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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Llyn Foulkes,
1997 June 25-1998 Dec. 2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Llyn Foulkes on June 25 and July 17, 1997 and December 2, 1998. The interview was conducted at Llyn Foulkes' home and studio in Los Angeles, California by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funded by Pasadena Art Alliance.

Interview

LF: LLYN FOULKES
PK: PAUL KARLSTROM

[BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with painter Llyn Foulkes at the artist's new studio and loft, and residence, located at The Brewery, a mixed-purpose complex, in downtown Los Angeles, and the date is 25 June 1997. This is a first session in an oral history interview with Mr. Foulkes. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. Well, I want to say for the record that I'm pleased that this has finally come about. You were talking earlier about how it was way back in '73 when we opened the Archives operation on the West Coast that I wrote to you and then there were a couple of aborted interactions, but all of that doesn't matter because we're here now.

LF: That's the letter I didn't answer.

PK: You are one of the artists who I really felt was very important for us to have represented in the Archives. We've talked about getting together and doing several oral history sessions about your career, but also about your own life and experiences, and presumably, or hopefully, your observations at different times on American art or international art, but particularly, the art of L.A. and Southern California.

LF: Does that make me regional?

PK: No. I'm not going to say that, but you can address that issue. I would never say that, but the fact of the matter is you have spent most of your career, most of your life perhaps, but much of your career here in Los Angeles.

LF: All of my career.

PK: Oh, all of it here in the Los Angeles area. It's interesting that just recently you made the move which I think represents probably an important shift certainly in your life, and perhaps your work, from Topanga Canyon where you were for a good number of years in a wonderful house there, but you made the move here to downtown Los Angeles which is a big move in a lot of ways.

LF: Well, where was I supposed to go? I didn't belong any place else. I mean I always had such deep feelings about Los Angeles. I've watched them systematically destroy Los Angeles for I don't know how many years. I came here in 1956, '57, and it's something that has just never left me as I've seen it, and now that I'm downtown L.A. It's like this is the place where I should be. This is what my songs are all about. My songs are all about L.A. My music is all about L.A. My paintings are about L.A. It's like I should be here. I was here a long time ago. I mean when I came to L.A. first, I went to Chouinard which was downtown -- which was over [at] MacArthur Park, and then I lived near downtown Los Angeles, and so I've always been here and drove a taxi for a year and a half.

PK: Oh, you did?

LF: I got to know all the streets of L.A. and everything, but the funny thing is, coming from the west side, it's like on the west side there's a division in Los Angeles. The division is, and well you know the division, we don't go past La Cienega Boulevard, maybe up to La Brea, but it's dangerous if you go any further than that, or the art is not very interesting, which, of course, leaves out a whole community of artists down here. And, of course, when you get into Latino art and black art, it's all called Latino art or black art. It's not art. We all know that. That bit is ethnic art. Well, I'm a Welsh artist.

PK: You're of Welsh background?

LF: Well, I mean, that's what my last name is. My last name is Welsh. What I mean is that it gets so ridiculous. In

a sense, I feel really good about getting away from that sort of uptown, do it as fast as you can, sell it as fast as you can, get on the right scene, be in the art magazines, and make sure that you're lecturing at the right places, that you know the right people, and back to some sort of basic thing which is what the hell is it all about. If it's not about yourself, it's not about your feelings, about what you're involved in, and your surroundings, then what's it about? I was surprised when I went to Spain in 19 -- well I was in the Army between '54 and '56. I went to Salvador Dali's house. I went to Cadaqués. I wanted to go see his house there because I didn't know much about art. That's all I knew was Salvador Dali. Salvador Dali was a surrealist. Of course he made all those things up.

PK: Sort of like your first painting.

LF: No. Well this was all then. My first painting was like Dali because that's all I knew, but when I went there and I saw his house, I saw the bay that the house was situated on, I saw the boats, I saw the light. That was a Dali painting right there, all the boats, all the water, the sky, the color of the sky and everything was just as he painted it. It kind of blew my mind. This guy was painting his surroundings, and nobody ever thought that about Dali. They always think well Dali was -- I mean they do to a certain extent, they knew he was Spanish, but he was really painting his surroundings. I'd always felt that was important for somebody to -- I've never been a selfless person. I don't believe in selfless art as Robert Irwin once tried to define good art as being selfless. In fact, I was in Irwin's studio a long time ago and I remember [Irving] Blum took me into his studio when I was first joined Ferus Gallery and it was just a whole bunch of curtains. There were no paintings and just one painting and a television set. I was looking at it. I said, "Where are the paintings?" He said, "Well they're behind the curtains so I can't see them." I said, "Why is the television set on?" He says, "Well, so I can watch it while I paint so I can become selfless." And I remember laughing to myself thinking, even at that age, I didn't know anything then, I still laugh about it. I say "selfless," a person can't become selfless. It's totally impossible, because that's why you do what you do.

PK: Well, this is almost now again retrospective here. It seems to me your observations about why it's right for you to be down here -- but let's back up just a little bit.

LF: I told you I'm going to go all over the place because this is who I am.

PK: That's fine. But I'll have questions as we go along. In fact, in our conversation earlier, you were pointing out that you're really quite a big change from where you had been working, presumably happily in solitude, everything.

LF: In solitude.

PK: I imagine all the words that were used to define your situation in Topanga would shift, would change for this experience.

LF: Like the perfect sound studio.

PK: So why don't you tell me again as you did earlier about how this came about and the process.

LF: It actually came about through a divorce. I didn't want to leave Topanga. You own three acres of land and you have a great studio and you have the solitude that everybody wants. Why would you want to move then? But it came through with the divorce and with children in college and not being able to afford to keep the place. It wasn't really a choice to move out of Topanga, and when I did realize I was going to have to move, I immediately started to look on the west side because it was the area I knew, my gallery was there. After I started looking around, I started seeing the studios. I could never be isolated like I was in Topanga. I didn't like being part of a group, so to speak, and if I were going to be a part of a group, I certainly wouldn't want to be a part of a certain kind of groups whose art I don't think is that good. So I kept looking around and I finally wound up down at The Brewery because I read *Coagula Art Journal* and that was the first thing that turned me on was I said, "Hey, this guy is just sort of talking about a lot of the bullshit in art." I'm not saying that everybody doesn't have their own agenda and their own people that they want to push anything, but he is talking about the bullshit in art and there's nobody else that's talking about the bullshit in art.

PK: You mean Matt Gleason [publisher, *Coagula Art Journal*]?

LF: Yes. Everybody else is talking about -- they're just reading all sorts of things. They're making things up about things. They're making things into much more than they are. I would say that 99% of the stuff that I see out there and the stuff that's written about it, I mean, it's amazing. It blows my mind. I said it's just not that deep. In fact, as far as I can see, Hackard has taken a step up the ladder. I used to work in a hand-painted picture factory when I first came to L.A., downtown Los Angeles. We had assembly lines of paintings and there would be so many people working on them and I got real good at it. They made me the head of the production line because I was so good, at which time, the production line slowed down, so they had to put me back on it, but it was like

one person did the sky, another person did the clouds, and you had all these -- anyway -- and then they would put them in motels; they would put them in banks; they would put them in department stores. Now I see a lot of paintings, they're also in banks, in department stores, and I see things in museums that look like they should be in banks and department stores. My feeling is that half of the stuff being churned out is just sort of a craft that the person can do it well, but they're not going to say much, and then the critics will come and they'll build this huge, huge, big thing about it. They'll read all this stuff in, and I know I'm not reading into it because the old critics when they would talk about my stuff, it's like all of a sudden, you'd start believing it, believing that you were actually doing all that. And it was all stuff that they were making up, a lot of it they were making up.

PK: Well when it became apparent that you had to find another space and started looking around the --

LF: See how quickly I got off that?

PK: That's fine. It's all there. It all comes together in like a collage or something.

LF: Okay, all right.

PK: But you were saying that some of your colleagues, some other artists you mentioned, like Peter Alexander, Laddie Dill, or [those] in Venice or in Marina del Rey...

LF: Who were saying, "You don't want to go to the west side. You don't even want to go downtown."

PK: And they were, as I understood it, quite adamant that this is not where you should be, and in the beginning -

LF: I know. They were trying to find me a place over there.

PK: Well they probably wanted you to be around. That's nice.

LF: Well, I think it may be that they didn't want me to go downtown because downtown, who knows, I may help to rejuvenate the art scene.

PK: Do you feel that there is this kind of a territorialism?

LF: Territorialism, let me tell you about territorialism. Whoa! How about the homosexual territorialism with Christopher Knight and all those people? There's a whole territorialism right there. There's a UCLA territorialism and it's all UCLA people. It's just like I can just see the different ones and I can understand it. Everybody wants to help their friends, but let's talk about art. Let's not talk about territorialism. I think that that's what I see happening more. In a sense, I wanted to get away from there. I've come down here, it's like, "Okay, either that or this is my territory now." Maybe it's that, I have no idea.

PK: Well, this is what I would like to explore a little bit because you alluded to it earlier and you told how it was fortunate this particular space opened up like a day before you had to move, or something like that.

LF: I had a month and a half escrow and these people from England -- an animator who was working -- who had brought over to work in Duck Soup, a new animation studio, and his wife fell in love with the house, but they needed a month and a half escrow, because they had to get in. Well, I hadn't even started looking for a studio. I had no idea where I was going to go, and I kept looking for a studio up until a week before I was to move. I had only a week and I had to be into the studio the day that I moved out of the house. So I looked on the West Side. I looked all over, and it wasn't until I got down to The Brewery that I started realizing, this is really quiet and this is really non-threatening in the sense that if I was over in the Santa Fe complex or any other place there, I'd step right out in the street and I would be surrounded by -- unless I was on the West Side in Venice -- you'd be surrounded by people coming and going and things happening and just as much crime. In fact, there's no crime here, as far as I know, everyone tells me there's no crime here, 23 acres. It's got a security guard and there's no reason for anybody to be here. I go all around the blocks here and I suddenly had a new feeling about downtown L.A. Suddenly, I find it very interesting. The people, there are all these ethnic groups and the Chinese and the Latinos, and all of a sudden, before -- you get on the West Side and you have a fear. There's always this fear. Well, you don't want to go passed such-and-such because there's crime there or these people are different than we are. I go up and down the blocks. I see people mowing their lawns; I don't see that the streets are particularly dirty or anything, and I look and I say, "I don't see crime or people running around with guns." I see people out with their children; I see people in parks. I'm driving around, and I say, "Wait a minute, I've been living in this rich white man's fantasy." Even though I've been up in Topanga, I haven't been rich, but I've been up in Topanga and the West Side, and you sort of become polyesterized, or Brentwood-ized. It's very funny because I just got back from Denmark where they did the European show, the L.A. show at The Louisiana. I went to hang my piece there and I was in Denmark for nine days and I could hardly wait to get out. Not that Denmark was not pretty in a sense, but everything was the same. It made me feel like I was in some sort of version of Brentwood

and Disneyland, and then I found out afterwards that Disney patterned his Disneyland after Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. When I went to Tivoli Gardens, I could see it.

PK: Well you certainly wouldn't approve of that.

LF: No, I wouldn't approve of that. It's just that L.A. is still a raw city down here and I've watched them destroy L.A. When I came to Los Angeles to go to Chouinard, I used to come up to Bunker Hill to draw with these other artists. They would sit around and draw these beautiful Victorian houses. They were the biggest Victorian houses in all of southern California, to rival anything in San Francisco by a long-shot. They were all lined there and there was a Russian hotel, and Angel's Flight went up to it. I remember sitting there one day and some artist says to me, "Well, they're tearing this down." I said, "What do you mean they're tearing it down?" "This is going to be torn down within the year." "Why?" He says, "Well the city wants to tear it down and they're going to build a city hall up there, not city hall, but all their administrative buildings and stuff." "Oh," but then less than a year, all of a sudden they were tearing it out, the best Victorian houses, a one story hotel that McKinley and Roosevelt stayed in and all these. It would have been prime things to have aside from Olvera Street. It would have been prime to have that Angel's Flight going up -- it would have kept people in downtown L.A. or it would have brought people to downtown LA. It wouldn't have been all Olvera Street and going all the way back to the beginning, but it would have taken some of the time that happened between Olvera Street and now, because Bunker Hill was where all the people lived, who built the original Los Angeles after Olvera Street. I couldn't believe they were tearing it down. I remember that the Historical Society had no power then. They were trying to save two buildings, two smaller ones, one I think believe was called The Bunker House or something. I forgot the name. Anyway, it was a small -- like a pill-box house. It wasn't Victorian like those other ones like really ornate, and they managed to take two up and save them, after the city had come in and torn down all the best ones, because they knew that that's what they would want to save first.

PK: Basically the ones that are there on the Heritage Square.

LF: Well wait a minute, no.

PK: Pasadena Freeway?

LF: Well, let me say, they took two of them, went up to Avenue 43 off the Pasadena Freeway and started a place called Heritage Square. This was going to be a place where the Historical Society had their buildings and they would start moving them. They took those two last remaining houses from Bunker Hill which really were nothing compared to the good ones, and put them there. Within a week or two, someone burned them down and two men were seen running with gasoline cans. I remember going up to the gate and seeing the burned-down houses and I knew who did it. This lady comes driving up in a Mercedes Benz, very indignant, probably somebody who supported Heritage Square. She came and said, "Who did that? Who did that?" And I turned to her and I said, "The city did it." She said, "What do you mean the city did it?" Well I knew that they didn't want to pay for them. Why would two men burn those houses down? They didn't want to save those anyway. Since that time, they have put other houses there, but Bunker Hill is the story to me that needs somehow to be told. They come and they put their administrative buildings up there, ugly buildings, a bunch of square, ugly buildings when they had these beautiful Victorian buildings on the top of the hill. I remember the guy took me up into the top of one dome of one of the houses that was a hotel or apartment, and lifted the top of the dome and I stood and looked at the whole city of Los Angeles, as it looked then without all the tall buildings, skyscrapers.

PK: That was in the early '50s?

LF: That was about 1958 probably.

PK: I remember that project started and I do actually remember when there were still some of those Victorians.

LF: It would have been something that they could have had. God, they could have had shops up there; they could have had a whole thing, and people would have gone up there. Who wants to go up there now except for MOCA, and you think the people from downtown L.A. are going to want to go to MOCA? No, maybe if there's a Latino art show on or otherwise, it could have been something. Now they're trying to make it again, they're doing the same thing again as they did then, only now it's with the Gehry Concert Hall [Walt Disney Concert Hall].

PK: Well the Angel's Flight, of course, has been kind of reinstalled.

LF: It wasn't put in the same place. It doesn't mean anything anymore. Then it was in character with everything else around.

PK: Would you then characterize that as a kind of Disneyland fiction?

LF: Disneyland. That is the Disneyland thing.

PK: Here's this little piece of the past that used to, simulate the experiences that aren't quite the same, but it seems to me that you have a wonderful, romantic relationship or attachment to an idea of what L.A. was as a city, and maybe what it could be.

LF: You're exactly right. What it could have been.

PK: What it could have been. Do you believe that in this community here at The Brewery and maybe similar kinds of projects or endeavors or situations, there's a chance to, not retrieve, but recuperate or redeem in some way and build something else?

LF: That's exactly how I feel. In fact, as soon as I got here, I started thinking, well, I played here first and then they have a cafe there, and I thought, gee, I should try to talk Richard [Carlson] into having a movie theater here and an art movie theater there. They should start making it into -- because there are a lot of artists down here, a lot of artists down here.

PK: Why don't you then, if you would, fill me in a little more, some of the people here. I was struck very much by what seems to be a real sense of community.

LF: Don't start asking me who all the artists are.

PK: No, no, no. We walked into what was a real community event without going into it.

LF: Yeah. UPS is building a structure across from The Brewery on the same street that the people come to The Brewery on, and there's going to be about 600 and some trucks and cars, and so, obviously, the artists are very upset about it. They like The Brewery because The Brewery is -- it may not have -- there's a freeway there. It may not be quiet, but at least it's not as bad as it could be, and that could make it much worse. People who start businesses and put businesses in places, they're much more concerned about what kind of traffic they can get through fast and what kind of money they can make, and the people always come in second. I mean look at Universal Studios up there and what they're trying to do around there, how the people are getting upset. It's been happening from the beginning of L.A. and it hasn't stopped. It's kind of like the rats have to get to the point where they're eating each other, themselves, and then all of a sudden, maybe something starts to happen. And before then, they just kind of let all these people take over maybe it's because there's enough room there and people can be allowed... I still have people coming to L.A. for the first time and saying, "Wow! What a great place! It's so wide open and --." A lot of people say, "Gee, you think this is wide open? You should have seen it before?"

PK: I guess it is relative they come from some places, maybe. I don't know that we have any interview or any source at this point, anything really about The Brewery. Why don't you just real quickly describe The Brewery?

LF: I can't say I know that much about The Brewery.

PK: Yes, but you know the couple who helped us, can you tell me a little bit about them?

LF: Richard Carlson and his wife, Cathy Regis, and they built a house there by a well-known architect, who I can't remember the name of because I can't remember the name of architects. I try to forget them.

PK: It's right there on the corner?

LF: It's on the corner and it's quite remarkable when you go inside. You'll have to take a tour of it. He used things for The Brewery, huge, big iron tanks that weigh 90 tons and all sort of things in The Brewery. The way the whole thing is situated, you actually get a view of the city, a view of the railroad, also, you start to get a real feeling about a house that is built to take advantage of downtown Los Angeles and what they see. That's why they're also very upset about the UPS building because it's going to destroy their ...

PK: That must be a UPS truck now.

LF: No. That's just another truck. That could be a garbage truck. Garbage trucks also come through here, or it could be one of the trucks in Carlson because they build everything themselves.

PK: Well, did you say that they also have property like Topanga?

LF: They own the center of Topanga also.

PK: Well, do you know enough about them to speculate or maybe tell --?

LF: What they're up to?

PK: Yes, because it sounds really interesting. Obviously, they like artists.

LF: According to Richard, it's just sort of built that way. When they first got the property here, his father was the main person to begin with, and as soon as they got the property, they started renting it out to different businesses and then they started to rent out to a few artists and that seemed to be much better because the businesses would move in and out and the artists would seem to stay. I think it just sort of developed into this, but his wife is also on the board of the Pasadena Art Alliance, Fellows of Contemporary Art and so she's also very aware of contemporary artists. In fact, that's really how I think I got this studio. I thought it was somebody putting their hand on my shoulder.

PK: That's what you said, you had been touched by God.

LF: Yes, I thought that, but when they took me out to dinner, she said, well, she had seen my house up there and she said, "I told Richard," she says, "We've got to make sure he gets a really good place," so then I thought it was Cathy putting her hand on my shoulder.

PK: Obviously, as we've said before, the circumstances which brought you here are not at all happy and you will be talking certainly more about part of your life as it unfolded along with your work. In so many respects, it seems to suit you more than perhaps you would have realized before it was put on you.

LF: Exactly. Once it was put on me, it was like, "My God, this is the right thing," and I didn't even realize it was the right thing. I don't think we really realize what's the right thing, until we find it. I always believe in the old thing that Picasso said, "To search means nothing; to find is the thing." It's like suddenly it's there.

PK: Well, you said that there were several features of this place here at the studio.

[END SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PK: Continuing the first interview session with Llyn Foulkes. This is Tape 1, Side B.

LF: You actually pronounced my name right. Most people say Foulkes.

PK: As a matter of fact, I think that I got that confirmed by Ed Ruscha when we were pronouncing your name.

LF: That's interesting. So Ed Ruscha actually pronounced my name right.

PK: At any rate, we were talking still about this new space of yours which, and I have to say, my thinking of all this is that it's sort of pivotal that it appears as if at the time of our beginning these interviews, you're having this big change that one phase of your life and career is over, at least in that form, and you're in a position now to be looking ahead, a different environment, different situation, and as a matter of fact, with a kind of different relationship to Los Angeles. In a sense, it has always been hovering there in the background, and not being actual subject. And you're in a different Los Angeles now than the one you had been out by the beach. One of the things you said earlier that this was connected to your music, and you had been doing some, composing some pieces, doing some music that was kind of cabaret, and you were connecting it in your mind.

LF: When I was looking for a place and was getting pretty well down to the line, but I was still practicing my music which I always did every day and I was doing this piece on L.A. -- in fact, the name of the piece was "What Did They Do To Old L.A.," and it started to sound very cabaret, I mean like really, because all the cow bells and everything, it sounded really like right out of Germany and the '30s or something. Then when I finally decided that The Brewery was the place that I wanted to be, I was going to take a temporary place until a place came up which was really good which may not be for two or three years Richard Carlson told me. So I put the money down. The next day, he calls up and said, "Somebody's leaving." "What?" He says, "There is -- it's a good place; it's the ground floor. You should come down and see it." I came down. I started to approach the building and right across from it is the Berlin Cafe. I went inside, and there's the perfect performance space, a sound room in the back that I only had to cut larger to get my machine in for recording, and a nice livable place upstairs. The guy had just put in a new bathroom and a new kitchen. I got a washer and dryer out of it, too. But anyway, it was like all of a sudden, it just sort of happened, and I thought it was like God had put his hand on my shoulder or something until I went to dinner with Cathy and Richard, the owners of The Brewery, they took me out to dinner. She was telling Richard at the dinner table, she says, "Well I had been up to Llyn's studio," because she was on the Board of Pasadena Art Alliance, Fellows of Contemporary Art and she said, "We have to find Llyn a good place. You should have seen his place; his place was really great." So then I started thinking, maybe it was pushed a little bit, and maybe God's hand was pushed a little bit.

PK: You said to me earlier [as we were] looking at some of your paintings downstairs, some of them are older works, and that you're going to work on some more. One or two things have come back like Mickey Mouse with the Mickey Mouse Club. I don't know what it's called, a political statement or sort of something like that, constitution of the Mickey Mouse Club.

LF: It's the first page for the Mickey Mouse Club. Called "How To Take Advantage of Children."

PK: You've been working on some of these paintings. You have one that is really the current work in progress right now with you and your wife.

LF: My former wife?

PK: Yes, former wife, which is really a knockout, but you said something that interested me, that you're eager to do what you need to do with these works and as you said, "Get them out of here." What I took that to mean was that you feel that there is some kind of a break. Is that right? And that you feel that you'll be moving on in some way.

LF: I feel like I'm coming to an end of something again like I did in the late '60s.

PK: What would that be?

LF: You mean what would it be? Are you talking about what?

PK: Well, okay, an end of a phase.

LF: An end of a phase.

PK: Why do you feel that way?

LF: Because these are things that I've had very deep feelings about and I want to be able to express those feelings in my music and in singing and talking and being out and recording and doing performances, and that's what I want to express those things, okay, and the painting, who knows what direction. I have a feeling what might happen. See, there's a certain part of me that wants to be very free, only these paintings, since I started exploring space this way and started to actually cut into the painting. I didn't realize I was going to have to go to so much work. I never wanted to go to so much work. My paintings were always easy to do before.

PK: You mean the three relief qualities?

LF: Yes. I didn't know. You don't know how complicated those paintings are to do. If I have to move a figure, if I have to move something because the space is not working quite right, I may have to shift a figure over. Well you don't just erase it with an eraser or wash it out with a paint thinner. You have to cut parts of it out and move it, and so the whole thing is constantly moving that way and I'm not afraid to do anything anymore. If I have to do something, I may still have to cut that whole painting in half and shift the whole composition down a fraction. I don't know yet.

PK: What's it called? I'm just trying to identify it.

LF: I have different thoughts about it. I don't know yet. I got to the point where I could do something as refined as the face or something like that and not be afraid of it. I could go into it, I'd say, "Okay, this needs a little more depth in there," so I take my 18-inch belt sander, and I just go [making a buzzing sound] into it, right, so I'm doing those fine, little details with a big belt sander. I remember when I was doing the Pop painting, I was so afraid to do anything. Once you get something really good, you're afraid to go into it because you're afraid that you're going to hurt it. So the whole thing about the artist and students have to go through all the time, which is I got this wonderful part; I don't want to destroy it, but the problem is, that part may be destroying your whole painting and you don't even know it. And so I get to that point and it's like, okay, you do it, and if it doesn't work out the way you thought, then you go with it. That's the premise of how I work. It's like if it doesn't work out, I don't fill it up; I go with it.

PK: Do you want to talk about, at least in a preliminary way, of that painting, the one that we were discussing which doesn't have a name? It strikes me that, too, is part of this pivotal phase, perhaps in some way symbolically and, actually, the ending of a kind of phase you're experiencing.

LF: Well, it is about my former wife and me and our closeness, our sexual relationship, my feeling of everything being for me, my own feelings about my narcissism, my feelings of... It's setting her free, too. You notice there's a bird above her head. She has an egg in her hands. She's the one who bore two of my children. And I'll always love her. It's just that we went in different directions, and that's the way that it has to be. People have their own lives to live. She was a very strong woman. She wanted to do her own thing, and she probably didn't appreciate

my getting all the accolades, and I can't blame her for that. So I have to get rid of that part of me. That's one part of me that I had to get rid of and find myself totally back again. I was the one, like my former wife used to say, "Well your problem was you never networked." I'd say, "No, I didn't network." See, like I was telling you before, I'm lucky I got as far as I got. I can tell you I'm really lucky. When I think of all the people that have tried to stop me over the years, I'd say "I am really lucky," "Lucky" is not the word. I had to do good stuff, and there's only one thing I could do and that's why I'm trying to do something that nobody else has done before. I look at representational paintings and there's a thing that I call material differences. It's something I've been teaching in art school since the late '70's, early '80s, and that's how to gain space in a painting; how to make things look and appear real; material differences being that so many painters use the same material for everything. They use oil paints maybe the whole thing, or acrylic for the whole thing, or whatever for the whole thing, and then they'll try to make something different, but they'll try to make it out of the same thing. When they try to make it out of the same thing, it has not only a different texture, but it picks up light in a different way. It has a whole different substance, a whole different material. So when I'm working in a space, I say, "Oh, this needs more light; this needs a different material until it gets to the point where it doesn't matter whether I'm putting recycled things in or whether I'm painting it. When you look at the whole thing, you get the feeling of it being right there without having to look and say, "Oh, that's this and that's that." When you get up close you can see, "Oh, well, that's a real rug; that's real," but that isn't real. When you get back, it doesn't make any difference, and, to me, it's the taking of assemblage and other things and bringing it into the realm of painting. I was always an assemblage maker in a certain way, in a sense that if you see those cases, those are all alike. Assemblage, to me, for the most part, is just putting things together that have some sort of meaning, but I see it in a different way, too. I get to the point where I can actually put real things in a painting that somebody would think was flat and it would work there. I can put a hologram in a painting and it doesn't flatten the painting out.

