

A TEI Project

Interview of Jules Engel

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (December 29, 1975)

ZOLOTOW

Now, one of the first things they [UCLA Oral History Program] were interested in establishing is where you came from, how you got here. Where'd you come from? [laughter]

ENGEL

Where'd I come from? I was born in Budapest, Hungary, and I came to this country as a citizen, because my mother was already here for some time. So as I said, when I came over, I came over as an American citizen, because she was already a citizen.

ZOLOTOW

How old were you?

ENGEL

I think about thirteen. I landed in Evanston, Illinois, which was a lucky thing for me, because it's a lovely place, and the people were very kind to me. They really looked after me in anything and everything. They made sure that my presence was comfortable. Naturally, I spoke not a word of English, so I attended some night school. But I was also able to enter a high school in Evanston. I guess I already was showing some signs of drawing talent, but they wanted me also because I showed promise in athletics. I became one of their star athletes.

ZOLOTOW

What sports were you interested in?

ENGEL

Track. I'd run anything from the 400 up.

ZOLOTOW

Still run?

ENGEL

No, no, no. I don't like to run for fun. No, let me take that back. For me, it's competition; that was good. But the running aspect of it, the whole athletic aspect of it for me, was a natural thing; it was just part of my body, my body rhythm. And I was pretty damn good at it, I guess, because I was the track captain, and I broke, oh, about a dozen high school records. But to me, the good thing was that I enjoyed it. Your body can function like an animal. In other words, you have your head and your body, and running, jumping, and all, that was where the body was in motion. To me that was a very good thing. So I guess because of that and the drawing, the people at Evanston were really very, very beautiful, and, really, I think I was lucky to land there because of the care that they showed toward me.

ZOLOTOW

Then where'd you go?

ENGEL

Then from there I took off to Hollywood.

ZOLOTOW

Direct?

ENGEL

Yes. I just got on a bus and I came out here. I only knew one person out here, because I met somebody back in Chicago who gave me the address. Of course, the whole thing is a little vague now. But what happened was that I landed out here and I went to see this one person, and there wasn't much there; but then he recommended me to go see somebody at the Chamber of Commerce of Hollywood. I saw this other man, and he said to me, "You know, you're a very nice chap. I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll give you the money that it would take for you to get back to Evanston, Illinois. You should go back. You are a nice fellow, and I really want to help you. Why don't you go back?" [laughter]

ZOLOTOW

He didn't want to wish Hollywood on you, huh?

ENGEL

And so that was my big contact.

ZOLOTOW

How old were you, Jules?

ENGEL

I was seventeen. And then I had an introduction to an artist; I think I got that from a high school teacher of mine. I had the address, so after this man at the Chamber of Commerce had given me the money to go back home to Evanston, I then decided to look up this artist. And that was something that bugged me already then, because the word artist--I had no idea what the hell I'm going to get into. I was near the place that this man was living. He was living, as I remember, near Hollywood and Highland, somewhere there. I saw a man on a corner painting a landscape. He kept holding the pencil up in one hand, you know, looking through for perspective or something. And I said, "Oh, no, shit — if that's the guy, oh boy, I'm already in bad shape." Because at that time already I had ideas, and I thought, "No, my God, if that's him — " Anyway, I

had no choice. I had to go to his apartment. Well, it wasn't him--it was another man, luckily, but he was also a strange one. He painted landscapes of Arizona, and then he would go up there. He painted the landscapes here, and then he would go up to Arizona and sell them there. He did extremely well. Now, he was the guy who knew somebody at the Charles Mintz Studio.

ZOLOTOW

Do you remember his name?

ENGEL

I think his name was [Ken] Strobel. He painted landscapes of Arizona. He knew somebody at the Charles Mintz Studio. He recommended me there, because I had no way of making a living, really. I was very good at doing pen-and-ink drawings at that time.

ZOLOTOW

Had you had any training, at this point?

ENGEL

I had very little at the high school. I had like four years of art school. I went to Evanston Academy. (Evanston had a kind of art school called Evanston Academy of Fine Art.) As a high school student, I would go there evenings and draw, mostly designs and that sort of thing. They would set up the material for a still life and so forth.

ZOLOTOW

Were any of the original teachers any good?

ENGEL

Well, I don't recall that I had too many teachers, really. I mean that person there set up the still life, and I would draw from it. But now I have to get around to a certain point. I have to be very specific here. To get back to Strobel, he knew somebody at the Charles Mintz Studio, so he introduced me. But the thing that he asked me was, he would give me some photographs of the desert scene, and I would then draw pen-and-ink drawings of that, as I was very good at pen-and-ink, as I said. So I would be there six o'clock in the

morning, and I would draw these pen-and-ink drawings of landscapes for him until eight.

ZOLOTOW

Did he sign them?

ENGEL

[laughter] You're ahead of me. I did about a dozen. I went there for months and months and months in the morning. A year or two later, I don't know how I picked up a magazine, *Arizona* magazine, but, by God, there were my pen-and-ink drawings, and he signed them. Of course, it was a kind of a compliment to me, because this was a mature painter, a very "fine painter" with a big studio here, and yet my pen-and-ink drawings were good enough for him to sign them. Then I find out later that he also colored some--you know, put color over the prints. I was not angry at the man, because he did introduce me to the Charles Mintz Studio, which gave me the first job. So in a sense, I felt that he did me a favor, and I did him a favor, although I wish to hell I had those drawings now. Just the reproduction, just to prove the point. He was a kind of real wheeler-dealer. He never paid for anything.

ZOLOTOW

Well, maybe we can track the drawing down. What magazine were they in?

ENGEL

I think it's called *Arizona*.

ZOLOTOW

Okay, well, maybe we can get some researchers to work on it and see if we can track them down.

ENGEL

I remember definitely I saw one of these drawings in a magazine with his name under it. Oh, what the hell, it 's long ago.

ZOLOTOW

What'd you do for Charles Mintz when you started there?

ENGEL

Well, you could only do one thing entering that animation studio, and that was to join as an apprentice. I was apprentice animator, what they call an "in-betweenner." Aside from that, I used to take a lot of layout drawings; then I would go over them with my lines to get it ready for the background department to paint. I had a kind of a nice line that they liked, so I would take some very rough drawings, go over them, and trace them for background. The big thing as apprentice, "in-betweenner," was that you're going toward animation. But you asked me something which is very important--if at that time when I was going to Academy of Fine Arts in Evanston, if I had teachers of consequence. Well, now, you see, this is the very strange thing that I have to explain. It might sound as if I am not telling the truth, but this is the truth. When I was in high school, I already had a very definite idea that, for me, going out and drawing landscapes or still lifes was not quite the idea what drawing or painting should be. Now, if you ask me where this idea comes from, I have no idea. But my feeling was then that if I would take an empty piece of paper and draw a line or two on it, even if I put a circle in a square on the paper, that that could be a drawing, and that could be a piece of art. And that should be enough.

ZOLOTOW

Was there anyone that encouraged you in this?

ENGEL

No, nobody encouraged me, because at that time I'd never even seen anything like it. I never saw anything except-- Because when you grow up in Budapest, and you go to museums on Sundays, you go and see the Rubens and Rembrandts and Titians. But my point of view was already that there must be more to painting and drawing than just what I have seen. In other words, that you should be able to just put anything on a piece of paper of your own invention, imagination, and that should be art. And the strange thing is that in high school, because I already had a very large presence as a draftsman, or drawer, my high school teacher, somehow — And I don't think she really knew much about things, but I remember that the class would go out in the field to draw the trees, and she said, "No, you can stay in the room, and you do what you want to do." I still don't understand why she would let

that happen, but I remember everybody had to go. And I would stay in the room and draw my circles and squares and lines. She went along with that, and yet I don't think she knew what the hell I was doing, because I was doing things out of my head. So this is how I began. I wanted to make this point, since at that early time, the basic concept of what my art would be was already there.

ZOLOTOW

Can you trace back and place where you were exposed to non-figurative art?

ENGEL

No. I told you there was no such thing. This is why, when people say that you have to have those other ingredients, I have to get back to myself and say, "It's not so." I say, "At that age, I had these concepts, and I made those drawings in high school." I remember when we had to do portfolios and put covers on them and make the designs, I was always drawing squares and triangles and stuff like that, filling up the space. I felt that that was already an expression, and that should be art. Now if I were to go back, I have to go back to certain experiences which at that time were strange. I remember when I saw-- I was in an artist's studio once, and I was about twelve, eleven, maybe twelve, thirteen, very little. That man was painting, and he was an artist. How I got there, I don't know. But I remember he had a big picture on his wall. It had kind of like a kitchen, and three dogs were chasing; and one dog was on the top of the stairs, one was in the middle, and one was already on the landing. What fascinated me, already then, was not the dogs but the fact that there was all that space underneath the dogs. And that fascinated me. That space underneath the dogs. Not the dogs. The space. (And it had some lines.) Now, this was the first time, as I think back, that I said to myself, "That's interesting." At that time, I was aware of that and it captivated me. Another thing I was aware of when I saw the Rubens and the Rembrandts and Titians was, you had a head which was enormously well painted, and you would have a hand which was well painted, but then you had a whole section of the canvas where you saw the brushwork. That brushwork fascinated me to the point where I said, "I like that better than the head. I see the canvas coming through and the rough feeling of the brush stroke. If I could frame it, for me, that's a painting." I can make one more point, which to me is more interesting

today than it was then. I was never aware of cars, of automobiles. I couldn't tell one car from another. I'm pretty good at that now. But I remember (I was again around that age) I came around a corner with my friends, and I saw a car which stopped me cold. For the first time, I noticed a car. I noticed a car, and it really was an experience. What grabbed me was the front of the car, the enormous simplicity. Again, as I say, at that early time, I asked my friends what it was. And that's the first time that I ever wanted to know what a car was. It was simply that I liked the front. It had the kind of a structure that I reacted to. And what the hell do you think it was? It was a Rolls-Royce. But the Rolls-Royce front had that classical shape. Later in time, I realized these things — that there was a gut reaction you can't explain. But why did I react to that shape? I never cared for a car, and I never looked at a car. When I saw that, I said to myself, "My God, that is something." So somehow — I come to a very early point here, or conclusion--I reacted because I had to. Sometimes you do in life what you have to do! In other words, all these things later were very obvious, and you see I had no choice. Now, this idea of having no choice is present in a lot of people. I remember listening to Jacques Tati a couple of years ago, and I asked him why he makes comedy. Tati simply answered, "I have no choice." Now, I have heard that from other people, and sometimes that no choice comes very early. But the fact that I saw that Rolls-Royce and that structure; saw the dogs and the space underneath the dogs; saw the Rubens, the Rembrandts, the Titians, and those large areas in the canvas where you just see texture — I was drawn to all that at a very early time. But I never studied abstract paintings when all these things were happening, but already my thinking was coinciding with those things. And yet they were not abstractions — they were part of a painting, or part of an object that I had an immediate simpatico with. So I know it might sound silly, what I'm saying now, but this is the way that all my work is started.

ZOLOTOW

When you got into film, did you feel a contradiction between what film was asking you to do and your own impulse to create the forms that you were interested in?

ENGEL

Well, no. At first, when I got in there, I didn't worry about that, because it gave me the first opportunity to be in a professional environment, an environment where things can happen. I wanted to get in there. I didn't care how I'd get in there just as long as I got in there. And then what was going to happen later, of course, I could do something about. But, you see, my first big impact of the world of the arts, in my gut, was when I saw the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Then I saw, for the first time, music, movement, dancing, painting--all those things combined. So that was the thing that propelled me to get into an environment where I could function on all those levels.

ZOLOTOW

You're describing two forces, then: the inner force toward a certain formalism, then this external force, the richness of full drama-art. Both these were working on you.

ENGEL

But that was the biggest impression on me as a young person; because there, for the first time, I saw the direction I might want to involve myself in. The sense of movement always interested me--I mean, the sense of movement as in dancing. That from the first always interested me, and it was already part of me. But again, you see, in the dancer's movement you have enormous simplicity. You have structure, but you have the simplicity, because you can't lie with movement. When you move, you don't lie. You have no choice. When you make with the words, you can say things that somebody else will come and say, "No, he means that."

ZOLOTOW

What do you mean, Jules? Aren't there phony dancers?

ENGEL

I'm not talking about phony dancers. I'm talking about, for instance, athletes and the Martha Grahams and the Ballet Russe. I mean, when a man runs, he runs, and that's all there is to it. When a man jumps for a ball, and he wants to put it into a basket, he jumps. And no one can come up and explain, now, well, he meant this or that. And you're going to say something, and five other people will interpret what you're saying. But if I run a 100-yard dash, no one

can interpret this: I am either going to get there before you do, or you are going to get there before I do . So in that area of movement, you can have this enormous simplicity and directness. It is a kind of total expression. And in my work, my early thinking was that when you got to a line, it's a kind of statement with enormous simplicity. Where these things came from, you see, is what we're talking about here. Where it came from, it came from my gut, and from no place else. And this is why often, when people say you need this and this and that to arrive to this thing, I don't think so. Because my whole experience in my life has always been against that. In other words, when I had a concept-- I remember in high school, they were putting on a stage performance. I was very much involved in that scene. And I recommended not to use anything as a set, just to use a bench, a table, and a chair. They looked at me like I was out of my mind. But then, five or ten years later they were doing *Our Town*, where they did nothing but use a chair or a table. But where the hell did this come from? I don't know where the hell it came from. All I can tell you is that these things are possible, that it can come from a person without his ever being exposed to anything of that sort.

ZOLOTOW

It seemed to arise simultaneously in a lot of people at the same time.

ENGEL

That happens. But I wanted to just make this point — and this is kind of a large statement — that if pure nonobjective art had never existed before my present, it would have arrived because I would have been doing it. Of course, people have a lot of art school, and then they have all the teachers, and they're exposed to a lot of things--but that's something else. But when you arrived at those things and you've never been exposed to anything like that and you just do it, well, that is something else, And maybe that's why, when I am looking at nonobjective work, I often feel that the stuff is not right, because it doesn't — not that it doesn't really come from the gut, the heart, but the person has no feel for it. If you have a feel for it, it should be as natural on the canvas as when Cezanne put an apple on the canvas.

ZOLOTOW

And yet when you got into film, you didn't feel unnatural doing representational images.

ENGEL

No, never, because then I was in another terrain, and I had to go along with that aspect of it. Let's say at the Charles Mintz-- Although the Charles Mintz studio experience for me was a disaster because of the people's lack of sensitivity of what the world was doing, I realized then that there was nothing I can do about that, because I'm a young fellow, I'm a beginner and I'd better keep my mouth shut. Which I believe at certain times is what you're supposed to do. But the whole place was very anti-intellectual, anti-sensitive to art, anti-art, anti-culture. I mean, people were doing that because it was a job, but not with passion, not with tenderness.

ZOLOTOW

Do you remember the year that this was?

ENGEL

Well, it had to be '38 and '39, see. But by that time, around that time, I was exposed for the first time to contemporary art. I think the first one that I saw was here in Los Angeles, either a book or something that I saw, a Kandinsky. And POW! That opened the whole vista. And also what was interesting about it, that I, all of a sudden, felt that I wasn't alone. Because before I always felt that I was alone. I made little sketches, and I showed them to my friends. I remember I showed it to a friend of mine--my first non-objective little drawings and stuff. He was a very good commercial artist; and he looked at the drawings and he said, "What the shit are you doing, Jules? What are you wasting your time for? What is this crap you're doing?" Well, all I could do, I just put the goddamn thing together, the little package, and we went to a party, and the next day I went back to my goddamned little abstractions. In other words, it could have destroyed me, but it didn't. It didn't bother me that he didn't like it, or that he reacted the way he did. It didn't really mean a damn thing. I just kept doing what felt right for me. In the studio, however, that was something else; that was a job. But still I was involved in getting closer to things that I wanted to get closer to. The only way to get closer to this desire was for a while to work with people whether I liked them or not.

ZOLOTOW

What images were you drawing for Charles Mintz? What were they--?

ENGEL

Oh, Jesus--I can't remember. But those were horrible things. I mean, they were just awful things. But as I say, when you start, you don't complain. It gives you, as you know, the opportunity to work and get experience, and that was important. The environment was bad because the people there were absolutely against anything that was refined or sensitive. In fact, I remember a couple of times, they knocked me a little bit. In other words, you were a kind of an "egghead," and "intellectual," a "snob," and all that kind of thing. So you kept your mouth shut and you worked. But already, by that time, I was in touch with a couple of people that were working with Disney on *Fantasia*. In fact, I saw a wonderful photo in a *Vogue* of those dandelions coming down, so I gave that to a friend of mine over at Disney, because they were already working on the *Nutcracker*, the whole suite. I gave him that piece of photo and I said, "Why don't you take it there and show him that--this could be like the ballerinas. You know, use those shapes." That's what happened. They used those shapes in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, at the beginning, and then they recommended-- Because by that time, I was doing a lot of drawings--as I say, I was already a ballet freak--of dancers in movement, just line, you know. They showed it at Disney to somebody. At that time they were working on the *Nutcracker*, and they had a lot of problems with the "Chinese Dance," the "Russian Dance," the "Arabian Dance." So the next thing I know, I was called for an interview at Disney, and I was hired as a consultant choreographer, put immediately on the "Chinese Dance" and the "Russian Dance," to do the choreography.

