975, I became a Canadian citizen—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you have dual citizenship?

ART GREEN: I have dual citizenship. I figured if I'm—I felt comfortable here and I think it was partly also the idea of being at a distance in some way. I feel better in that kind of situation. At any rate, we lived in Vancouver, moved to Toronto and I got a job at the University of Waterloo where I taught for 29 years after that. But I feel that my work—there was a flurry of excitement in Vancouver about my work and I—as I said, I had a couple of shows at the gallery that I was associated with, was included in some group shows and so on. But I haven't—in all those years, they sold one painting to a private collector in Chicago and one to a customs agent who saw the painting when it came through customs. [These were the only two paintings my Vancouver gallery sold to

private collectors. – AG]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow, that's wild.

ART GREEN: And really like it [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's great. That's the most unusual sale I've heard of. That's wild.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and I thought, "Well, there's my ideal viewer."

LANNY SILVERMAN: There it is.

ART GREEN: You know, and I found out about it when I went through customs for some reason. "Oh, Art Green, I bought. . ." you know, and I said, "You're the guy—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's funny.

ART GREEN: But all the other sales were to, you know, the National Gallery bought a painting because of this guy, Greg Curnoe was a friend with Pierre Théberge and the Art Bank which is a—had a really good idea. They bought art when they were younger with the idea that they could buy it back at the same price, plus a small storage when they get older.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And I thought, there is a great idea. In the meantime, they would rent it out to government offices. And, of course, they privatized that after a while and they—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Where was that run out of? Was that in Toronto?

ART GREEN: That was in Ottawa.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that was in Ottawa. Because that's something like—vaguely I've heard of that, but it's not something—it's not an idea that—I mean, there were people trying to put art in offices and there are a whole bunch of—they're sort of corporate—there's a whole model for that in this country, but that's a great idea.

ART GREEN: Yeah, well, when penny pinchers came in, they said, "You know, blah, blah, blah," and they gave artists six months to buy their work back at the low prices and I didn't have any money at the time and they will not even talk to you about it now. But—so, it was mostly and the joke is, once every museum and collection buys your work in Canada, you have to change your style because—[laughs] they've already got one.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's been there, done that. They want something new.

ART GREEN: Yeah, now Toronto is much more lively than it was when I was interested in getting a gallery there and when I was making enough work to have two galleries, but there's, you know, I still feel and I'm happy to feel that way. My work doesn't really—after we've been there for a while, there was a critic in *Time Canada* who said—had an article about the "draft dodgers" that came to Canada and how they'd affected our culture. And his feeling was they'd done nothing, nothing good. And he picked me as an example.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, geez.

ART GREEN: He said, you know, this guy, you know, we were counting on these people to hold up a mirror to ourselves so we could see ourselves. And I thought, "Gee, I didn't sign into that."

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's not—yeah, so far the bargain.

ART GREEN: I mean there is this sort of feeling that art has more of a social purpose in Canada in a funny way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's interesting.

ART GREEN: And it may be due to their—sorry Canada—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —it may be due to an anxiety about self-identity or something, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, that's one of the differences you think in between Canada and—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —the United States. That's an interesting one. And yet, I was going to say, you came, I mean, not recently, we had this conversation off the record, but recently, the politics have changed, but in some ways, not just for draft dodgers, but in some ways Canada was much more reasonable and liberal and not just in terms of war and some of those issues, but there in healthcare and so many things. I know a lot of people that retired—I know draft—I know that.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know those issues having grown up with that the same—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —era in a way, but it's changed quite a bit lately. So, I guess it's taken a downside. Everything's turning into crap. I guess conservatives and right wing and fear of other culture seems to be—is there a fear—there's a very multi-cultural—

ART GREEN: It's very multi-cultural. I—there's great—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And so Vancouver is—

ART GREEN: —it's very successful and Harper yesterday in a debate talked about the old stock people of Canada. In other words—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, we know where that—

ART GREEN: —he's using this as a wedge issue to get the old stock to vote—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, he's joining the rest of the crowd.

ART GREEN: —he's joining—oh, I mean, he's a fascist. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It's sad because, you know, Canada used to be looked up to as a model. Like, these day, who can you even look up to as being somewhat—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —reasonable, you know, there's some of the Scandinavian countries and so forth, but it's very sad. Now, let's go back to politics because I had a couple of questions that I kind of follow-up on—

ART GREEN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —but earlier on, we talked about not just—we talked about Watergate and McNamara. You'd done some pieces there.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: How did you feel—some people feel that art is like preaching to the—political artists preaching to the converted because people in the art world are pretty much left, liberal, et cetera? How did you feel about mixing art and politics together especially given now that you've come to a different view, being it Canadian or half Canadian and how do you feel about art and politics?

ART GREEN: Well, it's interesting because yesterday at the Art Fair, I had a discussion with a collector who has a very progressive collection and turns out he hates everything Obama did and thinks he ruined the country. And —

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wait, how do those go together?

ART GREEN: —he's divided us and you know it was a very awkward conversation. You sort of think, "Well, these are the people buying my work." And I'd say, probably—

LANNY SILVERMAN: When you say progressive, do you mean, you didn't mean politically progressive, you meant maybe art-wise progressive.

ART GREEN: Yeah, art-wise. You sort of associate and say, "Well, if they're an art collector—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You think the leading age in art maybe more—yeah, so maybe my sort of supposition may be a little off, but candidly speaking, so that's not always the case.

ART GREEN: No, no.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's wild.

ART GREEN: But—yeah, when I did the McNamara paintings, I was terrified of the way things were going and the wars and it didn't make any sense and so on. And I—but I wasn't the activist and, you know, there was a, you know, many opportunities that I passed up to go down to Grant Park and get tear gassed and so on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. You were here—

ART GREEN: Or march somewhere.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —for the convention, yeah.

ART GREEN: I was—I was a closet [laughs], you know, I didn't—I didn't get involved directly in politics, but—and McNamara the image was probably as much about my dad as it was about the war in Vietnam.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And having come from a conservative community that, you know, looks up to people like that is, you know, heroes et cetera.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now, we got Cheney. I mean, that's a whole other level of ugly.

ART GREEN: We've gone way downhill from—

[They laugh.]

ART GREEN: —from McNamara I have to say.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: So, but I don't know what to say about it. I never—I've—I haven't made politics the central feature of my work, that's for sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you said now that you're in Canada, that's sort of a way of—a Canadian way of looking at art is having social purposes. You haven't been—from what I can see, you haven't done more political art really. There may be something in there, but it's not something that swayed you. So—

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, you stayed fairly clear of trends and fads and things—you go about your own course and —

ART GREEN: Part of it is because I'm bad at discerning trends and fads [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I was going to ask you about trends and fads, especially, I started to about the Art Fair and you said it was a little hard to tell and it's hard to look especially if you're doing more a get together.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What do you make of some of the things that have happened since like, you mentioned Conceptualism, of course, that was a big reigning thing, but this sense of irony and which this was very big in the art world for a while and installations and performance and all those things that have happened. And social activism is art, you know—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —having—that happened in the '60s, you know—

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —where Robert Morrison, the one that had the food—this Rirkrit Tiravanija has done that too. More recently, the Italian artist, what do you make of some of that stuff that's sort of supplanted—gotten a lot of—or Marina Abramović for performance? What do you make of some of—

ART GREEN: Yeah, it just seems like—I mean, like, when I first, you know, encountered performance art and installations and Conceptual art, it was very exciting. But it seems to me it's become a more orthodox and kind

of, you know, some new bright artists doing something that basically happened 40 years ago and kind of, you know, it starts to become like faculties of performance art.

LANNY SILVERMAN: An entertainment too. Jay Z was involved with it, so it's something.

ART GREEN: Oh, it's become—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I mean, it's gotten to the point where it's—well, even at the point where I did something with Laurie Anderson and it was already big business, she was with Warner Brothers. Became—it crossed over—what was avant-garde, she was on the streets doing her violin, like, when Ice Cube's—[inaudible] on skates—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: When she was doing that piece in the '60s, that was really out there, but then all of a sudden, it becomes the in thing and now—then she commands, you know 30, 40,000 stadiums of huge people and it becomes pop.

ART GREEN: Yeah, you get the tickets through TicketMaster.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: And Toronto, they have the White Nights Festival [actually called Nuit Blanc - AG] which is a festival of installation and performance art, but it's a drunken, you know, a million people go out and get drunk. They stay up all night and throw up in the performance.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, even Burning Man, which started out as an alternative is now become—I can't remember which stars, but there are some major stars already milking it for mileage. Some major movie star was filming some stuff out there. It's become a whole other—I'm sure it's not only one, but it's become something—the alternative has now become—this is a little about that reassessment that we started this with. It's funny how things turn around. What was meant as a provocation, what was avant-garde now becomes in and then it's become everyone's following suit. It's kind weird.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah being associated with it is somehow a mark of your creativity.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, Oldenburg was at the School of the Art Institute, wasn't he?

ART GREEN: Originally, but I, you know, it was long before my time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because he was doing happenings and—that's before you. I was thinking—

ART GREEN: Yeah, and they were—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and Red Grooms, you didn't know Red Grooms.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I did know Red when he was here doing the show at Frumkin.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh.

ART GREEN: I was supposed to be the character that Ed Paschke played in *Tappy Toes*.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're kidding.

ART GREEN: But I had to pass it up because I was teaching five days a week and I couldn't really take any more time off. And they shot the thing at night after the gallery closed all night long.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And I wish I had just said, "The hell with it." And done it, but Ed did a fine job, I have to say. But I was—you know, what I like, like, Ray Johnson is in a way, his whole life was a performance—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, even his staff, yeah.