PK: So have you ever had a Renaissance view of space, a notion of illusion.

LF: No, no, no, no, no, wait a minute. Don't say Renaissance. I'll tell you why don't say Renaissance. I understand where you're coming from, but, you see, Renaissance developed the kind of perspective that we still use and the compositional ideas that we still use. So when people "Is this a good composition or is this a good composition?" If you pick that one, then you picked what is the right composition. Well, I'll tell you what my belief is. My belief is, as I've explored this whole thing about space and moving objects and things in space, I start realizing that perspective was developed not just to try to make deep space, but it was also developed to avoid problems. So the avoiding of problems would be, "Oh, you don't put that there because you can't make the space deep enough if you do it that way," because, see, we don't really see that way. We don't really see that way with one-, two-, three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-point perspective. We see with a thousand-point perspective. We see looking down there; we see looking up there; each thing has a different perspective. So I had to try to get away from the fact that when you put one thing in front of the other, you can still make it go back depending on what you do with the material and the light. You just keep going back to it and keep putting things -- you don't have to have a floor plan. You don't have to have certain things that were developed at that particular time. I see a lot of those things as being very artificial. I would much rather see Flemish paintings. I would much rather see even paintings that are older than that where the things were like really flat. If you take somebody like Vermeer, he didn't use the kind of obvious perspective that a lot of those other people used. His things were much lower, but he also used a camera obscura. So he didn't have to make perspective lines, he just used camera obscura. He was actually using, in a certain sense, pre-dates photography. But Vermeer was doing something that was important, too. He would pick up light just like Rembrandt would. I believe that Vermeer's paintings should be seen only with the light hitting in a certain angle. When I see all the paintings, whether it's hanging in the Norton Simon, in the Getty, or what, in a Vermeer painting there is a painting, another painting on the wall with a curtain on it. You ever notice that? Why is that curtain on that painting?

PK: Because the lights were off.

LF: When they open the curtain, then the light comes in at the right angle and hits the painting the way he saw the light when he painted the picture, the same way that I'm doing down there, and that's how I can get the luminosity. I'll bet you that Vermeer would be much more luminous if they'd put it in a room and had only the light coming at the angle that it's supposed to, but I never see anybody hang it that way because paintings are now treated as objects. After the Impressionists came out, when they invented oil paint, that's what turned around everything. When they invented tube-oil painting, tube-oil paint made it easy for the artist to come out and go outside and just paint, and so they stopped thinking about the light inside and how it was in a certain place and everything. In the Academy, they still wanted the paintings in the proper light. Well after the Impressionists came in, it was like that was out, and then it started to become paint on the surface, and then also the objects started becoming important, well it really got ridiculous after a while. Even though you could see it, you could see it all the way up to the Abstract Expressionist where the object became very important and the realization of the surface and the density and the space and relationship of the surface, but then it became object then it started to get ridiculous because why is it a square, because it was a picture? De Kooning was still painting a picture. When you look at one of his Parkway series, I remember that was one of the first things to turn me on in art school. I remember going around to my instructors and they said, "Oh, nah, that's just a little

paint." I said, "What do you mean, that's a Renaissance picture. Look at that. That white slash of paint there, that's like Christ splashes out and has form like a body, down below is this head that's going down like this and there's even this cross." It was like a Madonna figure and a cross. I said, "Wow! All that's in that Parkway series and most people are just looking at it as being slashes of paint," but since I was an image man and I could see that, then that influenced me in that direction, too. De Kooning was one my idols. He taught me how to push and pull space. He taught me about imagery and how imagery can be anthropomorphized in a sense, and you see people trying to copy it and they know that if it is free as it could possibly be, then it's going to work. If it's a slightly bit contrived, then it has to be maneuvered or manipulated, worked, pushed to feel like it also has a life of its own, and this is what de Kooning taught me. See how I got off on de Kooning. But anyway, it's all the great the Impressionists, Cézanne certainly doing something in a sense of as far as how he broke up space, I mean, there was a whole continuity and sense of how somebody from El Greco to Courbet to Cézanne to... how people were manipulating shapes to give them an activity on the surface to feel like they had bulk and form on the surface, but they were missing the light; they were missing the light, and this is what happened.

PK: That's what you learned from Vermeer?

LF: This is what I learned from Vermeer; this is what I learned from Rembrandt; even people like Van der Weyden and stuff, when you look at those faces, those faces, they ring out to you. You can't photograph that. That's a whole different thing. That was something that grew out of the, what do I want to say, the -- I don't even know where spirituality comes into it.

PK: Well maybe possibly it's finding a way to fix spirituality.

LF: It radiates out of the thing. That's what I felt about it. It's radiated right out of it.

PK: It seems to me that you use lessons learned from, in many cases, the old masters, lessons from painting, from the history of art and the history of painting, that you use these lessons yourself to put, perhaps as they did, illusion in the service of issues that matter to you including those issues closest to your own life experience. So it's a way to bring out, in your heart, to the surface, life experience.

LF: I know what you're getting at because I have people say, "Well, gee, you always talk about the space you're using, the color, and this thing, but you didn't talk about --." I mean it's the psychological part. I said, "Well, that is just a means for me to make the space, just as a model was for Matisse, so it's like that's just the way I do it, because my life is so complicated those paintings change. If you saw that painting when it began, it wasn't even me, so what I'm saying is that all of a sudden, everything changes and I say, "Okay, I need something that's going to make this space move back more," so what winds up in there is something that I have some kind of feeling about. I could do with just a shape, I could do it with abstract, I could be one of the best abstract painters around, I know that. My first things were abstract. Abstraction is also avoidance, too. As I say, while de Kooning might have been thought of as being abstract, but he really wasn't abstract. Well, maybe in his very later things which just became the shapes, but he was always putting things in there that, anymore, I suppose, jazz was abstract. It all has relationships. They're relationships that give you different kinds of feelings and those feelings are human feelings. That's what made de Kooning the greatest Abstract painter. Well, it's because he had the human feelings, that's really what it was. I think it was.

PK: I have to say, and I'm very interested to hear, how you weigh these aspects of your work which are primary to you and ...

LF: It's all a part of me, whatever I do, whatever I put in the piece. You haven't heard the music yet. The music is another part.

PK: Happily, we're going to have time for that. I don't want to gnaw on this like a bone, but this is sort of feeling my way towards a crash course to a better understanding of what these things mean to you. On the basis of what I've seen of your work, before reading about it a little bit, and let's say especially about the more recent ones that include Pop culture imagery, Disney, and so forth, to take it away for a moment from the marriage/divorce painting and so I've shifted over to the sinister, Evil Empire of Disney, and for all of your sophistication with technique and understanding of composition of these devices, light, space, and all of this.

LF: Why do you choose to do something so dumb?

PK: No. That's not it at all. What it looks to me -- and I appreciate and admire this, as obviously, you think a lot about it and perhaps it is the most important reason why you make these paintings, these objects, you describe yourself as a painter. The subjects themselves seem to be extremely compelling and powerful and your concerns about what Disney represents and the impact on people in the world. To me, it has to be an over-riding concern.

LF: Well, to me, that's a given. The painting is not a given. I have to work to get that painting to work. The other is already happening.

PK: But this is what you choose to do.

LF: Well, I choose it because I want people to know about that. I don't think that I could have enough effect with painting, talking about stuff like that. I got to get out my machine. People don't care that much about painting.

PK: So, Llyn, which drives which? Which comes first? Which is the goal? Which is the instrument to realize that goal?

LF: You mean like as the first goal to do something as good as I can do it or as a goal to transmit my message?

PK: It doesn't have to be one of them.

LF: I think they're one and the same, so I can't really distinguish the two. The first thing is to do it as good as I can do it because, otherwise, it won't catch anybody's attention. I want regular people to walk into my studio. I just love it when a regular person walks in to my studio. I don't care whether it's the plumber who comes in, sees the painting, and he says he's charging me \$10 less because I let him look at the painting. And that made me feel so good. Art has divorced itself from people, music hasn't, nothing else has, but, you see, we can't make money off of art and make art into a money institution for big real estate people and bankers and other people like that to pass around like dollar bills. If we don't make it into a sort of elite kind of thing where nobody really knows about art unless they're an art critic. And yet, everybody seems to have an opinion on movies; everybody seems to have an opinion on music, everything else, but art, oh, no, no, no, because that's money that's passed around now. They're already getting their money off the other things through corporations. Corporations are already getting their money off of records and things like that and they hype stuff like that just so people will believe that it's good when it's not true. I'm against the whole corporate thing. I just go bananas when I see it taking over the world like this. What it's doing is it's eliminating the individual. The individual is going to be like out of the picture. Sometimes I feel like one of the last individuals, I really do. That's why I do my machine, and that's why it isn't a rock band with electric guitars and stuff like that. Sometimes, I think maybe people just don't say anything and they just go along with it because they feel like -- but remember when we went to the Terry Allen thing there?

PK: Yes, the Ashgrove [Santa Monica Pier].

LF: It was so loud. Talk about how loud it was! It was really loud! I try to say, "Well maybe it's not Terry's fault, but he let it happen." But I'm saying it's just like any other rock group, it's really loud.

[END SESSION 1, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PK: Continuing the interview with Llyn Foulkes. This is still June 25, 1997, and this now is Tape 2, Side A, and we were cut off just about exactly at the point when you were, I guess, asking why music got so loud. And I know that there was more of a point to that, so why don't you pick it up there.

LF: So I was playing in a rock band in 1965. I started playing music again. I played the drums, of course everything else was guitar. You had a lead guitar; you had a rhythm guitar, and you had a bass. That was what it was. While you're practicing, the lead guitar player gets mixed up with the rhythm guitar player because they're both coming out of amplifiers, and an amplifier does not take a certain space like an acoustical instrument does. An acoustical instrument will pick a certain space in a room. An amplifier will go over the whole room, and so he would get mixed up with the other player because they're both playing the same kind of instrument. He couldn't hear himself and so he'd turn himself up. Then the bass player, he was also playing a string instrument, so he couldn't hear himself, so he would turn himself up. Then it got to the point at the end of the rehearsal, where everybody was blowing their amps out because they couldn't hear themselves. That's why I, as a drummer, they did not have electrified drums yet, and the sticks kept getting bigger and bigger until I had sticks that were enormous. They were these enormous sticks for a rock drummer so they could be as loud as a guitar. Could you imagine? Then they got the great idea of electrifying drums. Could you imagine even the thought of electrifying something that can be heard across a football field? Think of the drums when they're playing on a football field. Can't you hear the drums, quite loud?

PK: Yes.

LF: Okay. What was the point in it? To take them above or on par with the electrical guitar, and then the guitar players were blowing all their amps so they could hear themselves, then the amp company started making more powerful amps, and then they were blowing those because it was still the same thing. The sound was all coming out of the same thing and so they still couldn't hear themselves. Now you go into a rock club and you are totally assaulted. Then it comes to the thing where I had somebody say to me, "Well, you have to have the bass vibrating through your body." Well, of course, if you had anything that loud, it's going to vibrate through your

body. It's called a jackhammer effect. It has nothing to do with music whatsoever. If you had anything vibrating through your body, you're going to get some kind of a reaction and that's what they're reacting to, and my feeling is that's what they're dancing to, too. So I set out to capture something to me that was not really electric. I have nothing against electric instruments as long as there's one because it's just another instrument there, so that's why I developed my machine. I developed my machine with bull horns and bells and all kinds of things which you will hear down there [adjoining studio below], and I started to go in a different direction and I started listening to really old jazz and trying to capture something that hadn't been done. My feeling is that they try to identify -- it's just like art where they're trying to identify everything with Duchamp, and music does the same thing, they try to identify with, "Well, everything started with rock and roll." No, everything didn't start with rock and roll. People like Elvis Presley and those people, they were copying the old, black singers from the '30s there, and when you listen to some of that stuff, it's really down home. Some of those people weren't afraid to make mistakes even and that's what blew your mind. Sometimes those mistakes would be really great, but now, no, you don't make a mistake. You just play badly. You play badly with no mistakes. It's not that there aren't good musicians out there; it's just that it's gotten out of hand. It's gotten so out of hand that you can't even go to any club, any place, and even talk. Everybody says, "Yeah, it's too loud; it really hurts my ears," and everybody comes out saying that, but nobody says, "Turn it down!" We are so, what do I want to say here, we are so -- when I was a kid --

PK: Sensationalized.

LF: I don't know. When I was a kid, a person who would walk down the street with a sign on his back advertising a product was a person who was working for the company. Now, everybody accepts the fact that they're advertising a product. Every shirt, everything, you can't get -- any shirt that doesn't have a label on it. In fact, kids even like it better if it says the name of the whole thing all the way across the back and across the front and I think it's commercialism. It's gotten into everybody so much that it's almost like a religion and that's why Mickey Mouse is the cross.

PK: The cross? Crucifixion?

LF: He's the Crucifixion. He's the thing that they are worshiping. Just like we were talking about Taiwan and everything, it's like people are that way about religion. If the old minister can get up there and have all these people rolling in the aisles and talking in tongues, then there's no reason why those commercial people can't do the same thing with Mickey Mouse. I mean that's exactly what they are doing. And they've got them buying everything. They've got them seeing everything. They've got them getting it whether they want it or not, whether they're going to throw it away in a year. They're going to be out there buying it and spending their money.

PK: Well, what about this, talking about noise and getting everything ratcheted up all the time, more and more volume? You have pump-up the volume, and, of course, it is visceral and we -- creates more of a physical response.

LF: As a jackhammer would.

PK: But is it that we finally want to get beyond the barrage, and we don't have to think, just feel? We become these feeling machines, and there's no subtlety, no differentiation or anything like that. Does that seem to you to be what's going on at all?

LF: To tell you the truth, I can't really get into their minds, so I don't really know. I just know that I feel that there's something wrong there and that people are very swayed into being a part of something because they want to be a part of it.

PK: So, that which was celebrated as freedom and along with that came rock and roll or acid rock, the whole '60s.

LF: Yeah, but jazz came with freedom. The world originated right there.

PK: Just looking at that phenomenon which became really a much broader youth culture kind of thing, was the notion that these were instruments or sort of the background music that drove this quest for freedom, but I don't want to influence you.

LF: Who was the most pop -- what was the most popular rock band of all?

PK: The Beatles which was less than ...

LF: They took from music. They took from the past. They took from old English folk songs. When you listen to them, you hear those old English folk songs. Even though they were influenced by the rock and roll in America,

they still had their roots in music. They still did things that were beautiful, that had beautiful melodies, and that were personal things. It's not that people don't write personal things now. There are a lot of good song writers out there, but it's that all the music behind them is so homogenized. That's the problem that I see. I even see people who do have really good things to say like Ani Di Franco. I don't know if you know who she is, but she decided she wasn't going to go through a big company. She started her own record label and is becoming very popular, but never gets up there where she should be with a lot of those other people. She's much better and really a good writer with a lot of feeling to her stuff, and yet her last recordings started to become the same old base drum, the same old guitar, and all of a sudden, it started to feel very -- it's like people just get into that. It's like that is what is professional. That is what makes something better, and so people stop listening to sounds. I think the last thing that I really responded to as far as sounds go was Paul Simon's Graceland, because he was taking all these African sounds and also his sound was much different than everything else. I said, "My God, something sounds different." I responded to that. You see, I told you when I was a kid, Spike Jones was one of my idols. I learned you can make music out of anything and I knew that way back before the John Cage hype, which I also call a hype, I think music can be anything. When I say "music," I never thought John Cage was music. He was interested in sound, but I never called him music. No good musicians can say John Cage was a good musician because he wasn't. It wasn't about that. My dream is that some day people will be making music on anything and everything. There are a million, trillion recycled things you can make music on. You don't have to go to the company store and buy the company instrument which was made by the company people, programmed by the company people and you think you're far out? You see what I mean? The steel drum was music invented by recycled instruments, of old drums. Containers that were left by the Army and were cut and pounded and instruments were made out of them and that's how the steel drum was developed.

PK: So you believe in a sort of "grassroots music," "democratic music," music that might somehow ...

LF: Reflects the person, reflects his environment, reflects the things that he responds to, not going out to the company store and buying the same thing. How many people say, "Oh, what instrument do you play?" Oh, the electric guitar, oh my, how unusual. It's like everybody plays the electric guitar now. [sighs in frustration]

PK: This seems a fruitful avenue to pursue because of the way you build your paintings, or seems to also involve trying the things at hand. I notice you have a few pieces of wood and twigs.

LF: Well, you know what I'm going to do with that big painting out there now? When I'm chipping into it, I don't know what I'm doing until it happens. I know the space I'm trying to work with when I chip into it. I'm saving all the pieces that fall down and I'm putting them into containers. Little pieces are going there. My floor used to be just covered with a mess, and now I'm starting to pick up all the little pieces that I chip off and recycle them in my paintings.

PK: Well it occurs to me, and forgive me if I make sort of simplistic connections here, but you're talking about the importance of assemblage in your work and that's part of the way you construct things. But then you're a painter, in which you feel that some of these recent works you brought the two together, and the way you describe your music or your ideas about music, I think that perhaps may be defined with the term "assemblage," to the extent that I understand it which is just taking things from around and bringing them together and constructing something. Does that agree with you at all?

LF: I know what you mean by the word "assemblage," but I'm trying to think about that because I'm trying to think about the fact that well - "Does that mean if I just used a whole bunch of broken electric guitars and played on them, that would be assemblage?" You see what I mean? Even the word "assemblage" is a very funny word if you start to think about it. It's just using whatever works. A painter in the beginning used paint because that's the material that they had and they didn't have the material to be able to stick things on and do all that the same way, and the paint was all oil. But at the same time, I would imagine that people way back then, when they couldn't work with clay, they used a lot of different kinds of things. Even in Africa, they did it. They would stick feathers in things. They would use all different kinds of things to make the things with. So actually, it's all part of art. We sort of make the definitions or the separations between the things which gives the different kinds of schools, because we separate the things that way. My goal is that nothing would be really separated, because that's what makes artificial schools, too.

PK: Let's talk about your music. This is something that, obviously, is very important to you and has been very important for a long time. How did you start out? You mentioned earlier when you joined the band that you actually played with [rock] groups like The Doors.

LF: The Byrds --

PK: What is the history of music for you, your early enthusiasms?

LF: When I was 11 years old, Spike Jones was the first music that I responded to. I didn't respond to music particularly before that, I was 11 years old. I heard cartoon sounds and I heard bells, horns, sirens, guns, things

like that, and I could identify with that because I liked cartoons, simple as that. That was the beginning. Then I started imitating Spike Jones' records and I traveled around with a little show. I would perform around the state in different places. Then I started my own band called "Spike Foulkes and His Musical Mad Men" which imitated the records.

PK: When was that? How old were you?

LF: I was 11 at first, then I got to about 12, 13, 14, then by the time I was 15, I had a band that played the real music in high school and that was it. After that, I gave it all up.

PK: So you were traveling around the state of California, presumably?

LF: No, no, no. This was Washington State.

PK: We'll get to that background, okay. You were traveling around Washington State when you were what?

LF: I wouldn't say traveling around, going to a Moose Lodge here, things like that that my mother would set up. She would take me and she was like a stage mother. I grew up like a stage kid in a certain way and I never got over it.

PK: How do you mean?

LF: My father left when I was a year old. I was raised by my grandmother, my mother, my grandfather who never said a word, so I never even knew the man, and my mother's two sisters, a lot of women, and they talked about movie stars all the time. I was a very beautiful, little boy and they said, "Oh, he's so beautiful. God, don't you think he looks just like --," and they'd mention some movie star. So I grew up thinking that the only important people were movie stars. So I made my fathers up. I made my fathers up who were great people like Charlie Chaplin, Salvador Dali, Spike Jones, who were all very different people. They were all one of a kind. I had quite a thing to live up to because Chaplin was probably one of the greatest people in his time there. Salvador Dali was known by everybody more than any other artist. Spike Jones was the oddball that the record companies didn't like because all the people loved him. So I had all these fathers, and then as I grew older, I had to outdo my fathers and that was a tough thing to do.

PK: But you had constructed this father image?

LF: I constructed it; I constructed it, yes.

PK: So you set yourself up.

LF: I set myself up to emulate my fathers and didn't realize what a tough time it would be because of what I had to do. So it's like I know Salvador Dali was one, and the music down there is another and you can see that influence in there. Though I've taken it off to a whole different realm, you can still see the influence. Chaplin was a movie director. I still want to do a whole performance thing. I don't know what's going to happen next. I've got enough music for a whole stage musical about L.A. As far as I'm concerned, the music is more memorable. You can remember all the songs more than you could with Andrew Lloyd Webber. It's that kind of music, and they're all different.

PK: I have to straighten this out because this is very interesting. So as a kid, as an 11- or 12-year-old, you, you had a band?

LF: Well by 12 or 13, I had a band that imitated the record. It didn't really play, about 12 people. They all did it, and then I formed a band that really played.

PK: So it was an air band?

LF: An air band. Well like I do on television now where a lot of the people sit up there and they don't really play it.

PK: That's what you were doing.

LF: That's what I was doing. All the cute kids going up there [making a popping sound], and all that, and then I did a thing where we played the real music.

PK: That started in high school?

LF: That started in high school.

PK: Did you have a name for your band?

LF: It was called "Spike Foulkes and His Seven Tags." See, I named myself after Spike Jones. I ended up having a room downstairs where I collected all these things that make noises.

PK: So even at that very early stage, you weren't necessarily using conventional instruments. You were using, what, bells, washboards?

LF: This was before I painted, too. There were pans.

PK: So what do they call those types of bands?

LF: Spike Jones, as I looked at it over the years and I look back on him now, I realized what he took from, he took from people who were actually better musicians than he was, such as Hezzie of the Hoosier Hot Shots. He played a washboard with little horns all over it, and he would make little chords out of it and bicycle horns and he played the slide whistle and he was really good at it. And Spike Jones sort of came and commercialized it in a sense, but there were other bands around, and they were called German bands. They had washboards and things like that. He was the only one that made it at that time because he had some really good people with him who wrote for him. Carl Grayson, who wrote "Cocktails for Two," did all the arranging for him. I can name all the people. They did all this stuff for him. When his band broke up and all those people left, all of a sudden, another part of him came out which was that he wasn't as good a musician as I thought. I thought he was a good musician. But he did do something that was very important, he brought in certain kinds of sounds into music that have not been repeated since.

PK: So this was a great inspiration to you.

LF: This was a great inspiration to me when I was a kid.

PK: And so you had this band in high school and you would do gigs sometimes?

LF: I can't even remember what happened in high school. I mostly I was getting ready for the big show. This was the amateur show in high school. We had a graduating class of 400 or so and I remember -- you sure you want to hear this story?

PK: Yes.

LF: I had worked hard to get this band perfected. All the teachers really thought, "Oh, he is so talented. This is really great." I get up there and I perform and then the Boys' Glee Club with all the popular boys in the band, I was not a popular boy, I just did my music. They had an applause meter and all the popular kids sat up front and they broke the applause meter because they were all up front, even though it was very close, they got it. I was so disappointed. I got second place.

PK: You got second place?

LF: To the popular boys, and it's something I never forgot. After I starting seeing out there and getting a whole different perspective of people out there, it fed into that whole thing, only if you're a movie star are people going to like you. Only if you're popular are people going to like you, because you could just be popular and do nothing. These were just adequate singers. They weren't doing anything special. They happened to be the popular boys. So I gave up the music and I discovered Salvador Dali. I met some friends who were artists and started to paint. I gave up the music and didn't do it again until I picked up those drums in 1965 to play in a rock band, and by that time music got so loud and the sticks got so big. I was playing "The Cheetah," which finally burned down, the old Aragon Ballroom near Venice. I was beating these sticks and when I got through, my hands were bleeding. I said this is ridiculous, and I gave it up and I started my own band, "The Rubber Band."

PK: Llyn Foulkes' Rubber Band.

LF: The Rubber Band. Where I was coming from is only what I knew and I started to write music and I did a song called The Ghost of Hollywood; played at the Pumpkin Festival for Jack Farley, who was an artist at the time, he was a friend of mine, George Herms, and Ed [Ruscha], and Joe Goode, all those people know him, too, and he had a studio down there.

PK: What was his name?

LF: Jack Farley, and he started the Pumpkin Festival because he was a showman. He always wanted to be another P.T. Barnum. Paul Block, who did the entertainment for "The Tonight Show" came out to the Pumpkin Festival with his wife and his kids saw "The Rubber Band," thought we were really great and wanted us to be on "The Tonight Show." We were on "The Tonight Show" within nine months after I had started the band. Now you

got to talk about somebody who just started something, I hadn't been in for that long. I thought, "My God, it's Hollywood, here I come, what I've always wanted." I wrote the song for the girl singer to sing like Betty Boop, called The Ghost of Hollywood. That's her up there on the right-side, she was married to the piano player. They weren't getting along and she was taking her hostilities about men out on me, and I didn't like her that much as a singer. I thought she could only sing a certain kind of thing well, which is sort of character parts, but I really wanted a jazz singer, and she knew that, so we didn't get along well. After "The Tonight Show," we started arguing because I called her up that night. I said, "Well how do you think we did?" knowing she would be kind of --, I shouldn't get into that on tape.

PK: As much as you want.