ZOLOTOW

Did you have musical training at all?

ENGEL

No, I didn't have musical training, but my mother was a pianist. It was something that was around me, all the time. And a lot of the theater was around me, a lot of theater--not so much movies. And because I had this experience at Charles Mintz, so I knew how to put up a continuity sketch, you

know, for the choreography. Now, the problem at Disney was that the word choreography got in the way. They didn't know what the hell it meant. But it didn't matter, because I had these drawings, and they put me in a unit. Now, the problem with the unit was that no one had seen ballet before and no one went to the theater--I 'm not going to mention names.

ZOLOTOW

Mention names. Mention names!

ENGEL

Well, Norm Wright was the story unit director of this sequence, and Norm Wright, at that time, I don't think he had ever seen a ballet. I don't think he ever saw a play. And there was a couple of other people: they could draw well, but they were not into that scene. They never heard of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Ted Shawn, or any of that world. And, of course, the Kandinsky stuff or a Paul Klee idea of art was definitely taboo. But here they were working on [the] "Chinese Dance," and none of them had been exposed to any of that stuff. So again I come into the place like an egghead. And I began to make continuity sketches for the "Chinese Dance," the choreography, and then of course the "Russian Dance." And that started a big battle, between me and the other people in the unit, because for one thing, I was pushing for the black, total black environment, just black. Of course, that was unheard of there. "What do you mean, just black? We've gotta have something back there. We gotta have the bottom of a tree, or grass" or some crap." And I said, "No, no, just pure black, just pure black with characters moving, choreographies being done on the board. And nothing, not even the source of light--you see the light at the bottom, but not as a source of light." Now, this thing, this enormous simplicity, was staggering there, because they wanted to go with what they called "production"--fill up the place, you know, lots of stuff on the screen. Now, I had a lot of fights there, a lot of fights. Also they wanted to do like a Goldwyn. They wanted to have down shots, kind of like those follies girls with the down shots--

ZOLOTOW

Busby Berkeley.

ENGEL

Busby Berkeley.

ZOLOTOW

They wanted the Busby Berkeley choreography.

ENGEL

But I'd already seen the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo; I saw the "Chinese Dance" in the Nutcracker Suite there, and I had all that in my gut already. And now comes again the simplicity, the pure black and just the shapes. I didn't design the shapes (the shapes were already designed) , but the way they were going to move, I did all that. So we ended up — with both of those, the "Russian Dance" and the "Chinese Dance," we ended up on black. But the reason we ended up on black, I think, was because at that time the budget was so depleted, that that was the cheapest way of going. Now, the strange thing is that today, in *Fantasia*, whenever they run it, they always talk about the "Chinese Dance" and the "Russian Dance" — it looks like it was done today. At that time I had to [fight] them into not getting a Metro-Goldwyn [-Mayer] musical thing in there, not getting all that crap in the background — just to go with this enormous simplicity.

ZOLOTOW

That was probably one of the first times that an idea from modern painting and modern art got introduced in animation.

ENGEL

So, you see, with all those things in the bag, here I had the opportunity for the first time to put those things into motion. But I had an awful lot of fights and some very bad times with my people around me. All I wanted to do was just put something on there which I felt was right-- there was nothing for me to get back. In fact, I didn't even get credit on *Fantasia* because I was working in this particular area. And then when I wanted choreography credit, I remember, the guy said, "What do you mean? What does it mean, 'choreography'?" So forget it. So the fellow who animated the "Chinese Dance" — Art Babbit did the animation-- now, whenever you mention that, it's interesting, because it's Art Babbit. But the concept, the continuity — that had

nothing to do with him. The animator comes in when the aesthetics are solved.

ZOLOTOW

Was there anybody at Disney who was interested in what we call art, painting?

ENGEL

Well, they were all painting; they were all painting. But the painting then had the presence of what you call then the West Coast watercolor — Barse Miller, Millard Sheets, and Phil Dike, [who] was the man who hired me.

ZOLOTOW

Phil Dike was working there?

ENGEL

He hired me. He was the man who hired me on this job after seeing those drawings. So that was the texture of the art scene.

ZOLOTOW

Paris didn't exist? Picasso didn't exist?

ENGEL

Well, we used Stravinsky, you know, and all that. Or Beethoven. But then it was almost as if you were going to put them on the map, you know. Or I remember, I was going into a story meeting and they told me, "Don't use the word abstract because you're going to have people look at you like you're a strange character." In fact, I had drawings--I'll show you some drawings-- I had drawings on the story board, and the guys used to take them off the story board when Walt and his entourage came into the room because they felt that this kind of a drawing might look strange. You see, my approach to use colors then was like that.

ZOLOTOW

What years were these?

ENGEL

This is '39, '39-40. Now, you see, this was not the kind of color approach to doing things over there. I was doing things like that then.

ZOLOTOW

We'll recapitulate this on videotape, so we can see that.

ENGEL

This was wild for then. So what happened — No, at the time we were finishing *Fantasia*, Tom Codrick, who was art director on *Bambi*, one day stopped me in the hall, and he said, "I like this kind of a way you use color. I would like you to do something on *Bambi*, but to use color like you do. So that was the one nice thing that happened there, that this fellow saw this and he said, "I want you to use colors like this." But while I was working on colors like that on *Fantasia*, I had a lot of fights and a lot of problems. But these were drawings that were yanked off the board-- You see, just black. It has this kind of enormous vitality.

ZOLOTOW

In those years, the difference between commercial artists and art-artists was so aggravated--

ENGEL

Oh, yes. Because you were either an egghead, a queer, a snob--all kinds of strange tags were put on you, you know. I think there were some people there who would have a Cezanne in a room, maybe. But then Cezanne was already, for a lot of people, very weird. So when you come to something like Kandinsky--

ZOLOTOW

Did Walt ever collect art?

ENGEL

No, I don't think he collected art, although he bought something of mine. I don't know whether he has it or not; I know he bought something from me--I think they had a sale. You see, you can't just say Walt, because that would be unfair, because at least Walt had what I consider a tremendous sense of integrity to himself. But he was surrounded by people who fostered that,

because none of them had the guts ever to comment or buck him. So he had a lot of people around him who were constantly yessing him, and they had even less than Walt. That's not fair. They had less than Walt, because at least Walt had a sense of integrity to himself. I might not agree with him, but he believed really what he was doing, whereas these other guys were just there for the ride. They would go along with him, but he was the total talent, and all these other people were just working out his fantasies. I remember at one session, on *Bambi*, I recommended something, and Walt didn't care for it. But then when the meeting was over, I remember one of the guys came over and he said, "Jules, you know, I like your ideas. That's good stuff." I said, "You son of a bitch, if you like my idea, then why didn't you speak up?" Well, we were in a meeting, so, you see, they wouldn't.

ZOLOTOW

Who hired Rico Lebrun to work on *Bambi*?

ENGEL

I don't know who hired him. I really don't know. But, you see, Rico was teaching the animators--and I don't think they liked this idea--how to draw the animal. Because if you see the deers in *Snow White* and you see the deer drawings in *Bambi*, you can see an enormous difference of drawing talent, of structure, because Rico was teaching them from the inside out, you know. He had the classes, and you can see. Then also they had a couple of people like [Bernard] Garbutt, who was an animal artist, not a cartoonist--an animal artist who did fantastic drawings of the deer. He could draw like you write your name. But Lebrun was an enormous influence. And also there are beautiful books there, those big books with drawings of the skeleton of the deer in every position that you can think of. In fact, I have some someplace around here,

ZOLOTOW

Why don't we remember these for the videotape. I'm going to make some notes, because I would like people to know about the existence of those drawings.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (December 29, 1975)

ZOLOTOW

So the only painters that worked on *Fantasia* and the only painters that worked at Disney before *Bambi* were really the traditional California school of conservative watercolorists?

ENGEL

Yes, with the exception of one man, Kai Nielsen, who's a wonderful illustrator, a classical illustrator from Sweden. Nielsen did the story board on *Night on Bald Mountain*. Now, when you see the material on *Bald Mountain*, in *Fantasia*, when you see the dancing of these characters, you can see these drawings. I mean, it's completely out of character with everything else, as far as Beethoven. But again, he was a classical illustrator. In fact, when Tom Codrick first showed me some footage on *Bambi* and showed me a tremendous amount of color stuff already, paintings, you know, after he asked me to do something with color, I said, "Well, you know, the problem--and you probably know it--I feel very silly, because I can't paint like this, because that approach in using color is like an illustrator, instead of using colors dramatically. Forget the aspect of a book illustration, but use color as you would use words in a theater." So the whole idea which I will come back to later, when we talk about UFA [United Productions of America] was, don't paint backgrounds, but make the color part of the dramatic intent. My idea was, don't put the character in front of the background, but put the character in the background. That's another scene.

ZOLOTOW

Let's finish with the years at Disney. When did you leave Disney?

ENGEL

Well, I left Disney around, about '42 and then went into the Air Force.

ZOLOTOW

Up to that point, nobody from the world of painting had ever affected the Disney people in any way?

ENGEL

You couldn't because, Walt had a point of view, and that point of view, for him, was all right. But that point of view of course was Walt's feeling about what he wanted. Walt was a tremendous talent. He had the instinct of an entertainer. He had an instinct of a director. And he directed every damn thing that came out of that place while he was there. He looked at the rushes, he looked at the rough reels, and Walt said yes or no. There's no question about it. He was an entertainer, but the kind of entertainer that was right for him. In that sense, he was 100 percent. And he would not deviate from it. He had a feel for that. I remember we were in a session on the "Dance of Hours," of the ostriches, and we were in a sweatbox, looking at a rough reel, at the early part, when the ostriches were beginning to wake up. Walt looked at the damn thing, and he said, when somebody wakes up, then that person goes [Engel gestures] like that, you know. And you say now, that was right, for him, to spot that. So he had that natural instinct of performance, like a lot of directors--like [D.W.] Griffith. I mean, what the hell, Griffith became a great director, yet he was a lousy actor. He was such a lousy actor they kicked him out of the studio.

ZOLOTOW

As you talk, you're moving a lot like an animator, which is really interesting. Do you think that this is part of what Walt gave you, that you took on with you to use in other places?

ENGEL

No, no, no--no way. No way. I think that aspect of me using my hands, [laughter] I think that's European.

ZOLOTOW

That's Hungarian.

ENGEL

I think that's European. No, I didn't get anything like that.

ZOLOTOW

You know, that particular gesture that you went through when you were imitating Walt--

ENGEL

I was imitating him.

ZOLOTOW

That's a very animatory thing to do.

ENGEL

But he had that feeling, you know, of what was right, what felt good, how a person would react. He had all that.

ZOLOTOW

Well, did you get some of that stuff out of those meetings?

ENGEL

No, because if I knew what he was doing and why, then I already knew the stuff. This is obvious. I know I'm going to sound goddamned conceited, but I had all those feelings. In other words, I brought a lot to that place, in a lot of those areas. But for me, it was all just part of me, since I'd seen an awful lot of ballet and an awful lot of theater and liked that world. In fact, I was already involved also in a little theater. That's right, I was very much involved in a little theater in Hollywood. At that time I was in plays. I did it out of necessity, because I couldn't talk in front of people. I couldn't open my mouth. So I went to Anita Dickson Academy of Theater to take diction. I couldn't talk, I was so scared.

ZOLOTOW

But what about the meetings at the studio?

ENGEL

Well, it was very rough on me, because I died every time I had to--

ZOLOTOW

— express yourself.

ENGEL

Or say anything. And I was very shy, enormously shy. And that's why sometimes I said very little in those big meetings. I was different when I got to know people. But I went to the Anita Dickson theater to overcome the fright,

and before you know it, they put me in a play. I don't tell it to lots of people. I died every time I went on stage, but I forced myself to do it, because I knew I needed to overcome this fright. I know other people say other things about Walt influencing their life. Of course, it would influence you if you'd had forty years. But I was only there about three and a half, four years. And I fought more for what I wanted to get out into the thing than I got from them, because as I say, these people, most of them were not exposed to--

ZOLOTOW

Yes, Walt had invented the animation technique, the in-betweening and everything that you learned. I mean, in a sense, everybody was his child.

ENGEL

Well, not everybody was his child, and the animation was already on the scene, it was already invented. All that stuff was already in motion, the in-betweening and all this. But Walt had ideas. You see, if Walt was a good artist-- Walt, let's face it, you know, he couldn't draw like his talent. But it's not important, because as I say, like Griffith couldn't act, he had all the other ingredients. He wanted to do things. You know, he had these dreams. And he knew how to do it, because he looked at the stock and he said, "No, I don't want this--I want that. Forget it." But Walt was the drive. He was a force in the place. And so you were doing things with the idea that he would like what you're doing, because he would either come in and he'd buy it, or he would say, "No, I don't like that. I'm not going to buy that. So start all over again." But his instincts for his needs were right. Naturally my desire, like doing the "Russian Dance," and all that--of enormous simplicity--it was bought, as I said, because we ran out of money. But in other areas, he wouldn't buy it, because he wanted things always to be right in front of you, not hidden. It was never to suggest the idea. It was put in front of you. But, what the hell, if you could gain a little something.

ZOLOTOW

Then after Walter was the Air Force. I guess that must be where UPA started.

ENGEL

Yes, the Air Force. Then came the Air Force, and we were at Hal Roach in Culver City. And UPA was, in a small way, in motion. But John Hubley was at Hal Roach, Bill Hurtz, Herb Klynn, myself, Rudi LoRiva, Willa Spire. So the bulk was already in motion there. And the good thing there was that a lot of ideas were put into motion doing training films for the Air Force.

ZOLOTOW

You had more sympathetic ears, didn't you?

ENGEL

Well, also, you see, the Air Force was new. They set up a motion picture unit, and the people would come around and say, "Well, you guys know what the hell it's all about, so we're not going to tell you how to do it." So in the animation unit, where I was involved now for the first time, because they didn't care, we were able to use shapes, sizes, and all kinds of things for certain things. I remember I had to do a map--I had about five or eight cities. Well, I made little Kandinsky-like images of each city. I made a down shot, so I had to stand on a wall. And I remember this lieutenant came in--his name was Baer, and before, I think, he was working with Orson Welles. He came into the room and (I was just a sergeant) and he looked at the map, and he says, "God damn it, they look like Kandinsky." [laughter] Well, son of a bitch, evidently he knew something about art. But the other people didn't say that or didn't realize that. "Are you kidding?" He looked at the map and said that's what it is. Well, in a sense I was doing that. But that is a small thing. But at the same time we were able to do all kinds of things. Like we were sending food over to some other countries, and [we were supposed to] show the stuff. And instead of using apples, oranges, bananas, we used words:*apples, oranges*. So in a sense, the Air Force was by the far the best environment to try out ideas that other studios [wouldn't use].

ZOLOTOW

If it worked, they bought it, eh?

ENGEL

Oh, they bought it. If it worked, they bought it. And they said, "Well, you know what this is all about. We don't." And that was the most democratic studio I had ever worked in.

ZOLOTOW

I wasn't aware of that.

ENGEL

We could do anything we wanted to do, and we did it. We tried out all kinds of graphic inventions.

ZOLOTOW

Bill Hurtz must have been a kid in those years. I had the idea he was a lot younger than you and Hubley and the others.

ENGEL

Funny, because he was the one married already. I remember we would go out to nightclubs, and they would always ask for his cards, because he had those eyelashes.

ZOLOTOW

He just looked young.

ENGEL

He looked like eighteen — no, he looked like sixteen. But anyone with a face-- generally people who have tiny noses and big eyes and round heads--

ZOLOTOW

Was he fairly sophisticated about what was going on in the world of painting?

ENGEL

Yes, well, this, you see, is what then motivated UPA, because men like Hurtz and like Hubley--and of course Herb Klynn was a very important man. He's always been overlooked and not given credit. Herb was the first of what I consider--don ' t forget we're talking about that world--was the first really fine graphic artist in the whole business, including Disney and everybody else.

ZOLOTOW

I remember Herb Klynn used to get copies of *Arts et Metiers* *Graphiques* and *Gebelsgrafik* — all the European art magazines. I remember him as being aware. Now, was that true? He was totally aware?

ENGEL

He was more than aware; he was able to do it. Because I remember we were working with Alvin Lustig doing the *Magoo* titles, and Herb had to go over the damn thing to correct the lettering. Fantastic lettering! Airbrush, colorist—he had that stuff.