ART GREEN: Yeah, his staff was—

LANNY SILVERMAN: A performance, that's bizarre.

ART GREEN: —a performance, and he put himself on the line. But he wasn't, you know, he was a publicist. He publicized everybody and everything.



LANNY SILVERMAN: But he was—he was ornery. He, you know, he—

ART GREEN: Yep.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —he didn't try to get into museums, he deliberately avoided it which—

ART GREEN: He drove the museums nuts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, of course.

ART GREEN: And we had a wonderful friend, Alastair MacLennan and his wife, Toby MacLennan. Toby taught at Rutgers after Halifax. So, we met them in Halifax. And Alastair, he's probably retired, but he's a performance artist in Northern Ireland in Belfast and he was the son of a Scottish policeman and Calvinist and he would do these demanding performances where he would tie a rope around his neck, attached to a rock and he'd stand on the corner and just stand there for three hours, you know, and people would spit at him or harass him and say, "What you doing man?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sometimes people ignore you in some places.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And he would these insane performances. It was almost like, "Can you do it?" You know, it was like a moral exercise and I really—I really admire—I was riding on the bus one time and there's this figure walking down the street with all this stuff and price tags and tape all around—shambling along like some kind of creature.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: And I realized it was Al. So, I got off the bus and followed him at a safe distance.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: And he walked downtown and walked into a discount department store and climbed up on a display case. And it was—I don't know what it was about, but, you know, after a while, three assistant managers in high shoes and plaid pants came over and called the police. And the police said, "We're going to throw you in jail if you do this." You know, but he was just—and that was—that was amazing. And I really like stuff like that, but when it becomes—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I agree with you. I think the feel for it has really changed because I grew up with the height of performance art in the '60s and '70s and now, it's something completely different. In addition to being entertainment, it's been commodified and made into something—it's hard to be shocked or you get—and you're into people doing that stuff. It's kind of, "So what."

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I mean, there's a certain sense—although I think there's still some good people out there. There's people that are still pushing the edges.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you follow younger art? I mean, are you still teaching? You're not still teaching—

ART GREEN: I quit teaching in 2006. I retired.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, a while back, but did you—were you inspired by some of the younger work of your students?

ART GREEN: I was and remain so. And they're doing—I'm very glad nobody's doing what I do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: You know, in fact—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's important because you want them to do something on their own and develop as an artist rather than just, you know, you can learn in a bad way too.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I mean, if you—I've tried to avoid showing my own work to students. I show other people's work that probably had some relation to mine, but I tried to avoid it. Although sometimes I did, but, you know, your fear is either A, they'll be able to do it better than you—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —which is quite possible.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: —or that they're going to do it worse than you, which is very humiliating in a sense.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's awkward too.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and I didn't want to lead them down my garden path particularly. I tried to show them a wide variety of stuff.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And also, they might be, if they're trying to get your favor, they may, instead of finding their own voice, they may be sort of brown-nosing or doing things—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —for the wrong reasons. Because one of the most reasons, which you, you know, reiterated over the course of the interview, is having your own voice and sticking with that and doing the things that matter to you.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And if you don't know what that is—you said that with Ray Yoshida, if you don't know what it is you want to say, what's the point?

ART GREEN: [Laughs.] Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I mean, the technique or the—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I tried to—I tried to get them embroiled in whatever it was they were interested in. Some people are not interested in anything. I found that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, there are some students that are in it for the wrong reasons too, but that's a whole other thing. In terms of influences, I wanted to—this sort of gets down to performance. There's that wonderful photo—it looks like you're almost doing a performance with you in the background and then your future wife—

ART GREEN: Oh, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and I wanted to ask about Natalie, she's a textile artist.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Has she been an influence in your work? Do you guys—

ART GREEN: She has.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you guys play off of each other?

ART GREEN: Absolutely.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, there was a certain fate that—tell me a little bit more about that picture. How did you think you happened to be in a picture before you even knew her in the background of a photo? How did that come about?

[This was a small photo my wife Natalie found in 2013 among her late mother's belongings. It was a snapshot taken in the spring of 1963 of my future wife Natalie (on the right) and her younger sister Nina standing on the Michigan Avenue sidewalk near the front of the Art Institute of Chicago. The shambling figure on the left is me. (The sisters were no doubt with their mother, who taught on Saturdays at the SAIC Junior School. I believe this was taken on a Saturday when I was carrying some drawings in a poorly wrapped parcel around to the side entrance of the Art Institute to submit to the jury for the Chicago Arts Festival.) I didn't actually meet Natalie until more than five years later, in December of 1968. - AG]

ART GREEN: Yeah, this is like—there was a thing on YouTube of people who were in Disneyland at the same time when they were kids and then they're married.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And when Natalie's mother died at the ripe old age of 99 or something like that, after she was cleaning up her things, she found a little photograph of a tiny format and we looked at it. It was Natalie and her sister in front of the Art Institute posing for a picture and there was a figure shambling along [laughs] on the far left about to walk into a light post, I think. And carrying a poorly wrapped parcel and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: A big portfolio or something? Was it oversized?

ART GREEN: Yeah, it was me. And in fact, I think I know exactly the time that was. Natalie's mother taught, so there is an explanation for this.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you remember seeing those two young women?

ART GREEN: I remember one time walking—maybe one joined the other. I thought it was one at first, but while I was walking around to the side door of the Art Institute, there where trucks pull in—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: —on Monroe Street to deliver some drawings to be juried for the Chicago Art Festival.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: It was a Saturday. Normally, I wouldn't be downtown on a Saturday. Natalie's mother taught in the junior school on Saturday and no doubt, took the opportunity to take a photo of her daughters and I was walking way over to the side to avoid getting in the picture. But as it turned out, the lens was this sort of wide angle—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —so I got in. And that was when I was probably in my third year and Natalie was still in high school.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, so—

ART GREEN: And we didn't meet for six years—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Wow.

ART GREEN: —after that and I thought, "Well, what are the chances?" But, you know, there is an explanation for it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, there's some influencing—spheres of influencing and the fact that you both were involved in the Art Institute or her mom too. So, it makes sense, but still it's just wild that, that would—that you would be in the background.

ART GREEN: Well, I love things like that where chance has played. And the Surrealists valued chance—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course.

ART GREEN: —you know, value of chance and who was it—

LANNY SILVERMAN: And the meeting of the umbrella on the operating table, that thing. The—from that novel, the—

ART GREEN: [inaudible]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, [inaudible]. Yeah, there's some wonderful things about chance and actually, we talked about that with just using the titles to sort of—that's an interesting phenomenon.

ART GREEN: And I like the fact of finding—I love to go to the old bookstores and just looking through things and I love libraries. You know, this is one thing I don't care for in the digital future, they're talking about getting rid of books. "We don't need them. We have it all online."

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's all the information, but there isn't the way of being like a flâneur. Being able to wander about and just—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and just find discoveries. That's what it's all about, eventually—

ART GREEN: And in the future, probably, the library will already know what your interests are and give you a

curated—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, it'll—yeah, like Amazon. "You looked at this, you're going to like that." You're not going to have that active inquiring mind.

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's going to be taken over by computers.

ART GREEN: Talk about free will, we're going to lose it. But anyway, I like the idea of things being put in a system which is—creates random possibilities. So, you're looking for a book on this and you see three books over an interesting looking book on something else. And you open it up and you know it changes your life.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Even a dictionary or encyclopedia—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You're looking for one thing and you find something else.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's comparable things on the internet, I will say, but they're not the same and I think it really changes your perception or how you discover things. Let's go back to Natalie and—because I guess you—

ART GREEN: Oh, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —in terms of—I was going to ask you this in terms of some of the vocabulary that we were talking about, I left out a couple from my list as I jotted them down. One of them was two of them—one of them was textiles, which we alluded to with the Necker cube—

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —in terms of the quilting patterns.

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The other one is craquelure from ceramics and I know those are both things. So, let's start off with the textiles.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That seems to have played an important part in some of your work.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: How did—did that come from Natalie? Did it come from your childhood seeing the quilts?

ART GREEN: Yeah, Natalie majored in textile design and weaving and so on, but she also was very interested in drawing and painting. But along with her textile studies, she had a little book on all the things you could do with threads, needle work and so on. All the different sorts of needle work and it had this really nice diagram of looping threads and—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

ART GREEN: —this and that and I've always, you know, when you think about it, I remember when we were in Nova Scotia, to some prominent Conceptualist Natalie mentioned she was interested in, you know, embroidery and that sort of thing, as well drawing and painting, and he said, "Oh, yeah. I can see the future. Wow, that's going to be the next hot thing, embroidery." You know, this is the macho bullshit—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, yes.

ART GREEN: —and meantime, we're supposed to think that putting tar on a lead plate with a word in it is somehow superior to [laughs], I mean, it's nuts—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's free. It's very territorial. The things that you're defending have to be the in thing and everything else is like—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and nowadays craft of what used to be craft has been blended in.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And we talked about that. It's not nearly the dirty word that it was when you were in Nova Scotia or whatever.

ART GREEN: Yeah and so she had this book, which I really liked and she also had—her mother was a great collector and she gave us a few oriental rugs with—the kind with interesting, well, you know, patterns and borders.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

ART GREEN: And then the sort of religious aspect of some of them and the sort of feeling of meaning that they encompassed even in just their abstract elements. And I think that was really our big influence and, you know, I probably have often said at her 40th anniversary, I said, if it hadn't been for Natalie, I'd be living in a little jar on top of somebody's mantel.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, have you influenced her work? Has there been interaction? Did she take and sort of—did she see some of the same sources that you do?