LF: Anyway, she wanted her husband to have more power in the band and they thought I was too insecure and that I needed all the attention, which was true. "The Tonight Show" focused a lot on her because she was the girl singer, so she thought she had sort of a way out, you see, maybe they would ask her back again. I have no idea. So anyway, two weeks later, they quit the band, thinking I was going to ask them back and probably give Alan more power or something, and I said, "No way." I wrote all the music; I arranged all the songs. It was my friend who got us on "The Tonight Show." Within two weeks, the Johnny Carson Show ["The Tonight Show"] called, asked us back, asked us to take Doc Severinsen's place when he went on vacation for two weeks. That's how much they liked the band. But I would not call them back. Of course the rest of the band was kind of like this, "Please call them back. This is our big opportunity." Well little, old Llyn, thinking of himself all the time, I'm an artist. I do want I want to do. I got another girl singer and another piano player. They didn't like the girl singer right off because they saw it as a little comedy act. The girl singer sang like Betty Boop and the guy who played a washboard with horns, those were what they were interested in. It could have been any other musicians, but those two key things made it neat for "The Tonight Show." I knew that. I could have called them back. I could have wound up being another Spike Jones. I didn't need to be another Spike Jones. Ruth Buzzi, an old friend of mine, says, "You could have been another Spike Jones." That was my first girlfriend, by the way, when I go out of art school.

PK: Really?

LF: I'll tell you about that someday. She was going through Pasadena Playhouse and I met her when I was going to art school. Anyway, it never happened. I pushed the band around, and they came back about two years later. We thought we could do it again. We apologized to each other and everything, but I knew that was the end, and then I started to develop a machine myself. I stopped the band and started to develop the machine myself and now it is what it is and I never would be as good as I am now had I done that. I would have been limited. I would have gone the same route as Spike Jones. The route that Spike Jones went was the fact that he wasn't that great a musician. He was really a mediocre drummer, but he had a lot of really good people around him and he knew how to get people together and how to make certain sounds good. I would have been in that category except that I could really write songs also, and I wouldn't have grown because when they left, I wouldn't have had a one-man band. I couldn't play without them, so -- what I'll do is stop there.

[END SESSION 1, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. A second interview session with artist Llyn Foulkes at his studio/home, The Brewery, in downtown Los Angeles, this is July 17th, 1997. The interviewer is Paul Karlstrom, and this is Tape 1, Side A. Llyn, in our last session, we roamed around a bit, but going back to your childhood and some formative experiences and interests especially the whole interest in music. You'll probably be able to talk about even more especially in connection with your machine which you played for me after the session. I think a lot of questions for me emerged from our discussions, but I'd like to touch on a few of those. Just before we turned the tape on, you made the remark that you really don't want to be isolated, which suggests that in your past you were, and I believe you said that the current works you're doing are the last ones about you and I wonder if you could explain that a little more and the change that's taken place in your life with moving and with your divorce, leaving Topanga coming downtown, but especially the business of isolation and the work perhaps changing.

LF: That was a lot of stuff all at one time. It means I've got to go from here to here to here to here.

PK: You said that you don't want to be isolated anymore.

LF: No, I don't. I always wanted to be loved by everyone. Doesn't everyone want to be loved? So when I was a child and I worked on my music in isolation down there, when I would come upstairs, I would get the kind of love that -- I'm trying to remember whether I did say this last time?

PK: I don't think so, but it doesn't matter.

LF: It does, because I don't remember what I said last time.

PK: Well you don't have to.

LF: Because when I was young, my mother and my grandmother gave a lot of attention to me in a certain way, and that attention was that they thought I was pretty and they thought I looked like a movie star. They would say things like that all the time. So I grew up thinking that the only important people were movie stars and people like that, so, in a sense, wanting to be loved in that way. I think that started and generated from my childhood and it's never left me. I don't think those things that are formed in early years ever really leave you. You have to cope with them and somehow resolve them, and the only resolution is for it to happen and then I'll know that that wasn't really what it was all about. That's not what love really is, because I can see that now. Any fool can get up there and do anything they want and people will love them just because they keep seeing their face over and over again. I realize that, but at the same time, there's still that need. You can't get rid of a need until you resolve it.

PK: Your music certainly, the performance or perhaps the art itself, has played that role in your life. You said, though, that in the earlier days, you tended to be content, I guess, in isolation. Am I to understand then that part of that had to do with your immediate family, wife and children and so forth, that that provided enough that you felt fulfilled and complete within that community?

LF: I think so. I felt complete in the sense, I suppose, that I had a certain amount of love that I thought was love, something around me and I didn't need anymore. That's true. I just didn't need it. I don't know if I can really understand why I didn't need it, since I needed so much love, why didn't I need it then. I would have gone around to all the galleries. I would have socialized with all these people and just think of all. I guess when I'm that involved in my work, because I think of the work as even the more abstract work in the very beginning as being something that was really expressing how I felt, and so I think that whatever the skeletons were in my closet and it's like they come back to haunt you, and so that becomes a way of working. For example, I had a lot of anger, an extreme amount of anger, when I was young. I didn't realize I had so much anger. When I was very young, I'd walk along the streets sometime by myself and somebody would walk by me and say, "Gee, I thought you were angry." "No."

PK: They said they thought you were angry?

LF: Just seeing my expression, so I had two sides of me going then. I had also the humor and making people laugh and some sort of feeling of ...

PK: Depression?

LF: I don't know whether that, or whether it was rejection. I think it all leads into the same thing when I start to think about it, that I wasn't one of the popular boys, which led into that thing about being loved by everybody.

PK: And wanting to win the high school performance thing?

LF: Win the high school performance thing and being so devastated when I didn't and that the popular boys did. When I got in the art scene, I started seeing the same thing happening in the art scene, the exact same thing. Finding that somebody was popular, not that they were that great, that they were popular, and then it was, "My God, it's still happening here," and I thought art was different. In fact, I even did a painting called *I Thought Art Was Different*.

PK: I love that one.

LF: So it's like I thought art was special, and it was the same thing. I saw the same thing happening with art. I see people writing about art the same way that somebody writes about pop music and then you start wondering, "Well, is art anything anymore?" If it's on that level, well then I guess that means that there's hardly anything in the *Calendar* [*Los Angeles Times*] about it. Art is always way down there at the bottom. Today, the *Calendar* section has music and film and everything, but it didn't have any art, and that happens about every other day. So, what is art anymore? If art is not after something or doing something or if it's not, in a sense, an adventure or science of some form, then what does it even mean anymore? It's just sort of a thing to hang on your wall for someone to pass by and say, "Oh, don't you love the colors in that?" "Don't you like that?" "Oh, look at that image," and then walk away. If that's all art is, I don't want to do it anymore, I'd rather do music. I'd step right out of it and do the music.

PK: This is interesting. Let's pursue a little bit this idea of a need for validation, acceptance, or being popular. Judging yourself in the eyes of others, how you seem to be perceived by others?

LF: I perceive myself, right now at this particular state, I'm always surprised when somebody says, "Oh, Llyn

Foulkes, blah, blah, blah, blah, whatever." I'm always surprised.

PK: What, that they know who you are?

LF: I'm always surprised because that's what happens with isolation also. I don't see myself out there on TV all the time. I don't see myself on the cover of the art magazines.

PK: Well, sometimes.

LF: No, I've never been on the cover of an art magazine.

PK: *Art in America* or something recently had a big --

LF: I've been in an art magazine. I've never been on the cover.

PK: Well that wasn't on the cover.

LF: My former wife always said to me, "You're not going to be satisfied until you're on the cover of *Newsweek*," and I said, "Yeah, you're right."

PK: So this was a point of contention or problem, created a problem in your relationships, do you think then?

LF: Oh, yes, my last relationship with Katie.

PK: Your last marriage.

LF: Katie was really a good person. She just was very hard for her to put up with that sort of feeling that I suppose you could say, "Gotten my due or something like that." I was hard to put up with because it was never enough. But the best thing that happened to me in the last six years was Paul Schimmel putting me on the cover of the catalogue for the Helter Skelter show. I mean there's somebody who believed. Paul didn't know he was up against those forces, too. He thought, "Oh, I just put it out there and there it is." He didn't realize that that's another thing to get into, but I felt so good about that.

PK: What forces? He didn't know that he was up against what forces? What do you mean?

LF: The forces of galleries, the interconnections between galleries and museums and art magazines, and all that sort of interconnection. Paul's Helter Skelter show was only going to be like eight people or nine people. I can even remember him saying every word at the beginning, and all of a sudden, it turned into 25 people. These were all these different galleries with the high-profile artists in it, who were just starting to make the art magazines and all of a sudden, he put those people in it. That was not his plan at the beginning.

PK: What was his plan?

LF: His plan was to have like eight or nine people.

PK: You and who else?

LF: Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Maria Nordman, Richard Jackson. I can't remember now. I don't think Lari Pittman was in it. I know that the Robert Williams wasn't in it. This is what I recall at the beginning.

PK: I didn't know that.

LF: He may say something different when he says it, but that's what I recall him saying. Nancy Rubins, I don't think was. I personally think it would have made for a better show if you remember.

PK: More focused.

LF: Much more focused, and so what he got was not being focused, but then he drew in all the Robert Williams' people which was a big crowd. He drew in the homosexual contingency with the Lari Pittman stuff, and that was a big crowd. So all of a sudden, he drew in all these other elements, and suddenly it became even a whole different kind of show. Here's the thing that Paul didn't realize that these things were interconnected. For example, out of that show, the people who suddenly went across and got over to New York, to The Whitney and some to The Venice were five people, and I start thinking about what each one of those five people did. One had a giant penis in the front room. The other one was Lari Pittman, who does homosexual themes in his paintings. The third one was Paul McCarthy who had a man fucking a tree. The other one was Mike Kelley who had bathroom scrawls and stuff like that. What I'm saying, the whole thing was all geared toward that one kind of thinking. The painting now that's in Denmark, I was not called for any of those things, for any of that stuff at all.

No one asked me to be in anything after that Helter Skelter show, except for the museum in Japan, the -- in Tokyo and the other one where they had the new Renaissance and they used it on their cover. There, I got on the cover of something there. And then until this Denmark show, that's over there. What I'm saying, in the United States, it's been all tied up with a certain contingency of people and these people in the Los Angeles area are headed by people like Christopher Knight. Christopher Knight is well known amongst the art community as championing homosexuals over art. And, to me, that's not right.

PK: Do you agree with that?

LF: What?

PK: Do you agree with that view of Christopher Knight?

LF: I said it.

PK: You said he is seen that way. Is he seen that way by you as well?

LF: Oh yeah, and other artists that I know, oh sure. It's very obvious because on the cover of the *Times*, it's just like you could go back to *Times* in the last -- I think that would be a good -- real neat thing to try to do, in the past four or five years. You go back through the *Times* and you'll see that most of the things that are on the front page of the *Times*, in color, real big about something are either homosexual or has to do with some sort of issue like that or some sort of feminine issue. Christopher Knight, at the beginning, used to not give women good reviews and a lot of them didn't like him, so he started making the connection that if he's going to be for feminism, he better be for all right or wrong. He wrote an article in *Art Issues* magazine on feminism, and the article was filled with pictures, I think, one was fucking somebody in the ass; another one was sucking somebody -- this is Christopher Knight. He would never do that in the *Times*, but he said, "I'm for feminism," and he would say things in his articles talking about abstract expressionists and he was calling certain people butch posturing, as referring to Paul who might have had a relationship. Now this is the main art critic for the *Los Angeles Times* doing that, and I thought to myself, "My God, that's incredible." And he wouldn't even come and see my paintings. He won't mention me in shows. The "Proof" show which was one of the best shows they had that Charles Demarais did down there [Laguna Art Museum] which was really a comprehensive show,

PK: Which show was this?

LF: It was called "Proof." I have a catalog. I have these catalogues here, and it was a very comprehensive show. Since it was a good comprehensive show, Christopher Knight wrote about it. When Charles was championing me again, he put me on the front of the museum. He put my picture of a geometry teacher with the thing on the front, and *Art Week* magazine said that my stuff was the most powerful in the show. Christopher Knight wrote this article in the *Times* and didn't mention my name like I didn't even exist. Now you can't do that as an art critic. I suppose you can, you're the one who has the only control, who is the only person that says, "What contemporary art is in Los Angeles," the only critic that anybody listens to, and that's why art is in the state that it's in, in many ways. Okay, that's what I think. Then he's getting clones to work for him like David Pagel, who thinks just like he does.

PK: This raises all kinds of interesting questions. First of all, I should say that it's no surprise to me that you got put on the front of Helter Skelter, because for a lot of us who have been around for a while, you're like, I don't want to say, an old master of L.A. art from that time, and so you're a figure.

PK: But he wasn't doing it because of that.

PK: No, I know, but I'm saying that --

LF: Because he had Chris Burden there, too.

PK: I'm not just making a gratuitous compliment here, but for many of us who are somewhat familiar with the scene, you're the key figure, so that selection shouldn't necessarily surprise you. If that is indeed the case, then not being mentioned by Christopher Knight, reviewing the show which you were probably included does raise very interesting questions of why. And your explanation, well, it's a provocative one. You feel that because of your themes and you mentioned a theme throughout Helter Skelter and when Christopher Knight and others pick up on and sort of focus on.

LF: Focus -- Christopher Knight, when he would do the Helter Skelter show, he had to mention my name then. What he focused on was my moralizing.

PK: He liked that or no?

LF: No, he didn't like that. It was demoralizing. He didn't take it as a social critique that was important in the city

of Los Angeles talking about developers, talking about Disney, talking about -- he didn't take it that way because he didn't like it. As Pat says, he said, "Well he doesn't like you because you're too macho," and I said, "And that's the whole thing."

PK: You mean Pat Faure?

LF: Yes. What I'm saying is, it's not just me that I'm concerned about, I'm concerned about the fact that it's affecting a lot of artists. That's why I went out and curated that Imagination show. Even early on, it was still happening. I mean it's like whatever powers that be try to keep the friends and the people in, and it's that way in any field, and art is not immune to it. Only they think that art should be immune to it, but now it's not immune to it because the museums are following these people. It should be that the museums are saying, "Educated people like that should be going around and they should be defining 'What is art,' and not having these other people defining art." Museums should be the highest source. And that's what I see happening. I see it happening particularly in your modern art museum. [Maurice] Tuchman, because I wouldn't be in a show that he wanted me to be in, pulled my painting out of the County Museum for 15 years and it wasn't until they let him go that they put them back in. So what I'm saying is, what does that have to do with -- now, that's talking against what I just said, museums should be higher and yet even in museums, you have the same thing happening. Anyway, it's getting too personal in that sense.

PK: But obviously you did and felt deeply about it.

LF: I felt deeply about it. I don't think much about it. Christopher Knight doesn't bother me anymore because I know where he's coming from. It's just that I know that he's hurting other people. A lot of artists would like to get the chance, and you don't get the chance.

PK: Well this is part of your story anyway and I think it is important. It doesn't mean that you necessarily feel that way, a strong way of focusing on issues like this right now. But, obviously, over time, these have been issues of great concern and you saw it as affecting, to a certain degree, your reception of how your work was seen and how it was put forward, and that they are related to this very directly. I want to tell you something briefly. I did this interview with our mutual friend, Jirayr Zorthian. There are a couple issues involving him that I want to ask you about later. In my interview with him, and I'm not trying to make you guys the same at all, but it's just like having an example to look at. Zorthian socializes enormously and beyond the art world, and yet he feels, in terms of his art, isolated, that he's been overlooked, that the art world hasn't paid the kind of attention that he would like. I think that this is pretty basic and pretty true. He gets attention for other reasons. So in a sense, he would describe himself as rejected or not understood. I'm not saying that you say that.

LF: I think he's just saying what most artists feel and most artists don't say it.

PK: What he says, is that the art market aspect, the publicity aspect, the promotional aspect of the art world that goes around the museums and so forth, is basically corrupt and self-serving and very special interests.

LF: No, I wouldn't disagree with that.

PK: He then points to that as an explanation for why some people go out.--

LF: Zorthian once said to me, I was at this party up at -- see there, I'm going to parties. All of a sudden, this is just like during the divorce business, I'm starting to get out more. So I go up to Judy Vida and Stuart Spence. My friend Zorthian was there, and he introduced me to this girl and he says, "This is Llyn Foulkes." She says, "He's a famous artist; he's been marketed well," and I thought to myself, "What?"

PK: So Zorthian perceives you --

LF: As being marketed.

PK: But, of course, you disagree. You feel the opposite.

LF: No, no. I thought about that, too. First it was, "What are you talking about? I haven't been marketed." I haven't been marketed, but if you consider marketing being in the Ferus Gallery from the beginning and having, oddly enough, gotten the one-man show at The Pasadena Art Museum which wasn't through Walter Hopps, but through the museum for him, but falling into the whole Walter Hopps scheme, then you can say I was marketed without knowing it. I was marketed just by chance. I was marketed by chance.

PK: In other words, you were not promoting yourself and marketing yourself.

LF: I wasn't promoting myself. I wasn't marketing myself, and neither were they. I just happened to fall into the thing in an odd sort of way. When I had my first show at Ferus Gallery, I didn't even get a review, even though they had the blackboard and chair in it, I didn't even get a review, and it was at the worst time of the year, in

August. Now we're hopping into this, and I had already submitted my stuff to the Pasadena Art Museum and the Pasadena Art Museum, at that time, was Leavitt, I believe.

PK: Tom Leavitt.

LF: Tom Leavitt.

PK: Yes. What year was that?

LF: That was like '61. I had the show in '62. I entered the stuff in '61, and then they okayed it for a show, but they did this. Anybody can enter their stuff back then. They stopped doing that when Walter Hopps became the head of the Pasadena Art museum, and when Maurice Tuchman became curator of the County Museum, they stopped having the invitational show. I believe I'm correct on that, maybe within a year or two with the County Museum, but they used to have invitational shows there. I was also in one of those shows at the County Museum, too. By their stopping their shows and with Walter Hopps stopping the open shows of the Pasadena Art Museum, he gained control of everything the way that it was shown, so he suddenly became the person that started to define what was supposed to be Los Angeles art or art at the time.

PK: Who, Maurice or Walter? Walter you're talking about.

LF: Walter.

PK: What about Henry, Henry Hopkins?

LF: I don't think Henry was important at all. In fact, the reason that he's so over-blown it blows my mind. He had a little gallery called Huysman Gallery. Probably the only show he just happened to have was the War Babies show, happened to have Larry Bell and Ron Miyashiro and Ed Bereal and Joe Goode. His gallery closed at the end of the year, but he had the right connections, because Rolf Nelson had much more important people than Henry Hopkins did, but he's never even mentioned because he stopped doing gallery and went off to be a flower man in New York. But Henry Hopkins stayed with it and stayed and went to all the parties, all of a sudden, he's up there at UCLA. To me, that's kind of like Larry Gagosian being a poster seller, graduated from UCLA in Business Administration or something, became so poster-art and he realized he could sell art.

[END SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PK: An interview with Llyn Foulkes. This is Tape 1, Side B.

LF: Then he [Gagosian] thought he could make more money with more expensive posters, and then it got into a gallery. I think it was called The Broxton Gallery or something. Is that what it was called? In fact, I even lent him a painting for his gallery. He was trying to get me in at the time. I never got it back, ever got it back, and all of a sudden, this guy is defining what contemporary art is, and museums are listening to the guy. Museum people who graduated in art history and whose whole thing has been about art history are listening to this guy who sold poster art. I said, "What does that say?"

PK: Well, it's a business. It's merchandising and promotion.

LF: I thought art was supposed to be above that sort of thing.

PK: Well I wouldn't get confused between the art market and --

LF: But what I'm saying is the art market shouldn't affect the museums. That's what I mean.

PK: Well, I think it does, though.

LF: Well, I guess that makes Larry Gagosian like a record producer or something. And maybe I'm just the naive one here. I just think there's something wrong with this picture.

PK: You're not the only one to point these things out and to raise these issues.

LF: Zorthian, I'm sure did.

PK: No, I mean beyond Zorthian. In fact, I think a lot of people recognize this dynamic for what it is and that it can be trendy and that certain voices are more strident and they're the ones that are heard. That power actually does control what should be aesthetic decisions.

LF: Except for the people who are totally in the game and then they don't even talk about that.

PK: Well, maybe some of them if they're being candid and they say, "Unfortunately it goes this way," but there's no difference. This is like a whole different philosophical issue, but I think you're not wrong in pointing that out and I think your examples are good. Getting back to the '60s, I was interested in what you had to say about the '60s in L.A. as viewed as seminal moment where all of a sudden things came together in this great fusion.

LF: At the beginning of Los Angeles.

PK: So a lot of us are aware that L.A. art did not, in fact, start in the 1960s and it did not start with the Ferus Gallery underlying our conversation here and your remarks, seems to me is acknowledgment that the story has been pretty much told that way. In the beginning, it was Ferus.

LF: Right, exactly.

PK: In the beginning, there was Kienholz.

LF: In fact, I just said it myself, didn't I? You see how it even affected me.

PK: And what interests me so much is that you obviously have had all along an alternative view of the scene, and I would love to talk more about that.

LF: Well, I can only talk about in how it affected me personally.

PK: That's right, but that's good.

LF: That's the only way that I can talk about it. Otherwise, I didn't really think much about it.

PK: I don't even know if you think back to it now, but you have said, and more than once, that you would like the opportunity to tell how it was or at least how you've experienced it. You had mentioned Hopps, Tuchman, and Hopkins, and these various people that came on the scene, in effect, in some ways, created the interest or excitement or were involved in that, but at any rate, what interested me is that when you were talking --

LF: I'm not so sure that they created it. It was also already happening, so it's like they didn't really --

PK: Well -- or marketed it, if you will, promote --

LF: Marketed?

PK: Promote it.

LF: All right, okay.

PK: What I find interesting maybe is an entree again to this subject is your relationship to that art world. You said that you found when you entered into the art world, that you encountered some of the same disappointments and that is that what really mattered is who gets the attention and who was popular, that there was the popularity aspect to that. I suppose within the avant garde, so-called, the Ferus Gallery would be viewed as the home of the most popular.

LF: Yes.

PK: And, well, I'd like to pursue that.

LF: I was always just like really stupidly honest about everything. If I didn't like something, I'd say it. I would never be nice, and when I had my first show at Ferus Gallery because my teacher at Chouinard, my last teacher was Richards Ruben, and Richards Ruben, affected me as I also affected him because his paintings changed when I came into the classes and started doing something. Then my paintings changed when I saw him doing something at the Ferus Gallery. He told me to take my stuff over, so I did; I took it over and Irving and Walter looked at it, so they gave me a show.

PK: What year was that?

LF: This was 1961. This was August of '61. And so there weren't too many people around then. I didn't get a review in the magazines and stuff. And then Walter was leaving the Ferus Gallery to go over and be director of the Pasadena Art Museum. Irving was going to take over the gallery. Well, I guess it had gotten around. I probably told the wrong people when they asked me what I thought of Robert Irwin's work and Billy Al Bengston's work and I said, "Well I just didn't think they were that great. I didn't think Irwin could paint," and I

guess it got back to them because the next thing that happened is Walter Hopps telling me is that Billy Al Bengston and Irwin came to Irving -- well, actually, Irving told me that because he came to my studio and told me that he couldn't put me in a group show because Billy Al Bengston and Robert Irwin came to him and -- it was Walter that told me the first time, so Walter must have been there, too. He said this was the first time he had ever seen Irwin cry, he was so angry. They would not show if I showed. So they had to make a choice. These were his big artists, and I'm just a new person. A year later, he came back after I'd had my show and made the art magazines, I think, two years later, and said he'd take me back any time. By that time, I was out of Ferus, but I got the thing at the Pasadena Art Museum. Well, Walter was just taking over the Pasadena Art Museum, had nothing to do with getting my show there. I had entered my stuff. I had 92 things. I had the blackboard and chair and I had Flanders. I had really important early pieces, really a knockout show, 92 things in it. It was the first time, I think, Dennis Hopper and George Herms and Wally Berman, and all those people had seen my stuff. It had a lot of crosses and a lot of black things, a lot of crosses, and eerie black and assemblage stuff and all this, and dripping things, and even a dead possum like that dead cat up there, thrown at a blackboard and all that. It looked like that cat that was in the blackboard. Diana Slotnik wished she had bought it because I finally destroyed it. It started smelling because I didn't put enough plastic on it. It was downstairs and I didn't have the room and half the paintings were destroyed being outside because I didn't have the room. Anyway, I had that show. Walter was trying to make a name for himself as being the new head of the Pasadena Art Museum. Mine was the last entered show. I had to have the show and I had three rooms. It was a big show. There was one room with only about 15 paintings in this one room, and this was Walter's big hit. He's going to market it, "Pop Art on the West Coast." So he has his first show and he's making this big poster. I remember at the time he's doing this big poster. It's gigantic, all in color and they didn't do a lot of color stuff at that time. It was big and in color. It was going to be expensive, and I wanted to see what they're doing with my poster for the Pasadena Art Museum. Well, he said they couldn't afford to do mine, even though my show was much bigger. He couldn't afford to do mine because he was pushing himself. He was going to do this big, gigantic color poster on Pop Art.

PK: Okay, so there were two shows at the same time. Yours was one. Is that right?

LF: Right. The other one was the one that introduced Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode and all those people as being Pop artists. Do you know about that show?

PK: Yes.

LF: It's called "New Realism." It had Warhol in it and Lichtenstein ...

PK: But I didn't realize that your show was concurrent.