ZOLOTOW

Is he as important a factor as Hubley?

ENGEL

Well, for me, yes, because the first titles on UPA films, on the early three that we did for Columbia, if you see the title pages, it was all designed by Herb. Now, those were the first really sophisticated titles that came out of the whole goddamned motion picture industry. Let me put it that way.

ZOLOTOW

Where was Herb trained?

ENGEL

Ohio. And he had a very, very — I mean, his training was very strong. And he knew about color. He knew about the chemistry of color. He did airbrushing that you couldn't believe.

ZOLOTOW

Did he know about French painting?

ENGEL

He knew everything about all that! He was with us at Culver City. But he was a civilian working for the Air Force. UPA was already in motion on Vine Street, and I was working there, evenings or weekends, doing coloring. They needed a lettering man on a sequence, and I said, "There's a guy in the Air Force. His

name's Herb Klynn. He's very good at lettering." Well, they got him up there. And that was it. That was the beginning. I got him up there.

ZOLOTOW

That's fabulous.

ENGEL

Yes. And you see, if you realize that those title cards were an early UPA function from the very beginning and they were all designed by Herb--now you put those cards against all the other stuff in the whole industry, including the live action — nobody had that effect. That was the thing that started even the--because, you see, then we had the first job at UPA, "Fourposter , " which was Hubley's job. The motion picture people seeing those titles was also a reason why the jobs came to UPA. That was the first live action picture where you really had titles. Saul [Bass] came much later. In fact, Herb and I were doing outside jobs for the Mirisch Company, about eighteen full-page ads in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. We did a full-page ad, which is the first one, I think in 1951 or '52 for *A Woman with Four Faces* (I have that someplace), where she [Joanne Woodward] won the Oscar. Full page ads in *Variety* and *Reporter*. [The movie in question was actually called *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) .] So we were doing--see, this is Herb's contribution.

ZOLOTOW

Wasn't Herb involved in a law suit with Saul? Wasn't that — ?

ENGEL

No, that was Les Goldman. So Herb, for me, was very important in the whole structure of the picture business, and then if you want to come down, just the animation business, because he was the first man who was able to put this kind of a really refined typography on the screen, plus color. Because he was the one responsible —

ZOLOTOW

I'm interested in this connection to painting.

ENGEL

Now, he was painting all the time here. He was painting all the time. In fact, we had a couple of shows together. He was very good. But then Herb got naturally more and more involved with management, because now, you see. Herb was made manager of the whole studio at UPA. See, he not only had these other talents [with] the brush, but he was very good in an executive area, to write up contracts and all of that. Of course, also there's another side. But he was put into that position, and he was very good at that. So he was painting, and although he still paints, his painting, even five, eight, ten years back, was already on a downfall, because —

ZOLOTOW

Can you visualize to me what it was like when it was good--say, fifteen years ago--what he was interested in?

ENGEL

Very articulate. He always painted people or houses and streets, all that, very articulate painting at first, almost a little bit like [Charles] Sheeler, the early paintings .

ZOLOTOW

The American Sheeler?

ENGEL

Yes. You know, he painted those factories.

ZOLOTOW

Sure, like photography. Very much like photo- graphic images.

ENGEL

Well, he had perspective in his work. Herb was painting like that then, very hard-edge, but —

ZOLOTOW

Sheeler was the only one in America doing it at that time.

ENGEL

Sheeler has a lot of atmosphere and mood, whereas Herb had a very beautiful color sense, excellent.

ZOLOTOW

Flat.

ENGEL

And very flat. Then he goes away from that and gets very impressionistic and stuff like that. But he didn't develop.

ZOLOTOW

But it is kind of a sign that he was aware and influenced by that whole Georgia O'Keeffe- [John] Marin-Sheeler American school.

ENGEL

No, he had all of that. Herb had all of that. Well, Hubley was aware; Bill Hurtz was aware; and I was aware. So that, you see, was the gut of the UPA. Now, the other most important man was, of course, Robert Cannon, the animator. And Robert Cannon was the important man. And also what was about Cannon was that he had this idea again of how to move, how to animate. Which was not the Disney approach. Some people call it animation, which it's not. But the thing about Cannon--because I worked closely with him--was that Cannon was open to ideas and wanted to do fresh and new things. He would go along with me and Herb because he didn't have the graphic, the color, like Hubley had. Hubley had all that, because Hubley was painting and whatnot. But Cannon was not that. Cannon was an animator, a most creative animator, and a filmmaker. But all of that was instinctive. It was intuitive with him. Hub was more the artist. But Cannon would go with Herb and me on visual or graphic concepts, you see, because he knew that was right and he knew instinctively. This is how *Jaywalker*, *Fudget's Budget*, stuff like that were created. See, Hub left very early — Hub left in '52 or '53.

ZOLOTOW

I have wondered, in my mind, to distinguish between what the Disney people were thinking about movement and the way you people started to think about movement, and one idea popped into my head that I want to test on you. Disney was always trying to create sort of Renaissance space. All his

movements had to be the movements of volumes in space. But it appeared to me that cubist space, flat space, suddenly appeared in UPA, and that made it possible to make moves that weren't volumes in space but were moves parallel to the picture plane and other moves. Now, am I crazy, or is that really — ?

ENGEL

Well, you're putting it into a very intellectual and sophisticated level, because this feeling of Renaissance space and all that--Disney wouldn't know what the hell you were talking about. You don't need to make an intellectual movement out of something that had nothing to do with intelligence. Disney was strictly commercially oriented. His people working at the studio wouldn't know what you were talking about either. Nor would his animators. What they were aware of was that they had to create personalities in order for a studio like that to exist, to function. And this is where Walt was, again, what he was. He had to create personalities. Mickey Mouse was a personality but certainly not Renaissance in any way. Mickey Mouse was like a [Charlie] Chaplin, let's say, for another studio. Donald Duck, let's say, came like a Jerry Lewis. In other words, they had to create personalities in order for the studio to live, to function. Like Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had people under contract. So when you create this kind of personality, which is very close to reality, you have to animate them as close to reality as you possibly can. So whatever was going on around the character, it was a natural thing that if you have a character, like a Donald Duck or a Goofy, who had all the characteristics of a human being moving, they had to put him in a room, which has the characteristic of a natural environment. They were thinking on that level. But the important thing was to create personalities, [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

ZOLOTOW

Yes, go back to the Disney days a little.

ENGEL

So Disney was out to create personalities, like a major studio had a Clark Gable and a Harold Lloyd and Douglas Fairbanks and all those people under contract. They became merchandise of the major studios. So Disney was creating personalities in order to hang the whole studio on it. If you have personalities

like that, then naturally they are going to impersonate a real person, and then they had to move like a real person. And if you're going to have a real person working for you, then the physical environment has to also be real. The best people that could give that reality were the painters that were functioning, and they were thinking of painting of that kind. And one of the large talents as a painter- talent, I think, was Lee Blair, who was also one of the great West Coast watercolorists , like Barse Miller, Millard Sheets, Phil Dike, and even Emil Kosa, Jr.

ZOLOTOW

Did Kosa work for — ?

ENGEL

No, but these were the people that made the scene. And all the painters at that time were influenced by these people's watercolors. So the Disney background painters were all painters of that ilk. They had no other desire, and they had no other need. Barse Miller and Millard Sheets and Phil Dike were the best of that type. Also, the film, the character, needed that kind of environment. Of course, that was Walt's bag, working in that terrain.

ZOLOTOW

Well now, wait a minute. The characters were abstract. I mean, what the hell could be more abstract than Mickey?

ENGEL

You might use the word abstract , but they would die if you used the word abstract .

ZOLOTOW

I understand that.

ENGEL

No. Mickey Mouse is not abstract like abstract art. As far as they were concerned, the characters had dimension. The characters were three-dimensional. And then you go into *Snow White*, and *Snow White* was airbrushed, and the face was three-dimensional. In *Bambi* the characters were three-dimensional. They had volumes; they had--

ZOLOTOW

Yes, but the volumes were always eggshapes, ellipses. In a sense, that's a high degree of abstraction.

ENGEL

They had to do that in order to give it a kind of structure that anybody can pick up and say, "Here's the structure." The head is a circle, the body is an eggshape . So you had to have the structure underneath all that so anyone can pick it up and work with it, and also because it was easier to maneuver, to animate those shapes. You can put a structure in that very easily and locate the place for the eye and the nose and all that. But the whole aspect of it was still a natural environment, where a three- dimensional person who behaves like a real person can function; therefore, the painter had to be painterly, didn't have to be an artist. He was more or less a renderer.

ZOLOTOW

Except I do remember distortions of size, distortions of color.

ENGEL

Well, the size and all that. You have no choice. You got to have that because you're still working with the film. You're working with a medium that is the property of the poets. But, you see, a lot of those things came about because they had no choice. They had to go, but it was never done with any kind of a static thinking.

ZOLOTOW

Well, most painters don't do their own-- Theories come after the fact, right?

ENGEL

Yes, somebody thinks them up later.

ZOLOTOW

Naturally, Walt and those guys wouldn't have theory. But you must see, you know, that theirs was not a school of photorealism, and theirs was not a school of realism. Theirs was a pretty abstract way of drawing and painting, even though they didn't know it.

ENGEL

As far as they were concerned, their scene was realism, total realism when they painted the leaves and the grass--

ZOLOTOW

They thought mice looked like Mickey? [laughter]

ENGEL

Come on-- I mean when they painted the trees and the grass and the meadows and the flowers and all that, it was really — if you were around there, that was realism. And if you, as I say, look at the *Snow White* backgrounds, *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio*, you know, *Bambi* backgrounds-- [they are] almost photographic. And once in a while they would get off, maybe, and push the other way, but the other way was not good because that wasn't Walt's scene. This is where you have to give the man his credit. No matter what happened with any other person in the world, and no matter how successful it was, Walt said, "That's not me." And he said that! "That's not me. I can't think that way." I mean, he was aware of UPA--people mentioned and things were said about UPA--but Walt said, "That's not me." And in that sense, you have to give him his credit, that he wouldn't just say, "Hey, look, those guys are doing something great over there. Why don't we do it better?" Frankly, when they tried to do something like that, and although they say it's not, it was bad, [like] *Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom*. I don't care what they say — because they say, "No, it's not UPA influence"--but damn it, it is UPA influence because they tried to go into the flat design. And it's a disaster, because the taste is bad, the color is bad. They didn't work it from in their gut, you know. They were working it like, "Look, Ma, I made an abstraction." In other words, they had the talent to do the other stuff, but in this area, for me, they only worked the surface, and the surface wasn't good. And this is what a lot of people don't understand about UPA, because even now, you hear animators talk about like, "Oh, yeah, we'll do those backgrounds, we do those backgrounds." But it's not good because they don't work it out. They just look at it, and they think, "We'll copy it."

ZOLOTOW

There's no question that Disney worked from his gut. And I think that's why the young people now look back and see Disney through different eyes. Now, how about you? Does Disney's stuff look different to you now than it- did when you were in the middle of it, rebelling against it? Do you place a higher value on it, now?

ENGEL

No, I don't. I feel that it was right for the time, and it was right for Disney. And it was right for the animators. There are sequences, there are moments in some of the Disney efforts, like the pink elephant sequence in *Dumbo*, when you see that thing today, it's magic, it's beautiful. And how the hell that ever got made in that environment is still a mystery. That is a beautiful piece of motion, movement. But I don't get taken with the stuff. I admire the craft, and you have to start someplace. But it's craft.

ZOLOTOW

I notice you're not wearing a Mickey Mouse watch. [laughter]

ENGEL

I could never do that, because I cannot advertise other people. I don't want to advertise other people. That's what you're doing when you carry it. But I still don't have that feel for what they did, because, damn it, when I see some stuff of Jan Lenica or [Walerian] Borowczyk or I see an early [Oskar] Fischinger or a [Norman] McLaren, it's still the thing that turns me on. And although I admire the craft, the animation know-how, of *Pinocchio* and some of the *Bambi* stuff, it doesn't turn me on, you see. So that's the difference. And in that sense my feeling, my sensitivities are not changed. But I do admire Disney as a person who had a sense of direction. And he would never let go, just to get on a bandwagon of another art form, good, bad — But then again, in the world of entertainment, you know, there is an enormous amount of room for all kinds of endeavors. There are people who would be entertained with that, and there are people who will not be entertained. And you can't just go one direction, because you're still dealing with the mass media. You're still dealing with mass entertainment of a kind.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II [VIDEO SESSION] (January 23, 1976)

ZOLOTOW

The room is filled with film cans, animation cells, sculpture, painting, the products of a long and active career as a painter and sculptor and filmmaker. [tape recorder turned off] The area you are living in is surrounded by all wonderful things, Jules. Is that why you moved here to Beverly Hills? Why do you live here?

ENGEL

Well, because it's about the closest thing to a city in L.A. , and I love cities. I like the idea of walking out on the street and walking to a shop, walking over to the laundry, or walking over to the bank or the post office. And I like the feeling of the city itself: I like buildings, I like windows, I like front doors, I like hotel lobbies. I would really like to live in New York. That's the kind of life I like surrounding me. [laughter]

ZOLOTOW

Yes, in a way, it's like living off Fifth Avenue in New York.

ENGEL

That's pretty good. Or Madison Avenue and Seventy-seventh, that environment.

ZOLOTOW

When Frank Perls had his gallery here, did you hang around there a lot?

ENGEL

Yes, I used to go up there and see him. He was a great influence, you know, on the Los Angeles environment, a great personality. Plus I spent some time with him in Paris at Deux Magots. I would find him sitting out there on the street.

ZOLOTOW

What about Herb Palmer's new gallery?

ENGEL

I think that's a great gallery, and he's a very unique personality. He always adds a lot of excitement to the city. His first shows were very good, very

interesting, and I just hope he stays there and keeps it going. It's the only way you can get a city like Los Angeles on the map, is to have knowledgeable people stay for years and build an art environment, you know.

ZOLOTOW

Have you been on the whole disappointed by the art scene and the gallery scene in Beverly Hills?

ENGEL

Well, yes, because we just don't seem to have an honest and in-depth interest. It's a little bit too artificial, too much like table-hopping, you know. This is fashionable today — that's fashionable tomorrow. There's no reference to historical foundation. We are always working in a very small group in the city. You see, in New York, you have two or three dozen large galleries. You have half a dozen museums. So you have all kinds of avenues for expression. But here you have someone who can command like a high priest, and does command, "This is the way we go," and everybody then follows him. In other words, there are no avenues here.

ZOLOTOW

Have you ever been tempted to move to New York?

ENGEL

Oh, I've been tempted a hundred times. [laughter]

ZOLOTOW

What made you resist?

ENGEL

I'm not resisting; it's just that the working opportunities for me have always somehow been here. But if I have a chance (as I do once a year) to go anyplace, it's always New York.

ZOLOTOW

But didn't John Hubley create a center in New York that you might have worked at?

ENGEL

Well, he has a center, but that's not my center; that's John Hubley's center because Hubley is Hubley. And I am not John Hubley. I have to consider my media of abstract animation and of art animation. This style is not in any way commercial like Hubley's. So if I would go to New York, I would create my own center, and I would let Hubley have his.

ZOLOTOW

Jules! Here's this big, fat book on Disney, and it makes me think of what we were talking about when you were reminded of *Fantasia*, the role you played, and what happened. Tell me about *Fantasia*, and what you did.

ENGEL

Well, I was hired to do, very specifically, the choreography for the "Chinese Dance" and the "Russian Dance," and then later I got involved with "Dance of the Flutes" and the "Arabian Dance." But evidently they had problems with the "Chinese Dance" and the "Russian Dance," because no one in that particular unit had any background or knowledge or insight of what the dance world is all about, what choreography's all about. And I had some drawings, you know, so I took it over there. And Phil Dike saw the material, and he said, "I would like you to work on the continuity"--which means the choreography--"on the 'Chinese Dance.'" So that was the beginning of my experience with the Disney studio, working on the sequences of the "Chinese Dance" of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Suite.

ZOLOTOW

Did they feel they were out of their depth with serious music?

ENGEL

Well, I mean, they never really adapted serious music, but Disney was going to do this project, and it came from, you know, it came from [Leopold] Stokowski, but I also understand that before Stokowski, it actually came from Oskar Fischinger, from Oskar Fischinger to Stokowski, from Stokowski to Disney. Somehow they liked the idea, and I think Disney felt that he wanted to do something that was unique, something different, and it was just a natural direction. But they were not in love with that world, because, you see, they

interpreted it into a kind of a calendar art. That was about the height of [their] aesthetic intelligence.

ZOLOTOW

Did they feel that that world was above them, or--

ENGEL

It was above them, because, you know, you were easily made fun of there if you considered art, or were considered to be an artist. Art and art appreciation were things that Disney was not very comfortable with--with the exception of a few people. But you see, generally, it was out of their range completely.