ART GREEN: Well, she did some really big scale paintings for a while.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

ART GREEN: And I think maybe in the scale of the work, I don't see any direct influence in the subject matter and, you know, she's been interested now in doing drawings that are made up of rubbings that highly textured that she works into without maybe just a silhouette as a beginning, but that gradually changed as she works on them. So, it's like looking at something and seeing it change over time, but you're making it change, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that layering in the silhouette is not that far off from your work either, but on the other hand—

ART GREEN: Well, that'd be a stretch, but yeah—

LANNY SILVERMAN: —but I'm wondering, yeah.

ART GREEN: I'll be happy to—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] No, it's—

ART GREEN: But I don't—maybe.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The reason why I say that is I, you know, it's tough to have two artists in a family. It's tough because you're in the same arena and it's like, do you cooperate, do you collaborate? Do you—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I mean, our example is like Leon Golub and Nancy Spero, there are people that were very successful—

ART GREEN: Sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and had their own voice, but it's—

ART GREEN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: —tough to find—and there are people that collaborate. I mean, there's people that do things together, but it's not easy. That's kind of why—kind of why I was asking. It's just like—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —how do you artistically, you know—

ART GREEN: Well, you know, we have actually collaborated on works for gallery auctions and that sort of thing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, of course.

ART GREEN: But mostly, I value her, you know, I have her come to the studio and give me her unvarnished thoughts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: And you know it's wonderful to see works from somebody else's eyes.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Also, someone you can trust. Because—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —some of the art colleagues or friends aren't necessarily going to tell you the real truth.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what I tell my wife.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's like you want the real story here. I have no vested interest one way or the other. I'll look at it. I—I'll certainly am a little biased, but it's still—it's great to have that point of view, of course.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Let's get back to the technique thing. So, we covered a little bit of the textile thing. We talked about—you also did wood grain as a sort of—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —there we talked about flattening out things in reality and the trompe l'oeil and all those things. Between wood grain, flames and that craquelure, there's a certain commonality in terms of pattern and decoration, but something that's very fluid becoming very static.

ART GREEN: Uh-huh [Affirmative.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: The craquelure—you mentioned somewhere an artist that may be at the Artist Institute that influenced these.

ART GREEN: Bill Schwedler—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: —who died back in '82 or whatever. He was a big influence. He was a roommate of Bill Grams and I for six months or so. We were in the storefront on Orchard Street for \$70, a four room apartment behind it. And he was incredibly active and imaginative guy and he was—he would do his paintings fully dressed up. He dressed very well—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

ART GREEN: —painting and drawing, you know, as if he's sort of—you know, you could think he was a dilettante seeing how he was, you know, sipping a bourbon and doing—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: —he was so completely free and experimental and, you know, it'd start with some little thing and had to put a little Coltrane on and have a little bourbon and do a little more and I was sitting there, you know, with my, you know—and he really was inspiring in that way. And he used his own version of wood grain, which I think looked more like fingerprints to be honest.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

ART GREEN: And he also and I had forgotten about it, by the time I started thinking about this craquelure, which occurs on certain kinds of—some firing method, creates that crack. And by then I was really interested in order and disorder—

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's a whole thing about the order—there's a—I've forgotten the name for it. That

wonderful book, about Chaos, by James Gleick, that it talks about the patterns in nature. The natural—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —what looks like disorder is actually fractals—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —yeah, there's those things where things occur in patterns. That's part of what happens in craquelure. So, you were already fascinated by that.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I got interested in that at Waterloo and a book by Mandelbrot.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yes, of course, that came before—even way before—

ART GREEN: —that was kind of a crazy book. Yeah. But I really loved that because you could figure out a kind of way of doing it where it was free, but yet it fit within a certain pattern that had relation to other things. You know, you can roll along. You didn't have to plot it all out. You just, you know, you get that in your head. You get the algorithm in your head and you just make it. And—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's kind of the beauty of nature, what looks like disorder is hard to—sometimes it awing because you look at and you'd say, "Well, that's a perfect composition." That's kind of like the craquelure stuff.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The fact that it seems—there's something going on here and that intrigues your mind and that's that Mandelbrot and that James Gleick—what they're talking about.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There is something. And there is a way to talk about it, but you don't—you just sense that, but that's what's so wonderful about that.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah, but Bill Schwedler, in his later work used that. He—when he died, no one—no one I know, knows what happened to all his work. He had had shows—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's sad.

ART GREEN: —he was in Andrew Crispo Gallery, but he had shows in Philadelphia, New York and he was—seemed to be a rising star and died very young. And I owe a lot to this example, I think.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So, that's an important influence.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I had some other areas I wanted to go back over that I think we sort of missed. Let's see what some of these things are. Let's see. In terms of—oh, I know what I wanted to ask you that maybe in terms of influences. I know you have a—we talked about Canadian influence. Have you done much traveling apart from—well, you've done—even European or other things—we talked about people going off on the fellowship to Mexico. Have you done any traveling?

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And has that influenced your work?

ART GREEN: Well, we—the first time I went to England—I had a sabbatical in 1983-84—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: —and we had two young kids and we went—we lived in Cambridge for a year. Rented a house and probably would have had more of an artistic community if we had moved to Oxford rather than Cambridge, but it was very interesting and as I said, I had felt a certain affinity for British artists who had often been accused of being too literary or, you know, whatever. Victor—was his name Victor Nussbaum—Victor— ?

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm not sure if I knew that artist.

ART GREEN: My mind—my synapse is no longer working, so well—I always liked Kitaj's work.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, Kitaj, yeah.

ART GREEN: Now, he's from Cleveland.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course.

ART GREEN: But he lived in England for a long time.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He may have—and actually, I think he may have—was he at the School of the Art Institute, which actually—

ART GREEN: Oh, really?

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'm not sure. He was—you say he was in Cleveland. I'm trying to think. Somehow I have some vague sense of that. The piece on the wall there is a student who's actually Canadian—French-Canadian, Jack Chevalier.

ART GREEN: Oh, wow.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He went to the Art Institute. I had friends there I mentioned earlier during the interview, so I know—I know the Art Institute, but that—

ART GREEN: Are you talking about the Cleveland Art Institute?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, yeah, Cleveland Art Institute. There's some very interesting people that came out of there, anyways. Well, it's—

ART GREEN: No, I—back in art school, when I saw Kitaj's work, I really, really admired it. I liked it because of his inclusion at times of people in the news. You know, which I was interested in.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and texts.

ART GREEN: And texts.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: And I can't say I learned anymore about Kitaj from living in England that I would have anywhere else, but I was also, as I said, a big fan of some of Stanley Spencer's work and it was, you know, it's interesting to live in the U.S., live in Canada and then move to England and you see how much—how differently three different English-speaking countries—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, very.

ART GREEN: —have interpreted source—whatever they sprang from. And it'd be interesting to go to Australia—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that would be—yeah, I've been there briefly, but not long enough to get a feel for it. But what's interesting is—that's one of the things about travel, is cultural perspective and also, seeing within the same English-speaking language, yeah, it's very different in very different sensibilities. You've been—you haven't been in the Francophone part of Canada, that's very different too.

ART GREEN: Well, we actually—when we left Vancouver, we left at an awkward time, but we—my father had died and you know, in—you feel a bit detached from the world in Vancouver, which is nice and—but I missed extreme weather, as it turned out. I remember one morning I woke up after a little storm and there on the second page of the *Vancouver Province* was an article, headline, "Lightning Strikes City." And it said, "Last night, the weather office reported several strong bolts of lightning struck the city. No property damage or injury was reported."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, it is surprisingly temperate.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I didn't realize when I went up there how it's a temporary rain forest. I didn't know that.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there's people leading outside, like, when it's hard to find sweaters in the stores. They're sort of ignoring that it's pretty cool, but it's a very even temperature—



ART GREEN: They even ignored the rain, you know—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I guess.

ART GREEN: And I realized I grew up making deals with God, "Please don't strike me with lightning. I'll never do that again. I'll be a good boy." You know and I think it's part of my—you feel adrift in a way and I wanted to be close to my family and I was in Phyllis' gallery and I couldn't go to the opening. She didn't have any money to, you know, it was too expensive to get there, so we decided to move to Montreal because we wanted to buy a house. And houses were very cheap in Montreal. You could buy a house for \$13,000, you know. And in Vancouver—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I thought about retiring in Vancouver, although the prices of the Chinese have bought it up now.

ART GREEN: Oh, my God. It's totally—

LANNY SILVERMAN: There' was a while I had a friend who had moved up there. We were just thinking about it. And another friend that was thinking about it—unfortunately, you have to get in at the right time. Eventually, it just—

ART GREEN: Yeah, we were living in a slum and I used to bring friends from other cities out in front of our house and said, "What do you think this house is worth?" They'd say, 10, 15—\$40,000. [Laughs.] And now it's worth about \$2 million, I'm sure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, God. Forget it.

ART GREEN: Anyway, so we drove a truck full all of our goods all the way to Montreal and checked into a motel next to Monsieur Muffler overlooking the railroad yards, \$50 a week, and drove the truck around trying to find a suitable Franco-English neighborhood. Well, it didn't exist, and the [inaudible] the Parti Quebecois was running—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh that's that time when—Yeah.