LF: Simultaneous. I didn't have much money at all then, and I think it cost \$150, that was a lot of money to me. That's the announcement over there on the wall with the blackboard and the chair in it. This was the Pasadena Art Museum, 1962, one year before the Duchamp show and it had the blackboard and the chair in it. I'd see Walter's desk and he'd have all these letters to *Newsweek*, *Time* magazine. He's trying this whole self-promotion thing and he's really doing the number. He's sending this stuff out all over and they're not worried about my show. Even when they did the Denmark show and he's talking about it, he never mentions my show. When they talk about the early things, neither of the Ferus people in any of that stuff, mention it at all. Walter Hopps is promoting himself. I was not about to promote Walter Hopps in that sense, because he wanted to be established with something new that was happening. Mine was too separate. There wasn't anything else like it. There was nothing else like it. Well what happened is that John Coplans who was the editor of *ArtForum* magazine and Hopps were buddy-buddy, because Coplans took over Walter Hopps' place after he left the Pasadena Art Museum. This is the head of an art magazine. There was a guy behind me in my studio on Avenue 64 that I don't even remember his name anymore and he did these telephone-booth-looking things. He was only 19 years old at the time. They'd come over and look at his studio stuff and then the next thing you'd see in the art museum was just a picture of it, without saying anything. They said they just wanted to see what the reaction was going to be of it. They're marketing it. This is a museum conspiring with an art magazine to market something. I said, "Okay, fine." Maybe it was Hopps' leanings anyway, I don't know, but I think a lot had to do with that. My show was the first time I got anything in the art magazine. Well, Joe Goode at the time had not exhibited at all except for at that Huysman [Gallery]. I think that was after the War Babies thing, but he hadn't exhibited anything yet. That was his first time he had exhibited something, and it was to me at the time a take-off on my blackboard and chair because the section was the same; the shape was the same. It had the section on top, and then it had a milk bottle sitting down there, only mine was a chair sitting down there, and mine was 1960 and his was done the year after. He saw my thing and he sort of got the eye of Jasper Johns and painted it that way and did the same format. I knew that at the time and that's what I felt when I went in to look at the show there, the Pop Art show thing.

PK: Who was that, the artist?

LF: Joe Goode.

PK: Oh, Joe. We're talking about Joe now, okay.

LF: The milk bottle and the chair was reminiscent of my blackboard and the chair, the same idea. Nobody had put a flat object like that with a line and the object sitting in the front of it. Mine just happened to be a blackboard and chair, so, "Okay, that's fine." All artists get picky and say, "Well this is mine; I started this and -- ." Okay, but the point was that I went up to Walter and he had the art magazine there, and he was looking at it. I said, "Well did I get a review? I've never had a review in an art magazine." He says, "Oh yeah," with his head kind of sheepishly down. "Oh yeah, here," and he hands me the magazine. So I went to look at my review and on the cover was Joe Goode, the milk bottle and the chair, and there was my announcement, which I had to make myself with the blackboard and the chair that he wouldn't even do. He was just pushing himself. I threw the magazine at Walter. I said, "You son-of-a-bitch" and I walked out. The review was a great review; it was written by, what's his name?

PK: This was in *ArtForum*?

LF: It'll come to me. It was in *ArtForum*. It was my first review in *ArtForum*. I've got all those old *ArtForums*. I can't remember. He died. But anyway, that really upset me and that was kind of the straw that ...

PK: Well was it Fidel?

LF: No, it wasn't Fidel Danielli. He did write a good review on me in 1964 or something, great review, and who was it? Anyway, it'll come to me. So that sort of started setting the tone to me of what was going on out there. It wasn't like you just did your thing. The next year, Walter had the Duchamp show. I went to the Duchamp show and you know the effect that that show has had on Los Angeles art. I went to the Duchamp show. Now you can compare me to Zorthian, I don't care. I walked through that Duchamp show and my show had just been there less than a year before, and it filled up more rooms than the Duchamp show. It had 92 things and it was only a period of a few years. I walked around that show, and I thought about all those special things that I had there, all the old things painted on photographs and all the kinds of stuff like that. I walked around the Duchamp show and I thought to myself, "My stuff's better than that." There wasn't anything in the Duchamp show that really grabbed me. The next thing I know, Walter is playing chess with Duchamp and the cameras are around and this is all part of this marketing thing, connecting himself to Duchamp.

PK: Or to be better than that famous picture of Eve Babitz nude playing the chess with Duchamp.

LF: Right, with Duchamp.

PK: Yes, which one could view as very eye-catching from promotional choice.

LF: It was a promotional thing. What happened was John Coplans saw my paintings there. John Coplans, who comes in from a different direction than Walter even though they had a connection, saw my show and really liked it and he put me in *ArtForum* magazine and did a thing on three California artists, Larry Bell, me, and I can't remember who the third one was, but that started it off, and I was connected to Pop Art because in 196 -- see, what happened was, that I was affected by Pop Art. I wasn't affected by Ed Ruscha or Joe Goode, but I was affected by Warhol. When I saw Warhol, not Warhol's soup cans and stuff like that, but his largeness. I also was doing serial imagery, but he was doing it large with a lot of color, and other people like Stella were doing big things with stripes and things like that, so I was also affected by that sort of thing. I first started looking at the art magazines when I got my review, otherwise, I never looked at the art magazines. So either by my looking at the art magazine or going out and seeing that, I realize I was affected. I started doing my serial imagery with more serial imagery, whereas, I may not even have gone in that direction. I don't know that. I started flattening out. I started using canvas and doing them faster.

PK: About when?

LF: About 1963. In fact, if you look down there and you'll see that painting with the stripes, that's 1963. That was one of my best things from that period. That's going to MOCA this year. That was a serial imagery with stripes, affected by Stella, not Warhol, but it's still more me because in 1960, I did the same format. If you turn the painting sideways, they would be across the top like "Geometry Teacher" which was 1960 which was actually before Warhol was doing the serial imagery. I believe. I don't think he started doing the serial imagery until about '61, and that was Campbell soup and that wasn't even painting, that was just the single Campbell soup, then he did the paintings with the serial imagery. Well, then I started realizing as I looked back over years, in my show in 1963, I also had some cows. I had the big cow that's in the retrospective, a lot of other cows, and then I had a double-image sepia-tone painting called Mount Hood, Oregon. It was a big, double-image, sepia-tone painting, and cows and other paintings with serial imagery. Warhol came over and saw the show because he was having a show, his Campbell soup. I think it was right about there. Irving brought him over twice to my show, and the next year, he comes out with cow wallpaper and double-image paintings in 1964 sepia-tone. His were always like the Marilyn Monroe, all like that. The reason I did double-image was because I got a

stereoptican camera. I went around taking stereoptican pictures. And I was hung up on the photographic aspect and trying to make it look old. It was coming from a whole different place, and then years later, I was very perturbed by that after a while. I thought, "Oh, fuck, let him have the fucking serial imagery," because that's all he did anyway. So it was like let him have it, but it was still irritating because you start realizing unless you have a name and you're marketed, this don't mean a fucking thing whether you did it or not. It's the person who takes this and markets it. So now, I'm doing paintings that are so hard to do that other people can't do them. And so now what it comes down to is, "Who's the influential artist?" The influential artist is the one that most people take from, and now the influential artist becomes the one that's the easiest to take from. Duchamp was the easiest to take from. Conceptual art was the easiest to take from, but to do something that took a lot of work, a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot about space, light and form, and things like that, that wasn't as easy to do, so, to me, got roped in art after that and people are trying to say, all these people are influential. I say, "John Baldessari is influential?" Even Charles Desmarais when he came up to do his "Proof" show, he was going to do the whole thing on people who took photographs. He didn't know that much about them. At the beginning, it was all about John Baldessari that he was talking about. I said, "I don't think I want to be in your show." He came up and he saw my stuff and he started talking more to me and all of a sudden, he was highlighting me in the show, the same thing Paul Schimmel did because they don't know. They follow what's going on, what is the most influential. I go to art schools now and it blows my mind because half of them [art students] can't even do anything. When you copy Duchamp and you say, "All you have to do is come up with a good idea," and the art teachers are telling you that because they're threatened, even the ones that do know how to teach painting are also threatened, and they say, "Just come up with a good idea," then that's what you've got. So, I got a lot of anger about that and I could even start to sound like Zorthian. I could say, "Okay, maybe he's not the greatest painter in the world, but his stuff is certainly just as valid on another level as some of these people down here who don't do much work on it and are more valid." I can go to Rosamund Felsen's gallery and I can see shows that look like shit and paper with a couple things stuck up there. It's like, "Oh, get off my fucking back. This is baby stuff. What are you talking about." At least the guy's trying to do something, but nobody like that gets any fucking kind of credit at all, and it's like I can see why he's angry about stuff like that. There are a lot of artists who really work hard at what they do. It's the same thing that's happening in jazz music. You don't think they're fucking angry when they see some guy who can play three chords, and then he's got hit records and making a million dollars. Art has come to that!

PK: Robert Hughes did this, and I don't want to get off the subject and I don't want to stop your direction --

LF: Oh, you mean the one who Christopher Knight is after his job.

PK: Anyway, Hughes, of course, has talked about it being a power position in terms of visibility. He has this new PBS series which is getting a lot of debate, attention, and controversy, and American art historians are mostly pissed off about it because they feel that they're doing all the work and Hughes just takes the idea.

LF: But he hasn't done all his homework either.

PK: Anyway, but what is interesting, relating to what you said, is when he interviewed Jeff Koons.

LF: I did see that one.

PK: Did you see that?

LF: I did. "Oh, I just had somebody -- oh, they're all doing -- do you make anything? Oh, no, I just have it." I thought to myself, "Well what the fuck do they need you for?"

PK: Well Duchamp, or everybody else would say, the idea. Perhaps Jeff Koons answered, "Ah, my idea?" Is that what he said?

LF: But it even boils down to people who are a lot better than that, and so it's a shame. Well, I don't like to mention people that I also like, but I see the same sort of things. Well, like Chris Burden, when I went over to his studio, he was doing this big ball that was in the Helter Skelter show. He had two Latinos working on the thing for him and I said, "How do you direct them?" He said, "Well I just have them go around and do whatever they want on the thing," and he can put it like this and I'll come in and I'll say this like this, and my wife said, "Well would you give them credit?" And he said, "Well, no, it's my idea." It was kind of a disappointed me in a way because he did these great things like the big, huge motorcycle with the big wheel which was a great piece, and when you talk about sculpting something or make something, well then you've got different kinds of visions happening and other kinds of things like that. I think that that's what bothers me. I think that that's very special when you do something with your hands. I'm a big believer in the word "artist," the word "artist" or "art" comes from the word "artisan," somebody who works with their hands. Well that name "artist" has been so messed up, that now you have a teeny-bop rock singer on television and they're interviewing her and she says, "Well, I'm an artist," and everything is artists now. This only happened in the last 20 years. I personally think it's probably a corporate thing to try to make people feel special, so they'll feel like they're really somebody. I always thought

that "artist" meant, I don't know. It's a good question, though. "Artist" meant two things. Even if you go at the other level, "artist" meant somebody who does something really well. A musician will say, "I'm a musician." When a musician says he's an artist, then that's getting on another level. Now everybody says they're artists and the word doesn't mean anything anymore. And so I feel like I'm going to come out of my machine as "art man." I'm going to take my fucking name back. I mean that's what I feel like. I'm somebody who works with their fucking hands, pardon my words. You can bleep that out.

PK: No, no.

LF: I'm somebody who's working with their hands in relationship to my mind and how it comes out is how it comes out because it's coming out through my mind. I don't see the difference between that and some primitive artist making some spiritual thing out of clay. It's an extension of that level, and I think of art as being a spiritual thing on that level, so it's not just paper on a wall with a couple of things stuck to them.

PK: Oh, I have many ideas as you talk and so I have to be disciplined to try to get one of them. Actually, we're coming towards the end of this side. Why don't we stop this, and put in a new tape?

[END SESSION 2, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PK: Continuing this second interview session with Llyn Foulkes. This is Tape 2, Side A, and the date is July 17th, 1997. Let's see if we can get back on that, but you were about to make an observation. We mentioned our mutual friend earlier, Zorthian and you had something to say.

LF: I think that the connection that I feel between Zorthian is the fact that he is very passionate about his art, about his whole living relationship to his art, his whole being in relationship to his art. He is his art. Now whether you say it's great or not is another thing, but he is his art, and I think I can identify with that. I think that's what you see, and I mean at this point, Zorthian right now is building a monument to himself. He's certainly has had this incredible amount of stuff done in the last few years. So it's like he knows he's only got so much time left, so he's building this monument, in a sense, to himself. Well, maybe I'm building a monument to myself. Maybe I'm just saying, well, I realize that what I'm doing is really -- there's not another me.

PK: This is who I am.

LF: This is who I am. There's not another me, and everybody's an individual. I have the feeling that, in some sense, it's how far can I push that individual; how much can I accomplish; how much can I realize a whole to that young boy who started out in this world just seeing and being affected by certain things that molded him; how far can that be taken into something that becomes the art of the person. I don't know what it is. I couldn't even think of that in relation to Zorthian and how he was described and how he was when he was young. I think that that's something that everybody's living out in some way or another, and maybe I'm just living it out the only way I know how because I don't know any different. At one time, I could make people laugh. At one time, I was the class clown. It's like I want that to come out again. I want that part of me that sees people can dance and they can do whatever and that I can come out in that sense. I bring back that part of me that was killed somehow when I got into art, because when I got into art, I started seeing another side of myself, and the first things that affected me was the psychological aspect. I started reading Freud's interpretations of dreams, Stykel's interpretations of dreams. I started following Dali, then I started thinking about my dreams which, in a sense, you start thinking about yourself in a certain way that way, even though I didn't really start thinking about myself until much later on. I don't know if that all makes any sense.

PK: Yes, it definitely does. There's clearly a process of self-realization that uses self-discovery. I realize that these are all clichés. This seems to be what you point to as central to your art, in connection to your life.

LF: Whereas with Zorthian, I can't see it in the same way as being.

PK: You can or can't?

LF: I can't in a certain respect, I'm not sure, that emotionally he's still back there someplace. He hasn't coped with that part, so he can't move on to a different kind of a level, but he can still build a monument to himself. If he makes it out of concrete that's that solid, that whole thing burns down, you got a place that people will come up to and it will somehow be saved. He knows that.

PK: That's true.

LF: I don't even think that he really thinks that his art is that great. If he does, then he's deluding himself. I think that all the stuff that he makes out there is because that's what he really lives. I may be wrong. I don't know,

and maybe I would feel differently if I saw -- actually saw those later paintings again. I don't know. I just didn't want, in an artistic level, to feel compared to Zorthian in that sense, because I'm at a -- what do I want to say ...

PK: Well you're more of a professional artist, for one thing.

LF: Well, see, I don't like the word "professional." "Professional" is a funny word. I feel like I'm more evolved as an artist.

PK: In an interesting way, you're operating more within the mainstream than Zorthian is even though his work, his paintings, his means are more conservative than his paintings, but in terms of the totality of Zorthian, he's an outsider and you may feel like an isolate and so forth.

LF: Right, but I want to talk about what's happening here now.

PK: But you are a very sophisticated participant in mainstream modern and contemporary art. Zorthian is a character, but we're not going to dwell on our friend here.

LF: But valuable in his own way, valuable in the sense of art, in the sense of a person doing their thing and being a valuable person because they do their thing. That sounds like a cliché.

PK: I was going to ask you something that has to do with Zorthian and again, this interview is about you, not about Zorthian, but it's a point that's sort of a common experience between the two of us. And I might introduce it as a question. I'm a little bit hesitant because I think you need to see the most recent works in person, but I'll throw the idea out anyway. The question was this. His recent paintings focus on the nude. One might say that, his style, which is very adept, his craftsmanship and so forth, he can draw well, but like an illustrator, tends to be illustrational, and the results with these young, nude girls shown from strategic perspectives and all that, basically to reveal their charms. The net result, the effect is, I won't say it's prurient, but it's obsessive; it's focused, and what you end up with is a kind of pin-up image. He hates to be compared to [Alberto] Vargas and I brought it up.

LF: Did you do that?

PK: I brought up the word. I said some people may...

LF: How about what's his name, Mel Ramos.

PK: Mel's a better painter, don't you think? I mean he's got that Bay Area tradition.

LF: Yes, but I wonder what he would have said if you would have brought his name up.

PK: Well, I'll do that. Anyway, the point, and I don't want to waste time describing another interview on your interview, but I tried to get Zorthian to address this criticism of his painting, that I think is pretty valid, and that is that he is sending mixed messages that he is diverting because of the images he chooses, creates a diversionary effect where his ideas are really there.

LF: Well what you're saying to him is that he shouldn't use his images.

PK: Well, that's what he's interested in, but to quickly finish this point which was not satisfactorily resolved in that interview, but brought to mind what we were talking about earlier, and here is another similarity only to a point between you and Zorthian. In these recent works that people rightly could look at and say, "My God, look at the tits and asses," and they say that's the content, the meaning of this works. Now Zorthian is offended in the extreme by that kind of an observation, even though almost anybody who sees the pictures reacts the same way, because he believes that he's dealing with important philosophical, political, social issues, or gender issues, celebrating women, and that's what really lies behind it. What Zorthian believes, and this is what he claims is the theme of this particular work, is an objection to the way Native Americans were treated by white Americans moving West, in other words, the abuse, genocide.

LF: Well what in the painting describes that?

PK: Very briefly, I wish you had seen it, but it's a big painting and there is this Native American male lying down; he's been shot, and he's lying there and his genitals are hanging over very prominent of yet a focus. Then there are two nude female figures in chaps like cowboys, nice, round butt showing the rear view and she's sort of turning like this and, her breasts are showing, very, very lovingly rendered. She's got a gun. It shows that she has shot the Native American male figure. Then in the background is this horrible, bat-faced monster, and he represents, of course, white America, European America...

LF: With a bat face?

PK: With a bat face, a beast, a monster. He represents --

LF: But who would know that?

PK: Anyway, so here you have this rather bizarre very well-drawn, very well-rendered, very bizarre collection of interacting. Zorthian's description of the meaning of this, and he's quite passionate about it, passionate about it, is to the point of this great injustice. It's about injustice, historical injustice, something that most of us know perfectly well about but looking at the art work, without Zorthian standing there on tape or standing beside his work, you look at this and you say, "Well, gee, what is this?" And, basically, the most powerful signal or message is sent is the nude figures and the focus of the genitals.

LF: The infatuation with certain parts. So that overrides anything that anybody would want to read into that.

PK: Well, one could say this. I'm sorry to take so long with this and I need to, but maybe that puts the picture in your mind. So Zorthian, I asked him around this subject, I said, "What, to you, makes something art or makes great art?" I was trying to fish, and he thinks a moment and he says, "Clarity of idea, clarity of idea." Apply that to this painting that I've just described which is totally confused, and in effect, the means that he has chosen.

LF: It doesn't sound very clear.

PK: He has images and the way they're rendered. Not just the images, the right nudes could probably have done this, but pin-up nudity and obsession with genitalia and so forth, basically that seems to subvert the image. What a long way to ask a question.

LF: Yes.

PK: With that in mind, and this comes around to you because I see you as like Zorthian claims to be and maybe really is quite passionate about certain ideas. We may not be defining art completely, but there are injustices, political and social dimension to your art, ideas behind it that you express and you've chosen to express, for instance, Mickey Mouse, Mickey Rat, Disney, and these are the symbols for you, I think, of certain injustices in the state of our modern world. The difference clearly, in these two cases, is that there is the primacy of idea in mind behind the imagery. In one case, it seems that the artist has lost control of the means. What are your thoughts on that when it comes to your work? Do you feel that these ideas that you've chosen, the best, most effective means to communicate these important ideas for you?

LF: No, I think that my best means to communicate those particular ideas are through my music, probably.

PK: Really?

LF: But see, I have varying degrees and feeling about it. For example, I know that people like to see Mickey Mouse. So I know that if I put Mickey Mouse in there -- the only two paintings that I sold out of my last show both had Mickey Mouse in them. So the tendency is wanting to keep putting Mickey Mouse in there because then people are going to buy it, and that bothers me. It's like I've had a lot of feelings about that and I try to express my painting, but I don't believe that painting, unless my painting is the most phenomenal painting of its type, that people will look and say, "My God, I've never seen a painting that deep before," and it actually draws people. Then I'll say, "Okay, then those things and things will be effective," but until I do that, they just become another form of poster-art thinking. So I have to think a lot about that and that's why I'm dealing so much in the space and I can't always be sure what's going to happen. I may do something and, all of a sudden, Mickey Mouse appears because he's meant to be there. I don't start off the picture usually thinking, "Oh, I'm going to have Mickey Mouse there." It just happens he'll crop up someplace, but I guess it's been beneficial to me. Whereas with Zorthian, if the emphasis comes across, and nobody wants to buy the painting I've been lucky because it's Mickey Mouse and they say, "Oh, I can identify with Mickey Mouse" and they buy the painting. I don't even know how it is. I just know that I'm actually getting to the point where I'm not even sure that I want to start even using imagery in my painting anymore.

PK: That's going to take some thought at some point.

LF: Well, I can get a lot out of my machine, a lot of the social issues, only because I wasn't president of the United States. I wasn't even a talk-show host. How many people listen to these things? How much does it really affect them? You've got newspapers and you've got television and stuff like that. If a social thing were at a museum and a lot of people see it, maybe it would have some sort of effect if it's really, really good on some level. But museums don't get very many people and I'm out for the big shot. I'm 62 years old now, but I'm still out for the big shot. It's like Warhol could get the big shot because he was a good advertiser. He had a lot of people who were needy around him, and so he could start the same kind like Zorthian did with his happening things. And he kept going mainly to an art factory and sort of hacked them out. If I had what Warhol had and I was on talk shows where he didn't say anything and they'd ask him a question and he'd say, "I don't know," and

everybody would go, "Isn't that cool. He didn't say anything. Wow!" It's like man, if I had that forum, what could I say? But I don't have that forum. The closest thing I got to it is my machine, so maybe that's where's it going to go, because I would like to get back to what I lost after the Pasadena Art Museum show which was just an inner thing that I was expressing that came out, and it was more abstract in the sense that it came out of just the act of painting. That's where I'm starting to get more to in that big painting down there where I'm just working with the space and stuff. I would like to be able to just move the shape and the space around now that I've got this depth that I can work in and work with the light and stuff and take all my social issues out on my -- that's my thoughts. I don't know if that's what's going to happen.

PK: This is what you meant when you said earlier that you feel you're coming to an end of a phase and that the new work won't be as personal.

LF: No, and that's why all these paintings have me in them right now. You see, it's almost like I'm coming into the painting and it may be art, man, I'm not sure, and then that's how he comes out.

PK: But in your work, these may be highly personal works, but there is throughout, if people bother to pay attention and maybe hear a few things you have to say about them, but it's not that difficult to figure out, that it's you, it's autobiographical in a sense, but it's very much your view of the world, and it's a cautionary tale about the world around you, your environment, things you care about. The ideas, it's idea-driven, and it isn't simply confessional like an autobiography is if you know what I mean.

LF: Well wait a minute, wait a minute. You made one error there. It's not idea-driven.

PK: All right. Well explain.

LF: Ideas are something else.

PK: All right. What do you mean?

LF: To me, ideas are something that somebody suddenly comes up with. "Oh, I got a good idea," the old, bright idea up there like that. It never comes out of that. It all comes out through the process. Everything that I do comes out through the process. If you see the way those paintings change and even the people in the paintings change and all this stuff changes, it's like I don't come out with an idea, even a simple thing like Mickey Mouse sitting on a fence. It seems like, "Oh, that was the idea; he just drew it up." No, I start doing this landscape and then all of a sudden, he appears. No, I never come up with the idea. I don't say, "Oh, I should get ideas." It's almost like a fact. Even in that painting down there, even that huge landscape down there where I've started to chip out the wood. I'm using the scraps of wood that I chip out to fill in all the other parts, and so I'm trying not to waste the parts. As I'm chipping in there, all of a sudden, it starts to look like this. Oh, it's starting to look like The Brewery, so The Brewery building might wind up in there, but it's starting to look like that. This is starting to look like this. This is the way it happens. I never draw something else. A lot of artists would draw it all up. I do all my drawing in the painting, in fact so much so, that people come in and see my paintings and wanted me to stop every time they saw it. "Well you should stop now. It'll sell now. It looks good that." I remember when Doug Walla [Kent Gallery] came into my studio once and I had this big, huge, 13-foot painting, which became a new Renaissance with myself and the picture and my dog and the whole sky and the cross, telephone pole, with all the stuff. When I was at the beginning stages of those things, I remember Doug Walla coming in from New York, Kent Gallery was my gallery then, and then it was all black velvet. The whole sky was black velvet and I had taken white masking tape and made a big Christ figure up there, and then there was this guy standing next to the telephone pole which was holding the figure on the other side of the telephone pole which looked like a saint or something. He came in, and he goes, "Wow!" He thought the painting was finished. He says, "Wow!" If you'd seen the beginning of the painting, you wouldn't even recognize it at the end of the painting. It wasn't the same painting anymore. The same with the pop painting, at the beginning, you wouldn't even know it was the same painting. It changed that much from beginning to end, and yet it looked complete at the beginning. It's like you draw and you erase, and you draw and you erase, and it vanishes and it comes in, and that's the way my paintings operate. My bloody heads were the same way. All my bloody heads were that way. My rocks were all that way.

PK: Well let me restate this because I know what you're saying, and yet ...

LF: An idea may be like the Lone Ranger. Put in the Lone Ranger in the sense that in the last outpost, you might say that was an idea. Well, I got this thing I'll put the Lone Ranger in it.

PK: Well what I mean by "ideas" is not a preconceived notion.

LF: Well that's what I think of as an idea.

PK: But not a preconceived notion, but rather, cerebral activity which can involve the emotions as well, the

dialogue between emotions and the activity, the mind working.

LF: Well I think of that as the artistic process.

PK: Well in looking around at the world and there are certain things that matter to you, and a set of ideas that is in storage doesn't predetermine what you're doing, but they will then emerge.

LF: All right, okay. Maybe I'm getting mixed up to an idea, ideas and feelings about things.

PK: But there's intellect as well.

LF: Because people get ideas. That's what conceptual art is all about.

PK: I know, and you don't want to be associated with conceptual art. I know that, I think anyway, from what you said, that you view it as perhaps paradoxically lacking in what I call ideas or insight where a different notion of idea is involved where it's about concept, is one insight, one thought, and then that is the meaning of the work. And you're talking about process as I understand it, correct me. You're talking about forms and images sort of emerging or coming out through process. Is that right?

LF: Yes, but I guess you would say an idea in the sense that you're talking about. If I'm moving a space back and I say, "Okay, I need something dark there," and I'm moving this space back, I need something dark there, it -- "Oh, how about Mickey Mouse." Now that's an idea.

PK: But why do you choose Mickey Mouse?