ZOLOTOW

But yet they were deep into music. What kind of music was Disney involved with in that period?

ENGEL

The music they were involved with would be the composer who would score — like they scored a very handsome piece for *Snow White*. So it was a popular music, a popular talent, a composer who would just write a popular tune, "Whistle While You Work" and stuff like that. Unfortunately it's no different today. They do the same thing as they did then--no progress.

ZOLOTOW

I'm curious to know how you introduced some of your contemporary ideas into *Fantasia*. How were they visualizing their story boards? Did you play a role in changing their vision of how *Fantasia* should be shot?

ENGEL

I was very specifically put on the "Chinese Dancer." Of course, they wanted to do a Chinese dance with a lot of mushrooms jumping around the base of a tree with a lot of roots and a lot of weeds and this or that all over the place. My intention was to keep it very simple, to get rid of all the background environment and just have a nice, flat, simple black environment, black backdrop on a stage, you see. Simplicity is something I have always believed in. You would have a backdrop and then you need light--any light source, just

have a light shade that gives you the idea that light is coming from someplace. So this aspect of just having black and not having any texture, any physical gimmicks around these little characters, was very difficult for them to understand. You look at *Fantasia*; everything else is just crowded, constantly crowded with all kinds of images and shapes and forms. But I think actually what happened with this section was that eventually they ran out of money. Anyway, that was my understanding. The budget was quickly disappearing, and the fact that we were going to work with a black background, that means we don't have to put any background artists on it. This made sense to them, the finances. And today, I think it paid off beautifully, because both the "Russian Dance" and the "Chinese Dance" have a beautiful presence, almost as if they were done today. That is the test--if it will hold today and tomorrow. Naturally it was a lot of fighting, an awful lot of fights over that, to put the idea across.

ZOLOTOW

Do you have any drawings from that period?

ENGEL

I have some materials here which I used to propose the character or the spirit of dancing. The color here is very important, because the way I used color, it was again very fresh and very much removed from their use of color, which related more to using color the way an illustrator would. In these examples the primaries and the secondaries are just as brilliant but loose and not worked over, not too much underpainting and all that stuff. This is just brilliant colors on a black background, where color has a chance to come through into life.

ZOLOTOW

Did Walt ever see these drawings?

ENGEL

No, Walt never saw these drawings because the studio people were a little afraid that this stuff looked a little too way out than what they were used to. In fact, they told me to hide those drawings and not to let Walt see them. In fact, this is very abstract in character, and they told me not to use the word

abstract when we went into sessions with Walt, because, I said before, you would be looked at as either an egghead or an intellectual or some kind of weird, weird character. So these are some of the drawings, you know, that got by, however, even though I hid them. You know, if I hadn't put these drawings away, someone would have torn them up. The Disney people never allowed you any feeling of creativity, just craft, copying. It was a surprise to them and a miracle to me that these drawings got in.

ZOLOTOW

You weren't the only egghead around during that period. Wasn't Rico Lebrun on the Disney lot at the time?

ENGEL

Rico was on the Disney lot at that time. He was already training some of the key animators, and animators in general that were going to draw for *Bambi*. And I think his role was very comfortable, to be quite blunt. After all, he was an immaculate draftsman. All they could do was admire him, because this is what most of them wanted to be. Or I think they thought they were safe with him. He was one of them; he drew real things. They were crafts- men of enormous talent, but Lebrun 's influence was very important. You can see the deer, for instance, in *Snow White* and see how it's almost a bad drawing. And you compare the deer in *Bambi*; it's an enormous difference. At least now they were under the influence of impeccable craftsmanship.

ZOLOTOW

And they knew where the bones and muscles were.

ENGEL

Yes, in fact, Lebrun made a number of the sketches, and they turned this into books. And here you can see a drawing of Rico Lebrun' s. And it gave them an idea of what the bone structure of the animal was all about. He had, I think, about twenty or thirty pages of different drawings — any position, every position of the deer. I mean, he was something very, very special, an enormous draftsman, a great draftsman. And that's what Disney wanted.

ZOLOTOW

This is a far cry from the ellipses that the Disney people animated. Did they resist this kind of attitude toward drawing when Rico introduced it at first?

ENGEL

As I told you already, Lebrun was very comfortable at Disney. Actually, Walt wanted the animals to look, you know, real--at least as much, or as close to something real. Now, when he got to other characters, like a small rabbit or a skunk, and stuff like that, naturally they went back to their other style of drawing. But when it was deer, when it was Bambi, or the father or the mother of Bambi, I mean, those characters were extremely well drawn. So they had no choice. They couldn't resist or fight it because Walt wanted it to be done that way. After all, Walt was the boss in the place. This was his dream, and these people had to follow--to make the dream the reality.

ZOLOTOW

Did you get to know Rico during that period?

ENGEL

Yes, I got to know Rico pretty well, not so much in there, but I got to know him after that because he used to lecture a great deal at Frank Perls's. Frank had a gallery; he used to lecture there. I knew him socially. And he was an enormous influence on the whole Los Angeles scene. Of course, two artists. Bill Brice and Howard Warshaw, were really, at that time, his disciples, and then Edith Wyle was very much--you know, she has *The Egg* and *the Eye* today. But Brice and Warshaw really were his students.

ZOLOTOW

If you consider how big the Jepson Art Institute was, how do you account for the fact that so few painters survived from the number of painters that passed through Lebrun's classes?

ENGEL

Well, I would say that L.A. art in general was based on the Western watercolorists, as compared with the New York artists, who built their foundations on the experimental. So in a historical sense, Lebrun was not a trendsetter. You cannot be safe with safe art. Anyway, what happened to him? [Herbert Jepson]

ZOLOTOW

I don't know.

ENGEL

I saw him recently at a dance festival. I think the only two who really are around and working and exhibiting are Brice and Warshaw.

ZOLOTOW

Brice and Warshaw were already mature young men when they met Rico. Of the people that Rico touched as young students, can you think of any that are still active in painting?

ENGEL

Not really. I think one reason--when you are being touched by a master like that, I think it's a very bad thing. And maybe that is what destroyed a lot of those people, because they were living on Lebrun's talent, on his personality. And if you do that, you die. You just can't do that. You have to find your own way. I think most of those people just didn't find their way.

ZOLOTOW

How do you account for the fact that there was seemingly no connection between Lebrun's group and the painters that followed? Did you reject Rico's stuff because you were an abstract painter?

ENGEL

Oh, no, no, no. Plus I could never reject Rico's works, but I could reject anybody else's work who tried to emulate Lebrun. You understand that that's the way the cookie crumbles? Rico commanded an enormous presence. When he moved into sculpture, I think that Lebrun's large talent was in that, but it came too late. All the others tried to be Lebrun. The minute you try to be what you can't, there's no future.

ZOLOTOW

How 'd you get this Lebrun here, the one on the wall?

ENGEL

I think I bought it from somebody who wanted to pick up some extra dollars.

ZOLOTOW

What year did you buy it?

ENGEL

I think I bought it around '59, 1960. I picked it up from somebody, but I don't even remember who owned the painting. All I know, it was just a lot of people around and somebody needed some money.

ZOLOTOW

Was this before the [Lebrun] "Crucifixion [Series]" exhibit at the museum or after?

ENGEL

No, I think it was before; I think it was before. [tape recorder turned off]

ZOLOTOW

That was an interesting period. There was a lot of activity in painting then. Among the guys who were working in animation, how many of them were exhibiting painters in those years besides yourself?

ENGEL

There was Paul Julian. He was exhibiting and Bob McIntosh was exhibiting. And I think a little later, of course, there was Herb Klynn who also was exhibiting.

ZOLOTOW

Where did he show?

ENGEL

I think Herb was showing at Leonard Grossman gallery, Leonard Grossman with, I think, Paul Julian probably and Bob McIntosh, because that was the only, what we call avant-garde gallery in Los Angeles, Clara Grossman's on Hollywood Boulevard.

ZOLOTOW

I remember Julian showing at the Felix Landau Gallery on La Cienega. And I remember sculpture by--

ENGEL

--by Paul. Paul very specifically was in the stable of Felix Landau, whereas McIntosh I think was more or less showing wherever he had the opportunity. Also I think Helen Wurdemann was an enormous influence at that time. She had a gallery on Wilshire Boulevard, where the Otis Art Institute is. In fact, most of us, at that time, showed the first time at Helen Wurdemann 's gallery on Wilshire Boulevard, Because somehow, somebody would recommend you for a show. Like, let's say there was a new painter, someone would recommend you and you would be showing there. Yes, that was, I think, a very important place for Los Angeles painters to make their first presence.

ZOLOTOW

What were you doing at that time? What kind of work?

ENGEL

At that time, I was doing very hard-edge, very abstract [work]. My early work was hard-edge.

ZOLOTOW

You mean like that one over there?

ENGEL

Like this one down here, and then there's another one. This is also an early one. This was characteristic of my work of that time--very geometrical, hard-edge, almost architectural in character.

ZOLOTOW

What medium were you working in?

ENGEL

Mostly watercolor or gouache. But I could use a Windsor-Newton and make it look like gouache. But mostly gouache .

ZOLOTOW

Did you ever work with the stuff you worked with every day, at the studio-- cells and--?

ENGEL

No, I didn't use any cells on any of my work. The paint that we used at the studio was very cheap, cheap, cheap paint. So I would never use that for my work, because that stuff was always just throwaway.

ZOLOTOW

How did you relate the two things — what you did at the studio and what you did at home?

ENGEL

Well, I think the most important thing was trying to take something into the film that I was doing, let's say, of my own work. In other words, the simplicity, the directness, the flat aspect of the painting, the color taste, the color choice was something that I wanted to project into the work at the studio. That was, of course, a natural direction, especially if you didn't like anything that you saw around you.

ZOLOTOW

Did it ever work the other, way around? Did you ever want to take some of the things that were happening in film and move it into painting?

ENGEL

No. The most elementary thing being motion, I wanted to use my artwork in film. I was always interested in motion, and that aspect of motion didn't come to me until a little later, of putting just that onto film, what actually Fischinger was doing earlier. So the motion aspect of it is a big factor.

ZOLOTOW

Well, the painters and the futurists in the twenties were concerned with motion. Did you ever get into that kind of representation of motion on a canvas?

ENGEL

No, no way. No way. No, they didn't interest me, because I was much more interested in almost architectural image on the canvas. In other words, it was almost like the idea of using the canvas just as a flat surface, which later developed into what [Ellsworth] Kelly was doing, and Ad Reinhardt. It developed into that world, you see. But the movement, for me, took care of movement for my films. This is very interesting. I threw away or lost the early ones. I destroyed the films until I was satisfied with my work, until about ten, twelve years ago, in 1961, '62, when I began to consider keeping my pure abstract films and to put motion onto film. But then I just began using pure shapes.

ZOLOTOW

Could I see some of the abstract things you were doing during that period? What's that black and white one over there, Jules, those volumes?

ENGEL

Well, these may be volumes to you, but in animation these would be seconds of film. This was the beginning, you see, of moving into that world. This was the first one. And then there was another one, which was also a first one of that terrain. And this--

ZOLOTOW

How did you work with these painted surfaces, to digress?

ENGEL

Well, this was wood first. I cut it and glued onto the background and then painted over.

ZOLOTOW

Did you have film material like this?

ENGEL

No, the film came a little later, but this was the first--this was the beginning of this kind of a-- Because you see, this is just pure movement. Here is where, for me, movement was beginning to be very much part of my work. Not like the futurists, who went out and wanted to put a locomotive or a streetcar or a running horse and stuff like that. See, again, I go back to the straight line and

put the straight line into motion. For me, the straight line always means something very, very intriguing. I mean, the vertical line was very intriguing.

ZOLOTOW

You know, the paper that describes you for this series calls you a Bauhaus painter, and this is about the only thing I've seen around that makes me think back to the Bauhaus and [Laszlo] Moholy [-Nagy] . Do you consider yourself Bauhaus influenced?

ENGEL

Well, let's say I admire the Bauhaus very much, but I don't-- Well, I can't help it if people see a continuity between my work and Bauhaus. I mean, I admire them enough that I will not be unhappy about that. [laughter]

ZOLOTOW

Maybe it's because you're Hungarian.

ENGEL

Maybe because I'm a Hungarian and because Moholy- Nagy is a Hungarian and [Gyorgy] Kepes was Hungarian. The whole group of these characters who were working in that terrain. But I think this is just the way I am put together. It's my chemistry, and it is not a question of Bauhaus, you know, because I could just forget the damn thing and do something else. But I still am wedded to this character of very structured and organized imagery on a canvas. This intrigues me. And yet Martha Graham intrigues me, and Alvin Ailey intrigues me, and Twyla Tharp intrigues me. That's an enormous contradiction to your Bauhaus idea of me. of what they do and how they move on stage, isn't it?

ZOLOTOW

Did you ever draw them as people?

ENGEL

No, I have absolutely never had any desire ever to draw people. Never.

ZOLOTOW

Have you ever photographed people?

ENGEL

No, I don't even like to photograph people. I feel I'm intruding on their privacy, and I think they have every right to resent being photographed.

ZOLOTOW

Have you ever photographed objects?

ENGEL

Objects, yes. Oh, yes. Chairs all over the place. Buildings, stairways--anything and everything. See, for me, a person comes to life on the stage either in the theater or as a dance on stage.

ZOLOTOW

Did you ever do sets for the theater?

ENGEL

Oh, sets I've done. I did sets in Paris. I did a very important play, *Les Jouex*. I designed a set for *Les Jouex*, a very contemporary play. And also other things.

ZOLOTOW

Let's move on, along the work there, and see what other periods you have there. This kind of complicated spatial diagram is one. What's happening back there?

ENGEL

These paintings are of more recent vintage.

ZOLOTOW

Is that a serigraph?

ENGEL

That's a serigraph, yes. But here again I'm working with these particular shapes that I'm always intrigued with. In fact, I put this into animation, where it turned out to be a little bit too much work, and too complicated. After about eighteen or twenty-four drawings, I think I gave it up, and then worked them into a single painting.

ZOLOTOW

When we were talking about Disney, we were talking about his preoccupations with volumes and deep space. In a way, you're going back to representing deep space, except that you've got a lot of perspective at work.

ENGEL

But this is totally different; the shapes here are always in limbo and in space. In other words, I don't put perspective lines that would tell you that there is a front and there is a back, see. The only thing that would give you that feeling, maybe, is because the shape in the fore-ground is a little larger and the other shape is a little smaller, so it gives you a feeling of depth. But that idea of putting perspective lines that would take you back and stop, I generally don't work with that. It doesn't exist in any of the work I do or ever did. In other words, this whole terrain for me is still an area where you do nothing but excavate and come out and try to find new avenues.

ZOLOTOW

You know, it strikes me that most of your work is very small in scale, just about the same as animation cell or background. Do you ever do bigger things?

ENGEL

Of course. They are architectural, but these are mock-ups of the real things.

ZOLOTOW

Where do you think paintings belong?

ENGEL

Painting belongs in a home, in apartments, in museums. It belongs in the kitchen; it belongs to whenever and wherever somebody's in love with the painting and wants to live with it.

ZOLOTOW

Are you one of the film people that thinks that film and video's going to replace painting?

ENGEL

No way. It's impossible. I think film is important, I think video is important. But you can't live with film twenty-four hours a day because it belongs in a can, and you need a projector, you need a screen, you need all kinds of gadgets. But beside that, it's another world. It's another medium. It's a medium where you deal with light. It's a medium that also is a quickie. What I mean is, when you see a film--I have a very difficult time seeing a film twice. The second time they fall apart for me. And I love films. I mean, I've been in that world all my life. But the third time they die on me. Whereas painting, there's some magic about a painting. You can look at the damn thing and look at the damn thing, and you discover new avenues in that. But film — the greatest films that I've seen--oh, let's forget the word great, because that doesn't exist--but let's say the best of the very good films that I have seen, the third time, they fall apart. In other words, because it's still a bastard medium. Which is good. Which is good. It hadn't found itself yet; it's developing. And this is healthy. Let's face it, we're talking about an art that's seventy years old. It's not like the world of painting, where you have five hundred years, great artists. I mean, we have seventy years of film making and--

ZOLOTOW

Well, some people contend that painting is on its way down, and film is on its way up. How do you feel about that?

ENGEL

Oh, I hope film is on the way up. After seventy years, it has no other place but going up. In other words, we don't have a Titian or a Rubens, the Rembrandts and El Grecos and the Goyas, and we certainly have no Picassos, Braques, and Matisses. And Jackson Pollock. I mean, that's a point of view. So after seventy years, you have no choice but going up. But from my point of view, I think a lot of film making is going down, because they're taking on the enormous presence of an illustrator. All of a sudden, most of the films look like they came out of the hand of an illustrator. The mediums of the film are not being used to capacity, let alone beyond this. They're using the camera to illustrate an illustrator's script. They illustrate. They are illustrations. They don't even use several images in order to design a film. What they do, now, they take a very good picture, an enormously beautiful picture, and then they keep going into it, let's say for a close-up. So they compose things inside this piece of

illustration, instead of using first shot, second shot, and a third shot, and put the three together in such a way that it becomes a composition that you can only get through films. We're not doing that. We're beginning to illustrate again. But then, what the hell, within seventy years--

ZOLOTOW

Are there economic reasons?