ART GREEN: —was just elected, and everybody was mad at everybody. They wouldn't even forward our mail. I'd come to the post office to get the general delivery, and they'd say, "Back of the line, Anglo." And it was just brutal, you know? Now, Montreal is much—

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's back to—Yeah, I was there fairly recently—

ART GREEN: It's fine now.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually I was expecting to try out more of my French. The first time I was up in Quebec, I had an embarrassing episode. It was worse than being in Paris, actually, which turned out to be reasonable.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: They were nice to me in Paris, whereas in Quebec, it was probably at the time you're talking about, when these battles were going on. But we recently, a couple of summers ago, we went to Montreal, and people, yeah, there's a lot of English spoken, and it's changed quite a bit.

ART GREEN: Yeah, it's much less—but anyway. So we sat—after two weeks of driving around, I was really going nuts, you know, what are we going to do? And I thought of—we thought, well, maybe we could go to Toronto, Natalie's sister was in Toronto. And I always thought Toronto was the dullest city in the world, which it was. I mean, there was a period—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I kind of liked Toronto.

ART GREEN: Yeah, but in the '50s—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, '50s. I'm thinking—

ART GREEN: —they would not allow you to have a beer without having something with it, you know. So you had to, like in a restaurant. And you couldn't get a beer on Sundays, they had helicopters looking around to see if people were drinking beer. I mean it was just—There's a book by Harry Rasky, a documentary filmmaker who grew up in Toronto. And it's called *Never On Sunday*. Bad title choice. But anyway, what it was about was, he was out as a kid, swinging on a swing, and this cop car came by. "Son, do you know what day this is?" He said, "Yes, Sunday." "No swinging on the swings on Sunday," he said, "somebody had forgotten to take the swing off

Saturday night."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, my God.

ART GREEN: And Toronto made Boston look like gay Paree.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, there's still communities like that in the Shore. We had a cousin's reunion in Ocean City, I think it was. Wherever it was, they had to rent out, they wouldn't allow—It's dry on Sundays. We had to rent out a place to be able to serve drinks. I was thinking, "Where does this exist, what sort of community?" I mean, there are places, I'm sure there are religiously motivated, fundamentalist communities that still do that. But basically, it was a time warp. The '60s or probably the '50s for, you know—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —in this country.

ART GREEN: And Toronto now is just fantastic. But it turns out that even then, it had just fantastic little neighborhoods, and we lived in an Italian neighborhood there for a while. But I realized I was counting on having a sell-out show, as artists do—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course, that's the hope. [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: It's the only hope, basically. And buying lottery ticket's another good one. So, I was having a show at Phyllis's, and I'd gone down for the opening, and I waited around a few days afterward. And I noticed that—she was up on the third floor, on Spring Street, and there was a very slow elevator. And I was sitting in another room, and I kept hearing the elevator door open, then a squeaking sound, then the elevator door closing. And I looked out after a while to see what was going on, and people were, because of the slowness of the elevator, didn't want to get stuck with my show. So they'd jump out, look at it, and then spin on their heels and go back. And I thought, "This is not going to work out."

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is that audience thing again. Well, now we're going to now reverse course. Yesterday, when we were talking, your gallery was calling in with a sale—a lot of money, and your work has been reassessed at a huge rate. Do you feel embarrassed by that? That's that whole thing about being—

ART GREEN: It's humiliating.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —the art world. I mean it's the value of an—what's that Zen thing, what's the most valuable thing in the world? It's a dead cat, because you can place new value on it. Well, I mean—

ART GREEN: Yeah. By the way, I haven't heard any more. There's a complete silence on the other end.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I almost was thinking of going to that gallery. I decided I wasn't going to play that game, I stayed away from that, I didn't have time.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I, you know, I've seen a lot of pie-in-the-sky. And usually it ends up on your face.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, when there's interest, in quotes interest, this means that they—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —might be showing off, they might be, who knows what's going on? They might just be talking the talk, until the money's in the bank.

ART GREEN: Yeah, so, no, I mean, I—

LANNY SILVERMAN: You just look at it dispassionately, like, you know?

ART GREEN: It's kind of embarrassing, because I still think, you know, if I had put my paintings in a neutral space, say my front porch—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: —and said, "For Sale," after six months or so, I might sell a big one for \$200 to somebody, as a conversation piece for the rec room, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well—

ART GREEN: And I'd probably say, "Well, that's—They got their money's worth."

LANNY SILVERMAN: It might change your work. My friend Chuck with that piece in the other room, that self-portrait, he only makes money from art, and he barely survives. He lives on the edge, really, truly on the edge. And it changed his work. He started doing more landscape things, safer things. His work was—speaking of sexual, it was very sexual, very political, and that's the best work. But it isn't, it's not your saleable work. So be thankful that you're not selling off your porch. I've seen Chuck have house sales, and I looked at the work, and I was embarrassed to tell him, "You know, this—" He I think must know that, he's clearly—And there's another artist, when I first looked at his slides, they were about ten different personalities, every possible different style. Actually, in the bedroom, in the back bedroom, there's a Surrealist painting that's totally different, abstract, that has some more color palette, but otherwise totally—He had all these different styles, but he could paint anything you wanted, any way you wanted.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But if you're doing it for money, you end doing something, I think, that gets compromised.

ART GREEN: It's very embarrassing. I mean, I come from, you know, my folks, and, you know, the value of things and so on. And I hate it when you're given something—a place to auction off. I always like to start the bid at \$75, so that people get embroiled, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sure. Yeah, it's important to—

ART GREEN: And I don't—I like it, you know, I do these little things, you know, maybe like that. And somebody gets it for \$500, I mean, that's great. And that feels like, "Well, that's a lot of money for what I did."

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's more value for it. And, well, there's something for—

ART GREEN: I don't like to tell people what my work sells for, because I think—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I thought that I could sense that, when you—

ART GREEN: And it doesn't really sell for that, by the time, you know, you end up at the gallery, and then the expenses, and then how many paintings that I, you know. Over the years, I've sold a lot of paintings, but at a show I might sell a couple, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well—

ART GREEN: And so it's all—that whole end of it, I prefer to leave to somebody else. But then, you've got to be involved in it, otherwise you—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, we just came from the Art Fair, and that's actually where you see—

ART GREEN: Oh, my God.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —the high-end. And that's sort of like, that's one of the reasons why I race through it. It's kind of scary just to see that luxe, and sort of precious end of the, you know, the people with—It was fun to look at the clothes, and the fashions, and some of the—Some of the pretense from the outside is kind of fascinating, but I've always had a mixed feeling about the art world in that regard. The sort of, in our culture it has a lot to do with the upper class.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess it used to have to do with ruling classes. So it always was, you know, art when people were doing it to commission. We talked about changing work. Yeah, look at Goya or people that got in trouble because, you know, they were doing work that was, it wasn't flattering to the commissioner—

ART GREEN: Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and that's sort of a whole—it's an interesting issue, though, commerce in art. And you see it so much at the Art Fair. And then you see, in terms of schtick, there's some things—Oh, did you see the sackcloth clothes, and puppets?

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It's funny you were saying that. I thought of you when I saw that. But you see a whole bunch of schtick. You see things that people—there's every year, there's the person who does those 3-D, 2-D things, which you've used.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Those trompe l'oeil things where when you walk through it, it changes perspective. It's a nice game, but it really is just a game. And I guess it always gets attention, and probably it's a winner in terms of crowd support. Again, we're talking about the masses, people like that stuff. But when you see that aspect of the art world, it's kind of frightening, and sort of appalling at the same time. I guess you and I are in similar regard.

Art Green: Yeah, yeah. I—There was something I was going to say, but I—something on that line.

LANNY SILVERMAN: About money and art?

ART GREEN: Yeah, but I—I mean now, you know, I mean, that auction, you know, I went on the auction site for, was it Christie's or Sotheby's? The one where they—Was it a billion-dollar auction? I mean, [inaudible] just complete insanity.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well—

ART GREEN: And then there's that thing where it's supposed to track, like, advise you what to buy?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: You know that, where it says, "Buy at \$10,000?" And I looked over there, I mean, I never heard of hardly any of these people to begin with. But then, there was a guy back in January, he said "Buy at 10,000, and then you hold it, and then dump it." You know—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, a lot of people are doing—

ART GREEN: —it's like pump and dump.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And the other thing that's really ugly about the art market, you know, there was a bust in that in terms of the Japanese economy, a lot of it is for money laundering. Since the value of art is so hard to determine, real value in the art world—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. Right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and it changes, that there are ways to hide your money. And that was what was going on with the Japanese buying a lot of, I don't know, it's very scary, that stuff. And actually, if you're in for the love of it, you've got to, you know, wonder about some of these games that go on. I don't know.

Let's go back to something else in terms of a subject that we were talking about, your vocabulary. You alluded to lightning strikes and feeling fortunate, disasters. What—is there a personal sort of relationship to—You know, I think you've mentioned, though, that the six times—Oh, that's right, the six times—

ART GREEN: [Laughs.] [inaudible]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that was coming back to me. You actually mentioned this in your little summary of your life, that you had actually avoided scary and death-like incidents many times.

ART GREEN: Well, I've walked into them. You know, I almost got hit by the top of a crane when it fell. It landed about 18 inches from me, because I was standing in the path of the thing when the cable broke.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: We almost crashed in a plane into a cargo ship when flying in the Eastern Airlines shuttle into Boston one time. And they carried the pilot off in handcuffs afterwards. So my wife—I call myself a catastrophist.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's an interesting one.

ART GREEN: Because I'm always—And my wife thinks of me as a pessimist, because I'm always looking on the dark side. "Oh, no, well, you know, we're going to lose our luggage," or this or that's going to happen. "We're going to lose our shirts." But I'm an optimist, really. But I'm superstitious. I believe, if you think everything's going to work out—because Natalie's more of a, "Oh, great, it's going to be wonderful," and I'm always saying, "Well—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: We're reversed. [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: "—let's calm down here a bit, you know. This could go sideways." "Oh, come on."