LF: Because I have feelings about Mickey Mouse. Mickey Mouse represents America to me. I mean my God, you don't see tourists with American flags on their T-shirts, do you? No. You see Mickey Mouse on their T-shirts, and Mickey Mouse represents America, and the good, happy, friendly, passion side of America as opposed to a mean, evil American flag which is really crazy because if you really think about it, it's like everybody's got this backwards. The American flag has represented a lot of things. It's represented the good, the freedom, the people coming over to America for that reason to escape tyranny and everything. It's represented all that kind of stuff. It represents a government which tries to help the people even though they've got corrupted politicians also. It tries to help people. It has things set up to help people. Corporations don't do that. Corporations want to take all our money, and, in fact, Hollywood is falling apart where Disney can go down to Orlando, Florida and build a Hollywood and make all this money. Is Disney over there helping Hollywood? No, it's not helping Hollywood, and yet, they're building a tribute to them down there in the middle of Bunker Hill. You know, it's like, "Oh, get off my back."

PK: You don't like that Disney auditorium [Walt Disney Concert Hall].

LF: No, well first of all, you want to know what I think of Frank Gehry.

PK: Sure.

LF: Frank Gehry, when I looked at Frank Gehry's things and I went to the Museum of Contemporary Art, I looked at Frank Gehry's things there. In fact, I had been building a house at the time. I had already built a house. I'm looking at his houses that he built. First of all, I look and I say, "Wow, what a lot of wasted space and junk going up the side. It doesn't mean anything." And then I just saw a lot of wasted space. The only things I saw interesting were the chairs, his little cut-out things that he made. To me when I look at the Gehry Concert Hall, what I reflect immediately is a first-year design student putting his little cardboard, cut-out pieces. I could have a first-year design class so I could come up with a building for me.

[END SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

PK: Continuing an interview with Llyn Foulkes. This is Tape 2, Side B. Frank Gehry.

LF: So anyway, when I look at these forms that look like a first-year design [student] did it at Art Center, and I imagine him working with these cardboard things because that's what it looks like. It looks like he just took the cardboard and he banged it and got the building. Then it's like, "Now let's see how we can make this into a concert hall, because the building really looks great." What a lot of architects are doing now is they're trying to make a big piece of sculpture, whereas before, it was always a necessity and it became great because of that. I suppose he's thinking to himself like he got the cathedral in a sense where the sculptors are putting a facade on the building. Well, I could see it in a sense of gouging where the whole building was all one thing and it was a church. When I look at the thing, I think of Toon Town. I say, "Okay, if it's Toon Town, then that's what Gehry did. He made the perfect tribute to Disney, Toon Town," When you look at the leaning buildings and stuff, it looks like

a cartoon.

PK: You mean in the movie, Toon Town? Roger Rabbit.

LF: Yes. I could see Roger Rabbit with it in the cartoon, Toon Town there. It's perfect for Disney, but when I think of the expense of the building because, first, he's wasting space because you can't tell me that when they come in with all this air-conditioning and everything, they're going to have to make straight things inside. They have the things leaning, so they have to make all these straight things inside, so it's double expense. It didn't make any sense in that way. The guy was getting his rocks off. And then Eli Broad who knows nothing about art, championing the whole thing. He's another Larry Gagosian as far as I'm concerned, in that sense, and he's a person that's never bought my art because Doug Walla asked him once how come he's never bought a Lynn Foulkes and he said, "Well I only buy mainstream art." I said, "Okay, all right, okay." We know what that means, marketed art. He can make money off of it. The foundation and he can take the stuff, a mediocre Jeff Koons and donate it to museums and get tax right-offs, and we know all that stuff. And this guy is championing the Disney Concert Hall. And, of course, he's a big person, so MOCA does the big thing. Also, MOCA knows that it's going to be across from MOCA and that's going to help MOCA. So all of a sudden, the city has spent all this money to build a park and thing out there, and now all of a sudden, it's escalated the price, of course. This is a typical building to make. Not only that, but it's a tribute to Walt Disney who didn't really help the city of Los Angeles. He helped the image of Hollywood, but he did not help the city of Los Angeles. He helped the image of Hollywood, and maybe he helped the city in the sense that for shoots and stuff, but Disney probably did most of their shoots in their own place. He helped the city of Anaheim. He built up all of Orange County. So what is the thing here? What is it? We need a concert hall up there, why? So all the Latinos can go up to the concert hall? Oh yeah, sure.

PK: Well you don't object to cultural centers and performance halls, do you?

LF: No, I don't. I don't object to that, but it didn't have to be made like that at that expense. It's made to get Gehry's rocks off and for Eli Broad and people like that to feel like the great art patrons, but it didn't need to be that. It's a great expense, and the city of Los Angeles will probably find out in a few years down the road when they find out that this is going to be hard-up people, because that's what always happens in this city. They wind up with the bill after a while.

PK: Well could you make the same critique of many other cultural complexes or buildings? For instance, you could say perhaps the same thing about maybe the L.A. Public Library or say the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art? I don't know. That's maybe \$100,000,000 there. One could say that's a monument to [Mario] Botta, the architect, or to the Gap or to Don Fisher, who's one of the major funders.

LF: You probably could say that, that's true, but, I mean, that's to say what?

PK: I don't know.

LF: You are talking about San Francisco museum. I see this as an entirely different kind of thing because in a sense that first of all, I see it from the perspective of what Bunker Hill could have been.

PK: Yeah, that's what I'm trying to get at.

LF: Okay. I saw it when they had all the Victorian houses up there which were huge and probably better than anything in San Francisco -- right in the middle of the city which were the people who built the city of Los Angeles which is down there. It's not identifiable with the city of Los Angeles. It's identified with corporate Disney. It's identified with corporate Gehry. That's a whole, another kind of thing. San Francisco already has its beautiful downtown. You can't beat San Francisco. That's not going to make a dent in San Francisco. They're trying to make the Eiffel Tower of Los Angeles a tribute to Disney and a tribute to Gehry, who I think is a mediocre architect, and Disney, who I think of as a man who took advantage of children for money, who took advantage of cities for money, who would move down to Anaheim and started the whole right wing. I mean you could go on and on with that, and this is a tribute to him on the top of Los Angeles. I remember going to Bunker Hill when the Victorian houses were still there and just think what that could have been, with Angel's Flight going up to it, and Olvera Street down there. They want to get people to come back down to Los Angeles. You could get a meaningful relationship with the Caucasians from the Westside and the Latinos from the Eastside all together there in some certain way. They could make stores out of those things. They could make it into something. Anyway, that's beside the point.

PK: Well I don't think it's -- go ahead.

LF: The point is now it's like this is for upper-class sort of Westside kind of thinking. Now if they could change that and this concert hall could become something else, well then maybe it would be a good thing. I'm not saying that something like that is not going to look good up on the hill. I'm one of the people who say, "Well you

could take anything and make it that big and it will look good." You could put an elephant that size and everybody would come up to see the elephant, the white elephant. A big, white elephant that size, everybody would come and that would be the Eiffel Tower of Los Angeles and the white elephant would become the symbol of Los Angeles. I'm talking about a real white elephant.

PK: I want to make sure that this gets through and down in the way that you think is accurately reflecting your views, is your objection I think perhaps in terms of symbols, this is --

LF: An art.

PK: An art, but symbols certainly come out in your art as very, very strong, and you're talking about the Disney Concert Hall in a way is symbolic or emblematic in terms. The fact that it's Disney is a big part of what seems to annoy you.

LF: Hasn't Disney got enough tributes to himself? The central theme of the city of Los Angeles should be Disney?

PK: One of the things you object to, it seems to me, at least this comes out through in much of your art is that Disney is a symbol, not just here in Los Angeles, but all over the world, and so finally what drives this kind of passion when you're talking about it, and if it comes through in your work ...

LF: Would I object to it as much if Gehry was doing a concert hall, but it wasn't the Disney Concert Hall?

PK: Well that's part of the question.

LF: I probably wouldn't object as much, but I would just say that I don't think that the building is that great or to look good up there because it'll be so different from everything else, but so would a white elephant.

PK: What I'm also getting around to here is in talking about ideas, and I'm going to use that word carefully with you because it has slightly different connotations. I want to be clear about this. I was thinking in terms then more of themes and symbols that express, communicate these things, and where you have a lot of passion about this issue, this concern of yours that has to do with environment, has to do with Los Angeles, but sort of lost in a way ...

LF: People are beginning to think. That scares the holy hell out of me.

PK: And in your work, although you describe it as determined by really an artistic process, in fact, wherever they come from, they do appear. There's your Mickey Mouse and there are these other elements of pop culture which end up being a scathing critique of popular culture, and particularly, as the biggest symbol of that, corporate Disney.

LF: You think it takes away from the painting?

PK: No. That's how I understand.

LF: Not trying to compare it with the Zorthian thing?

PK: No. This is how I understand the work. This is not to say that your concerns aren't also -- I think both can coexist -- but I want to make sure that I'm accurate according to your views.

LF: I think you are.

PK: Okay. Then we can, for the moment, I guess leave that alone. I would like to jump back in time to another artist with whom some people would think you have an affinity. That's a Ferus Gallery artist, a very famous one, the one who, in almost no respect as far as I can tell, was connected with the other Ferus artists, and that's Wallace Berman. To me, and this is just my point of view, you share something. I don't know if you call it spiritual or whatever, but something.

LF: I think it's spirituality.

PK: There's a connection. Could you talk about that a little bit, your relationship to Berman.

LF: My relationship with Wally is not very much, in a sense. He would send me things. God, I went over to his place once; he went over to my place once. It was all through either -- I don't know how to describe it. To tell you the truth, I felt an affinity with his feelings about -- there has to be spirituality. You got to realize, I didn't really start thinking a lot about Wally until after he was killed, and then I started to really get into him. I didn't make more of an effort to make a better connection with him because I knew that there was a certain kind of spirituality that was connecting us, but I never thought about it at the time. I liked getting things from him, but I

didn't think about it. He probably thought about it.

PK: He would send you things?

LF: He would send me things. I gave him that hand with the cross. He put that in the Semina. He put the initials of different people depending on who they were, who the poem was by and like that. It was a little hand with a cross in it. I could still feel that because when he did his transistor radio, one of the first ones, he had the hand with the cross in the middle. So I could feel that there was a connection. He was doing the serial imagery thing. I was doing serial imagery things. I loved the things on the Verifax [collages] things that he did. I went over to his studio when he had the show there because they looked almost like they were drawn.

PK: This was in Topanga?

LF: That show was in Beverly Glen, and was the last show he had. I went over there, but I didn't extend myself, that's all. Actually, I didn't even do the same thing with George until later, until the '70s.

PK: It seems so strange and I have to say this.

LF: I know it seems strange. It seems like we were all paling around or something.

PK: Seems like a natural sort of community.

LF: I know. But, you see, that's why I wasn't in the beat show, because they were coming from that period. I never identified with the beat thing. It never even entered my mind. I was just doing what I did.

PK: Let's talk about that.

LF: The early days, the Ferus Gallery, things like that, I don't even know if I was affected by anybody, either Wally or Kienholz or George Herms because I can't even recall seeing their things before 1961, before I had the Ferus Gallery show because I never went. I didn't even know the Ferus Gallery existed until I had the show there and showed the work which was in 1960. I didn't even know the Ferus Gallery existed then because I didn't even know there was an art scene. I was in art school then. I was doing paintings on photographs, and black paintings with images and some swastikas.

PK: You didn't know there was an art scene at all?

LF: I didn't know there was an art scene. I never went to any galleries or anything like that. I just went home and painted, that's all. I didn't even look at art magazines.

PK: Weren't you interested in finding out if there were some other people who were interested in doing the same thing, making art, around you?

LF: No, no, I didn't even think about it. I was just thinking about what I did.

PK: Tell me again how you met Berman.

LF: The first time I ever met Wally was, I think, when he came to my show at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1962 with George Herms. I didn't even remember because when I talked to George -- in fact, we had this big talk in Denmark. We went out for hours and we were talking about some of the -- and I was telling him about how I wish I had more -- and I said, "Well I remember when Wally first came up to my studio in 1962," and he said, "Yeah, you know who was with him?" I said "No." I said, "Yeah, Dean Stockwell was with him." He says, "Well I was with him." I didn't even remember, because like I said, I just was working all the time. I was in my studio painting all the time. I never socialized with any other artists.

PK: Even after you met Berman and that group, obviously ...

LF: When I first saw Wally's things -- see, there're certain things I don't want to say on tape. I wasn't that affected by them. They didn't grab me that much.

PK: Well, no, you've got to say it on tape because this is ...

LF: I was still related to painting in the sense of if it was an object, it still had drips and it had painting process to it. That's the way I relate it.

PK: That's certainly not Berman.

LF: I didn't relate to him like the stone things with the rocks and things like that. It was a whole different thing

and I just wasn't relating. I can't remember the first things I saw of George. It seems to me the first things I saw of George's was -- Dean Stockwell had some things of his and some things downstairs, I don't know. I just remember seeing a lot of baby heads and things like that, and I didn't think about them. Then I saw things of George's later on, maybe when he was with Wallace in '63 and he showed things, to me, that looked more spiritual, things that were more that way or something. Then I started to relate to them in that way. I liked George's things, and I remember liking his things then. But that was '63. I had already done the Pop Art then. My stuff started to get flat. I was gone out of assemblage by that time. I had done all that stuff and everything, and then the serial imagery started to turn into flatter things where I was affected by Pop Art, and then I was affected by the fact that you could sell things. Oh, my God, I could sell a painting like that. At that time, it was a lot of money for me. I'd do a big painting and I would sell it. And I could do it fast. I could go down and I could turn out some of those things in a few days.

PK: Where were you living in the early '60s? Were you in Eagle Rock?

LF: When I got out of art school in '59, I had a studio on Monterey Road, and then I had a studio there, and that's when I started doing the construction things. Let's see, did I do the blackboard and chair there? That was 1960.

PK: Where was that? Monterey Road where?

LF: Monterey Road -- the building is still there. It was right after you get across -- if you're coming from Huntington Drive and you go over the bridge and you drop down onto the bridge, you know where that bridge is, Monterey Road where it starts at Huntington Drive and it goes down, then it goes up to York. You keep taking it and it hits York and then makes a turn. Right after the bridge about two blocks, there's a little thing that used to be a market that was on that corner. That was where I did the blackboard and chair and that stuff and a lot of those tar things.

PK: What is it Highland Park?

LF: Highland Park, and then I moved from there to Avenue 64 where I did -- '63, that's when Berman came to the studio there. By that time, I was already starting to do the big -- like that picture down there. I was already starting to do that.

PK: You mean the one you're working on now?

LF: Yes, so I had actually met Wally really after I had finished my real assemblage things, now that I think about it. I went to Wally's house once with Tosh and it was before it rolled down the hill, and that would have been about, --, before it rolled down the hill. When was that show where he did his first Xerox things? It would have been right around that time.

PK: But he was in Beverly Glen at that time? And did you say he was on Crater Lane?

LF: Crater Lane.

PK: So you did visit once, and this, potentially was the beginning of some kind of socializing and exchange.

LF: Not really. It never happened.

PK: Historically, it should have happened.

LF: Historically, it should have happened. I remember Wally calling me. After that, I called Wally and asked him how he did the Xerox thing because I really liked the process and I might want to do some collages on the Xerox machine. I remember him saying to me -- I think he felt bad about it afterwards. I remember him saying to me, "Well it's really a very difficult process. You've got to get all the chemicals right and you got to do this like that," and I said, "Well, okay." And I think that that was the last time that I talked to him before he was killed. Which was in '76, was it, or something?

PK: No, '74. I think, yeah. I'm pretty sure about that. [Wallace Berman died in 1976.]

LF: He sent me things, they're up on the wall, maybe up to '67, right after that. I did get an old Xerox machine and did do a few things on it, tried to do it. I don't know where they are, somewhere.

PK: Art historians are always interested in affinities, they call them, kinships.

LF: I know it throws you, doesn't it? It throws you. That's why you would always hear George talking about Wally and everything like that and Wally talking about George, because they had a real friendship going, too. I never nurtured it.

PK: But you did with Dean Stockwell, for instance?

LF: No. He sent me stuff, and I gave him something.

PK: Jesus Christ, Llyn, who the hell did you know?

LF: It's throwing you, isn't it, huh? I told you I was a loner. I think my art affected all these people, and they've been on my mind all the time and how much my art was affected. I have no idea. That's for other people to say. I don't really think about it, so that's all I know.

PK: So even though you are a serious artist working within the mainstream with a personal vision, in some very real ways, you and some others, an outsider, occupying the same space which is this Los Angeles but never, despite the Ferus show and Pasadena, never fully within what is described as L.A. art of let's say the '60s. You were aside. John McLaughlin actually occupies a bit of a similar position.

LF: More surprising for me, since I was more visible in a certain way. I understand that, but it seemed that way. There were some people that affected me.

PK: Like who?

LF: But not at the time the same way, maybe some of the time, I'm not sure, somewhat maybe, at the time. My feeling was that I affected Kienholz at the time, whereas Kienholz affected me later on when I did the pop thing with his things like Sollie's Room and stuff like that. I think he affected me in that way except mine was painting, but I affected him early on, I think, because when I looked at his retrospective show, if you look at his work and consider when it was done and the sort of things that were happening then, I remember Kienholz calling -- in fact, Kienholz actually called me a couple times, come to think of it and I never responded. Kienholz called me up to wish me a Merry Christmas once and he called me up when my show was at Ferus Gallery and I had the blackboard and chair sitting there, and the other dark pieces with the crosses and the stuff, and he said he called me up just to tell me how great he thought the piece looked and he'd been sitting there looking at it all day. I realized that his things started to become more spiritual after that show. His things, more before that show, were more construction kind of things with heads and -- you mark me if I'm wrong. I may be wrong. So I have the feeling that I, unbeknownst, introduced a sort of painting with that with George, with Wally and with those people, unbeknownst to me, with all the crosses that I had and all that kind of thing and the dark and that's my feeling. I may be, I don't know. I just may be blowing my own horn, but my feeling is when I look back, that's what I see. I don't know how you see it because you're coming from a different perspective and you know what these people did before that. I may have been latching on to a lot of that stuff and not even knowing it. I may have gone into the assemblage thing because of Ferus showed Bruce Connor and Kienholz. I'm not even sure of that. All I know is I started doing black things and doing things with construction, and if you consider the blackboard and chair as the same sort of thing, maybe so, but I don't consider it exactly the same. Maybe I was affected by the fact that it was burned and it was old, I have no idea. I don't remember whether I saw Bruce Connor right at that time or not. I may have been affected by that.

PK: Well you wouldn't be chronically thinking about it in those terms.

LF: I think the spirituality part, because they connected with me in that sense. I was just thinking of it as just another thing I was doing. So I didn't have the same kind of connection, otherwise, I would have set out little things and stuff. Maybe I was just so fucking egocentric, like I still am that the world revolves around me.

PK: Let's pause because we're at the end of the tape.

LF: Okay.

[END SESSION 2, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 3, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a third interview session with Llyn Foulkes at his studio/home in The Brewery, downtown Los Angeles. The date is December 2nd, 1998, and there's actually been quite a long break between these sessions. The first and second were June and July 1997, so this is well over a year since, we sat together. The interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. What we need to do today is try to keep in mind, some of the areas that we covered in the first two sessions. It was a long time ago, but we have had some notes to refer to that cover those topics. Maybe with now a year and a half's perspective, we can then fill in maybe some of the points that were made earlier. I would like to start with something about the exhibition, Sunshine and Noir, Los Angeles art [Sunshine & Noir: LA Art 1960-1997]. I don't know the exact title, but it's known as "The Sunshine and Noir" show which was in Denmark. In fact, it was about to open at the time that we did the last interview. Do you remember?

LF: It opened in November of '97, because I went over there in November of '97 to set my piece up,

PK: Well so what's interesting here is that when we last talked, that show was very much in the works, but nobody had seen it because it hadn't opened yet. And now, we have the benefit of the show having done its time in Denmark and then now several months ago opening here in Los Angeles at the UCLA Hammer Galleries. This is sort of Henry Hopkins' "swan song," I guess, or "goodbye exhibition." I would like to pick up our conversation with a discussion of that show. Now is a perfect opportunity for you to say how you feel about it. Maybe it would be useful to talk about it in terms of what maybe your expectations were for a show that purported to cover in a responsible, historical way this sweep of California art '60s up to now.

LF: Well, I suppose that when I went over there and then I read the catalogue to the show, I realized that everything was taken from a particular viewpoint, and the viewpoint having started the '60s with Ferus Gallery, obviously, of course, not including other people that were doing things at the same [time] that were just as important that were not in the Ferus Gallery. These people were not included and that's the one thing that I noticed right away. For example, you would have John McLaughlin in there and they'd say, "Why is John McLaughlin there and Lorser Feitelson isn't?" Because John McLaughlin, though he was not in Ferus Gallery, was a favorite of Robert Irwin, and Robert Irwin was a person in Ferus Gallery. Robert Irwin identified with his early paintings because that's sort of a similar area that he took off from. When I look at John McLaughlin's paintings, to me they look extremely boring and flat, and I don't see what the big deal is about him. Somebody like Lorser Feitelson was much, much more of a heavyweight in the Los Angeles art scene. He even had a [television] program on art, an extremely educated man and the stuff that he was doing with line and stuff, it was a predecessor to Ellsworth Kelly and people like that. He's just totally disregarded because he wasn't in Ferus Gallery and he wasn't championed, by Robert Irwin, who was the great net worker, and now he's doing the garden at the Getty. We all know that. And same people say like Judy Chicago wasn't in there. Well, Judy Chicago also was not connected with Ferus Gallery, neither was Lloyd Hamrol, who was doing the first really big installation things. These people are just totally disregarded. In fact, these people were in the same gallery that I was in which was Rolf Nelson Gallery. In the whole catalogue, there was only one mention of the Rolf Nelson Gallery and it only said there was a gallery named Rolf Nelson, and that's all it said. Everything focused on Ferus Gallery. At the time at Rolf's gallery, I mean, my God, besides Judy and Lloyd and Joe Goode and George Herms and H.C. Westermann, there were a lot of people in the gallery and it was the top. People back in the '60s who you talk to know that it was as big in the middle '60s as the Ferus Gallery was, but it was just totally wiped out because they want to perpetuate this kind of one-sided history which is that everything was Ferus Gallery. There were people doing line things over at [Felix] Landau Gallery like Norman Zammit. Those people have been totally wiped out. It's incredible how they just wiped them out. Ron Davis, he was just wiped out. Ron Davis also showed at Rolf's. I think it all goes back to the perpetuation of what happened with Kienholz and Berman and all those people left Ferus and I was kicked out of Ferus which I talked about on the earlier tapes. Then Irwin was trying to make it into his kind of gallery where he introduced Ed Ruscha and Larry Bell because these were students of his. It became that kind of a gallery and the light and space and colorful things. All of a sudden, everything started to change in the gallery, and so I didn't fit into it. Well that kind of thinking perpetuated all the way through and he became a controlling power, and people listened to him and that's why he's doing the thing at the Getty.

PK: So you think that Irwin was a more powerful figure because they always hear about, well, Hopps primarily and Hopkins and a few others as being ...

LF: I think he's much more powerful than people want to think. Well Hopps did have the first Pop-Art show where he was trying to introduce those Pop-Art people, but again, the other people that were the Pop artists in that show, which was Phil Hefferton, Robert Dow, and people like that. Those people never went on because they weren't with Ferus Gallery.

PK: How do you suppose Ferus Gallery achieved this rather amazing position in which other artists in other galleries could be marginalized and even forgotten.

LF: I think it's because all those people got in power. Walter Hopps got over to the Pasadena Art Museum. He was friends with John Coplans and John Coplans identified with Robert Irwin's work because the sort of paintings that John Coplans did at the time was like Robert Irwin's, and so they became the power structure because John Coplans was the editor of ArtForum magazine, and then afterwards took over being the curator or director of the Pasadena Art Museum after Walter Hopps, so it was all sort of inbred and was all perpetuated and never stopped from that point on up. Then all these other people became friends and they also wanted to get in with those people, Henry Hopkins being another one. And so you just don't go against the grain of that because that's the power structure.

PK: It's interesting and indeed appears that a story was established, or rather, a myth was created, that seemed to have this ability to be sustained and maintained over time, so that the art history of the area is told pretty much in the terms that you've described. I mean there's no question about it.

LF: Oh, there's no question about it.

PK: Do you feel that in some way there was almost a "conspiracy" involved?

LF: I guess "conspiracy" sounds bad, but in a sense, it was a conspiracy. I mean a conspiracy to make history around what they were doing that became the history. When Hopps brought Marcel Duchamp show over there, all of a sudden, if you notice, Marcel Duchamp has been the big figure now for the past 30 years and everybody refers to Marcel Duchamp also like he's a god now. I don't know how much it had to do with the Pasadena show because it also happened in New York. I think it came from New York and went to Pasadena, didn't it?

PK: No.

LF: So Hopps gets credit for all that stuff.

PK: Now that was his first, I do believe, first retrospective, interestingly.

LF: That's true. It was his first retrospective and I notice on my own tape that I said how my feelings were about it. I didn't think much about it and I had a show there at the same time. As far as I could see, my show was more powerful than that show was.

PK: Were you on at the same time?

LF: I was on a year before.

PK: It seems to me, Llyn, that notwithstanding this Ferus-centered art world that we're describing, you still, overtime ...

LF: Wait a minute. I think this all started to happen after Kienholz and Berman and those people left Ferus Gallery.

PK: I see, so it didn't start out there.

LF: Well, why did Wally Berman leave the Ferus Gallery? You must know that through your interviews. I mean he left and started showing on his own. Why did he leave Ferus Gallery? Why did Kienholz pull out of it? I remember Kienholz sitting in front of my blackboard and chair. He called me up when my show was on. I remember the telephone call and him saying that he was really awed by that painting. He said he was sitting there looking at it all day. Kienholz told me that. When I had my show at the Pasadena Art Museum, it was all these assemblages and dead things and stuff and big crosses and all this stuff. Wally Berman and George Herms came and saw my stuff for the first time. All of a sudden what I introduced there, which is never talked about was something that was coming from within, was a spiritual thing. I had crosses and I had all these other things like this and it was like another whole thing happened because I saw the work of both Kienholz and Herms change after that.