ENGEL

Oh, no, no. Talent, talent. That is nothing to do with economics.

ZOLOTOW

Well, they tell me that one reason that —

ENGEL

When you spend \$11 million on a film, there's no problem of economics. When you spend 4 million, there's no problem of economics. What the hell, you can take a piece of 20x30 inch canvas, and you can put a masterpiece down. So it's not a question of economics. It's a question of talent, of thinking.

ZOLOTOW

How does sculpture relate to your painting and film? When did you get into sculpture?

ENGEL

I got into sculpture around '61. I went to Europe, and I was very impressed with Rome and Florence and Venice-- that whole environment. [tape recorder turned off]

ZOLOTOW

So sculpture really turned you on in Europe, and of course you made your things here.

ENGEL

Yes, but I first really saw things there, and what turned me on really was the structures. I liked their buildings. I liked the free flow of a lot of the designs on some of the buildings, and, of course, the great masters, you know. But I still

had no desire to do anything with the figure, because, again, I went back into the very architectural kind of imagery. And eventually, like, you see this centerpiece on a table, this is what happened--I began to realize that there was no sculpture to me that's related to the American image. See that centerpiece? This is the American image--the skyscraper. And that's the beginning of my realization that there's nothing really in this country that relates truly to the American image. And what the American image is to me, is really the skyscraper. Also what turned me on was that some time ago, about that time, I landed in Washington, D.C., and I saw all this — I saw Lincoln in a Roman environment. I saw the [Washington] obelisk, which is an Egyptian thing. I saw all Roman and Greek and Egyptian shapes in Washington, D.C., surrounding the American giants, you know. And I said, "Wait a minute. There's something wrong here. Why can't we have some kind of a shape, form, or sculpture, something that relates to this country?" And that was also one reason that I started to do this kind of shape, which to me is the American image — nothing Roman, nothing Greek, nothing Egyptian, nothing but just American New York.

ZOLOTOW

Well, that was what was so wonderful about animation, the fact that it really was a native art. And I remember that explosion that occurred when *Gerald McBoing Boing* hit the theaters, and for the first time, animation came from a source outside Disney. How did that happen? How did UPA grow out of Disney?

ENGEL

First of all, animation is not just a native art. It had a background other than America. What happened [was that] some of us-- I worked at Disney, Hubley worked at Disney, and Bill Hurtz worked at Disney. Let's say that we had other ideas. We had other concepts of what an animated film should look like. We were aware, very aware, that at Disney everybody was pushing the film toward what we call illustration. I mean, illustration that would work better in a magazine. Now, of course, there is a place for all that sort of thing, and there are people who love that. But we had other points of view, because we were already very much involved with contemporary art. You know, we were aware

of Matisse. We were aware of Paul Klee and Kandinsky. Dufy was, I think, very important for us. Leger was very important for us.

ZOLOTOW

The divorced line was a big thing in animation.

ENGEL

Also we wanted the character flat, and let's not divorce the character from the background. What they did over at Disney was that they put the character in front of the background. And that is even wrong in a world of theater. When a set designer designs with an idea that he's going to put a design behind a character, he's already off on the wrong foot. The important thing for a design, even in the theater, is to design so the character fits into the environment. In as much as we decided to work on a flat surface with the character flat, we wanted to push the two things together, and flatten out the background, flatten out the character, and now you're on a terrain, on a very honest, aesthetic point of view. Because you're not trying to cheat. You're not trying to make a three-dimensional background and put a two-dimensional character in it. That was one of the point of views at UPA that we were very aware of. We wanted to have that happen and we did. It really happened and happened big and happened well in *Gerald McBoing Boing*. I have some materials here. Here is Gerald McBoing Boing from one scene. Then here's another Gerald McBoing Boing. Again, if you notice, something very interesting here. For instance, you don't see any lines. You don't see any line that would tell you where the floor stops and the walls start, and where the ceiling starts. In other words, the environment is established through the shapes that you were putting into the scene. If you had a shape close and that was large, that gave you the point of view that this is the foreground. And then back here, when a shape was smaller, that established the position of distance and time. But this point of view was a good one, and we knew we were doing something right. We wanted to get away from what we called just pure Sunday calendar illustration, that so much of the Disney background was about; and for us, it constantly fought a flat character. So this was the beginning of our thinking, of having a flat character working in a background where he would either do away with a horizon line where you would say, "This is the ground, and this is the sky." All that was not important in the world of

painting, because our approach was more of a painterly approach, or an artist's approach, who was aware of the flat surface and knew what the hell that is all about.

ZOLOTOW

Do you think it's comparable to what happened in cubism, when the picture plane got flattened out after all those years of deep space?

ENGEL

Well, for me, I'm a kind of primitive in thought; I'm not what you call an intellectual. And I think those things have to happen. I think there is no choice. I think an artist, a serious person, will come upon things. I think Picasso came upon things, because everything else was there. And he said, "I'm going to do something with all that, and I have a new point of view." Then he went about and brought this thing into a position. But also, I think he did something very interesting, the cubist approach, that very much exists in film, or in a film world. Because when you have a close-up and you have a slow cross-dissolve to a profile and you have a slow cross-dissolve to another point of view, you now have three separate aspects of the image, looking at it from a different position. And they are all on the screen at the same time. I think in a strange way cubism is very much in a film world, and I think a lot of filmmakers are not even aware that this thing really is on the screen, which is pure cubism, where you show a different aspect of the image, at the same time, on a screen.

ZOLOTOW

What other influences of French painting can you see on film? How about that thing you mentioned, Dufy and the divorced line?

ENGEL

Dufy was very, very, very influential, and I think I have something here where you can see the divorced line. Now of course, this is very, very —

ZOLOTOW

That's not so divorced. [laughter]

ENGEL

Well, it is divorced.

ZOLOTOW

That's tightened up.

ENGEL

No, no, it's enormously divorced when you see the shape and where the black line is working. The divorced line here is very obvious. But it's very articulate; it's very clean; it's very neat. You notice we couldn't quite work Dufy in the film, because you're still dealing with a piece of merchandise that will be used by millions of people. But it was very interesting, because even at [the] studio at UPA, the animators at first were very much against this idea of a divorced line from a shape. In fact, they made fun of it. They were knocking it, and they were criticizing it quietly. But once it got out there and people accepted it and we were applauded, then they shut up, and the criticism then died down. But at first, they were really not with it, because they said, "What the hell is the matter with this? There's something wrong. The line is missing at the edge of the shape."

ZOLOTOW

Where 'd the color come from in those days?

ENGEL

Well, I would think the first big influence at UPA was from Herb Klynn and myself. Herb was in charge of that aspect of it, let's say, background color. And I was working with Herb, and it came from me also. Then Herbie was moved into a managerial job, and the whole thing was on my shoulder. So color was something that was in my bag, and I then had all the say-so, the total say-so, all the right to do as I damn well pleased. And then I really began to push color into this medium that it never really had had before.

ZOLOTOW

You must have been looking at paintings during that period. Which paintings do you think influenced your use of color?

ENGEL

Use of color? Well, several, but I think Matisse was very important. I think Paul Klee was very important. Leger was very important, because he's so clear and

clean. He uses the strong primaries, but always uses them very elegantly. But of course I must also mention Braque, and I must also mention Picasso. And I think that would take care of it.

ZOLOTOW

All Europe. No one on the American scene that you were interested in?

ENGEL

Oh, the only American scene painter that I was interested in for color was Albers, Josef Albers--and Hans Hofmann. Hans Hofmann and Albers were the two that I would look to. The other person who also interested me very, very much, and I tried to get some of that stuff into some of the UPA films, was Stuart Davis. But if you're talking about mood, then it's something else. [Charles] Burchfield and [Edward] Hopper--I was very, very keen on them. But Albers and Hans Hofmann, the use of the wild colors [by] Hans Hofmann, for me that was very beautiful. And Stuart Davis, for me, that was very, very important on the American scene.

ZOLOTOW

Yes, I see the connection.

ENGEL

But, as I say, we just opened a whole new world then at UPA. The way I used color there, which you and I could never do at Disney. Because there, color was used simply as an illustration, and not as color which has something to do with the dramatics. Again, you see, at Disney, they put the color behind the character instead of putting the character into the color.

ZOLOTOW

Well, didn't you have problems putting colors on cells, though? Doesn't color fall off?

ENGEL

No, that's no problem, because you put it on the cell, at that time, whatever paint was used, and it was sharp. So it didn't matter what the hell happened after that. Today with acrylic and stuff, you can put paint on a cell, and it will stay on it for the next fifty, hundred years. You can step on it, you can walk on

it, you can bend it, you know. But it didn't matter then. It just had to last from your desk to the camera. Once it was shot, it would go into the garbage anyway.

ZOLOTOW

Wasn't there a difference in the pigments between what the painters were using, the permanent pigments, and the kind of raw color that you were getting out of cans?

ENGEL

No, because the subtlety was already there, because the question of what color you put in next to another color, you know-- But if I wanted to use raw vermilion, which was in the primaries, you know, if that was the mood of the film, I used that. But otherwise, no, because it's still what you put next to another color that makes the damn thing work, makes it right or makes it wrong.

ZOLOTOW

Was *Magoo* the big commercial success of UPA?

ENGEL

Magoo kept UPA alive. *Magoo* was the commercial success, and kept us alive, and the other stuff that we did, like the *Gerald McBoing Boing*, *The Jaywalker*, *Frankie and Johnny*, *The Unicorn in the Garden*, those were the offbeats. We had that contract with Columbia [Pictures Corporation] and Columbia had no choice. They had to take what we were delivering. But if Columbia ever had an idea of what they were going to get after the *Magoo*, we would never have had the opportunity to do those films, because they hated every film that we made that was not *Magoo*.

ZOLOTOW

The Unicorn in the Garden--that animated the Thurber drawings, didn't it?

ENGEL

Yes, and we kept very strictly to the Thurber.

ZOLOTOW

Was that the first time a thing like that had been done?

ENGEL

Yes, yes. We did Thurber's *Unicorn in the Garden*, and we did *Madeline*, which was [Ludwig] Bemelmans's *Madeline*. And the idea when we used those people was to give it the lines that they used in their own drawings. Why destroy their drawing style? The whole idea was to bring those drawings alive. And they were right, because Thurber worked with the lines, so again, you were working with a flat design on a flat background.

ZOLOTOW

I think that really broke open the whole industry.

ENGEL

Also, it broke open from a point of view of animation, you see, because often people refer to that kind of animation as limited animation. They always downgrade it, which I think is very stupid because there's no such a thing as limited animation-- there 's such a thing as limited talent, but not limited animation. They don't understand that the best performance that you can get from that medium should be a kind of limited gestures. Because if the animator really looks for performance to the stage, the gestures there are truly limited. There isn't a gesture on the stage that is not truly necessary. In other words, very seldom do you find a really great stage actor where he would use his hands or his head or any portion of his body, where he would make as much movement as the best animator made for Walt Disney. The animator at Walt Disney, or most of the animators, they are afraid to stop gesturing, because they are afraid that the damn character falls apart, because all of a sudden he becomes flat. By having the flat character and designing flat, like we did at UPA, we didn't have to worry about that, and still our gestures, our "acting technique," was the closest to what a great actor on the stage would be doing.

ZOLOTOW

Yes, most of the gestures--like walks — were sort of parallel to the picture plane at UPA, whereas in Disney —

ENGEL

Well, he was moving all over. He was moving his body, and the more he moved, the better they felt that they had accomplished something. Whereas our feeling was that all that was very unnecessary. They thought they were doing something that was real lifelike; when in reality they were not lifelike. They were just something else.

ZOLOTOW

It was a different kind of symbol.

ENGEL

It was something else. But they were not as aware at Disney of the art of acting, I think, as we were at UPA.

ZOLOTOW

Who was the great animator at UPA?

ENGEL

The great animator at UPA, whom I also think was the greatest in the business, is Robert Cannon. He was the one--

ZOLOTOW

They used to call him Bo Cannon.

ENGEL

Bobo Cannon, Bobo . He was the one who really added that refinement to enact a performance of this gesture. Because there is nothing more minimal. You watch Laurence Olivier on stage, and it's absolutely magic. The gestures are minimal. And this is what Bobo Cannon was able to do on film. Sometimes not even with that kind of thinking, but he had that instinct, that this was right.

ZOLOTOW

What was his background?

ENGEL

Just a person who grew up in a medium, who wanted to be an animator. I think, if you go back, he was a tumbler. So that means he had a beautiful

sense of timing, which was again innate and was part of his body. He was very keen on movement and very keen on aspects of comedy, but again, in a very elegant sense, more like Jacques Tati. Tati always was mimicking people. I had lunch with him once, and he was mimicking people. He was mimicking at you with a fork or a knife that he had in his hand, you know, even in the way he did movements. Bobo Cannon was in the same thing.

ZOLOTOW

Where 'd he learn how to draw?

ENGEL

Bobo? You don't learn it; you just sit at the desk eight, ten hours a day. None of those guys ever learned to draw, except that they decided to walk into the damn studio, and they sat there eight, ten hours a day and knew that's for them.

ZOLOTOW

Did he have any exposure to classical art education?

ENGEL

No, none, none.

ZOLOTOW

Was he interested in painting at all?

ENGEL

None. But I must say about Bobo that [although] he had none of that, he never fought it; he welcomed and respected it. This is why he was able to work with me and with Herb Klynn. He had a simpatico. He was sort of wide open for that, and it was beautiful. Whereas so many of these people, they either know it all, or they're against and afraid of it. Bobo, for example — this is a very strange texture that this man was wide open for these recommendations, for these suggestions, and he asked you. And yet he had none of that background.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (May 19, 1976)

ZOLOTOW

We are at Cal Arts, and what we really want to do, Jules, is find out what you are doing now.

ENGEL

What I am doing now, you want to know? [laughter] I am now heading the California Institute of the Arts film graphics-experimental film department and creating new talents for the world of films.

ZOLOTOW

Is that an experimental film department?

ENGEL

It's both. It's called "film graphics dash experimental," and then animation, because this is all those levels. In other words, some of the works that come out of here are purely of an experimental character, whereas some other stuff, let's say, is more conventional in character. And then, too, you have the other type of film, which people relate as film graphics, which would be, let's say, just the highly designed and very articulated forms and shapes that people accept as film graphics. Still others in the abstract experimental vein don't have that quality, because it's, let's say, more liquid, more organic, more sensuous. It's purely experimental, you know.

ZOLOTOW

What relation does this have to the traditional animation skills which are taught here?

ENGEL

Well, what I am doing here, I'm interested really in the talent that I would say has more of the character of the poet, the fellow who is really much more inventive, or the fellow who wants to go into the scene of film as an extension, let's say, of a painter who now wants to work in motion and not a question of aesthetic painting. So the conventional animation here is another department. And although I have people who work with characters, their approach to the character animation is where you invent the aspect of how the character moves. To be more specific, it's movement, but not from observation. It's

movement from a point of view where you invent, where you create, where you make the movement function because you're dealing with a drawing, and not [because you] try to copy or imitate. That is the only thing that relates to conventional animation in my department.

ZOLOTOW

Are you getting young people out of the painting department to work here?

ENGEL

I have some people who come from the painting department in the school. But then I have people who come here from other schools, specifically because they want to work in experimental filmmaking. These are the people who are art students, and they have a B.F.A. or whatever from other places. They come here, because they feel that here they have this total freedom of really working the medium and not [being] locked into any kind of ideologies or school structures.

ZOLOTOW

Do you regard this as kind of an extension of painting?

ENGEL

Yes, it can be. I think of some of the people, like Dennis Pies, who's been here, as just that. He was a painter--he 's still a painter--he 's an excellent printmaker, and he came here because he wanted to get involved with film, but with his world of painting. And he's done some beautiful work. Barbara Stutting has done a few abstract films--again, a painter. Jane Kirkwood has done a film like that. In fact, the best talents that I have are really the true artist, who looks to the film as an extension of the world of art. I make a difference between the talent that I would call studio-oriented (that's the conventional type) and then the other who says, "I don't want to work at the studio. I want to produce my own world. I want to make new horizons." So that's the other world. That's the large talent.

ZOLOTOW

You know, you have Bruce Nauman teaching here. How do your students and your work relate to what's going on now with video art and what's been called post-object art?