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's good to have that balance.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I wonder what happens if you have two sort of worriers or pessimists together, or two optimists.

ART GREEN: I think, you know, it probably goes, like, you know, I was what you call introverted. My dad was worried about me, I could tell, you know. "Shy, he's shy."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did you have to be chased outside, like me? I mean, I had to be sort of forced into socialization.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And my dad, who was a bit of an introvert himself, but pretended to be an extrovert, worried about me being an introvert.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course.

Art Green: And I think, you know, in evolution, if we all rushed to the front of the cave when we saw that interesting hairy fellow come up, we'd probably all be dead.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] We wouldn't be here today.

ART GREEN: You've got to have a few people that say, "Wait a minute, let's wait and see what happens," you know? And we need fat people, because they'll survive during the drought.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I guess so.

ART GREEN: And we need the skinny people to, say, run away from the tiger. You know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So there's a certain balance.

ART GREEN: So I—But I do feel, and I mentioned going to the steam engine building place with my dad, you know. And it was terrifying, you know? I thought, "This is—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: So this is like a love-hate response to—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I love this stuff—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or sort of ambivalence. It's sort of like—Yeah, some people are accident chasers, too. My family has some people in that, that used to—I never was into that, you know, go running after fires, or just—

ART GREEN: Yeah, oh boy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —or the perverse or the freakish. There's something, there's this love-hate thing that goes on, it's true in our culture in general. As a matter of fact, if you look at our news—American news, that is, I don't know about Canadian—

ART GREEN: Oh, yeah, it's the same.

LANNY SILVERMAN: The first five stories are almost all fires, and droughts, and disasters. And you wonder, "Okay, what happened to East Timor? What happened to all the parts of Africa that are not reporting?" There's so much stuff going on—

ART GREEN: Yeah. How are those people doing?

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and people must have a fascination with—I don't think you're alone. I think our culture, or maybe it's humans, have a fascination with disasters. How did you—I mean, you must have been aware of, like, Andy Warhol's disasters. He did a whole series—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I really liked his car crash things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, and electrocutions, and a whole bunch of other things. So—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I was attracted to those. Not that I want to see anyone electrocuted or see anyone in a car crash. But there was something that broke the mold of the corporate, you know, he'd done the soup cans and the Brillo boxes, I think, by then. Or was that before?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, I think that was after the soup can. I think. But that's my guess.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I think it was. Because he was well-known. And then those seemed like, you know, everything else that he'd done was, you know, the factory, where it's almost like he's part of the corporate culture, in a funny way. And then to have this human tragedy.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But there's a certain deadpan, that's very much his style.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and then it was just reproduced over and over, like [inaudible], yeah

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's that same ambivalence, even though it's something really shocking and disgusting or possibly scary. It's got a really—it doesn't have the irony of the, I think, people that followed.

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But it definitely has a deadpan quality, that's very—How did you, when you took disasters into your work, how did you hope for the response to be? It wasn't that deadpan, and it wasn't quite as shocking. But there is that formal attraction, like with some of the—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —iconic things, of tornadoes or things like that.

ART GREEN: Well, I, you know, include little postcards of—And I've done paintings of, people don't know it, but there's one sort of round one, of all these sort of postcards of disasters that I thought of. Cities burning, or rockets coming in—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, I remember seeing that, yeah.

ART GREEN: —and stuff like that. And people having a fight, or, you know, some woman trying to pull away from a man, that's just sort of balanced by a man holding up an idealized woman on his shoulder, you know, like a circus act. By having his silhouette, it's sort of like a more—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Distancing?

ART GREEN: More distant. And I think I have this distance, and, you know, the flame's not going to burn anybody. And you can't [inaudible]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So there's a certain similarity to what we're talking about with Warhol?

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's a certain formal attraction that distances, and there's that contradiction, which I think is a large part of your work, the sort of opposites. At the same time there's a tragedy, but it's kind of beautiful, you know. Fires are dangerous, but, yeah, it's like you want—like a little kid, it's very appealing.

ART GREEN: Yeah, it has an appeal. I mean, people sit and look at the fireplace, and think "How lovely," you know? And it is. It warms you, but it can destroy you. But the tension in my work, I always want my—I don't always, but lately—I wanted my work to look as though it's under enormous pressure, and possibly about to fly apart. You know, held together by ropes that are under pressure.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You want that tension. Not just the meaning. We talked about the meaning of tension, about trying to figure out the puzzle, but even formally, just like with the tesseract and things like that.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's a certain kind of—it's not—it's holding together, and yet you're not quite sure what it is, or what you're looking at. There's certain—That's a big part of your work, that sort of tension.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And what do you think—that's a very big part of your work. I think that runs—that might be a theme that runs through all your work.

ART GREEN: I'm a tense person, I think, you know. I try to—[laughs.] I don't know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's like me. Inside I'm very calm and whatever, but I'm very frenetic on the outside. You can be two things at once.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's kind of what your work is. It's about the balancing of opposites.

ART GREEN: I think it's good to be two things at once, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Definitely. It's very boring to probably—

ART GREEN: As long as you have them in balance.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. So that—

ART GREEN: Three or four things [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So that tension between opposites, and that sort of holding together versus flying apart, that seems to have always been a part of your work. Just about always.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What do you think that came out of? It might be tough to come to, because that's probably like the sub-theme or the sub-text of all your work. Forget about all the external content. That might be the way it sort of adheres.

ART GREEN: Yeah. You know, I'm one of those people that often thinks, "There must have been some mistake made."

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: [Laughs.] You know? They let me in here.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What? Why are we here, for that matter?

ART GREEN: They're going to find me out, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: What are we doing here? What's this about? What's this? What is going on?

ART GREEN: And I mean, you know, I get along fine and so on. But I think—My dad was, he was a very interesting fellow. He was, you know, very accomplished, but a self-made man who had an enormous—had a lot of insecurities, as many self-made people do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know, I have similar themes in my family.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: My dad sort of—I mean, he didn't have—He couldn't take the art scholarship because of the Depression, and he actually loved art and stuff. So he ended up doing it on his own, and doing things in a more commercial way. But there's a certain insecurity when you haven't gone to school, done things. That's that whole thing, where you're talking about the gatekeepers, and about—it's the power thing. That you're not—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —you're not, you've not been approved. You're not the approved version, you're the sort of —

ART GREEN: Yeah. Which is, you know, in a way, is an American kind of thing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course. That's one of the things we're proudest of.

ART GREEN: In other countries, people knew their place, you know, and they said, "Well—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: And had to do it by the rules.

ART GREEN: —yeah, this just not done," you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Whereas we broke the rules, supposedly.

ART GREEN: And my dad, you know, was—he became a professional engineer, a city engineer in Fort Wayne.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's a tough thing to be self-taught at. It's one thing to be a self-taught artist, but—

ART GREEN: He had these little books from the International Correspondence School, but he had no degree.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's amazing.

ART GREEN: And he studied those when he was younger, and passed the, I remember he was quite nervous about it, passed the big professional engineering test—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So he got the approval, but the other way around?

ART GREEN: —and, you know, but he always, I think, had some—He wanted to get a Cadillac, I remember.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That was his idea of success.

ART GREEN: And we got the Cadillac, it was like, you know, "Well, we went to this place, they saw the car, they saw the Cadillac, they stopped the traffic and drove us right through," you know. [Laughs.] Dad? Come on.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well—

ART GREEN: But anyway, I'm sure that there's some. And he could be a little bit sarcastic, joking around, you know. Like I was a 78-pound weakling when I was in sixth grade, and he said, he'd been having a beer with a friend, he said, "Well, there's my son. He can beat up anybody in his class." And at the time, I thought, "Dad, you're just mistaken." And I didn't realize it was a sarcastic comment, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Takes a certain kind of sense of humor.

ART GREEN: You know, it's sort of, you know, that kind of thing. And so I think that kind of tension between what you should be and what you are, or the ideal and the, you know, that seems to go through my work in some way or another.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you grew up with that, that's part of your personality, you're saying. And that's what seems to be coming out.

You know, I also was talking a little bit about your visual vocabulary. We alluded to some of them, and we followed up with a couple more today. I guess I'm not sure if you answered, maybe you did, we might have gone in some circles. But where your ideas come from, or—When you sit in front of the canvas, you sometime take some things from the past, past paintings, and not rework them, but redo some of the same ideas, adding to them, layering them—

ART GREEN: Reusing them [laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: But where do you get your ideas from? We talked a little bit about, like, the craquelure, and the blocks, a little bit, you talked about. Sometimes it's something just in the world, or—

ART GREEN: Yeah, it's sometimes things that happen in paintings, that I wasn't expecting. For example, there was a pattern when we were staying at the Leo House, in New York—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I know the Leo House, sure.

ART GREEN: Where we had to show, they wanted us to show the marriage license before we could get a room. But anyway, on the floor—

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It's Catholic, yeah.

ART GREEN: On the floor of the Leo House, they had this kind of tile pattern that you could look at it as a square tile with a diagonal tile inside, or as a big diagonal tile with a square tile inside. And then, if you were really involved in the bathroom for a long time, you could start to see them as flying postcards. And so I put that in a painting, you know? It was something that, you know, I started paying attention to. And with these blocks I did, about my daughter, I did some blocks that had bands going around. So each side would show four of these bands that went around the whole set of blocks. So I thought, "I'll put the adjacent sides of the blocks next to each adjacent side." And there was a painting shaped like a man, that I did that on. And my idea was, on the foot of the man, which came out like a little shelf with the blocks, you could hold up the block—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The extra block, yeah.