PK: After the Pasadena?

LF: I saw a lot of crosses, all kinds of things like that, and same with Berman. He was in my studio and I gave him that hand with the cross on the hand. The next thing, he comes out with his images with the little things, and he used them in his seminar, and then he came out with the little transistor, the middle one had a cross on it, same way, with the hand holding the cross. That was all a connection, but none of that stuff is talked about. It's like when the Sunshine and Noir show came on and they talked about the '60s and assemblage, I was not mentioned like I did not exist, I meant nothing. I don't know what George says about me, but I'll tell you one thing, I don't think anybody is saying anything, the ones that are alive. It kind of pisses me off, because I had a certain effect on some of those people and it's never talked about. Do I want to talk about any effect that they had? Well, I don't want to talk about it so much as the effect of what other people might have had on me, if they don't talk about the effect that I had on them.

PK: Why do you suppose they don't? Because, first, there's George [Herms] is an admirer of your work.

LF: Bet he never talks about that part. I bet he never talks about coming and seeing my Pasadena [Art] Museum show.

PK: But I guess my question is this, that why would artists, who at least in what they say now, who are admirers of you and your work, why would they sub-consciously deny what apparently was a connection to them?

LF: Well you can't talk to Kienholz and Berman.

PK: No, no, I understand that, but I was thinking of George.

LF: Well as much as I like George and he's a very sweet guy and that I've seen him a long time, he is a net worker and that's his thing. He's been doing it for years. In fact, that's one of the reasons that I had this big falling-out with George in the '70s because I was doing this imagination show which was a show where I went out and saw 400 artists. I was so fed up with what was going on in the art magazines in the '70s that I went out and did this show. A lot of artists around that I introduced will tell you about that show. It was conceptual and performance art and all that, and nothing in the art magazines had anything to do with any kind of humanism. I went over to George's studio and I started going around to openings to see what was happening with the people. Every opening I went to George was there and he had his suit on. I finally went up to George and I said, "You know, you really disappoint me. I thought you were this free spirit out there doing this stuff, like I was." I was a free spirit. I never networked; I never went out to all these things. I just did my thing and I thought George was this way. All of a sudden, I saw him doing this, and that was the last time I saw George, I mean the last. He still did the same thing. I go to this -- what was his show at the County Museum [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]? Oh, it was a student of mine, Mark Tansey. He was having a show there.

PK: Oh, Mark Tansey was a student of yours?

LF: Don't you know his big landscapes just like my late ones in the '70s. I didn't tell you that story that Maurice Tuchman told. Maurice Tuchman, when that show was on, somebody from the Kent [Gallery, New York] brought him over to my studio. I had dinner with him because he considered me his guru because he was my student. I didn't even remember him, but he started doing those things after I was doing my big, one-color, sepia-tone or rose-color or blue or what landscapes. That's what he took off from.

PK: Now where were you teaching then?

LF: Art Center. Oh, maybe I never mentioned that before, but anyway, when that show was on, and I'd never had a one-man show at the County Museum. When that show was on there, I saw George. I said, "Oh, George, I didn't know you knew Mark." No, he didn't know. He was just coming to the museum doing his networking thing. But anyway, Well, one of the trustees at the museum, Pat, my gallery dealer, said that he was talking to Maurice Tuchman, and he said, "Gee, his work looks a lot like that painting of Llyn Foulkes' at the Whitney Museum," because he'd just been at the Whitney Museum. Maurice Tuchman said, "Oh, no, that has nothing to do with it whatsoever, nothing to do with it whatsoever." And the guy got really upset and angry, and they finally put my painting back up because Maurice took it out of the County Museum for 20 years. When Howard Fox was over here about a month ago, and he said, "Yeah, and I put it back in." But what I mean it's like there's been a concerted effort by certain people like Tuchman and all these people to keep me down and I know why.

PK: Why?

LF: Well because I didn't do what he wanted me to do. He wanted me to be in the photography in the late '60s, in the painting-in-the-photograph show, the show that he did back there. And this was the late '60s, '69 or '70? I had just stopped. I didn't want to have anything to do with that anymore. I just stopped all the landscapes, so I didn't want to be in the show. After that, he took my paintings out and never went up again for 20 years, and they had them up all the time before that.

PK: Do you think Maurice would be that sort of petty?

LF: Petty? Yes, definitely, definitely.

PK: Because that's pretty extreme.

LF: Well that's not the only petty thing he did because then in '83, there was [a show of] 20 years of new talent purchase grants winners. Well, I was the first new talent purchase grant winner at the L.A. County Museum in 1963. Tuchman came in '64. I was the only one he didn't choose, so he had to have me in the show. So he came over and he selected a painting, and when they put the painting up, it was actually, The Last Outpost. I'll always remember this because when I went to the opening, they had put my painting in a window there. They put my painting so you could see it from the window like to get people to come in because it's a striking painting with the Mickey Mouse in it, but when you came in, you couldn't see the painting because it was off to the side by the window with the light, so you could never stand in front of the painting. It was done to draw the people in, but not to really look at my painting and show it off. But he had to do that.

PK: This was after you had turned him down in terms of participating in the painting and photography show?

LF: Yeah. This was '70. That was like 15 years later or something like that. But he had to have me in the show because I was the first new talent purchase grant winner, but he made the point of putting my painting where it couldn't be seen accurately.

PK: That's Maurice.

LF: That's Maurice.

PK: You gave one of the reasons why, which that you denied him on the request of participating in the show. You didn't do, as you said, what he wanted you to do. I suspect that that could certainly call the issue, but I suspect that there's something more than that, and Maurice alone couldn't have effectively blocked you out which is the way you described it.

LF: Couldn't have effectively blocked me out of ...

PK: Of the broader picture, that there were other people involved, not taste-makers exactly, but others who were sort of building this history, constructiveness history.

LF: Well look, if you take Tuchman, the County Museum, Walter Hopps, and Irwin, you've got a real power house right there. Think about it.

PK: And Hopkins.

LF: And Henry. They were considering my show at the Armand Hammer Museum, my retrospective show, until I went to lecture at UCLA. I think I've said that on the tape before. I went to lecture at UCLA because the Helter Skelter show had been on and it looked like I was going to really take off again, so the students wanted me to lecture. In the middle of the lecture, Henry Hopkins came in and then he left after a little bit. When I lecture, I just tell what the art scene is about. Well after that, no one ever returned their phone calls from [the Hammer]; Henry Hopkins would never return any of the calls. So what am I to assume? At least he could have returned the phone calls and given reasons or anything, but he never did.

PK: But I'm still hoping to dig a little deeper because you said earlier that you felt over time and pretty consistently that you've been kind of shoved aside. It's like a consensus or almost a concerted effort with a few exceptions, like maybe Schimmel and MOCA.

LF: But even Paul Schimmel, there's another example. Well, I don't know if other people told you this, but I have heard it from several people who are very close to Paul who say that he got the idea for the Helter Skelter show because of my work and he was going to build everything around my work. I was going to be sort of his center thing. That's what I was told, because he had seen my painting. It wasn't that he had seen my painting in New York, but he had seen it in magazine, and he had seen it in New York, but it also was in *ArtForum* magazine, so suddenly, here was this big splash on *ArtForum* with this Pop painting. He had been at Newport and I was very popular down at Newport and in Orange County. I've been very, very popular, because they don't have the L.A. connections. When he comes up here from Newport, he puts on the Helter Skelter show, his first big show, and he puts me on the cover of the catalogue like he's going to highlight me, but I think it sort of backfired on him. I mean because a lot of people liked my painting in the show. It helped their show a lot, all those paintings and stuff like that.

PK: How does that backfire on you?

LF: Because first of all, when he started out the show, he was only going to have eight or nine people. I think I told you that before. When all the galleries got into it, all this sort of stuff started happening, and they got into this huge, big show because of all the galleries. Well when the show was over, I didn't go over to New York; I didn't go over to Venice; I didn't go over to The Whitney; I didn't go. Mine just stayed right here. It was the Mike Kelleys. It was all the same people, so it sort of backfired on him since he was thinking that he was going to present me and this was going to take off and it didn't take off. And then I read his article in the *Times*. I don't know if you read his article in the *Times*. Did you read his article?

PK: No. I didn't read it in the *Times*.

LF: They interviewed him in the Calendar and he was talking about the Charles Ray show, and he was talking about the Charles Ray. He knew at the Helter Skelter show that Charles Ray was the one that was going to really take off and he was going to do all this, and not a mention of me. He talks about Mike Kelley; he talks about Chris Burden, not a mention of me. Again it's ...

PK: Well it was ...

LF: Well no, no. I think they follow the thing that's -- it's not like there's a lot of conviction in a lot of these people. You got to remember, Paul Schimmel is the kind of person that he walks into my studio and he never looks at anything, ever. He walks in and his eyes are always like this. They're just going all over the place. He never stops. It's kind of like well what's going to be the big thing, what's going to be the big image. I understand that. And I don't want to bad-mouth him. It's just that I know that he goes along with what's happening because, obviously, if he had pushed me so much thinking that I was so great, then why didn't he follow it through?

PK: Well what you've described, of course, one term for it is careerism, and it is true, a lot of art professionals are, to a certain degree, understandably, their eyes are always on that and the right move to make to advance their career, and so that certainly could be at work. But without beating this subject to death, I just find it puzzling in a way. I was around in the '60s and your work was very familiar. You were thought of as one of the major artists at the time.

LF: I know. You wonder why they left me out of the whole '60s. I'll tell you the truth, I can't really answer that. I can only go from my perception. I think it just has a lot to do with trying to perpetuate Ferus and I have talked against my Ferus days. I was kicked out of Ferus Gallery. I was disassociated with Ferus Gallery and I'm not going to say a lot of good things about Ferus Gallery, and I think that has an awful lot to do with it.

PK: So, in effect, you are, unfortunately, they would say un-politic.

LF: Well, as Paul Schimmel once said, in some article, "I made a career out of ruining my career." Which means I don't think of my art as a career. To me, it's a way of being. It's not a career. I don't go around to all the openings. I didn't do all that stuff. I really can't tell you why it has been so obvious because I can't think of anybody in the '60s that was as big as I was ...

[END SESSION 3, TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 3, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

PK: We're picking up where we left off. This is Tape 1, Side B.

LF: Well, I'm saying it's not only perpetuated, it's perpetuated by a lot of people. That's why I have reservations about people who you respect, but who also don't tell things accurately the way they are, and they let it go on because it's better for their career. Examples, I remember the assemblage catalogue that Corcoran Gallery put out. Did you ever see it, on assemblage? It was a good example.

PK: Yes, Morey Starr, I think.

LF: Well at the same time, Ed Ruscha was in that gallery there. I think Joe Goode was in the gallery. I remember looking at this catalogue and reading all this stuff, this is like the history of assemblage. First of all, that even Ed was included in the assemblage was ridiculous. I remember things like Ruscha in Paris Biennial also included were Llyn Foulkes and so on. I won the Paris Biennial. What I mean it was like it's always that big. Marcel Duchamp meets Ed Ruscha, rather than the other way. So it's all perpetuated and made into this big thing, and I'm just put down as less and lesser and lesser because it doesn't benefit them to push me. It benefits them to push the other. Anne Ayres is the only one that even put my blackboard and chair in her assemblage thing with Joe Goode's milk bottle and thing. She's the only one who put them there. No one ever talks about that, things like that. It's like the only thing I care about is just make it accurate, that these people and things were happening at that time. I almost wish that I had gone back and repaired that painting that was the first painting in the retrospective catalogue because the first painting in the catalogue, this painting right here. Where's the catalogue?

PK: It's right here.

LF: See this first painting in the catalogue?

PK: We're looking at Llyn's retrospective catalogue.

LF: See this catalogue here? When this painting was shown, and I have the photographs of it in the Pasadena Art Museum, when this painting was first shown, it was the first painting in the catalogue, 1959. See that painting, 1959? This is blank. It's called *Return Here*. In chalk was written right here, but was eventually wiped out in big, block letters, *Return Here*. It said "Return Here" on it. It was like big, block letters, and I just wish that I had kept the thing there because I was writing on things all over the place. I was writing on my paintings.

PK: Why did *Return Here* get effaced? What happened?

LF: Because it was just chalk, and after a while after it got moved around, it somehow got erased. It's on that wall in there.

PK: In the bedroom?

LF: No, that long painting there. You might be able to still see it on there. But what I'm saying is, there I would have had this painting from 1959 with these big letters that said "Return Here" and then the blackboard and the chair with the thing which would have seen both Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode because I was very influential at Chouinard. I was the big painter. I won first prize in painting; I won first prize in drawing. I was the one they

looked up to, and I was doing all this writing on my paintings and I was doing all this stuff. It was like all of a sudden, I'm just totally wiped out from having any sort of influence at all that way and none of these people, it's like, "It just came upon them one day." They just saw Jasper Johns, and that's where it was all from, but, to me, it was a combination of things. Joe never would have put his milk bottle down there in front of the chair if he hadn't seen my blackboard and chair the same way. I know that. I bet Joe doesn't even say that. Not only that, it was not just the idea of that and an object, it was also sectioned off. The first one I did was sectioned off in same way, just like my blackboard with the thing on it. I knew right away when I went and saw the Pop-Art show and there was my blackboard and chair there that I'd done in 1960 and there was this milk bottle and thing over there which was done in 1962 or '61. Afterwards, I knew it, and then I got real pissed off. I told you on the interview before about Coplans putting Joe Goode's thing on the cover of *ArtForum* magazine and how I threw the thing at Walter Hopps because I was so angry because I knew and he knew why I was angry.

PK: Do you think that part of the trouble was that the art establishment around here was pretty thin as we know back at that time, but that you were perceived frankly as kind of trouble?

LF: As troubled?

PK: Maybe you were unpredictable or something. I'm asking. I'm not -- I don't know this.

LF: You mean I was trouble. Yeah, I was trouble. I would get mad at Walter. I would call it the way I see it, so yeah, I was trouble.

PK: This doesn't mean you were wrong or anything. It just means that if you don't cooperate, if you don't play the game then you're viewed as trouble. Is that your perception of the situation?

LF: That's what Paul Schimmel meant when he said, "I made a career of ruining my career."

PK: I mean do you regret this or do you feel that you were right?

LF: No, I don't regret it, I think, I was right. I just am surprised. I guess, I shouldn't be surprised that history is written by people who were doing things to benefit themselves and their friends.

PK: To what extent do you feel that the gallery influence had to do with at least the potential of economic considerations, sales? One of your stable, one of the artists associated with, like Ferus, to maybe get the attention? In other words, what role did the market play? We've been talking about building a history and wanting to create a kind of history for L.A. art.

LF: You talking about a financial market?

PK: Yes, yes.

LF: Well in the '60s, when I got associated with Pop and I was doing all the landscapes, those things were selling like hot cakes. That's when Irving came and asked me to go back into Ferus, and I was in shows all over. I was in the Guggenheim at the four-man show with Warhol and I don't know who else.

PK: You were with Rolf at this time?

LF: I was with Rolf at that time, and I was showing in London in the Robert Fraser Gallery and other places like that. I was all over then. I was a big thing. That's one of the reasons I probably won the Paris Biennial. They knew who I was, so yeah, I guess the market had a lot to do with the fact that I was selling stuff, but I think it had to do with being very prominent in the art magazines and people would see those landscapes in the art magazines and they associated them with Pop, and they were more Pop, and Pop Art was the thing and it was selling.

PK: So it would seem to me that there was a lot of incentive for some of these other galleries, but to sort of quote you, to be flexible and find a way to get you. You say that Irving Blum did try to win you over.

LF: He came over and asked me to come back in. I believe that was '64, but I think mainly because I had suddenly got in all the art magazines, and he was probably a little more secure by that time.

PK: What if you had agreed to go on over to Ferus again, do you think, given the power that you feel Ferus and those attached to it had, that would have then made a difference for you in this whole business of how you're perceived historically and whether you're a part of the '60s exhibitions?

LF: Probably, yeah, sure. If they could wipe Rolf Nelson Gallery out, and certainly, that probably would have been the case, but then they folded a couple years later because *ArtForum* moved and then it was all over. But certain people had established themselves already. Now Ed had a gallery in New York and that has always been

a place to be. I never had a gallery like that in New York. That was one of the things that kept Ed going. Although he never made it really big in New York, it still made him bigger out here.

PK: Well his career certainly, even over the last few years has taken off and, of course, he has Leo Castelli.

LF: I know. That's what I mean.

PK: Obviously, in the art field, anybody who thinks that these gallery associations don't matter, is really naive.

LF: Well they do if it's a big gallery.

PK: But what's interesting to me and what is particular to Los Angeles is that certainly in the early '60s, although the recognition was coming to the art scene here, the impression is that there really wasn't that much money being made. You could be interested in contemporary art, but what you were buying would be done out of the New York galleries. Less at stake, I guess, it would seem.

LF: No, that's true, that's true.

PK: My point is then the incentives would have to be a little bit different for choosing who's in and who's out, and still remain as a bit of a mystery to me.

LF: It still remains a bit of a mystery to me, too. I can only say what my experiences are and one of the big things is that I always stayed in my studio and worked and didn't go out and hobnob around. I don't think that was good for me. Even though I may have gotten -- well no, it's more than that, because, shit, Judy Chicago did. She was really out there, but they left her out of the Sunshine and Noir show. So there's more to it than that. I still think it has to do with the perpetuation of the Ferus and the people that were around Ferus Gallery, and trying to make it into the Bauhaus, or something,

PK: I guess one of the things that might be worth remembering is that the curator, what's his name again from Louisiana [Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark]?

LF: Lars Nittve.

PK: This Sunshine and Noir exhibition is carrying a big burden, a lot of freight because we, of course, expected it to be an accurate reflection of an art history that you, certainly, live through. Nittve didn't, and so what you end up with, of course, are the enthusiasms of interest of a 1990s curator and not even American, much less an Angeleno. So could you explain some of these gaps in that way, that it just wasn't a form]?

LF: There's that, but I think it's also who he was talking to. And how much you kept hearing the same information coming back. For example -- because I know on the first list, George Herms was not on the first list, but then he was on the second list, so obviously, it's whoever's giving the information, though he doesn't listen to everybody. Like I told you when I was trying to get Michael McMillen or people like that and he wouldn't listen. I'm sure he listened to everything that Robert Irwin said.

PK: There are power brokers and the history makers in that respect. It's an interesting phenomenon one hopes that, any single exhibition, but certainly this one isn't taken then as, in any way, definitive, because there is just way too much left out, but leave out Judy Chicago, no matter what one may think at the dinner party of any of her works. She is a prominent female artists and perhaps the prominent exponent of feminism.

LF: You see, it all goes into this big kitty. For example, Christopher Knight, and there's only one newspaper in L.A. and one art critic who defines what contemporary art is. We know that, which is very bad for any city. He did an article on Judy Chicago about a year ago. I don't know, if you remember, a year and a half ago or something? It was huge. It had a big picture of The Dinner Party on the front and the whole article was slamming her. The whole article was putting her down like she wasn't important. And that really incensed me because, I know why he did it, because she was a feminist, but she wasn't a lesbian. Well, I remember that Ed Ruscha agreed with me because I saw Ed Ruscha over at some place and we were talking about that and he said, "Well I think that Christopher Knight was right," and I started to get in this little argument with him. I remember that.

PK: Oh, Ed agreed with Christopher?

LF: Well, Christopher Knight likes Ed Ruscha.

PK: We can talk about Sunshine and Noir for quite a while, although I think we may have covered some of the salient points. You said that you actually played some music as well. And you said a couple things, especially with the music thing, that you a got good response from some of the guards there. What did they say to you?

LF: Well the guards just said, "Boy, that music is really great. You can make a lot of money with that." And they

also liked my painting, the best in the show, too. And so did the woman at the front desk who said that all the people that came in, they said by a long-shot, mine was the most popular painting in the show, which, I suppose, is a very bad thing.

PK: Well why do you say that?

LF: Well because art is not supposed to be popular. It's not supposed to be for the masses. It's supposed to be for just an elite few people, who can define and cut their little territories out. That's what art is all about. If art doesn't change in the next so many years, I feel sorry for it, because all the other areas, the people have something to say about. When it comes to art, you just have a few people who define what art is supposed to be. And, of course, if you have that, it's going to be for their benefit, and they become the kings. Art is much too broad to do something like that and I can get very bored. I can walk through the Sunshine and Noir show I get bored with particularly the last half of it. Ninety percent of the stuff, I just find extremely boring. It's just boring. Well that guard who's standing there, he's getting bored, too. I remember going to MOCA and I said something to the guard because somebody was having a show up there. I don't know who it was. Who did all the word stuff from New York, the woman, big words and stuff?

PK: Pulser.

LF: Yeah, probably. And I think it was that, and it was just like a couple words, something about the government. I'm looking at it and, to me, it's boring. It's a one-liner and some collector's got in his house and they're trading it for money and stuff. This guard is standing around there all day and I said, "What do you think of that?" And he said, "Nah, doesn't mean much to me." He can understand what it says, but they don't count. These are just people. They don't count. You have to get into the art scene and you have to be sort of programmed.

PK: Let's talk a minute then about what you see as the audience for your work, to whom you're speaking, and what ...

LF: Well, see, my goal is to capture -- first of all, as a painter, I am very much aware of the roots of painting and that's very meaningful to me and it has been very meaningful to me ever since I started painting. I know about space; I know about light; I know about surface and texture and how to do all that stuff. It's the idea that I don't see that you can't do that and still do something that everybody can respond to. I think I'm trying to reach out to people. I think that's really what I'm trying to do. I've been trying to do that for a long time now, and I've been held back by the art crowd of reaching out to people because they want to keep it exclusive. I don't identify with people like Robert Williams, who does that kind of stuff, because I don't consider him a painter. I can't respond to his paintings as paintings. A lot of people respond to his imagery, and I think that you can respond to both. I think that one of the faults of art is the fact that it becomes almost like opera. After a while, they want to keep it in that tight, little place because that's how they can keep the money flowing. It becomes big dollar bills and that's what it's come down to and we know that because the trustees are starting to take over the museums and they're the people that are in that whole thing.

PK: It sounds to me as if part of your, I won't call it a dilemma because it seems to me you've resolved it, but you're operating within an art world that is fundamentally a beast and it's gallery and museum-driven and the audience tends to be rather small, and the art world feels most content if the advanced art is basically inaccessible to the masses. That's viewed as a virtue because it's supposed to somehow be always pushing beyond. How do you feel about this?

LF: That's pretty bogus right there, pushing beyond. I'll tell you, I don't see anything different, for example, when I was a child, one of my idols was Charlie Chaplin, and I still go back and I can look at one of his movies, and your directors will cite some of his films like *City Lights* as being one of the great films of all times. That was done way, way back then, but at the same time, he was popular among people. People loved him. Now you go to the museum, they'll have *City Lights* or something, but they'll try to push other people who weren't as good as he was, say like Buster Keaton. Buster Keaton was okay, but he was never Chaplin. But you'll see a lot of emphasis put on that because they just don't want anybody who is that popular. I remember somebody at the County Museum was curating an impressionist show. They were talking about impressionists and she was talking about Renoir and she said, "Well Renoir wasn't in a sense, really as good as the other one. He was too sentimental." And I thought about that afterwards and I thought what does sentimental have to do with anything? We're talking about art; we're talking about painting; we're talking about space; we're talking about a lot of stuff like that. What does sentimental got to do with it? And that's what I mean. It's because people like this stuff and you might even get some woman who liked flowers liking his stuff. That's why they do the same thing with music. With my music, people who look up to me, come up to me all the time; people who do sound and stuff -- they do sound, not particularly music, but sound -- and are showing at places like the Santa Monica Museum. They look at me in a whole different way, because mine is more accessible to people. If it was just sound and I could just sit there and just make sounds, and all of a sudden, I would just hoping you'd be champion because I would just be making sound.

PK: Well what about your painting? What is it about your paintings that you feel make them accessible to others.

LF: Because I've got things that people can relate to. I got symbolism and people can look at and they can actually figure it out.

PK: For instance, what would be an example?

LF: Well all the Mickey Mouse stuff I'm doing. People can understand that, what they're looking at. There's nothing wrong with that. I see nothing wrong with somebody understanding something. I mean I feel like I'm furthering painting because I'm furthering what can be done with painting. Now whether people like my subject matter or like what I'm doing should be irrelevant. I'm furthering painting. I don't think Lari Pittman is furthering painting. I think his stuff is flat. I think it's big and it's garish and that's why they like it because it's big and it's garish and it's got all these little homosexual themes that all those people can like, but his stuff is flat. It has nothing to do with space.

PK: But most people don't necessarily like that within the art world.

LF: But I'm saying I don't think he's furthering painting. I see no light; I see no space. I see nothing in there, to me, that I could look at and see that I could respond to as a painting, divorced from all of the subject matter that he has in there. One of my idols was de Kooning. Whether the people could understand him or not is one thing. Somebody might say, "Well it looks just a kid does it," but, to me, I look at it as a real painting. I mean these were my Gods, but I still think you can do both.

PK: So the painting and the content or subject for you can be different. It can be sort of evaluated or approached separately, independently. I mean your art, as much as Lari Pittman's I think, carries a message. It's message is ideological. You have a point of view about your society.

LF: I don't care about his point of view. What I care about is whether he's a good painter, and I don't think he's a good painter. He just stencils things and he just puts things in haphazardly.

PK: Well he describes himself in terms of interior decoration.

LF: Well, good, that's what he is. He's an interior decorator. That's what I think, and, in fact, the interior decorators have taken over, and that's why you've got your Jim Isserman and your people like that because Christopher Knight pushes feminism and interior decorating. There should be nothing wrong with interior decorating. Well I guess there isn't anything wrong with interior decorating, but what's it really got to do with painting?

PK: I don't know, not much in the way we used to understand it anyway.

LF: Well let's put it this way, everything has a language and everything has built up from a certain period. And I don't believe that you totally cut the roots off of anything because it doesn't grow.

PK: In other words, you really do believe in the efficacy, the continued value of a tradition.

LF: Well let's put it this way, since the beginning of painting ...