ENGEL

Well, we have video in the school, of course. So, if a person in here wants to jump around and try something new, have fun, fall in love with the medium, they see what happens. And, if a Bruce Nauman is here, or another artist of that character, what happens is that my students will go over there. If he had any kind of a rap session, as they do, or they show their slides, I encourage my talent to definitely go over there and listen to the man. Just look and listen. And what you like you take in, and what you don't like you don't bother with. But the idea here is the exposure of young talent to all those other people. I mean, this is the best thing that I can help them--not tell them but just say, "Go and look, go and listen, and then work with that. " But the talent is very young; you can't expect a hell of a lot at this stage. Also I am a firm believer of working with the talent where the talent is. But the important thing is exposure to all the arts, both to the large talent in the painting world or the dance world or the music world and then I wait.

ZOLOTOW

What about the relationship to photography? I notice that your print room has all kinds of photomechanical means. Are your people here getting into photographic ways to create new images?

ENGEL

Well, in the sense that, again, the lab is there. That's where you have to take chances, but why not? I mean, I like this idea of introducing a talent to another field and seeing when there is an explosion. Or if there is an explosion. Or if there is some kind of blooming that will occur .

ZOLOTOW

Yes, because I think of that McLaren thing of the *Pas de Deux*. Remember, he did that basically photographically. And then how did he get that movement? Was that on an optical printer?

ENGEL

Optical printer, yes.

ZOLOTOW

You have an optical printer here?

ENGEL

We have an optical printer here. And that is really the heart of the more experimental filmmaker, because that's where they can really make magic, go and do all the impossible things. I mean, you can shoot something in black and white, and then go on optical printer and put color in it. You can triple, quadruple an image. You can make fifty passes on one frame. I mean, that's a magic machine, and it's a must today for a filmmaker. In fact, the big difference, I think, today in the talent, when they come into a place like that, they ask you if you have an optical printer, they ask you if you have an Oxberry. Now, years ago, and at the studios, I mean, a guy would come into a studio, like Hanna-Barbera or Warner's or MGM or Disney--I mean, for them to even ask if you have an optical printer, they would kick him out. [laughter] Because even today, most of those guys, they don't even know what the hell you're talking about if you talk about optical printer.

ZOLOTOW

Do you feel you're sort of the leading edge, the cutting edge of the art world, sitting here?

ENGEL

Yes, today, I think in the field of a certain genre of animated film, yes, we are definitely a force. We have created films and images and concepts on film that just did not exist before. So, this place is that. Of course, I've been very lucky, because I've had some very beautiful people. When I say "beautiful," I mean talents who've been coming my way. It's just one of those fortunate things that always has happened. But we are definitely a force. And although I use the word animation, I don't like that word. But at the moment I have no other word. Because "animation" people always relate to arts, life, and the world.

ZOLOTOW

Why don't we just call it "film art"?

ENGEL

"Film art" would be much better, yes. Because when you mention that word [animation], people are so conditioned-

ZOLOTOW

Mickey Mouse.

ENGEL

--to what it was before, that they have no conception--what is this all about? An interesting situation today is that the dance is so popular. I think probably the most inventive art that's happening today is taking place in the dance world on stage; and people will go to that and can enjoy this beautiful thing which deals just with movement. And yet, when you do that on a screen, people have a problem of going with it. Now, I think maybe the word animation -- they look at it as animation, and they don't quite buy it or enjoy it. You mentioned "film art," "art projected," or "projected art" — all these things would be much more apropos with that aspect of filmmaking that is happening here and what I am pursuing here.

ZOLOTOW

One of the things that is happening in the world of so-called fine art is that there's a whole anti-art movement. They're saying the galleries are dead, paintings to hang on the wall are dead, easel painting is dead. And the peculiar thing about your activity to me is that you don't say that the canvas is dead, but you have certainly moved centuries away from the canvas into this kind of film activity. And I'm curious--do you think that video, TV, and the other kind of electronic forms are going to replace canvases and prints and the still images?

ENGEL

No, I don't think it will replace it. No way. I think painting is going to be here. And video is going to be here. And film is going to be here. And sculpture is going to be here. And it's all going to be here, and they're just going to work parallel. But not going to replace one another. If there is a great painter who comes around tomorrow, or a great sculptor tomorrow, everything is back as big as it was yesterday. Film is just a child. This whole medium is just a child, such a bastard medium at the moment, that it cannot replace the great arts of yesterday in no way.

ZOLOTOW

I'm not talking about yesterday. I'm talking about if a vigorous young talent comes along, you know, will he be drawn to this medium here because it is new, it is exciting, it's in the twentieth century? And will he not be drawn to the single image of the canvas? That's the question. Are you, is this room going to siphon off the best of the kids, and the weakest of them wind up painting pictures?

ENGEL

Oh, no, no. I mean the good ones will paint pictures. And the good ones will make films. They're not going to siphon off to any one avenue. I think what's happening more and more, that the talents are working in the different medias. I think that's just going to be much more the scene than just picking a particular avenue. It's happening now, and I think it's going to happen more and more, because you can buy equipment and it's not going to be expensive. And I think artists are always, no matter how serious and how big, what a giant they were, they still have to be in a character where they're playing. You've got to play, and if you don't play, you're finished, because that's the name of the game. So they are going to play with the medium of the canvas. But I don't think that you can walk into a home where you have kind of a spiritual presence, and you're just going to have empty walls looking at you. There's nothing wrong with empty walls, but I mean that's just the nature of man that he wants to live with things that--not just a piece of decoration, but that has a life of its own. And I think great art has a life of its own, and a man wants to share this piece of art with himself, you know.

ZOLOTOW

Yes, I'm glad you're saying that, because for a long time people have been talking about what one man has called the industrialization of the mind. I mean, for a long time, every technological device was considered automatically a step forward, and apparently you don't consider film a step forward, you just consider it another--

ENGEL

— another form of expression, another form of art. And I think that's the most beautiful thing about it, that you can go back and forth. You go into one room, and you're looking at great paintings; you go into another room, and you're

looking at great films. Of course, you don't have any great films to look at as yet, but at some time we will, because, as I said, the medium is so young. But I don't see that at all when people say that. I just don't understand them. Because when I go to Paris, I have to go to the Louvre; when I am in New York, I go to the Museum of Modern Art and I go to the Met [ropolitan Museum of Art]. And I go and see films. And I go to the galleries and see new painters. I'm very anxious to see new sculptures or collage or whatever form. And I am very interested to go to the theater and see a dancer like Twyla Tharp or Merce Cunningham or Alvin Ailey.

ZOLOTOW

That's an extraordinary attitude, and that's why I'm hoping to have you develop it. Because from what I have been hearing of--well, I'm looking at Marcel Duchamp, and of course, he produced almost no art. I mean, he really was the origin of the anti-art sentiment that motivates a lot of young artists today. He, in effect, said, "Why do it? Why make paintings for dealers to sell to rich people, and so on?" But you don't share that really.

ENGEL

No, I can't share it, because when you do something, you do it because you have to do it. I mean, you don't tell a bird to stop singing. You have great stars at the opera house and you have Stravinsky and you have a Bach and a Beethoven. I mean, he still keeps on singing, and you keep on listening to him, and you keep enjoying it. Well, an artist is in the same position, if he's really something very special. He has no choice. He will create. He has to create. I mean, it's part of his chemistry. These are things that we can't explain, but it goes on all the time. And the talent that comes around me, I mean, they are coming around because they are interested in the medium of film. It doesn't mean that five or ten years from today, they stay with the medium, because it's possible that they just go back to painting or sculpture or prefer still the other arts.

ZOLOTOW

You know, one of the things I think it would be good to have on record is your view of the evolution of Cal Arts. We did not discuss how this school came about.

ENGEL

Well, I don't know anything except when I first came here and they said we'd like to talk to you. But I have no idea how it came about before that. I know that when the thing was in motion--

ZOLOTOW

Pick it up where you got on board. When was that?

ENGEL

Well, I was on my way to New York. I was going to move to New York. A dear friend of mine heard about it, and he said, "We don't want you to leave for New York, because there is a school that is going to open up, and maybe they can use you. " And they had a very dear friend whose name was Anais Nin, and they called--because Anais Nin evidently knew Herb Blau. So they told Anais Nin about me, who met me years before, but I don't think there was any strong remembrance. You know how sometimes you meet people, and then you're in limbo with them.

ZOLOTOW

Yes, but you can't forget her once you meet her. She can forget us. [laughter]

ENGEL

That's right. So, this friend called her, you know, and the next thing I know I was with her and on my way to Herb Blau. Then Herb Blau had me over and had a kind of a rough cross-examination, lasted like three hours. I never talked three hours in my life before, and he just kept, you know, talk, pumping me and pumping me. That went on, and then I met [Robert] Corrigan. Corrigan saw the films, and Blau saw the films that I had done already. And then I met Sandy [Alexander] MacKendrick, who was then already on the board as the dean. And they needed somebody for this particular department. So, just simple as that, they liked the material, and the next thing I knew, I was part of Cal Arts.

ZOLOTOW

You weren't involved in any of the struggles and the push-pulls.

ENGEL

Before that, and all that?

ZOLOTOW

Well, even then things got pretty complicated when Blau got in trouble.

ENGEL

Oh, yes, when Blau and Corrigan-- When we first opened, naturally, it was very hectic, because the idea was very big. The concept of what the school was about was going to be something very spectacular. But a lot of people that came here really didn't know how to use that kind of, let's say, freedom that they had. And they just-- I think they just blew their tops. And they almost wrecked the whole joint.

ZOLOTOW

Tell us about that period. I don't know if any- body's putting this into the history.

ENGEL

Well, no, it was just what happened. We were up in Glendale; they rented that old, old school.

ZOLOTOW

Convent, wasn't it?

ENGEL

Convent, some girl's Catholic high school [Villa Cabrini]. And so we just moved into the rooms. There was no furniture. You sat on the floors. You sat on boxes. I think, the largest problem was with the humanities. That's where the problem came, because I think at that time the idea was to go out into the street and have some kind of confrontation with the local police in Glendale. And then once that would take place, then everybody would run back to the school, and then they would have something to talk about. I'm putting it more in a humorous way, but it turned out that that kind of activity constantly was that. Because the dancers were already dancing, the painters were painting, the filmmakers were already involved making film, but the humanities had a kind of a problem. Somehow they were so unstructured, because it's going to be free and you can do as you damn well please, you can come and go. And

the next thing you know, we had all kinds of problems with the people in Glendale. And the humanities-- that was the big problem. They liked that idea of having this--

ZOLOTOW

Okay, obviously you don't want to get into the nitty-gritty detail. Well, some of it has been written, and somebody will put it on record, that period, but--

ENGEL

Well, probably a lot of things happened, you see, but myself, not ever being part of a school structure (I come here from a professional world), I don't even know, really, who's doing what to whom, because I don't know the mechanics. Now, the other people that were in other institutions knew all the strings. But when you're an outsider, you come into a place like this, you really don't know.

ZOLOTOW

Yes, it's like my relation to Art Center. I feel like an outside hired hand.

ENGEL

You don't know. Now, once you're in this world for some years and you begin to know the principal, the vice- president, the provost, and how those things, then you begin to get part of it. Maybe today, I'm much more aware, you know, what is going on in the place. But then maybe I'm the kind of person that frankly, I don't give a damn about those things, because I have my terrain. I'm working, and I said, "The hell with it. If there are problems like that, let them solve it. I don't care."

ZOLOTOW

Okay, let's get off the school then. The thing that we might explore a little more is working both in the painted canvas and in the film, what are the aesthetic similarities or differences between the two media?

ENGEL

The similarities? Well, if you're a painter like I am, naturally, and I'm working in a certain characteristic of the canvas, which is the hard-edge, geometrical, architectural, structural thing, naturally, I'm going to take some of those

shapes and ideas and want to put them into movement. I mean, for me, that is the interesting situation, to put the character which is on a canvas into motion. For me, that's very lovely. But then again, I've always been very involved in the world of dancing. Then the other edge is that I would like to put the painterly shapes, the painterly characteristics on, get them into motion, but also put the dancing world, the dance world, the Martha Graham world, onto graphics and into motion. So that's the terrain.

ZOLOTOW

Well, the Martha Graham world is still concerned with storytelling, poetic storytelling as well as motion. Has storytelling been an interest of yours?

ENGEL

Storytelling, when I worked on my films, has never been. If I worked at the studios, naturally, then it's a must. It's just part of it, and I participate and do it. But at the moment I don't quite want to get involved with storytelling because, frankly, there are so many people doing that anyway. Everybody's doing that, so that I am very comfortable letting them all do that, because as I say, everybody's doing that, everybody's telling stories. The problem, I think, in this whole film area now — there are very few people doing these other things where you're dealing with movement and have all the characteristics of a painter's approach to movement to the film, or the painterly approach. I think that you don't find much around. But storytelling — I think everybody wants to tell stories.

ZOLOTOW

One of the reasons I bring this up is that now, in the world of paintings, people are asking for a return to, somebody said, "pre-Courbet painting," painting that was involved with poetry, social ideas, storytelling. In fact, I think it was Bill Brice, in an interview in *Art News*, that said he felt the time had come for us to pick up previous things that painting used to be involved with. And painting was involved with poetry and storytelling, social ideas. And I'm just wondering whether, sitting here with this medium which is a natural storyteller but that's been telling jokes for years--the only story it's ever told has been jokes--do you feel that when painters move into these concerns, or

pick them up once again, maybe film will be waiting for them, you know, as a new way to be a Delacroix, or a new way to be--?

ENGEL

Well, from my corner-- [laughter] When Bill Brice is talking, he's talking from his corner. When I'm talking, I'm talking from my corner. And from my corner I don't see any such concern. Because you're not going to tell an artist that we, the public, are ready to reach back to pre-Courbet or whatever. No way. I think a talent comes, and he comes in his own time, and he has to work what's right for him. My feeling is that no such thing will happen. What will happen, let's say, I don't know, but I cannot see them going back to anything. I don't think that we're put together that way. We don't go back to the horse and buggy, we don't go back to the airplane with a prop, and we don't go back to fountain pens, the thick, heavy, bulky fountain pens. I don't see any way to go back to anything. I think Bill Brice is dreaming, or he would like to have that happen, but I, from my corner, I can't see that. No way. I think you come along in your time, and you work as the time is right for it, but no way that you can go back. I think that you are always going to have dramatics, you've got to have dramatics, but the theater is going to take care of dramatics. I think the film is not quite really put together for dialogue, because I think what people still enjoy in film is the feeling of movement. If you start a film and you're going to have nothing but dialogue going on up there, you're going to destroy the medium. There's some- thing about this medium, film, and what people enjoy about it is the sense of movement. I don't know why people enjoy that, but they enjoy it. Now you can see film after film where the beginning is just sheer movement. Nothing happens, but somebody sits on a bicycle and rides. Another picture starts with an airplane in the sky, and it's going and going and going. There's another film I saw recently where it started with waves, and it just goes and goes and goes, and then pretty soon somebody comes to the beach. But it's interesting, all these films starting with just sheer movement. Now, what happens? There's something about that that people feel right about. It moves, and this is what it's all about. Good heavy dialogue, and large meanings, I still prefer on the stage; that's me. I love the stage, and I love the fact that it happened there. Naturally, you've got to have dialogue on the stage, and you will have it. But it will have nothing to do with what took place yesterday. It will have nothing to do with what the painters did yesterday,

because they were storytelling and stuff like that. Whatever dialogue is going to happen, it's going to happen, because it's going to be right--but not with the view because of what happened yesterday. This is just from my corner. No way.

ZOLOTOW

Do you see the reintroduction of subject matter in painting? I mean, look at, well, we've got the photorealists now, and then we had the pop guys before that, turning their eyes on parts of the world that painters hadn't looked at before. Do you see that?

ENGEL

No, I think it's just a moment. I think it seems like eternity because you're part of it. But if you look back ten or fifteen or twenty years later, you're going to see this thing's just like bubbles — it has just disappeared. I think these are just things that are brought on by galleries and brought on by people because it sells, it makes news — these are quickies. I don't see anything in them. But I accept them as part of my time. I accept them as I accept a headline. And often they are headlines and nothing else. But you cannot go back. You cannot go back, to anything. I mean, you can look at it and enjoy it, but I think these are just moments, of no consequence really. But I still accept them as part of my life, and I think I understand, it has to happen. But I think whatever is going to happen tomorrow, it's not because you're going back to something yesterday, in other words.

ZOLOTOW

I didn't do justice to that idea if I implied it was just a retreat. What I was trying to suggest is that some people in the world of painting feel that certain ideas that have been not of concern in the last fifty years are going to become of concern again, the way the Museum of Modern Art, with its Beaux Arts show, suggested that certain concerns of Beaux Arts architecture which were thrown out by Le Corbusier and by the organicists may be reintroduced, but in a new form. I phrased it badly.

ENGEL

Yes. Okay.

ZOLOTOW

A thing that interests me about your conviction that films dealing with movement and space and color and shape are going to be with us in the future--how do you see them being distributed?