ART GREEN: —and turn it to any angle, and you could find it in there. All the sides were visible once. This came out of the hypercube idea, of seeing both sides of something at one time. And so I laid that out with the bands. Well, much to my amazement—it was like I wanted to run out in the street and yell "Eureka!"—all those bands,



when they were all laid out flat on adjacent sides, like wallpaper, they interlocked with each other to form these interlocking circles. Well, it should have been obvious to me, because they were interlocking circles. But I hadn't thought of that. And I started using that as a motif in the painting to hold things together again, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: So even when you started out with a particular motif or an idea, it changes, it morphs as you figure some things that happen as you go along.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you ever improvise? I wonder that, too. Since I sort of have some idea where you get these things from the outside perceptual and other things you see, or here.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you ever—

ART GREEN: Do I ever, like, draw my own postcards?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Or, yeah, or just start with a blank canvas, and just see where it will go, see where you're going, you know?

ART GREEN: Right now, I don't start with a canvas. I usually have been doing so-called shaped canvases.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Right.

ART GREEN: So I have to figure out what the shape of the thing is before I start. I have started with shaped-canvases where I didn't know what I was going to put in it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, okay, that's interesting.

ART GREEN: You know, it was a canvas that was rectangular like a bunch of postcards held together. And I just sort of started at one corner and, you know, filled it in as I went along. But I filled it in with things that were part of my vocabulary to begin with, but I layered them in different ways.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it wasn't all new to you, but you did start—because you, like me, have a high need for structure, I gather. I mean, I showed you a little of what I do or had done like like, 40 years ago.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That structural need, that's why I wondered about improvisation. I probably have seen that from Bill Conger and some of the other artists that are very highly structured.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But they almost always—I don't think Bill improvises either. I think his sense of improvisations is like yours. He doesn't necessarily know what colors or—He starts out with a very clear structure.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: He's got the underpinnings, the bridge. He's got it built, he's got the engineering.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yep.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But then some of the colors and relationships change.

ART GREEN: Yeah. Yeah—I forgot what I was going to say.

LANNY SILVERMAN: In terms of just improvising. You say you filled in, you started out with a shaped canvas and worked your way around. But they were—a part of your vocabulary is what filled it in. It wasn't something brand new that occurred.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. In that case. But I guess I did add a couple of, kind of, improvised things. But mostly—Yeah, most are things that I've seen, or found, but I try to—After a while, they have no—like the tire, you know. There was interest in this tire with all the colors cascading. Well, I started flattening it out, and then I would just use it as patterns. And I can't count the number of times, you have a slide talk or something, somebody will come up and say, "You know, all those stairs that run up and down in your paintings, what are those about? You know, the stairs with color?" And I say, "Well that's a tire." "A tire?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yeah. Again, the audience isn't necessarily—I mean, you may have a very clear notion of what it is.

ART GREEN: So I, you know. And one of the things I realized is, after I'm done painting it, I can't tell what it looks like anymore, because I know it too well. And I go through this sort trajectory and doing work off it. I start off with a little idea, I start to think it's pretty good, and then as the show approaches—and particularly when it's sitting on the floor, in the gallery before it's hung—I start to think, "This is really a bad painting."

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: "This is probably the worst painting I've ever done, maybe the worst painting anyone's ever done."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, God.

ART GREEN: So that leads to me not publicizing the show, you know. "Oh, you had a show? Why didn't you tell me?" "Oh well, you know..."

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think that's troubled a lot of artists. And I think it's really tough, because you're out there, on the line, and you're vulnerable. And yeah, in terms of assessment, we talked about this in terms of success, there's a fine line of what's in, or what's good or bad. These are all very relative terms. And even when it's well painted, I mean. It's very subjective. And actually, I mean, you can have arguments about what a good painting is, or what—

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You said you really learned a lot more painting. Well, there's probably some people that would like the flatter, you know. Maybe it isn't as skilled in color-mixing, but somebody might prefer the earlier things. Who knows?

ART GREEN: Yeah. The more honest, or whatever you want to call it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, there's that beat thing, you know. First thought, best thought. So maybe everything else is the refinement. It might be getting away from the pure—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I can say the native, sort of, ideas, or feelings, or whatever.

ART GREEN: I have people talk about my surface, you know. And I don't really think about it. It started off as an impulse to save paint, you know? [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] The thin paint?

ART GREEN: Put it on so it, you know, lasts a long time, and make it consistent. But I had someone talk about it, "I just love your surface." And, you know, "What about the imagery?" "Well, you know, it's all right, but oh, your surfaces, how do you get that surface?" "Oh, I just put the paint on like a house-painter might, who is not interested in using much paint."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Got you. Oh, man. And actually I was just reading something about editing. There's an article in the *New Yorker* about editing. And I can't remember who it was—Oh, I think he was—I think Eisenhower was a painter, I don't know if you knew this.

ART GREEN: Oh, I remember, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And there's, if you get the *New Yorker*—

ART GREEN: It was a sign of culture, to be a painter.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually, you know—Yeah, well, this other interesting people—

ART GREEN: And George W. Bush is a painter. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, that too. That's bizarre, and that's—his paintings are actually kind of bizarre and interesting.

ART GREEN: I kind of like them. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yeah, I agree. Well, apparently Ike painted, and I guess someone was picking on a

painting. This was an article about editing, about what you leave out, which I found fascinating. It's worth looking at. And this might amuse you, too, in terms of painting technique: He was doing still life, I guess, and he—there was a still life he was working on, and he'd left out the grapes that were in the actual, you know, setup that he had in his studio. And the person who was there said, "Well, why did you leave out the grapes?" And he said, "Well, grapes are awfully hard to paint. [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: So sometimes things that are compositional, things that you write off as surfaces, to you it's about saving paint and just getting it done with.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That person: "Oh, that's just wonderful!" Well, someone will say, "That's wonderful that you left out the grapes, that's a compositional sense of genius! It makes it so much better." Well, not I can't paint grapes. [Laughs.] So you can over-read into things.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I've left fuzzy things out of my paintings.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Fuzzy is hard? I didn't know that.

ART GREEN: Fuzzy is hard, oh my God. You know, when I taught drawing or painting, I'd ask people, "Bring in some things that really are meaningful to you." And back when I went to school, people would bring in things that seemed to be meaningful, like a photograph of their dad, their dog, or their grandpa, or where they grew up, or something that someone gave them just before they died. Now students bring in plastic muscle guy models, or Barbie's, or fuzzy little teddy bears. And I said, "Well first of all, you know, you couldn't have picked a harder thing to paint than a fuzzy teddy bear." Really.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] They'll learn.

ART GREEN: "This is going to be a challenge to you, you know. Make this—is there any thing about this teddy bear that perhaps you could emphasize?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, well—

ART GREEN: And they'd look at me puzzled.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I guess—

ART GREEN: "I love my teddy bear." [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Younger generation.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Let's see, I'm thinking what else, I'm looking for some other things that we probably didn't go over that I wanted to. Let me see what else I have here. Or are there some things you wanted to talk about, in terms of your—

ART GREEN: Oh, I just thought of some other oppositional things.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, oppositional? Because those are the sort of—

ART GREEN: Like the tornado, is the result of resolution of opposites, between hot and cold air.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, of course.

ART GREEN: And the bridge, the sort of bridge, the Bayonne Bridge, or the Sidney Harper Bridge. Those arches will support the structure because of elements that are under tension, and elements that are under compression. If it was all under compression, the whole thing would fall down. So—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So it's a balancing act?

ART GREEN: It's held up by its opposition. And I like that idea. And I guess I feel that in myself. And maybe—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's what you're talking about in terms of the—

ART GREEN:

—it creates a certain temperature that—And in my paintings, I like that.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So that thing is, you know, sort of like a compositional, sort of, overwriting, sort of, I don't know. Not theme, but overwriting sort of process. You've got some sort of—How would you distinguish yourself? We talked about how different—You seem very different from the rest of the Imagists, in terms of, maybe not in terms of the camaraderie or the things that you're interested in.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But in terms of your work, how would you distinguish your work from—

ART GREEN: I think the structural element of it—

LANNY SILVERMAN: The engineering of the painting?

ART GREEN: The engineering of the painting, yeah. I mentioned about feeling that things had to have some support. You can't just hang—

LANNY SILVERMAN: No floating image?

ART GREEN: —the refrigerator on the wall. It has to have something holding it up.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: It's not going to work. And the same thing on a picture plane. You've got to have the gravity. There's a top and a bottom, and things have to be held in place. And I—The photograph, the famous photograph on the cover of the *Hairy Who?* book that Dan Nadel put together, showing us jumping up in the air, I think is evidence of my difference from the rest of the group. Because Jim is in a paroxysm, looks like he's having perhaps a stroke, and Gladys, likewise, and Suellen. And I'm—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Grounded?

ART GREEN: As if I'm standing in mid-air, you know, with arms to the side.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You want to be grounded. You want—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I want to make sure my feet hit the ground at the same time, you know. And part of that is—

LANNY SILVERMAN: I think that's because internally, there's all this stuff flying around, that's that sort of contradiction.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But you want to stay grounded. That's all that—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I'm—So I think I was—I mean, I really love what, you know, I loved their work. And it was a big influence on me. But for a while, I would start to think, that's one of the reasons I felt I had to get away from it. Because I thought, "Well, is this going to fit in the *Hairy Who?*" you know, and "What is the *Hairy Who?*" you know, and that sort of thing.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sometimes who you're surrounded with can really change artistic development. I know this very personally. I didn't make art very early, even though I wrote a lot. But I didn't do as much art. Part of that had to do with the politics. This is the '60s, the times that you talked about. And the woman I was with, this didn't seem, it seemed something somehow—oh, how to put it? Some of what we were talking about earlier, there's something sort of weird to making art—

ART GREEN: In this time?