[END SESSION 3, TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 3, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

PK: Okay, Llyn, this is still our Session 3, December 2nd, 1998. This is Tape 2, Side A. You were saying something to the effect of since the beginning of painting -- we were talking about tradition.

LF: Painters have followed painters, have followed painters, have followed painters, and it's grown and it's grown and it's grown and it's grown, but it's changed through the experience of artists becoming involved with art before, as you had Picasso following Velasquez. You had de Kooning following Picasso, that's how the thing kept growing and growing and growing and growing. And then when '60 came and Pop Art came in, it sort of cut off the roots of painting. Now that is applauded, "Oh, well, we cut off the whole European ties." But what they cut off was light, space, form, texture, color, all the things that meant something as far as doing a painting. They just sort of cut it off and said it was just flat; it was just image; it was just advertising. It was no difference between advertising and art. That's why you've got painters in art schools now, as I'm going to Otis next week to go through the whole foundation class. My friend, Katie Phillips, tells me that these people are crying to learn something because none of the art schools are teaching them anything. I went over to Claremont, saw 60 graduate students and went through all their stuff. I could not believe it, plastic hanging, bras, and things like that, nothing to do with real art. It was just like whatever was the easiest and fastest and quickest to do.

PK: Do you think that's the fault of Marcel Duchamp's exemption?

LF: I don't think it's just the fault of Marcel Duchamp. I think it's the fault of a lot of people who were teaching because they lost touch with painting and they lost touch with how to really manipulate space, to really manipulate forms, or just the whole idea of making a picture. The idea of going into something and being a world within it, and it becomes the world out here, which, to me, can start getting extremely boring. When you see sculpture on the outside of a building, very, very seldom do I ever see sculpture on the outside of a building that looks like anything because it's competing with the building. Well that's the same thing they're doing. The nice thing about a picture is the fact that you could go in and create your whole world within this picture. That was the idea of making a picture. Then they come up with Pop Art. Everything started flattening out. It wasn't a picture anymore. It was a decoration on top of a surface, and everything became out here until it just jumped all the way out and then everything was installation, which can be interesting and nice. It started taking up rooms in museums and museums had to spend all this money on making this huge installation things, and now you got all these artists that are floundering around out there and they come out of art school and they don't know anything to do but to make an installation.

PK: It's interesting, you sound as if you're quite attached to the notion of the Renaissance picture space and are really opening up a window, as you said, create a world which you can enter.

LF: Well, see, my feeling is that if people can really get back into painting after it was cut off in 1960, they've hardly been able to do it because they don't know where to turn. All they can see is reproductions of things. They can't see the actual things. Nobody's teaching it and people who are supposed to be teaching it came from conceptual art and minimal art and don't really know how to teach painting. And so very few painters know how to teach painting, but there's no bounds to how far you can go back into a painting. My feeling is that in another so many years, probably after I'm dead, that you'll be able to look at paintings and you feel like you can walk right into them. I mean literally, that you could push them that far back. I'm just starting to touch the tip of the iceberg of it. I feel like you could really, really push paintings back, that you can really go in open up space and really go back into this. I'm talking about really go back in, literally. And it looks like you're right back in. Just like I can take that dead cat down there and push it back into the painting so it looks like it's back in there.

PK: There's a painting right down in your studio. What's it called?

LF: New Frontier. Rather than the object just sitting out in the front, the object actually feels like it's way back in the painting. That's actually a three-dimensional object, but it feels like it's way back in the painting. I feel like the combination of painting and sculpture, this is something that nobody ever really got into because in the Renaissance times, they had painting and they had sculpture, but the sculpture was too heavy to put in the painting. They tried relief things, but they never came off because they never really painted on them. Now with the sort of technology they have, they can actually do things that have dimension to them and actually push things back in the painting. I feel like what I'm doing is an extension of plasticity that was used by Gorky, de Kooning, and those people up at the end. They were moving things and creating that kind of space so they shift back and forth and they move back and forth, and that's the way I'm picking up light. I'm moving it back into the painting. I don't see anybody else doing that. No, I did see somebody and I think there are some people doing it. I remember seeing a picture by Mark Boyle. Do you know who that is?

PK: It rings a bell, but I don't know him.

LF: I was out to Newport Harbor Art Museum and they had a Mark Boyle in their collection, and it was a different thing than mine. It wasn't done the same way, but they took a slide of these rocks and then they put the real rocks in, but they showed the light and so you're looking down at the photograph. Well actually, it went back in like that. Oddly enough, when I saw this, I said, "Wow! That's really great. How come I never heard about this? Why does the name Mark Boyle sound familiar?" and I realized that Mark Boyle was at the Paris Biennial, so he's got to be my age. He was in the Paris Biennial from Britain at the same time that I was in there, and I remember that.

PK: If you're seeking the creation of an actual space, a pushing-back through combining painting and sculpture. Can this happen in non-objective work?

LF: Sure it could happen in non-objective work. In fact, when I get through with all this stuff, that's what I want to get back into. I was really a good non-objective painter, when I was at Chouinard. That's what I won my first prize of painting. When Irwin was on the board and so was Emerson Woelffer and Richards Ruben. They're all the ones that voted me in. That's how I got in Ferus Gallery was on the basis of that abstract impressionist thing.

PK: So Irwin was supportive of you.

LF: At Chouinard. Until I probably told Larry Bell or something that I thought he was a mediocre painter and it got back to him. Then when it got back to him, all of a sudden, it went [making a sound].

PK: This is going several different directions, but the thread I would like to pursue a bit right now, but I was thinking of Jay De Feo. Were you familiar with her *The Rose*? Of course, one of the key things, a distinguishing feature of that work was the building of with the valleys and the ridges and so forth, but it was, in fact, a painting. Did you see it when it was exhibited at Pasadena in '63?

LF: I saw it originally way back. I just remember it was very thick and everything like that, but I don't remember being something that went back in. I think it just all came out.

PK: Well, it was, at the very least, a combining, literally, of sculptural form and paint using the material itself.

LF: That's true.

PK: And I just wondered if by any chance whether you took any special notice of that or any interest in it given what some of your interests are.

LF: I know what you mean. I can't remember. I think I remember the painting as being this big thing with all that. Let's put it this way, I don't remember having anygivings about spatially what it was doing. Let's put it that way.

PK: Well the second question about De Feo, and this one may be a little more fruitful, you were talking about assemblage and talking about how credit and primacy seems to be given in certain areas where you feel that that doesn't reflect the actual developments. In the De Feo book, I can't remember which author, one of them claims that Manuel Neri and Bruce Conner credit Jay De Feo as starting the California assemblage.

LF: Oh really. Did she do assemblage?

PK: She did, to a degree; so did Joan Brown, and Manuel Neri. They made these concoctions, but basically, it was funky stuff. It was part of Funk Art and it wasn't mainly what they were doing, but they were doing it for a time. I thought that that was a bit of breach in terms of a claim that De Feo, or that Jay ...

LF: Wait a minute. What period of time are you talking about?

PK: Well I'm talking about the late '50s, very late '50s, I think.

LF: Oh, well then you should go back to Gordon Wagner. He was the one that really started it.

PK: Well this is why I want to bring it up because this is the way these kinds of art histories are created by that kind of crediting from two other important bay area artists as a tribute to de Feo, but I look at what you and I are talking about assemblage art in Southern California, and I wonder if Conner and Neri even know anything about Wagner. That's a very good point. Why don't you tell me how from your perspective you see the connections?

LF: In fact, when I did the imagination show, oddly enough, I was going around seeing like 400 artists. I didn't know who Gordon Wagner was at the time, and I was curating that show in 1976, and I went around for four months and I went over this gallery, I think it was Tobey C. Moss at the time, and I see these assemblages and I said, "Who's this person?" It sort of looked like George Herms, because it went like this and it went like that and then I started finding out about him, went over to his house, and then I saw these assemblages that went all the way back way before George Herms was doing assemblage from Topanga. He lived in Topanga, and they looked very much like George Herms with the same wooden things and stuff like this. I think that helped me to get a little pissed off at George at that particular time in the '70s, aside from that, because he never gave Gordon Wagner any credit. So I put Gordon Wagner in the show.

PK: When was the imagination show? '70, did you say?

LF: '76, I believe, at L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art. Mike McMillen was in it. He should remember that. Carl Cheng was even in it, and Roland was in it. Gordon Wagner was in it. Betye Saar was in it. Bruce Houston was in it. I gave all those people a kind of push. All of a sudden, they started getting out after that. That was Bruce Houston's first show, and I sort of helped some of those people get into a mainstream in L.A. art, just started selling their stuff because that was my motivation, to get some of these people out there because all the art magazine was showing was that other stuff. And then who else, Tom Jenkins. Did you hear of Tom Jenkins?

PK: No.

LF: Do you know he's in that book there? He's in the same area that I'm in there. He did environmental paintings, and he also did performance things with tops and things like this.

PK: That's interesting, I can't remember if we talked about this, your curatorial career here with the imagination show on the last tapes. How did it come about, you were invited to curate the show? Was that Bob Smith?

LF: I was talking to Bob Smith and I don't know whether he asked me to curate a show. Maybe he asked me if I wanted to curate a show or something, I can't remember whether I approached him or he approached me. I just can't remember. And so I did and I saw about 400 artists. Where did I just see that review the other day? I just, just came across a review because I was looking for something in the filing cabinet and it was stuck in there with other stuff. William Wilson reviewed it. It was called *Wide Awake in a Dream World*, and he gave it a good review, but I think *ArtForum* went out of their way to come over and knock the review, if I remember. But it helped a lot of people.

PK: There was a publication.

LF: They couldn't afford a catalogue. I have all the slides from the show.

PK: We have the L.A.I.C.A. records, by the way, at the Archives.

LF: They wouldn't have the photographs. I had the photographs taken or something. I don't think they had the photographs. In fact, ask Mike about it. He'll remember the show there. There were 300 artists. Oh, it was a big show. I'm trying to remember where that review thing was. I just saw it the other night because I was looking at photographs and it was stuck in there. It was a year after the assemblage. Hal Glicksman did a show called *Collage and Assemblage* and I think it was the year after that. That was a big show, too.

PK: Did you, at this time have any contact with the Temple of Man and those artists and Robert Alexander? George Herms is actually like on the board, and it's still going. It's in Venice.

LF: No, I was never involved in that.

PK: So it's not something you really even were too much aware of? But on the other hand, certainly not exactly the same thing, but you did have a connection or a contact with Jess up in the Bay Area. How did that come about for somebody who doesn't write letters?

LF: Jess was involved with Rolf Nelson Gallery. He was with Rolf here. See, there's another one with Rolf. That's where Jess showed here with Rolf. In fact, he did that show of all those paintings with those really thick. And then Jess and I traded works. He traded me two smaller things for one little larger thing of mine and he still has the thing up there, the painting. It says "To Jess" on it. It's a good painting, landscape. And then he traded me an oil painting and a collage. My first wife got the oil painting. I think she still has it. And then I finally donated the other one for a tax write-off when I needed the money to a museum, so I don't have that anymore.

PK: Which one is that?

LF: I'd have to go through my files. I also donated a Pettibone that I had, Richard Pettibone. I'm trying to remember who I donated it to. Oh, I remember where they are. I know exactly what happened. This was with Kent in New York, and Doug Walla said that he would like to have the Jess, so he would trade me something to donate instead of the Jess, so I would give him the Jess. So I donated a Jeff, was it a Jeff Koons?

PK: Oh, so this wasn't too terribly long ago?

LF: And so I donated it. It was a Jeff Koons. I would never have owned a Jeff Koons, but I traded with Doug. I don't even know how we did it. We wound up doing it some way or another, but it was legal. So I donated the Koons, so he could get the Jess because. I guess, he had somebody that buys Jess.

PK: I'm interested to hear about the nature of your correspondence with Jess.

LF: Well, the actual correspondence had to do with -- I still got the letters down in there-- the trading with the painting. I went up to his house before when he was living with [Robert] Duncan. But it had a lot to do with the fact that Rolf Nelson was taking him and owed him all this money and he was going to sue him. So it was this thing about the lawyer and he was going back and forth about that and that's what the letters are about.

PK: Is that so, Rolf was --

LF: It happened about 1966 when the whole art scene started. He moved his gallery and got a bigger space where he showed the big Georgia O'Keeffe and it was huge, Georgia O'Keeffe in there. It was one of the big cloud paintings. It was like 14 feet or something. But he was putting out all this money. He owed me money and told me my paintings were in London traveling or something, when actually, he had sold them. And the same with Jess and then Jess was going to sue him, so it all had to do with getting our money from Rolf.

PK: Did you ever get your money back?

LF: I never got all of it, but I threatened to sue him. He just went under and then left, so I don't know how much

he actually --

PK: Despite that you seem to be quite understanding about that as a matter of fact, and credit him for playing an important role at one time in terms of the artists.

LF: Well, that's the funny part, as much as I knew that he was going under and he was taking money from me, still, he should get his due. He did help a lot of people and he did have important people. Anyway, I always liked Jess's work. There's not collage person like him, I'll tell you that. I liked those paintings, too, that he did with the real thick oil paint.

PK: It looked almost like puzzles or something, just parts built up.

LF: He was one of a kind. I think that's one of the reasons that I liked his stuff so much. It's like you couldn't really relate it to anybody else. They were also extremely romantic you could see what was going on in there. There wasn't anything pretentious about it.

PK: Now a big friend of his was Michael McClure and I may have asked you this before, but did you know any of those people?

LF: I may have met them a couple times. They came to my opening at Paule Anglim's and so I met him there, maybe '85 or something, and then went to this party. Terry Allen was there, too. I remember that, because he gave me the records that he had done. People give me things, like Terry gave me the albums there and everything. I never sent anything back to him. I should have been much more generous with myself, but I wasn't.

[END SESSION 3, TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 3, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

PK: This is Tape 2, Side B. You sort of touched again on the theme of Llyn Foulkes as hermit, although you didn't say that, and I guess you must really feel this at this time because you mentioned the gestures that others had made, even people who you really admire your where it hasn't been your ...

LF: That's what bothers me the most, is people that I admire their stuff and I haven't made the ...

PK: Well, you see, there's still that way, but I mean I get the impression ...

LF: Well, and then the other part is maybe some of the stuff is like maybe I didn't admire some of their stuff as much. You see, that's the other part.

PK: Why do you have to admire their stuff? I mean here's what puzzles me a little bit, but then, my nature is social.

LF: Your nature is social. Mine is totally wrapped up in myself. See, that's my big problem.

PK: I'm sort of wrapped up in myself, too, but I should have said that on the tape. It's just different with me.

LF: I know, I know.

PK: But I was thinking that especially since your divorce, which was like two years ago, was it? It was just about the time when we first got together.

LF: Two years ago.

PK: I just wondered if subsequent to that, if you've been more outgoing. I've seen you at events a few times, at social things. I mean you go to places, but I guess what you're saying is that you don't feel the need to maintain, or take an initiative in maintaining, like a correspondence keeping up with people in that way. Certainly, there must be some people that you do that with.

LF: Jess was the only one back there, but there was a reason for it because we were talking about Rolf Nelson having to do with the money thing, but otherwise, no, just like we were talking about George. I even had things on the wall from Wally Berman and Allen, but I never sent anything back to them. And yet when Wally came over, I gave him the drawing, stuff like that, but I didn't go out of my way to correspond. Don't ask me why. All I know is I was just going to my studio and doing my thing.

PK: Well you're not antisocial entirely.

LF: I'm not antisocial. I guess I just don't follow up on things that I probably should, because there are certain people that whether I admired their work or whether I admired their spirit, there was some sort of connection. It's not following up on it, and I suppose, that has been one of the reasons I haven't benefited, and certainly if I had not turned away from Andy Warhol at Dennis Hopper's place, who knows where I would have been now.

PK: Well what about with people in other fields? I mean we've been talking about artists, but you've had a career and an interest in music and musicians and so forth. Do you keep up more with some of them or is it kind of the same pattern that there's a real reason to do it?

LF: I might go see a friend's band that I was with in the '60s if I get enough of the invitations and he calls me up. I don't know why. Don't ask me why.

PK: What about people who aren't in the arts? I mean I'm not trying to pry into your personal life, but it's interesting in a way.

LF: It's really the same thing in my personal life, too, except for my kids. My kids I see all the time, like that.

PK: But they hardly have to come to you. Is this what you're saying? More often, they will initiate contact

LF: More often, yes, probably 99% of the time.

PK: It's just the way to be. There are other people like that.

LF: It's not that I want to be that way. Maybe I'm just so fucking self-involved that's probably why I got the divorce.

PK: I'm trying to connect this in some way to your art, the kind of tone or vision of your art which much of it is, frankly, negative, and I certainly do feel that, and I don't know if that precludes finally a positive solution to the situation, but your view of the world, and to a certain degree, people, seems in many of your works to be negative or, in some way, pessimistic. I'm just wondering if there may be some connection between the way you operate your relationship to other people and a kind of vision that is in your art.

LF: I have good friends at The Brewery and we get along like really great, so I'm not I really... It's funny because you see my art as being pessimistic.

PK: I should rephrase that because I think it might be a better way to say it. Then you can see if this fits at all with how you see the work. It has to do with the way you're seeing the world. It's not so much a comment on people necessarily, but what they're up against living in this world, an environment in which there are these forces and some of them are corporate. You have a very negative view of the corporate world and those who are despoilers of nature and of the environment.

LF: But that's good.

PK: I'm wondering is if your view of the world is finally ultimately pessimistic, that these forces you can call them out, call them by name, Mickey Mouse or corporate Disney or anything else which you use as symbols, but the circumstances of the world are such that it's perhaps fairly hopeless for people, the struggle, but the deck is really stacked against you.

LF: Well I don't know. I think in a certain sense, particularly lately, I'm trying to call people's attention to it. Now I don't know if that would be pessimistic as much as it would be trying to call people's attention to what's going on. I get extremely frustrated and angry when I see the aftermath of what I've tried to call people's attention to and then I'll see people respond to it. I mean people respond to the work, but at the same time, I'll see the same corporate people in the same newspapers and the same thing take things out of what I'm trying to say, and respond to it in the way that I was hoping they were going to respond to it because it goes against the grain. It goes against the way that everything is going, and I would like to see everything change.

PK: But you don't see things change in this respect. Is that right?

LF: I don't see things changing and that's why I try to keep hitting it harder each time.

PK: Did the people disappoint you in this respect that your art provides material for them to recognize problems, and perhaps even become engaged, but in fact, they don't take that step, and they don't become engaged? Is this a source of disappointment?

LF: That's why I want to get on with my music and get my message out in another way because I think that people will really respond to the music. Already so many people want me to put out a CD they're going to buy right away and everybody loves the music so much, and so there's a format where I think that I can really get

out and start talking about things and playing the music about things which will hit a much broader audience. The audience in art is not that broad. Sometimes I wonder why I even do it in art, why even bother because art is so elitist and controlled that you're talking to a wall.

PK: But I think most people would agree that your art is seldom, if ever, upbeat.

LF: Well, okay, but I'll tell you one thing, I've had people really touched by my paintings and that really pleases me. I've had a lot of people come up to me and some of them with almost tears in their eyes saying how touching my painting was, so when you say "touching," you see, I mean it hits a note with certain people.

PK: Well yes, I'm sure of that.

LF: So what I'm saying is the pessimism about what's going on, to me, you have to hit people in certain ways before they even start to respond. I said, the plumber comes in to my studio in Topanga while I'm doing the Pop painting and he charges me \$10 less than he was supposed to charge me. I said, "Well why are you charging me less than you said?" He says, "Because that was for letting me look at the painting." To me, that means something to me. Or Like Cathy Regis over here who has the painting of mine and the gardener comes in, Latino gardener, and he says he's knocked out by the painting. This painting when I get done here, I may show it at the Plaza de la Raza where they had the Frida Kahlo show in East Los Angeles and I may put in Spanish the name of Los Angeles on the top. I may go that route because this whole thing up there is so tight and controlled that I may go the other route. I'm not even quite sure yet. I'll see when I get to that point. I just think that there are a lot of people that will respond to my work if it's out there and if it's seen.

PK: What do you want that response to be? You mentioned it pleases you when the viewer is moved or touched in some way and tells you that.

LF: You mean like how is that going to change them?

PK: Beyond that, which it doesn't have to be beyond that because you're touching emotions in that way, but what would you hope eventually to see come from it.

LF: That I make a connection with a lot of people through my art. My connection is not through my personal relationship with other people. My connection is through my art. If I can't make the connection through my art, then why do I even want to do it? I am not the kind of painter that's trying to put out the latest things. I'm just trying to do so much stuff to get it out there so people can have it hanging on their wall and look pretty over in the corner there. I'm not that kind of a painter. I cannot even do prints or things like that because they don't mean anything to me. They just sit there on the wall. They just don't mean anything to me. It's got to be heavy-weight to me. It's got to say something; otherwise, there's no point in even doing it because I don't want to respond in the way that a lot of artists respond which is so they can have it in a person's house and they can say, "Oh, look I've got my such-and-such. Over here is my such-and-such and here's my such-and-such," and so it becomes just another object like this couch, and it's something that's not aggressive, does not threaten them at all. They can walk by it and look at it like they do a vase of flowers or anything else. No, I don't see my art as being that way. I can't work that way. It doesn't mean anything. There's too much going on in the world. There are too much terrible things happening. There's too much control happening with corporations or these people than to just perpetuate that same thing so these corporate people can have that nice, little thing hanging on their wall and they can turn it into money. I just can't deal with that. I can understand why other people do it because that's the way they make their living, and I'm sure they're very use to their lifestyle and don't want to change it.

PK: Your work then seems to be one very much of communication, and in a really more personal way than I necessarily understood.

LF: It's not personal like between two people as much as it is ...

PK: What struck me was when you were saying this is a way that you can communicate and reach out to people more. Do you feel that you're more effective, more eloquent in that kind of communication, human interactions through the art, than in this other sort of day-to-day social interaction.

LF: When I'm lecturing, I can really be out there talking. I can really talk like this and I can talk like that, or with the music or with the painting. It's something where I'm just letting all my feelings out, because I'm not a big party person and I'm the kind of person that likes to let out my personal feelings. Sometimes I'll let them out too much. But I'm the kind of person that just wants to let everything out and I want everybody else to let everything out, but that's not the way it is when you're at a party. Most people are doing, small talk and nobody wants to get into anything heavy because that's not any fun. Everybody is into having fun. Me, I'm not into having fun. I see too goddamn much terrible stuff happening all over the fucking world and see too many things happening and everybody getting their feet in there and changing things and making other people have to

suffer for it than to go out and have fun all the time. I haven't gone to a movie now for four months and yet I was a big movie-goer, too. People spend so much on entertainment. They're being entertained all the time. So that's one of the reasons why I want to do the music. Maybe I can get out and entertain them and, at the same time, get my point across.

PK: It's going to be the music, the sound itself, the melody. It would be the lyrics you did one for me on the Mickey Mouse theme.

LF: Mickey, right.

PK: Are the themes in the music through the lyrics then related to the themes in the paintings? Do they tend to be the same concerns?

LF: They have been. I'm getting much more into jazz and stuff on the machine now, and people can really dance to the music now. I mean you can really feel it. I want to be able to capture people. I don't want to just get out there and start screaming about stuff. I want to capture them so I can have a voice. All I want is a voice.

PK: But in the music, how is that voice expressed in a way that is going to communicate something]?

LF: Because if enough people can like my stuff and it can be out there, then I will have a voice. How many people out there -- now divorced from the music, just the music, how many people out there actually talk about what's going on? They don't because they're part of the system, so they don't talk about what's going on because the system is feeding them. My hope is to get out there and then start talking about the system. Now there's many ways to do it and we've been going through it with different people, and, of course, the Internet is going to be very big in the next century. This is going to be like really big, so there are all different kinds of ways of starting to get out there and figuring out how to do it. All I know is that I need a voice. I can't stand on the street corner anymore and I can't go out into the little art crowd. You've got no voice in the art crowd. I mean it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't go anywhere.

PK: It's true. You're talking within a small circle. It's like Academia. I gather from what we've been saying, what you've been saying, that finally, you see your art as a tool or an agent for social change to improve the world. In other words, there is notion of the power of art to be redemptive, to help people find redemption.

LF: That's where I see it. Otherwise, shit, man, so many times I've just gone out there and done that thing. I mean it's easy to do. When I changed at the end of '69 when I did all those big paintings, I could have gone on and done that same thing and I could have been another what's-her-name and what's-his-name, by doing that same thing. When I started going back into the art, I started being more social. I did pictures of Nixon with bloody heads and all these other people. It was a lot of social stuff started coming out right after that. I saw the art scene as just being this kind of frilly, little thing that you did this one thing. And like Sam Branson said, "Get an image and grab on to it and keep it," like he did for 30, 40 years. After a while, it got to be nothing. I just couldn't go that route.

PK: What about your plans for the Church of Art? You showed me earlier the studio space next door.

LF: Well the funny part is I'm not sure exactly what's going to be. I see it something almost like a television show. I would like to get on television or something like that. I think that's where I need to go, something that reaches the most people the fastest. Who knows if it's good. I have thought of it as being like a theater or a stage thing, but anyway the Church of Art is hopefully going to involve all these other people and that's why I'm making all these different instruments and things that other people can play and maybe even the audience can play. Different people from the audience can play, along with me. It becomes something that's interactive, that's a social thing. Other people come in and I have other friends here like Ed Colver who's been collecting all this stuff out of the newspaper now for the last year, so he's going to have all this stuff. It's going to be a real thing, all I can keep saying is anti-corporate, anti-fascist. And I suppose you could say it's political in a sense, but it's anti-fascist. I was just seeing something on television the other night about, what was it, Seldis. What that his name? Not the art writer, he was a writer in the '30s and '40s and '50s a newspaper reporter, had a column and everything, and he was the only one who told it just where it was at, and slowly, slowly, he got phased out. He talked about what was happening with Hitler, what was happening with Mussolini, all things like that. All the rest of the newspaper was white-washing it all because this all benefited all the fascists over there, like Mussolini. This all benefited J.P. Morgan and these people like this. So the newspapers never really wrote on what was really going on except this one reporter. And there was a documentary on him. Anyway, it's that sort of thing, because I see the same sort of thing going on in the newspapers now.