ENGEL

Well, I see them distributed in the museums. In other words, they will be part of the museum. In other words, I see [that at] every museum we're going to have a projection room. Every museum is going to have several projection rooms. It's going to be just part of your going to a museum and seeing this projected art. I can also see them in galleries, where galleries will have small gadgets where you work with a tape--the material is going to be on the tape. You put it with this gadget into this piece of machine, and it comes onto the screen. It's going to be sold like you sell albums, music, in the same way. In fact, it probably could go on a record, the image could go onto the record. You just put it on and you have a projected image. So I see these things as part of, well, like you buy a lithograph, or you buy a multiple. I can see them as people buying it like they buy books, and they have a library. But people are already beginning to-- oh, it's another reason. People are beginning to buy films. Now, twenty- five years ago, it was unheard of that a young student could go out and buy films. Well, damn it, today, they're buying films. They go out today and buy early black and white films which cost--

ZOLOTOW

Sixteen [millimeter].

ENGEL

Yes, which cost five, eight dollars, beautiful things. But they are buying films today. And this is very new, and that's very interesting. And I've been in a lot of homes of people who are film buffs, like you have record buffs, and they have projectors. They are buying projectors, and they have a screen. A lot of homes now, you know, they pull a screen down. This is the way, and it's happening because they are buying films. I was very surprised when I first began to realize that the young people are buying films. This never happened before. My God, I was over at UPA and Disney, nobody had a film. But today, they have films.

ZOLOTOW

I used to rent films a lot.

ENGEL

Or you rent. But they buy. They buy. They want to have it. And I think galleries definitely will have rooms predicated for showing films. And there's no question that museums--because look at the Los Angeles art museum, [which] has big film events where they're showing Mervyn LeRoy and characters like that. I mean, this is just a natural next step in the world of art, running films.

ZOLOTOW

Well, you know, of course, the big revolution is going to be cartridge TV. Apparently within two or three years we're going to see some more signs of that.

ENGEL

Yes.

ZOLOTOW

So that's what you see. You see the museum playing a role and the 16 millimeter projector playing a role, and maybe the 8 millimeter, those cheap little rear projection units that are developed for 8 millimeter, and then the video cartridge, and you see that as the natural distribution--?

ENGEL

Natural distribution of these art films. For art, yes.

ZOLOTOW

Well, do you ever see this integrated in the feature film as we know it? Do you ever see any of the new expressive or communicative techniques you have being swept up by an avant-garde director and integrated into feature filmmaking?

ENGEL

Well, I think you see maybe little tiny bits, like *2001 [A Space Odyssey]* , you know, that one where he goes through that space area.

ZOLOTOW

Doug Trumball's section, yes, the split scan.

ENGEL

Yes, so you saw a little of it there. And then you see some very bad thing where this guy did *Tommy* --

ZOLOTOW

Yes, terrible.

ENGEL

It's terrible, but that's the problem.

ZOLOTOW

No, but I mean do you ever foresee it being done well?

ENGEL

Oh, yes, oh, yes.

ZOLOTOW

Do you ever foresee artists like your artists here--?

ENGEL

Oh, definitely, it's a must, it's a must. It takes a little time, but it's a natural thing. It's going to happen--that 's tomorrow. Oh, but yes, there's no question about it, because people are getting so conditioned to all kinds of imagery. Now you can begin to come in, and it's no problem for them to participate emotionally [with] what's on the screen through this imagery. It's going to happen, it's just a question of somebody has to come along with a film which has all these characteristics, and people will love it. The problem is that people who are still running the film world are still so definitely locked in to what's been yesterday--

ZOLOTOW

— or last month —

ENGEL

— or last month [laughter], that it's hard, it's hard to break that wall. But, oh, it's on it's way, there's no question about it.

ZOLOTOW

This is the first time I thought about it, listening to you here, and it really does seem to me a possibility.

ENGEL

Oh, yes, it's all around you, you know. Somebody just has to have the opportunity to do it. People today will buy, they'd buy it.

ZOLOTOW

How strong is the cinema department here, the live- action cinema department?

ENGEL

It's very strong. In fact, the cinema department here is the same as it was when the school first opened. That's the one department where all five persons — Sandy MacKendrick, Terry Sanders, Don Levy, Kris Malkiewicz and myself--

ZOLOTOW

Terry Sanders was here?

ENGEL

He's been here from the beginning.

ZOLOTOW

Oh, I didn't know that.

ENGEL

Oh, yes. [All five] have been here from the very beginning. And it's very strong. It's very powerful.

ZOLOTOW

Well, maybe this new film artist that has the resources of live action and film art, maybe that new film artist is going to come out of here.

ENGEL

You hope so. I would like to see it. But, for me, we have produced some fantastic talent. The new book just came out from the Whitney Museum [of American Art in New York], which works with the American Federation of Arts, called *New American Filmmakers*, you know, and in that, in the film-graphic area, Adam Beckett has a full page. Dennis Pies is in there. Pat O'Neill is in there. And myself, I am in there. So here is four people from Cal Arts in this new book called *New American Filmmakers*. So, I think the texture is right here, the ambience is right.

ZOLOTOW

So when I asked you whether you felt you were at the cutting edge, you've got justifiable reason to think that you are.

ENGEL

It's a shame I didn't bring the book. I just got it yesterday from the Whitney. But it's very powerful. You see, that's the difference between USC and UCLA and us.

ZOLOTOW

Okay, let me ask you another funny thing, because I get a real strong feeling about this film department here. How do the painting students view this activity in this school?

ENGEL

Well, so far, they've been very keen. They're very keen, and they applaud us. The accolades are really plentiful from them. They've really been very good to us. They appreciate, and they understand. They know that this is something very important that's been growing here and happening here. So I really have the backing of other departments, including the dance school, because I've put on some film performances for the dancers, to open their eyes to the mechanics and the possibilities. But the painters in this school are very keen about us. Really they--you know, I'm not trying to say something that's not real or honest, but really they look to this place as some- thing very, very special.

ZOLOTOW

Well, you know, it's a refreshing thing to hear because, I don't know, I talk to people and I don't get this kind of story.

ENGEL

Oh, you mean about this place?

ZOLOTOW

No, about other schools.

ENGEL

Oh, you mean where they knock the other departments or something like that?

ZOLOTOW

Yes, where there isn't this kind of feeling. Obviously this is a uniquely motivated and strong department you guys have, and its connection to the traditional painters and the traditional printmakers and all that seems to be pretty exciting and pretty good. Well, what haven't we covered, Jules?

ENGEL

I don't know. See, I don't come with notes, so-- [laughter]

ZOLOTOW

Well, I think, you know, we have some sense of where you came from personally, and I think we've covered the relationship of yourself to the Disney world, and the relationship of the Disney world to what spun off. It's really funny, because it's almost duplicated at Cal Arts, because you've got a Disney department--right?--and you're like a spin-off department. I think we've covered your relationship between painting and film art as you see it. I think we've really covered the story.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (December 16, 1977)

WESCHLER

This is the first tape of the second series with Jules Engel, and we're interviewing today at the [Charles] Aidikoff Screening Room in Beverly Hills

where we're going to see some of Jules 's films. Well, Jules, perhaps you can introduce them yourself.

ENGEL

Yeah. Well, you're going to see about eight abstract films, and this will be probably a good indication of where we go from here as far as your questioning me on my intentions, where I am, where I am going. The first film is *Train Landscape*, and it's a painter's approach to filmmaking, to putting painting in motion. Primarily I'm working here with vertical lines. The reason for that is because it gives me a kind of effect that is not known, not discovered. So we're discovering imagery that comes about when you put images in motion. So the idea here is to discover, which often is my concept or approach to filmmaking, where I am at . In as much as I worked in the major studios where you had so much restrictions, you never had any opportunity to have things happen, I mean, happy accidents or painterly accidents, or even from the point of view of a sculptor, that accident that I can find here. [the film starts] These are straight lines, and you're already beginning to feel the strobes, something the vertical lines would give you, strobes. Now, this is total taboo in the studios, but I'm interested in that aspect of it, because as a painter I could never get this character on canvas. But because you're working in time — in other words how long I hold a straight line on the camera, whether I hold it a second or two seconds or eight frames or four frames--this will give me the front strobes. You see a lot of strobes there.

WESCHLER

And you're using color.

ENGEL

And color also. But very little color here, because I've always been very interested in strong black and white. Now you begin to get really the feeling of the strobes here on the straight lines. And this is a form of discovery that I'm very interested in when I work in film. Very nice. It's wonderful stuff all through here. It's all strobes, and it's all geared timing. It's all strobes — beautiful. Fantastic. [the film concludes]

WESCHLER

I notice that the sound score is by Stan Levine. Does he develop the score after you've — ?

ENGEL

Yes. I like to finish a film, and then I have some session with a musician. But I always look forward for him to surprise me. Just as I'm looking for surprises or accidents, I also want him to surprise me, because I could nowhere near have the idea that he as a musician would have. So I think here he did something very special. As my art work is still the terrain of a painter, he at the same time brought me a sound score that had the character of a poet and not just a sound score that would be some- thing you could pick up by going to the train stations. So I leave the musician open; I want to give him all the free- dom. Again, I hope that he'll surprise me with the kind of image sounds that I could never in a million years think of.

WESCHLER

One other question about the general form: Do you work mathematically at some of the effects that are created, or are mathematics not at all part of it?

ENGEL

No, I don't work mathematically, because that would put me in the terrain of a computer animator. No, the rhythm has to come from me, and it comes from my gut. Although this is hard-edged stuff that you've been looking at, I am incredibly influenced by the world of dancing. That is a major influence apart from painting or being a sculptor. And so the rhythm that I have is something maybe from that world that I have experienced. But I do not work with any kind of formulas. I think that because I'm so interested in the world of dancing and I had some experience in it (but not professional or anything), I think I just have a good sense of rhythm. Often the musicians, they said that when they start to work, they discovered there is a natural rhythm they can work to which is there. But I prefer to create my own rhythm and timing. But timing is something that — maybe because I have all those years of experience in the medium — but timing is something that you either have or you don't have. That is something you can't develop. You can go to dance school and learn all the steps, but if you don't have a body rhythm, forget it, you see. So I'm glad that you asked that question, because it's been asked before, and some

people do look for formulas. They very specifically ask me how do I structure, what formula or musical gimmick [do I use]. But I don't work that way. It's just from the gut.

WESCHLER

One fact question: How long did it take you to make that particular film?

ENGEL

Oh, I think it took me about three months to do the art work, and the shooting was maybe, I'd say, about fourteen to sixteen hours under the animation camera. But the art work, maybe three months, just to put it together.

WESCHLER

Well, why don't we see the next one?

ENGEL

Okay. The next one is *Accident*. We go into entirely different terrain. You'll see an animal running, and the idea here is to disturb that piece of artwork that you see there so completely that you almost end up with something else. Okay. [film starts and concludes] Now again, you see, if I thought of maybe a sound of the dog making a panting sound — But then I let Carl Stone, the musician, I let him come up with something. I like what he came up with, because the other one would have been just a natural sound with nowhere the mystery, the magic that is on the screen. Because the kind of sound he came up with — this clung-clung — it's like breaking up a piece of porcelain. That's what I mean: I would like the musician to surprise me, and he did surprise me. I wanted to work with this idea of when I have a piece of art — and also the aspect of a smudge, you know, how when you smudge something that's a nice texture there. The only way I could make it really interesting for an onlooker is to have here a dog that you can relate to. It's a dog that is running, and it's running well, and this thing happens. You take him off the paper, bit by bit; and eventually all I had left there was the smudge or something that I couldn't quite get off the paper altogether. But at the same time I have arrived at another image, and arrived at this other image, again, this form, because I'm working in time and I'm working in movement. The aspect of the smudge to me was something that I can always get when I make

a situ drawing; I leave it there, and those are nice accidents. But here I had to go about it other ways so that the onlooker will have a kind of sympathy with the image.

WESCHLER

It's interesting in hearing you talk that when one sees the title *Accident* one gets a certain kind of image, like a traffic accident, but in hearing you talk, you're also interested in the accidents and things that happen when you erase and so forth.

ENGEL

That's right, that's what this is all about. Often, the interpretation is very wrong, because they make the associations that you said. But actually the accident was that of using the eraser and having the smudge happen. So that's a whole different terrain.

WESCHLER

That is a very visceral image to watch happening, and I think you relate to it on one level almost as a philosophical concept about mortality or so forth. But do you try to discourage that kind of interpretation?

ENGEL

Yes, I would, because I had none of that in my head. No, it was strictly a piece of line drawing, a pencil line, a dark line on a piece of white paper, and then you take an eraser and begin to take some of it off, and then all those wonderful things happen. But to make it interesting — because you're still dealing with a medium where you have onlookers and a lot of people — so I had to give something that they can relate to. If I was doing, let's say, this strictly for a museum or an exhibit, maybe I would not use a dog. But I'm still dealing in a terrain that I want people to get acquainted with; and the only way, sometimes, you can pull them in is to give them a little something back that they can get a hold of.

WESCHLER

Well the dog is also an incredibly graceful creature, this particular dog; it reminds me of some of your comments about dance.

ENGEL

Yes, that was very important, to have this beautiful piece of rhythm on the screen.

WESCHLER

Did you take a film of a dog?

ENGEL

No, I worked from an [Eadweard] Muybridge book. I studied the dog there, and I used those movements. But then I would exaggerate the movement, so that when you see it here, it's a very beautiful, rhythmic movement; and at the very end you just have those little black feet.

WESCHLER

It's spectacular how long you have the image of the dog beyond when it's almost completely smudged. It continues to be there for the onlooker.

ENGEL

Yes. Actually, when I finished the film I wish now that I would have gone with him a little longer; just a little longer. But that's the way things happen.

WESCHLER

Well, what have you got for us next?

ENGEL

Next is *Shapes and Gestures*. Now, this is a film where the influence of the dance world is very obvious. It's pure abstraction, and it's really pure graphic choreography. I think the musician again came through here and did something very, very special. [film starts, runs, concludes]

WESCHLER

For people who didn't see that and only heard the tape, the images are as graceful as the music. The music seems to fit them perfectly.

ENGEL

[Steve Goldman] did the job. It took him like six months. I had no idea that it was so long: I thought the film was much shorter, and I had no idea. But he used mostly classical instruments, a very young fellow, and I think he did a beautiful job of scoring it. He doesn't make it too cute. Sometimes he goes with the rhythm and sometimes he stays away from it; it's in and out. So, again, see, I could never have visualized this kind of a musical score. So that was again one of those wonderful things that he gave me back something that I hoped he'd do with the piece. Now, this is pure graphic choreography where the dance is very obviously influencing me, the movement and gestures. It's again this pure abstraction working with the simple lines. I'm very keen on art working: that it does look like a line, a drawing, it does look like something that you put on paper, it doesn't look mechanical, it's not pretty, it's not gimmicky, it's not clever. It's very simple, and sometimes simplicity is very difficult for people to accept because they look for something that's clever. Now the other thing is, it's interesting for me that people will go to a dance concert, let's say Merce Cunningham. All he does is walk around the stage, you know, and he stops and walks around the stage. That's it — no music, no sound — and people are very comfortable with it. All they see is pure movement, and nobody's going to try to say, "What the hell does that mean: a tree walks around? or a pyramid?" No, it's just a man walks around and they're comfortable. I think what I'm trying to do here with these things is to have the same character. In other words, when you come to see this film, it's more like seeing a concert, an exhibit, an exhibit-concert, more than a film. People think of film immediately in certain ways because they're conditioned. But I think this fits into the terrain of a concert world.

WESCHLER

Do you find that it's possible to bring this before dance audiences rather than film audiences? It seems that most people who see these are people who are film freaks.

ENGEL

Well, I think this is where I am heading for. I am heading for that world where I can have a dance audience or a concert audience to see these things, or a painter. But that's the world that I'm working in, and this is why, often for critics or judges, it's very difficult for them to put themselves into that scene.

'Cause what I should have rather is a dance critic come and see it. When I run these things for dancers, the reaction is incredible. At Cal Arts I often have a program of these films for the dance school, and it gives a lot of ideas for the dancers. At the same time, I needle them a little bit — "Look what I can do that you can't do" — but, I mean, that's just a friendly suggestion. But that's the terrain where this film and these ideas function. It's not really for what you call a film audience; it's something else. It's an extension of the dance floor; it's an extension of the music world; it's an extension of the painting and sculpture world. You see, it's all that and it's something of its own that I am doing. But it still has all those ingredients. But this is film, this is new, the whole scene is new. You know, all we can go back to is 1920, to Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, and that's all.

WESCHLER

One thing that I just wanted to note in terms of my own reaction was just the grace. That's the word that I would use for some of the movements; they were just incredibly graceful. What have you got next?