LANNY SILVERMAN: In that time. And there's something—It's about the upper classes, there's something sort of —

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And I was under the influence of that person, and I didn't make very much art in that period of time. And then, you know, later on, I did, and it had more to do with—sometimes your surroundings can affect you. So I think getting away made it possible for you to see, maybe to distinguish yourself further from that group.

ART GREEN: Yeah, I think I became—Well, I—The thing about being in the Hairy Who, it provided the single most important, for my mind, a deadline. You know, because I am a procrastinator—

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's true of a lot of artists with shows. A lot of people do it at the last minute.

ART GREEN: Yeah, and I knew there was going to be another show. Or at least I think we pretty well knew after that first one that there might be another one then. And ambition, you know. Although it was—They were serious about what they were doing, you know. It may have been jokey, or whatever, but—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, things were pretty locked up even back then. Because I've talked to artists that dealt with the fact that the Chicago show—I mean, Chicago artists had a hard time.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I talked to Evelyn, and there was momentum. There were people that were in contrast to the Chicago show. They tried to do something, and this is what Don Baum and Dennis Adrian did, is they found, you know, a way to give momentum and pardon the pun for that show. But they found a way to give a certain kind of energy, and basically they showcased Chicago artists in a way that hadn't happened before.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And it was very difficult to be an artist before then. The Monster Roster didn't—I mean, and the Chicago shows were very—I talked about gatekeepers—they were very limited, and there were a lot of other people on the fringes that were just as good, and you wonder, "Why them?" or "Why not them?"

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And so you were of a—You got validity, in a sense, or a certain kind of exhibition space, in a certain kind of—

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. The "Gee, this is—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: "This is real, this is art."

ART GREEN: "People are taking this seriously, I'd better shape up."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Did your father live to see your successes? Your work getting success? [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: Yeah, he—They came to, I was in a three-person show with Jordan Davies and Ray Siemenowski, at the Allen Frumkin Gallery. At the same time, Schwedler and Cynthia [Carlson] and William Wiley, were in the show at the New York Gallery. And at some point they said, "Well, do you want to be in the New York show?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, right.

ART GREEN: And like a fool, oh well, the shipping, I don't know. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, were they paying for shipping? Were they doing a catalogue?

ART GREEN: But nobody in the New York show wanted to be in the Chicago show, so it was a moot point anyway. But—And for a while after the show, because Frumkin didn't have a big storage space, for want of a place to put it, they put the big painting with the ice cream cone in their window, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: Overlooking Michigan Avenue. And that was a thrill, to ride by on the bus and see this crazy painting—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah, that's great.

ART GREEN: —in their window. And I thought, "Wow, this is—" I think I sold maybe one painting out of the whole show. But my folks came to that show. But even in the early days of the Hairy Who? my dad, who was a great believer—he used to read Horatio Alger books when he was a kid, about a young boy with pluck, and stick-to-it-tiveness, started out sweeping up and ended up making 10,000 a year, you know. They always ended somebody making \$10,000 a year.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's where you're talking about the American myth, working your way up.

ART GREEN: And they would call up and say, "Well, Art, you know, I know you've got your own ideas, but we see

a job here for a guy—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: So they still wanted the backup plan?

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. "And he's a handy boy, to clean up at this graphic design studio. You never know, you know? Someone might get sick, and—" "Gee, I have a degree from the Art Institute, I could maybe do this."

LANNY SILVERMAN: So even with the success, he still wanted the backup plan? I know what that's about, yeah.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah. It's sort of like, "You know, it's all right so far, but how are you ever get married and raise a family?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well, keep in mind that he grew up, like my dad, he grew up during the Depression—

ART GREEN: Depression. It's true.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —and that's really, I mean, that changes your whole idea of following your dream. That whole thing is a very empowered—that's from a different generation. That's that Boomer generation, that's my generation, you know, or after. They're even more empowered these days, the kids.

ART GREEN: Yeah. And we, you know, with my teaching, you know, I'm the "Follow the Dream" generation. And because it was possible, it was cheap, you didn't have the student loans, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: G.I. Bill. I talked to a couple of people that—yeah.

ART GREEN: And I talked to students about that, and they're so, "Well, if I get a B on this, it's going to be on my transcript, and they're not going to hire me," or "I can't get a job."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, the careerism these days is in a whole different order. And I guess that the pressure is even higher, in a way. It's like the Depression, almost.

ART GREEN: And the universities have—Excuse me. The universities have bought into it as a way of increasing their ranks and building buildings and raising their tuition, because this is going to lead to a job. And no way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: No, there's a lot of—I think someone should just point out the facts, for every artist—other than maybe teaching, for every artist that's really making a living out of art, there's thousands and thousands of them that are not. I mean the success stories, since this is a fame culture, you hear about the Damien Hirsts, and the Jeff Koonses, or Banksy, or whatever the latest trend or fad is. You hear about those, but how many graffiti artists? I did see that DZine, who's a famous graffiti artist in Chicago, had worked with—is it Tiffany's? He had some bejeweled, like, really glitzy, speaking of Tony and Luke's, really flashy thing. Well, this is what happens—

ART GREEN: Started with graffiti, and now I'm working with jewels.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Now you're working with jewels. It's like, the irony of that, last night, yesterday, just hit me, and I'm thinking, "Wow." I mean, it did fit his work. He had a sort of Baroque sensibility, I get it. And you follow the money, I guess. But that's what I'm saying, the kids are following the money. And it doesn't matter if you start—well, even look at Basquiat. He started out doing street art. Or what's his name, Keith Haring. They started out doing street art, but all of a sudden, when you get a gallery, that can really—that's what I was saying about my friend Chuck. You get sales, and that can really—I love that you're feeling still pretty independent of all the stuff, and it's hard to get involved in that whole—

ART GREEN: Yeah, I know. I like being a thousand miles away, or something.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That helps, I think, because—and being an outsider is part of the privilege of being an artist. Some of the great artists and writers were very much outsiders, because, if you're too much in it, it's very hard to have new thoughts or new ways of doing things. You just follow the same stuff.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And being on the outside, you can maybe—Or you see another point of view. That's why I was asking about other cultures, because when you go to another culture, the most valuable thing I've found is that it throws your values upside down.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: This isn't—you know, even just walking down the street, or walking across the street. They

don't follow the same rules in Saigon, or wherever.

ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: They—what are they doing? How do I even cross the street? There's some pattern here.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Sort of like the pattern of chaos and disorder. There's some underlying principle here, but it isn't anything I've seen before. And it's scary, because your life depends on it, and you can't assume anything.

ART GREEN: Well, when we were in England, I, you know, I really loved all the eccentricities that are encouraged and valued.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's in English. We talked about the *Horse's Mouth*. There's a thing about the British eccentric, yeah.

ART GREEN: And there was a newspaper vendor down the street from us, who was never open on Thursday. And I'd go there on Friday, I said "Geez, what happened? You weren't open." "Well, I deserve a day off. They can jolly well get their—"

LANNY SILVERMAN: Whatever day he wants, he can pick it.

ART GREEN: Whatever day he wants. And stuff like that. But at the same time, you know, I got sick and tired of looking in the *Sunday Times*, and there's a hot new artist, and she's just had an opening, and there's a full front page of her work, which doesn't seem remarkable. And Lord and Lady So-and-So were there, and So-and-So was there, and it turns out she's the daughter of some royal family, you know. And oh, you know, just such a discovery.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you've got that in Canada. But for us that's a little hard to—Or for me it's hard to understand.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: We have the fame thing, so I think there's a—And I look at some of the sleazy entertainment TV shows, and I just am amazed by what people are—look at that as a way of seeing our culture. But we have a parallel thing. But the royal thing that the Brits have is just very peculiar.

ART GREEN: Yeah, just a class system, after a while. It became oppressive, in a way.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And it seems outdated.

ART GREEN: And was glad we weren't living there for more than a year.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, this Queen, I mean, the fascination with Harry and the Queen, and all that stuff, I mean, it's—And it carries over into the British-speaking part of Canada, which you're more part of. It's a little bit—That's a peculiar phenomenon, to us. I mean, it's a little hard for Americans to understand that. [inaudible] revolves around, it's not just royals, it's class, and it's—But it's like hundreds—It's the colonial thing, too.

ART GREEN: Yeah, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: It's a whole different sensibility. Here's a question going back to, I guess, to just go around the circle again. We talked a little bit about shaped-canvases today, or you alluded to them.

ART GREEN: Oh, yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You ever thought of making any—Have you ever done any sculpture, or worked in other mediums at all?

ART GREEN: Printmaking. I used to do prints when I was in school.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Printmaking you mentioned, yeah.

ART GREEN: And I've done drawings, but rarely as an end in themselves. They're mostly sketchbook, I do a lot of doodles, and then out of that sometimes comes an idea.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And you've done some things, as you mentioned, three-dimensional things that are sort of flattened out—

ART GREEN: That have—

LANNY SILVERMAN: But they're not really, technically sculpture.

ART GREEN: Yeah, the most sculptural thing I ever did was that set of blocks, which are basically, in the end, simply flat paintings on blocks.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, they're flattened out, but they allude to the—so you—

ART GREEN: I had a roommate, Bill Grams, wonderful guy, and he lives in New York now. He does his art on computers now, but he was a sculptor. And in those days, the sculptors took pleasure in wearing heavy boots that wouldn't get crushed by blocks of granite, and asbestos jackets so you wouldn't catch fire when you're welding.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

ART GREEN: And he told me, "I knew right away when I saw you, you were a painter."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, there's a—[laughs.]