PK: So how in the Church of Art, whether it's on TV or just next door in the studio space, a kind of theater where people can come, like going to a Baptist church or something, well how is that going to ...

PK: I don't know. Maybe I can get all these people to come in and confess all their sins and what they've done

wrong. That's why those confessional booths are there, so you can get the people to come in and do it. I don't know. I'm playing it by ear. I'm building on something and whatever happens, one step in front of the other. Do I have a particular plan? Yeah, I have a plan to get my recordings out, which is going to be happening this year, all the recording of my stuff, and to do performances in there which will be videotaped and recorded. How they will be totally structured, I'm not sure yet. I'm approaching it the way that I do my painting, and the way that I do my painting is the same way. I don't know exactly what I'm going to do. I know what I feel, but I don't know exactly what I'm going to do. Let's put it this way, I don't have a master plan. All I know is I have the equipment and it's making the equipment work and it will also be coming involved with other people, which I really would like to do. I would like to become involved with others, but I want the people that I become involved with to be concerned about these things, too. Most people are just concerned about their own act, which I can understand, like I'm concerned about my act. But, I go toward people here at The Brewery like Ed Colver who's an assemblage maker; he's a very good friend of mine and he was the big punk photographer. In fact, they're going to do a book on his photographs of all the punk photography. He was the one that did it all. And he is extremely political the same, anti-fascist, and I got to become involved that way with those kinds of people because it reinforces my feelings about the directions that I want to go, then I don't feel alone. It's really basically that I don't feel alone in it, and I have felt very alone in it because in the sense of art, I don't see very many people taking any kind of stand other than doing their little art thing. I would say that's not a nice thing to say, but, if I see one more David Hockney, I think I'm going to puke. It's all made for rich people up there, fill in the numbered stuff. He photographs his stuff and fills in the numbers and he's got his act together, and it's all about that. He supports museums, but he's supporting the thing that he's involved in there. Well there's more to art than that. Maybe I have this stupid feeling that art can save the world.

PK: It's very, very modernist tenet.

LF: But people don't like painting that much. Painting is supposed to be dead now, so how in the hell am I going to save the world with that?

[END SESSION 3, TAPE 2, SIDE B]

[BEGIN SESSION 2, TAPE 3, SIDE A]

PK: An interview with Llyn Foulkes on December 2nd, 1998. This is Tape 3, Side A, and we were about to get into a discussion of different ways individuals can have some impact or influence or help to form thinking or direction of others. Of course, we're talking mainly within the art world, but it's not unrelated, by the way, to what you say your very dear objectives are in terms of your art and its impact on other people.

LF: Well I think way back, it was my first wife, Kelly, her father was Ward Kimball. Ward Kimball, of course, was one of the nine old men at Disney Studio and he was my father-in-law for nine years. Ward also collected a lot of stuff, so he had stuff all over, and he had trains and things like that. Well I remember at the time that I had just married Kelly and so had this house and I remember I would have a few little things in there, but I never really collected a lot of things or had things on my walls. When I married Kelly, I started putting things all over the walls and I started this whole thing until my house just became filled with all this stuff. I never thought about it at the time, it was just one of those things. I would see his way of living, which was so personal it all had to do with him. I was very influenced by Ward.

PK: By your father-in-law.

LF: My father-in-law because, oddly enough, Ward had a band called the Firehouse Five Plus Two and I was a big Spike Jones fan when I was young and I remember hearing the record by the Firehouse Five Plus Two, and it had a little reminiscent of Spike Jones. It would have a few bells and things in there like that, even though it was Dixieland and everything. It still had a certain flair to it that was the same and he was into really old music.

PK: What was Ward's last name?

LF: Kimball, K-I-M-B-A-L-L. He was an animator. He created Jiminy Cricket that was his thing. He did a lot of things and was a very powerful person at Disney Studio. He's the one that gave me the pamphlet that had the first page from the Mickey Mouse Club on it, though at the time, he didn't think of it as being something that was, as I think of it, as being evil, marketing and stuff. He just thought it was another Disney thing, that I might like it.

PK: Well that is something. I mean that is interesting because there are these different people or different events and situations that make a difference for us.

LF: Then there was Jan de Swart down the street that was also a friend of Ward's who lived down the street from me and his whole house was also filled with all kinds of plastic things, all these things that he had made. Have you ever heard of him?

PK: We talked about him last time. We actually have his papers down in the Archives.

LF: Oh, you do? Who did you talk to, Jacques, his son.?

PK: Yes. He contacted us. He's either in Arizona or New Mexico or something.

LF: I don't know why I've lost contact. Somebody wanted to know where he was and I said I didn't know where he was. On the back of that photograph you were looking at of me, it says, "Jacques de Swart."

PK: Well, these things do make a difference and it kind of leads into something I was hoping we could talk about a bit, and the most institutional way is to talk about art school because you have taught, and you did and you did go to art school, and the issue or the question is the nature of the rules in these schools, the art school in general, played in Southern California in terms of developing an art world, how influence may have gone back and forth, just what was the dynamic. There are those who think, and then I'll shut up and let you talk about it there are those who think that these schools played a very important role in California more so than the schools did perhaps in New York.

LF: Oh really?

PK: And the reason, and I'm not going to plead that case, I'm just saying that there are those who feel the schools have been extremely important to art in California. And we've talked a little bit about your experience both as a student and then very little bit about your teaching, but both ways, what interests me is your observations on that whole issue of the art school, what differences they made. Who, as a student, you came in contact with, and then you've taught at UCLA.

LF: I taught there from '65 to '71. I was there for six years.

PK: And then you also taught at the Art Center, did you say?

LF: Yeah.

PK: And you've mentioned, and it seems to me with some kind of interest, almost pride, some students of yours were really quite good. I'm interested in your just sort of reflecting on that kind of role, this sort of connection with artists either as a student learning or seeing role models, or turning it the other way where you've been able to work with others in bringing them along and see their ...

LF: The real idea of a real instructor is to open people's eyes to things and then, hopefully, they're going to respond. You get very few people that actually are aware or respond. When I was at Chouinard as a student, I don't know whether I talked about this before, but Don Graham was very influential to me because he was actually taught all the people at Disney Studio to draw. He had been there a long time at Chouinard, way before Disney ever took it over, and he was very influential to me as was Richards Ruben, and Richards Ruben was in Ferus Gallery and he was an abstract expressionist. And he was actually sort of in the lines of Frank Lobdell, that sort of painting, and it was a trade-off back and forth. I would influence him and he would influence me. He's the one who told me to go over to Ferus Gallery, so that's how I got into Ferus Gallery. But I never took them Irwin. Irwin was a teacher who was not teaching advanced painting. He was teaching the one below it. And Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode and Larry Bell were in his class, and obviously, they had an impact on Larry and Ed and Joe, but I think the impact came as much from the art magazines as it came from the teaching, because when I was there, the thing that turned me on in art school, oddly enough, was seeing de Kooning in the art magazines, just seeing his late things. It was the Merritt Parkway series and those complete abstract ones. I saw the kind of imagery that I remember taking it to some instructors there at Chouinard and they sort of poo-pooed what I saw in it; not Richards Ruben, but some of the others did. I just got up to a point in art school where I didn't feel that there was anybody else that could teach me. I think it's because when I won first prize for painting and drawing there that I probably felt that I was so fucking great that I could quit then. It's probably more than that and I had to struggle when I got out.

PK: Who were some other teachers? Now you only went to Chouinard, is that right?

LF: Emerson Woellfer was there, too. I think I was also influenced by Emerson Woellfer when I look back on it. He was doing these white things with big kind of blob things, and then I was doing things that I did on photographs, had kind of white images, except that my images were always more anthropomorphized. You could feel them as being alive in another way or something, but I think I was influenced somewhat by Emerson Woellfer's things if I look back and think about it. I was never influenced by Robert Irwin, obviously. Anyway, when I was teaching there, the other people that were teaching there at the time in '65 when I came there.

PK: At UCLA?

LF: UCLA. There was a whole faction in there of people who owned the school, Stussy, Nunez, people like that. Well they didn't like me that much because I always sided with the students and I was very much like one of them. I was 30 years old, but I looked like I was 20 and I had a rock band and I had a couple students were in the rock band, so they all really identified with me.

PK: Bill Brice was there.

LF: And Bill Brice was there. He was like a father to me. He became this person who took me in and showed me the ropes, and he was a very, very kind, nice man, and I always liked him a lot. Then Diebenkorn came the next year, maybe a couple years afterwards. Diebenkorn was there all the way up to when I left. And Kitaj came and taught there for maybe a half-year, a year, and then Hockney, I think, he came and taught there for a year or something. Ruscha taught there for a little bit, but he was a lousy teacher, so they didn't keep him on. I remember that one. And then, let's see, who else was there? Robert Heineken. Oliver Andrews, who finally died. Sam Amato. Lee Mullican was there. I got along well with Lee.

PK: Yeah, that was what I was wondering.

LF: I got along well with Lee Mullican; I got along well with Diebenkorn and Brice. In fact, Diebenkorn came into my class, when I was teaching one day, I had put all this stuff on the blackboard and he came into this class, all that stuff was on the blackboard. He was talking to some student and he didn't know it was my class and he said, "Who is this? Good God, this guy really knows about painting." I remember that. But Diebenkorn fought for me to stay there because when tenure came up, the people who owned the department, which were Stussy and Nunez and those people who had been there forever, they had the balance of power. Diebenkorn and Brice fought for me to stay, but they didn't win, so they let me go. They wouldn't give me tenure because they knew I was too close to the students. Usually Diebenkorn and Brice and I had the same people, who selected us for their graduate studies. I was teaching graduate classes. Usually, it would be Brice and Diebenkorn and me. You could have two or three people and usually we would be paired all together. Peter Alexander was there then.

PK: Did Peter take classes from you?

LF: That I don't remember, but he used to come up to me all the time and ask me all this stuff. I don't remember whether he actually -- he was a graduate student. I don't think he was in my graduate class because at the very end, I remember him coming up and he had these boxes and he wanted my opinion on them. I said something about that they were too much like Larry Bell's, I remember that, in kind of like Plexiglas boxes. Other graduate students of mine, I don't even remember, Maria Nordman was one; Carl Cheng; Jim Doolan. Let me think now, Martha Alf. I'm trying to remember who all there were now. Karen Carson.

PK: Karen Carson?

LF: Yeah, but she would never listen to you, that's why her stuff is so fucking bad.

PK: You mentioned a couple of students who really did draw from you.

LF: Well Jim Doolan is one, obviously. He does all those landscapes and stuff. You're talking about Mark Tansey. That was Art Center.

PK: Oh okay.

LF: That was afterwards. That was '73 to '77 I taught there. That was after I left UCLA.

PK: But what about Carl Cheng? He's the fellow who has the show now at the Santa Monica Museum.

LF: He was one of my students. Nobody ever copied me. In fact, the only one who tried to copy me, and she was so fucking -- oh, man, you would know who I'm talking about. I'm going through this before I tell you. She would try to copy my paintings and I hated anybody who tried to copy my paintings. I said, "Do your own thing," and I went like this and like this. And I really got on her, and then finally, she just finally dropped out of my class afterwards because she kept coming and I wouldn't have anything to do with her, and now she shows at Gagosian Gallery, Elyn Zimmerman. What a lame brain. She's somebody who just got somebody else to paint, somebody to do stuff. I'll tell you. That's the way she was. She was kind of a rich girl. I'm trying to think of who else. I can't remember them all. The reason I remember the ones like Carl and Jim is because I see those people. I'm trying to remember ones before, some people that are out there.

PK: McMillen, of course, was never a student?

LF: No, no, no. The first time I met him was when I had him in the imagination show in '76.

PK: What do you think these students took away from you or took away from your classes or the contact with

you? You discouraged them from copying you, of course, but do you have any idea what might have been passed on?

LF: You got to remember, I was pretty young then, too, so I don't remember. Right now, if I were to teach right now, I would teach in a whole different way, so it's hard for me to look back there. I had Bob & Bob, the performance team, which were also left out of the Sunshine and Noir show which should have been in there because they were out there with a couple of kids and everything. They were on the cover of High Performance magazine, but they were connected with me. It was probably their big downfall is they happened to be connected with me.

PK: Well so are you saying then that the antipathy towards you and your work spilled over on to your students as well?

LF: No, no, no, no, no, maybe that's just my paranoia. That's probably just my paranoia. When I did the imagination show, I had a performance and I played with my band at the performance and I introduced Bob & Bob at the imagination show. This imagination show was knocked by certain people because it's not what was going on in art at the time. And what was going on in performance at that time was Chris Burden shooting himself and other things like that, more heavyweight, and they were more like a comedy team. I don't know; I don't know. You figure it out.

PK: Well it doesn't matter what I think, but it does matter what you think about it if you really think that an association with you on the part of Bob & Bob say was detrimental to their career.

LF: Well maybe it wasn't. They got on the cover of High Performance and stuff like that. Maybe so, but why weren't they included in the Sunshine and Noir" show?

PK: I think part of what is perceived connected with current concerns. I think that would be the curatorial aspect.

LF: Do you know Walter Hopps did a show at the old L.A.I.C.A. called Current Concerns? I probably still have the catalogue somewhere. They asked him to curate what was going on in L.A. at the time, Current Concerns. He actually did put me in the show. I don't think you're going to get as much out of me on this teaching thing as you think because I didn't teach politics and things like that. I taught about painting and space and if anybody got something from it, then they got something from it. I never know. Just like that Mark Tansey thing. I didn't even remember him as a student. I have people coming back to me that say "This class was the greatest class that they'd ever been in." I have people saying that all the time, but I don't remember who they are or where they went. I remember them, unless they're people who kept in contact with me somehow. Which is not easy to do, then they may be doing something and I don't even know it. Maybe another name will pop back into me or something. Oh yeah, another one I remember that just popped into my mind is what's her name in that showed over at Pat's [Patricia Faure Gallery], she did all the big eagles and lions and -- what's her name? She's another one that as a student I didn't care for that much. She's selling all the stuff in there. What's her name now? Murrill, Gwynn Murrill. She's doing real well in New York now. She's selling a lot of stuff.

PK: You didn't establish special relationships with many of these students? You didn't hang out with them?

LF: Not unless they played in the band with me. I had one student that played in the band with me in the old rock band, but he was more interested in music and I don't know what's happened to him.

PK: If you were forced to, just from your own observations, your own experience, how would you characterize the importance of art school or art education of that nature in L.A.? Presumably, in an art school, they have the same interest and perhaps in a communal sense, rather than getting together in bars the way they did in New York, so forth, if you're going to hang with artists and interact, probably is going to take place in these art schools and departments.

LF: No. I think they're following the art magazines more than anything else.

PK: So you think that the teachers have less importance than examples through the art magazines.

LF: No, no, I wouldn't say that either. Obviously, teachers are going to be extremely helpful in teaching people how to do things, ways of seeing and things like that, but they can also be extremely detrimental. When I was teaching in the '60s, what was happening was a lot of the instructors -- particularly when it got up to the late '60s and '70 -- were doing things that would take money to do where it wasn't hands-on as much anymore. And a lot of those people would go on and on. Another one that I had, a graduate student of mine, is James Hayward. He's the one that goes around telling everybody that he's very proud that I was the only instructor that ever gave him an "F." it got to the point where the art that was being done and was being shown in the magazines and stuff was not relating to things that they were teaching, but they would go along with it, and they would go along with graduate students who would say, "Well for my thesis, I'm going to do this, but it's going to cost me

\$3,000 to do, but tell me what you're going to do." It became not the hands-on thing as much and that was starting to happen. Then I saw it perpetuating even more until now and that's why the graduate classes out at Claremont was very much that way, too. They'll have foundation classes and they'll go up to maybe a year, a year-and-a-half, and then all of a sudden, it's like they're on their own.

[END SESSION 3, TAPE 3, SIDE A]

[BEGIN SESSION 3, TAPE 3, SIDE B]

PK: This is Tape 3, Side B. I probably have a few more things to say before we conclude. But I think your point was that it got to the point they really were not teaching much of anything after like the first year, year-and-a-half.

LF: Except theory and no hands-on, and so that was all up to the student in a sense and maybe the instructor would try to help them the best way they could, but they may not even know how to do it themselves. I think Cal Arts is a good example. I think what's happening in art schools today is that things have turned around. People have become influential like Baldessari and people like that. I think one of the reasons is that it used to be that somebody became influential because people wound up painting like they did, but now it's influential because they're taught how to take the easy way out. That's the way I see it.

PK: In other words, how to conduct the successful art career rather than ...

LF: In a sense, the easy way out. This will be flash and they can make this, so things start to become simplified. If you're looking at something, you have to read all this stuff before you even realize if there's anything there, and then you try to imagine that there's really something there because you've read it all. That's what so much of the art has come to, and I think a lot of this influential stuff is because it's easier to do. Even things that they see in the art magazines, they'll pick the easier thing to do. "Oh I can do that." That's why you see so much installation stuff with plastic hanging because it's easier to do.

PK: But you said earlier that one of the big influences on you back in the '60s in art school -- we know it was true even back in the '40s with the soldiers coming back on the G.I. bill going to art school -- how there was an enormous influence of abstract expressionism in many cases that came through reproductions and magazines.

LF: Right.

PK: But now you're saying that Cal Arts students and others are also just looking at magazines. What's the difference between looking and seeing a de Kooning reproduction and being inspired by that as an example and looking at saying ...

LF: I understand what you're saying. The difference is you're talking about de Kooning. You're not talking about Jeff Koons. You're not talking about some mediocre person like that. What I'm saying is they're taking the easier way out. It's much easier to do something like that and have it made than it is to actually produce it yourself and start from nothing. Than just to come up with an idea or a theory and have it produced.

PK: You're talking first about conceptual art.

LF: I think conceptual art was one thing that also hurt a lot, not that there aren't good things that came out of conceptual art. Certainly, Chris Burden's big wheel thing and stuff like that are great conceptual pieces, but it also spawned the easy way out. "Oh, all I have to do is put this here and put that there and put that thing on top." And the critics love it because the critics can read everything they want into it.

PK: Well, that's true. That's very much become the mode of the day.

LF: And it's all part of the same system.

PK: So you're critical of a too-close relationship between theory and practice or the art itself, that if it's based on theory, it necessarily then loses something you deem important in the creation of a work of art.

LF: Oh, sure, the feeling of a human response to it. I was with some collectors over at some gallery in Bergamont Station in Santa Monica and this guy had had all this crap. I don't even remember exactly what it was, but there wasn't anything pleasing about it. I mean there wasn't anything when you look at it, you say, "God, that really grabs me." But then here was this whole thing about what it was all about. Once you read what it was all about, then all of a sudden, you're supposed to see it in a different way. I don't see it in a different way. I still see the same crap. All I see is that you have this writing. You have a story that goes along with it.

PK: This is an objection that is made that art has become more and more hermetic and more and more dwelling within a realm of ideas and discourse, and therefore, becomes less and less accessible to the untutored person

who doesn't have the benefit of theory and training. I gather this is one of your large objections.

LF: It is one of my large objections. That's the same thing that happens with a lot of certain realms of music, like jazz. You have a lot of theory, and when you think back in the earlier jazz where those guys were really cooking, they didn't have the third man. You could feel it. You've got to have that feeling there. Now you can see the guy with all his theory, but there's no feeling. I am really against theory. That's what it's all about. That's what I hear in the art school. That's what Katie at Otis was telling me. She says people are really getting fed up with the theory; they want to learn something. But the people at Otis in the high divisions don't know how to teach them anything because they don't have any good people there to do it.

PK: It's a problem, and it started quite a bit earlier than the introduction of theory, although that's just carried to an extreme.

LF: When would you say the introduction of theory started in the arts?

PK: Well, it certainly didn't start in teaching in studio art classes. It came out of English departments and was well entrenched back ...

LF: You mean art historians? Is that what it is?

PK: No, English departments.

LF: Why?

PK: Because theory has to do with language, but theory is a way of thinking and a way of addressing text, the whole idea of text and art work is a text. It's something to be read and it's laden with meaning, but the meaning is pretty much to be extracted by the viewer or the reader. And it becomes much more political and so forth.

LF: Like the show over at MOCA now? What's her name? I just got the thing for it. It's obviously somebody who liked Ed Ruscha. What's her name? I got the thing on the table there somewhere.

PK: Kay Rosen. Oh yeah. The only point I was going to make because it means actually a number of different things, but it's very much cerebral and language games and so forth.

LF: Well I'm not into games.

PK: And one could say, although theory people would say that it's not about games at all. It's very, very serious business.

LF: I'm sure they think it's serious business.

PK: I remember in the '60s, they were talking a lot about [Ludwig] Wittgenstein and the whole philosophy of language and connotations of words and codes, this sort of thing. This explains, I think, to a large extent once that finally developed is what we would see in the studio classes is the application of theory, but what happened ...

LF: Well the whole thing is that someone could sit there and explain everything to me the way it's supposed to be. It doesn't make me turn onto it because there's nothing visually to turn on to.

PK: Well, no, you're right. It's conceptual; it's cerebral, and finally goes back to Duchamp.

LF: Well, that's why I always felt when I did that blackboard and chair over there, you see it up in the Norton Simon Museum. It's surprised me. It was actually very powerful when I saw it in my retrospective show. Did you see it in Laguna? Did you ever see the blackboard and chair?

PK: No.

LF: It had a lot of presence to it. It really surprised me. I thought it was going to look like nothing, but I've been seeing a lot of stuff, conceptual things and stuff like that, and in a certain sense, it's kind of like Duchamp's Urinal, but it's just a blackboard and a chair, but it has a lot more meaning to it. I just think Duchamp and all that gave the easy way out for people to put anything there and call it art. I'm not so sure that Duchamp was really saying that anything could be art as much as he was saying anything can look good. I put things all over my walls because they look good. I mean looking good and being art is not the same thing, and the art goes deeper than that.

PK: Well there are provocative ideas in this and I think that we all agree whatever Duchamp was really up to, he helped us to see or to think in different ways, but it is very cerebral. I think you're right that it moves then into a

realm that's really pretty chilling and pretty removed from actual experience. My sense from our whole interview is that you're much more interested in establishing a direct human, even maybe even emotional connection.

LF: Contact with people. Well you imagine what I must feel since I felt that way since I first started painting, that I've seen art grow into this cold, cerebral. I don't react to it. It doesn't give me any kind of feeling. I can see that somebody lays this down nice or maybe letters this nice or maybe does that, but it doesn't do anything to me.

PK: Of course, they would say that's not the point of it. I certainly understand what you're saying. There's nothing sensual about it, nothing emotional, and finally, it's, in a very real sense it's removed from human experience.

LF: It's a head trip.

PK: It is interesting because art that's sort of loosely based on ideas that we associate with theory can also be very focused on making people aware of social issues, political issues, or matters of race and gender.

LF: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm sure it could do that if you want to sit around for an hour and read the goddamn thing.

PK: All I'm observing is that the motives of some artists would be described as drawing upon theory in terms of strategies is as close to what you're goals are, which is to make people aware of the problems, injustices, corporate power being abused, and so forth.

LF: Oh, I can see that; I can see that, too.

PK: It's a very different way of doing.

LF: Well I can see that, too. I like visual stimulation. If it does not stimulate me visually, then it doesn't really turn me on. Duchamp's things never stimulated me visually, and when I saw his show at the Pasadena Art Museum, I walked through the whole thing, looked at everything, there wasn't one thing in that whole show that stimulated me visually.

PK: Not one?

LF: Well he didn't have his *Urinal* there. That might have stimulated me visually just by the fact that it was this object, but nothing really stimulated me visually. So they had to have Walter Hopps with a new girl out there to stimulate everybody visually.

PK: Oh yeah. That was Duchamp who was playing.

LF: I mean Duchamp. Well Hopps was playing with Duchamp, too, different times. You can imagine my surprise being right there not knowing how that thing is going to take off. It blew my mind when I realized that everybody is quoting Duchamp like he's the "God of the Twentieth Century." It's like it just blows my mind, just blows my mind. The same as John Cage, that blows my mind, too, me being a musician, me being interested in sounds and all kinds of stuff like that. It blows my mind. There's nothing that John Cage has done that has turned me on. I can understand why he does it. I've heard him talk and I have a tape on him and stuff and, again, it's all theory, too, but it's also divorced from people. People don't care about John Cage. They're safe with that. I mean Spike Jones was doing stuff with sound. I mean you talk about where John Cage did this piano thing where he put these different things on the piano and made these different sounds and stuff, but Spike Jones did it way before that, but he doesn't count because he wasn't a serious artist. I get real irritated by that because I'm a sound person and a musician. And artists are real funny because the same artist will go to a movie and they'll like to go to a movie and they'll listen to other things that other people listen to. In fact, I would rather go to a good movie than an art exhibit, and most artists would, which is very odd.

PK: What does that tell you?

LF: I don't know what it tells me. It tells me that somehow art doesn't reach out enough to people. That's the whole problem. This next century, once art starts reaching out to people, it's going to be worse than it is now as the trustees have taken over all the museums and all this stuff. It's going to be worse than it is now where it's going to be a total fascist, locked in thing.

PK: It sounds to me, though, as if you think the artists certainly are not without blame in this situation.

LF: The artists aren't without blame because they're playing into the whole thing. And as far as I'm concerned, there is no art unless there's discourse. Unless there are sides, and there is no art, and that's the problem with the Sunshine and Noir catalogue and the whole business is the fact that everyone just agrees with each other and all the artists are agreeing with each other. The Impressionists and the salon things, they weren't agreeing

with each other. There is some discourse there. There's no discourse now. Everybody is just agreeing with each other. They're all trying for the same critic, which is Christopher Knight, to like them because there's only one critic. That's a bad scene.

PK: Well would you extend that beyond just L.A.?

LF: Oh probably all over.

PK: Well listen, I just want to thank you for these sessions and because we've done a good, solid two and a half hours today, adding the previous four hours.

LF: Thank you, because otherwise, what I'm saying wouldn't be getting out.

END OF INTERVIEW

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