ART GREEN: I said, "How did you know I was a painter? Is it just slight of build, or what?" And he said, "No, no, no. It's your eyes. They're so close together. You can't see three dimensions."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, isn't that interesting.

ART GREEN: And I said—Well, his eyes were set farther apart. And I said, "Well, Grams, how can I overcome this?" And we thought up the idea of making a little binoculars that had a set of prisms in them. So maybe my eyes could be this far apart. I could be a—

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you think you could have been a sculptor?

ART GREEN: I could have been an uber-sculptor, you know. [Laughs.] And someone actually came up with that idea, independently, and patented it, and made a career of going around and giving demonstrations with it.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, now they have virtual-reality stuff, and you can probably, you know, do all kinds of stuff to change you perception. But so you haven't really—

ART GREEN: I have not.

LANNY SILVERMAN: —I mean, even though you wanted to push the edges of painting, and had some sculpture and the vent that you added there.

ART GREEN: I pushed against the edges of my painting, I wouldn't say I was pushing the edges of painting.

[They laugh.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. Well, there's a literal quality there.

ART GREEN: I'm about as radical in my practice as I am in my politics. I was just not—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well it's a—yeah.

ART GREEN: My heart's in the right place.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Of course. And actually, so, I guess, you know, to sort of come to a certain kind of, not finality, but I—What are you hoping to achieve in the coming years? I mean, what do you see before you in terms of your art practice, or—

ART GREEN: Well, I hope to keep painting as long as I can. I hope not to lose my mind. A mind is a terrible thing to lose. Isn't it George Bush did that?

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yeah, well, that's ironic in more ways than one, and we won't even go there, but—

ART GREEN: And I hope to see my granddaughter grow up, and maybe some more. And I hope to see a change in direction in the politics [inaudible]. I just hope to keep doing paintings that still seem hard for me to do.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I look at, you know, I don't know if I mentioned Art Paul, I think I mentioned an introduction to him—



ART GREEN: No.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And he's, like, in his 90s, he's losing his vision. He's actually, I guess I just found out, that he's got either dementia or Alzheimer's, too. But he's still making art, and it's amazing. And he's doing self-portraits, and things that have to do with his—

ART GREEN: Yeah. I've been thinking. You know, it's occurred to me that some of these knot paintings, I could see as self-portraits.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

ART GREEN: They seem to be all about myself, to be, you know, moi moi moi.

LANNY SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Isn't it all about ourselves?

ART GREEN: I was—I've often toyed with the idea. I used to do, you know, demonstrations with students, in class, and try to do a self-portrait, you know. And it usually turned out wonky, but would give them courage. You know, "If he's teaching, and he turns out shitty, and he's brave enough to show us, I guess I can try something," you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: That's a tough thing to do. Yeah, it's a tough—

ART GREEN: So I think I might do some—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, you might do some self-portraits? Or do things that are more obviously self-portraits? You could say that all your—

ART GREEN: Maybe just some—I kind of admire the idea of self-portrait. It's kind of a test of who you are, and how you present yourself. I always liked Beckmann's self-portraits, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, those are incredible.

ART GREEN: And I love that self-portrait Jim did, that little drawing. It was in an art auction, recently.

LANNY SILVERMAN: I'll have to look that up.

ART GREEN: And I like the idea of a self-portrait. It seems a little more between you and the picture, you know?

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you can tell, probably from my art collection, also my toy collection, there's a whole bunch of portraits of monkeys. There's something about the face, about the physiognomy, that tells just so much information. I think it's maybe Western art tradition.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually I think that's sort of, like, a real fascination for me has been the human face. I mean, you could say that about hands, too, but I think less so. I think the face has really got so much content in it, and so many layers of perception, you know. Even with monkeys, you know, it's the gaze, or the point of view. Is it the man looking at the woman?

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: There's some, we were talking about that as a subject matter, in terms of your mentioning the sexuality or fascination with women. There's so much stuff in the face that it's really hard to avoid in art. And actually, even in abstraction, even when you look at de Kooning or stuff like that, or Modigliani, or other artists.

Art green: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: So really, that's a great area to mine. So I look forward to some of this stuff. I'm curious to see how not—I know that you had done some strange things to deconstruct faces. Alongside, there was something you'd taken an image of a face, it looks a lot like one of those plates or block's cuts that I have.

ART GREEN: Oh, right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You know, the flattened-out face, and then put it next to it. And there's some other things you've done with faces in them already. Having them conflated with knot should be interesting.

ART GREEN: Yeah, anyway. But another thing, as I get older, I went to have my eyes checked one time, because

they—I woke up one morning, I saw these sort of black shapes in my eyes, and I thought I'd better have them checked. This was 1990. And the guy, you know, it was a clinic, and he looked at it. And he was a student at Waterloo, they have an optometry school, and he said, "You're going to go blind." I said, "Oh." He said, "I'll go get my teacher." And the teacher came in, and he looked. "Yes, you have some macular degeneration." I can't remember if it was wet or dry. "We should have you go into Toronto, have inject something in your eye so we can get a baseline, and keep an eye on this. And I went in, and they said "Yeah, you should look every day at this whole grid, and if the lines are going like this, you know, give us a call."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Uh-oh.

ART GREEN: Well, I looked at the grid and the lines are all going like this, you know. And so for a while I worried about. And then when I had cancer in my neck, in 1999, I had prostate cancer in 2005—

LANNY SILVERMAN: Oh, you've been through it?

ART GREEN: Yeah, three in a row. They go in threes, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, you seem in great shape now.

ART GREEN: Well, anyway, I had to get a head scan, because they were worried. And I had something in my eye, and I went to another optometrist. He said, "You don't have macular degeneration. You're fine." And so I haven't worried about it. But I noticed the black spots getting bigger, but it's been now 26 years, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah.

ART GREEN: So I'm not—But who knows?

LANNY SILVERMAN: So you're not going, "Well, that's pretty scary?"

ART GREEN: I think of Madeleine Albright, I'll just try to keep painting.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, I can—I mean, I've found something interesting as I get older. I've found that coordinating the two left and right [inaudible], it seems like I can now sometimes go in and out being focused, and that's not always good, if you're driving. Like it doesn't always come together as one image.

ART GREEN: Right, right.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's kind of scary, but it allows you to see around the side of things. There's some interesting things about perception. You talked about things that are givens, you know, about perception, assumptions we make. But as you start to change your perception—this is part of growing older, to maturity. But even perceptually, it could probably affect your painting.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Do you think any of those—I asked a little bit about, like, if, you know, you still had painting, you know, hand-eye coordination. I look at Ted Halkin, who's still making work. Actually I like his new work a lot. The reason I asked you about sculpture is I didn't know that he had done sculpture, I didn't know his earlier sculpture. But he's still making work, and he's at least—I think he's older.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And actually, some of the people—a lot of the people I've been interviewing are older, and were making work for Clement, Evelyn. But some of them have scaled down the size of the work. And look at Leon, he was doing huge canvases before he died, he scaled down in size of the work, and the ambitions.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Because that was a very physical kind of work. You can get assistance.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: But it's very different, as you said the other day.

ART GREEN: I would not be able to stand having an assistant standing around while I'm farting around, I don't know. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: Not only that, but I think you said that for you, it's partly the work changes, even though it may be thought through, or thought ahead, it changes as you go.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: And that's the reason to do it.

ART GREEN: And if you have an assistant standing there, "Well, he can't make up his mind, what's wrong with this guy?"

LANNY SILVERMAN: "Yeah, really, why doesn't he make the decision that I would have made, too?" I mean, that's kind of weird. Yeah, I think it would be hard to do that. And I talked about, you know, kids these days, fabrication. I mean, that was happening with minimalism, with fabricators, and it became okay to not make the work. But you're very much wanting to make the work.

So you'll still keeping plugging away, and discovering what you discover?

ART GREEN: I hope so, you know. I feel about the same as I've always—you know, it's kind of weird, you know.

LANNY SILVERMAN: You don't feel like the person—When you hear the age repeated back that we are, you didn't think to yourself, "Wow, I feel like the young buck."

ART GREEN: If I was a package of doughnuts, I'd never be sold. But the doughnuts are still good.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, it's amazing, our perceptions. And then when you get—but when you get addressed, like when people start to give you their seat on the bus—

ART GREEN: Oh, I know. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: When you say, "Oh, yeah, that's right. I'm older." [Laughs.]

ART GREEN: That's when I do a handstand on the strap, or something, yeah. [Laughs.]

LANNY SILVERMAN: That would be a good one. Get their attention.

ART GREEN: "Nope, that's quite all right."

LANNY SILVERMAN: Yeah, our perceptions of ourselves don't always change as much as perhaps the reality, I know.

ART GREEN: Yeah.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, is there anything else in terms of for the record that you can think of, that I didn't cover? We've covered a lot of your work, in terms of how you work, and what you do. Anything else?

ART GREEN: I'll probably think of something as soon as this is over.

LANNY SILVERMAN:

Oh, of course, that's the way it always is.

ART GREEN: That's what I count on, in my paintings as well. I'll probably think of something.

LANNY SILVERMAN: Well, that's why I didn't—I had some notes, but I also found that sometimes just talking, and sometimes—and I came back to some of the things I had in mind anyways, that I meant to ask. But that pretty well covers it.

ART GREEN: Yeah. I'm—it's a great institution, and I'm proud to be included in it.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]