ENGEL

The next one is called *Wet Paint* [actually *Landscape*]. It's not a flicker film like some people relate it. It's a color-field painting in time. It's very important: a color-field painting in time. By that I mean, if you go into a gallery and let's say the canvases are red or yellow or blue, you can walk through or you can stop at your own time; but what I'm doing here, I am doing that, but I make the time, I allow the time for each canvas. That gives you a clue. [film starts] Oh wait, this is a different film. [film concludes]

WESCHLER

So this one was different than we thought.

ENGEL

Yeah, it was my fault. This was *Wet Paint* and the interesting thing here is that I asked him [Nikolaj Bogatirev] not to follow the image too closely. I wanted him to have the music function with the film but almost as if it was coexisting. They each work on their terrain, and they work in themselves; but still they don't get in each other's way, and they help each other. So that was very

important here, because when you relate this to *Shapes and Gestures* here the music was just playing around the place and yet they worked together. So that is what I asked him to do, but that was the only thing. Then he looked at the film, and he was trying to work out a music. After maybe about fifteen or eighteen or twenty sessions that he was looking at it — that was like three months later — we said, "Okay, let's do it." Then we made one take, ran the film, and he had the continuity. But also here I structured a very straight line, so there's a structure almost like a building against a soft, simple image, just dabs of color, and a lot of texture here. I used a very soft paper because I wanted the paint to seep through the paper and maybe end up with something at the bottom, which it did. So that was, again, the kind of beautiful accidents and gestures that I look for. I [found them here] by using another paper where the paint had a chance to go through, and then I would look back and there it was, you know. It just happens. But it's good, and it makes this kind of a thing more human, you know, it has the human quality. You know man is at work, and it doesn't look like a piece of engine.

WESCHLER

How do you relate it to *Shapes and Gestures*? They seem in similar universes.

ENGEL

Yeah, but in *Shapes and Gestures*, all the shapes are very hard-edged, cleaner and more geometrical. Whereas here the shapes are very loose, primarily, and a lot of shapes just happen because of the character of the paper. Even his music was then like that: Instead of hitting the notes or hitting the shapes, it was just sort of playing around; so it had the same character.

WESCHLER

Which did you do first of those two?

ENGEL

Oh, *Shapes and Gestures* I did way before this one. Often, when I do something as structured as *Shapes and Gestures*, then I have a desire to do something very loose, you know, to loosen up. And so this is how this came about. The next one is *Landscape*, and that's the one I described earlier. [film starts, runs, concludes] Stan Levine scored that one also.

WESCHLER

Why don't you talk about this? You mentioned the color-field quality before.

ENGEL

It's a color-field painting in time. That means that what it does is to give you just so much time on each color, and by doing that I give you the right and not *you* giving *me* your time when you walk through my exhibit and you just run through or maybe stop for a painting. I did stop for some paintings — the red and the blue, when I give you a little more time to watch the color. But even if you walked through the gallery and saw the exhibit, you would still never have the interaction with the colors, how the red came forward and the blue moved backward, which is just naturally characteristic of these colors. One recedes and the other goes forward.

WESCHLER

I was thinking: In this particular one, you are much more interested in optical effects, things that human beings in their perception would experience about the blues and the reds and how they bleed together, back and forth and so forth.

ENGEL

Yes, and that of course just comes about because, again, you're working with time. That is something that a painter has to consider, that when you work with film you're working in time. That's why it's so important, that word, "in time" — how long it's up on the screen, how short a time it's up on the screen. But you mentioned [the optical effect] that happened. That is something that's almost like a by-product. That other color that sometimes you see — it's not there, but you see it because —

WESCHLER

Did you do a lot of experimenting yourself to develop those kinds of effects?

ENGEL

Well, I shot a lot of colors and got some kind of idea how they're going to interact. Toward the end you saw there were very soft blues and purples where they just hardly move, but you saw the change.

WESCHLER

That was with the train whistle at that point.

ENGEL

Yes. Again, it's by shooting some tests and then putting the whole thing together. It's really like one large canvas. Again, you need the film, and you need time to create those secondary effects that a painter cannot get on a canvas. That's why this whole adventure is so exciting, because there's so much to discover in this medium, there's so much there that we don't know. The only way is by sometimes just shooting and seeing what comes back; then, if you want to, you can make notes, so the next time you go into it you know what's going to happen. But the minute you do that, you're already restricting yourself, and I think we're too early in this terrain to restrict ourselves to anything like that. The next one is silent. Now, here is *Fragments*, just a pencil line. You have to watch it because sometimes it's so little. [film starts] The idea of what I'm doing here is this idea that there is space behind the canvas; I poke holes into the canvas, and the line disappears and comes out of the canvas, you see. [film is running] Sometimes I go off and that's, of course, a surprise, but then other times-- And you also repeat; you repeat like a musical theme repeats. Sometimes I'll do something like that, where I'm going to leave a little dot where he goes in, so those are with the holes.

WESCHLER

Are the holes consistent on the canvas? Are there about eight places where they go out, or do they go out anywhere?

ENGEL

Well, they're consistent as far as where I structure them, you know, the movement. The idea is that there is space behind the canvas as there is space in front of it. The movements were working here more in a circle, but then also now I'm going to bring very straight.

WESCHLER

Straight seems to read as having more velocity.

ENGEL

Yes. [film concludes] I think I'm going to leave it like that, not have any sound.

WESCHLER

Is that a fairly recent one that you've done?

ENGEL

No, it's about four years ago, one of the earlier ones.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (December 16, 1977)

WESCHLER

You were just talking about *Fragments*. You were going to leave it without sound.

ENGEL

Yes, leave it without sound, because I think it's just an idea of this very delicate pencil line and a piece of white paper and at the same time working with the idea of puncturing the canvas with a pencil. Again, as a painter, I could never really do this kind of thing, but showing a way that there is space behind, that you can move into it and almost move into an incredible amount of space that is just there, and you can make good use of it by doing just that. There was a painter, a sculptor, [Lucio] Fontana, Italian painter, who did some wonderful things on a still plate or a copper plate — he would have holes in it — and in a sense I've been always very jealous of that. I wanted to do something like that here, and this was a perfect approach to that. But I think I'll sometime do the next step where I'll have the line go into the canvas and leave a hole there and then see what happens when the whole canvas is full with these holes, like he did on copper plates.

WESCHLER

The silence in that piece reads like negative space in a way, so that it fits right in with the white of the canvas.

ENGEL

Yes, yes. Now the next one is *Rumble*. Now here, after these gentle delicate lines almost, here I go to very heavy, almost bombastic, kind of like a [Franz] Kline painting. So much work in this terrain is kind of light, and I wanted

something really heavy and weighty, very much influenced by the world of dance. Even the title came from *West Side Story* — "Rumble" — and the sound took wonderful care of it (it almost looks, feels like logs rolling). Okay. [film starts, runs, concludes] David Shoemaker scored that, and I think, again, he captured the character of the shapes. He's a very good musician: they had six hundred applicants at Yale, and they only took three — he was one of the three that were accepted. But I think he really got hold of those shapes and sounds. It's a hard-edged, heavy painting. Yet at the same time, every once in a while I come from way back and come forward; so I give you the feeling that, again, there is space. If I had this on a canvas, it would all be on the surface. But by having it come from there, small growing to big, again, I point out the character of space that the film gives you. As I said before, I wanted to do something where the shapes would be big and heavy and bold. Now, interestingly, a man in France asked me, a film critic, "Why black?" That's a strange question, "Why black?" "Why not?" I said. "Why not?" But you see how far these people are removed from that world: he wanted color. Well, I mean, you have black etchings, you have woodcuts in black, you have painters — Ad Reinhardt worked with black. And yet here's a film man who said, "Why black? It's so heavy," he said. But you see how — Because people are so conditioned, what film sometimes is, if you do something like this. And I was quite surprised, because he was a very bright man, and he was very disturbed. "Why black?" That's what I wanted to do is to have this kind of a weight on the screen. The shapes are painterly. They make good paintings, but I could never have had the excitement and vitality that I got there. And also switching from the black background to the white image or the white background to the black image; and letting the shape come from the top or sometimes from the bottom and going from left to right or right to left. So I created a kind of excitement that I could never, never get on a canvas. And that, again, is the magic of working in time.

WESCHLER

Are you interested in the room in which the film is being shown? In this particular film, it completely lights up the room when it's white, and it makes it dark, it makes pyramids of light and so forth. Is that interesting to you?

ENGEL

Yes, that's very interesting to me. Of course, this one lights up the room, almost as if lights were turned on and off. Also, with this film, you need a large canvas. The other day I ran the film, and the canvas was that big, and I had to explain that this is a painting that needs forty-by-fifty, or fifty-by-fifty. So that is, again, a very important character of the film, that some- times I make the size of the screen very important. And here a very big canvas was important.

WESCHLER

A naive question, as someone who's obviously not an artist myself: Do you find that when you're working on this that you are psychologically more on edge or tenser than when you're working on the very graceful gestural things?

ENGEL

Oh, yes. When I work on the other one, that's very soft, very gentle, almost like listening to a piece of chamber music.

WESCHLER

And you feel that way yourself afterward, after working that way?

ENGEL

Yes, yes.

WESCHLER

And this one?

ENGEL

This is entirely different. It's a blast, and that I feel, because this is the only way I can really get the rhythm into the film. Now, this was a film where I was asked by a very competent filmmaker what rhythm structure I used. And again you see people are so locked in to that aspect of it. But I cannot do that because my feeling — The way I feel about the rhythm structure is, I think it's so right, that it's all there. Now, he wanted me to give him a formula. Well, I don't work with formulas, you see. You make a gesture and the people say, "Oh, you made a gesture. What does it mean? Is it a tree?" "No," I say, "it's not a tree, it's just my hand." You see, it's as simple as that. Maybe it's not that simple to other persons, but for me it's just that simple. But the film always has a totality: it has a beginning, it has a middle, it builds, and then I

like sometimes the surprise ending, which is very important, also it's very theatrical. But the exit and entrance is very important for me on the stage, and it's very important for me on the film — how you start out, how you finish.

WESCHLER

Continuing my question of a moment ago: You say you don't work with formulas. To what extent do you work with feelings? Is that a proper category to attribute to your pictures, that some of them feel?

ENGEL

It 's a total feeling, yes. And naturally I have some years of experience, so I know where I want to go off, where I want to come into the scene. Well, that is the experience I have. But I think it's also a natural rhythm.

WESCHLER

The response is one of feeling, and that's expected.

ENGEL

Yes.

WESCHLER

You're not just concerned about the perceptual response?

ENGEL

No. For instance, I talk to my students and I try to tell them, "If you come in from the right" — And they'll come in from the left and they'll come in from the bottom. It's very difficult to convey this aspect of movement in the right directions. They say, "What do you mean?" It isn't that I mean anything. That's natural. It's very interesting to convey these ideas to a beginner. But I have to work through feelings. Plus, don't forget the experience that I have viewing other work, the world of ballet, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, the Ballet Russe. I mean, naturally, you gain something from that world. But then you want to connect it to something that's your own. But I just assume that I have all that in me, and so it happens. The next film is a computer film, *Swan*. I have a piece of music [by Camille Saint-Saens] which is very popular in the dance world — [Anna] Pavlova danced that — and I've always wanted to do

something with this music. And I had this piece of computer film for ten years before I decided what I wanted to do with it. In other words, I have done a lot of editing here. But what I'm doing here, I want to put an end to those computer films which are beginning to look like TV titles, where they are so cute and so clever that I think they are a total bore. What I want to do with the computer is to cut that concept into ribbons. Because in the painting world, those things would never exist; they would look banal. They would make magazine covers, but they would never exist as a piece of art. So what you see here is none of that. [film starts, runs, ends] See, this is computer material. Naturally, I always wanted to do something with that piece of music. I had a lot of material for about ten years, and about a year ago or so all of a sudden I said "I know what I'll do with this." So I edit and cut. Almost out of this idea of — It hasn't been around much, hasn't been out too much. But every time I see a computer film, everything is the same on both sides, they're always glued together, and God, that stuff just drives me crazy, because it's getting to look so much like television titles. That's the danger with computer film and people doing it. They begin to look like industrial graphics. At the Academy last year, I was sitting next to this man; we were looking at some feature pictures, and some computer stuff came on as the beginning. He said to me, "Oh, a television title." You see how horrible that is. It was a feature, had nothing to do with television, but he already equated this kind of texture with television titles and television commercials. You see this damned thing all over in television, and they're killing this. What I have here is irregular lines, just moving. There is no such a feeling that they're all the same on both sides. A lot of these people when they work with computers, they work with engineers who have absolutely no idea what the hell they're doing. Most of these people are not artists, they're really not. They just get on this gadget — and naturally when you have a circle here and a circle there and they're working at the same time, they're so taken, so seduced with that stuff. It's so cute and it's lovely. But as a piece of art when you look at that stuff — well, it's very bad stuff, it's incredibly bad stuff, very banal. So this, I almost did it out of anger. Because it has some lovely stuff here: nothing works cutely, it's never cute, the image.

WESCHLER

Do you want to do more with computers? Is computer technology developing so that there are more interesting things to do?

ENGEL

I will do something. I have something else I'm working on which is a lot nicer [*Three Arctic Flowers*]. It will be very popular, I think. I think I have a lovely piano score behind it, and it's not too long. I think it'll work. But I like this because of the lack of regular lines. It's an irregular line which very seldom you see. When you go to see a computer, just watch: It's always the same at the bottom and the [top], at the corners; and it's just a very banal piece of design.

WESCHLER

I want to ask you about the line in this movie: it's beads of light. Is that because the computer was only capable of that, or did you choose to have the beads?

ENGEL

No, it's only doing that. And of course the blue that comes out of that, that just happens, but it's very nice. So, again, I grabbed that because, as I say, it is very nice. This is again that something that happens; and when I find things like that, I'm very happy with them, because those are unexpected things. It's all there: It's like an incredible mine that's full of surprises. Unless you're aware of that, you almost throw out the surprises; whereas I don't throw out the surprises because I think that's a most wonderful thing. This is that constant search and discovery that I have. See, when a scientist goes from A to B, that's from A to B. Then the next person takes the B, and he goes from B to C, and then he goes from C to D. But there's an incredible progression somehow. Whereas in art you don't discover things; you don't even know it's there. It's not like taking Picasso, and then I go from there to something else. No, you move into the field, and all of a sudden you discover something. I think film has that, but a lot of people are afraid of that, they don't know, and the surprise is something that they think is a mistake. It's not a mistake — it's there.

WESCHLER

Sure, you realize it's there.

ENGEL

Yes. It's there, yes! So that's the terrain that I'm very much involved in.

WESCHLER

What is this last thing you're going to show us?

ENGEL

Now, the last thing is my first live-action film which won the Jean Vigo award, won half a dozen awards. It was done in 1965. It's called *Coaraze*. *Coaraze* is the name of a French village. This is moving from the world of animation into the world of live-action. I had a wonderful time, and also I used a lot of still photography here (some of it you'll be aware of; some of it, not). But it got a lot of wonderful presence. It got such a good presence that none of the art houses would show it. They threw me out of major studios with this film. Ingmar Bergman saw the film, and it ran with his film in Paris. Even there the people complained to the management — the sound was too this, the editing was too fast. We're talking 1965, of an art house in Paris, and it raised hell. But it's such a gentle film. You'll see, it's nothing like it. But I was able to incorporate a lot of ideas coming in from the animation field, knowing how to use the animation camera and still photos, and again, as a painter who sees things differently. It's a very gentle film. [film starts]. That's the highest award you get in France.

WESCHLER

Prix Jean Vigo.

ENGEL

Yes, and it beat out all the features that year. [film is running] There's a still. Still. . . still. . . still.

WESCHLER

Did you take the photographs?

ENGEL

I took all the still shots, set up the camera, and I directed. These are all still photos put together a certain way. [film ends] That was quite a film because it

is shot in 35 and 15 with all the stills. But it is incredible that in Paris, you know — Bergman liked the film, and he wanted to do it with his feature. Actually the sound on the 35 is much more brittle at the end, and [the people in the audience] would complain to the management, they complained about the editing to the management, too fast and things like that, and this film never could get a playdate anyplace. It was in the hand of a distributor in London — couldn't — But see, coming in from animation and having all that experience in painting, I was able to see images and shapes and sizes. Then it's a question of editing, of putting together the structure and the film in a way that a little thing like that becomes very potent. A lot of people have seen this film. But I could never get a job with that, by the way; I was turned down every place.

WESCHLER

Really!

ENGEL

Oh yes, because they said, "You're too arty" and things like that. But this has a lot of wonderful things in that, you know, and if you're working in a large film, there's that kind of thinking. There's a lot of things that have never been touched in live-action when you're dealing with content, that have never been touched. And then when you go in with something like that, they say, "You're too arty," and stuff like that, or "It has good black and white." Again, I think it's a question of the eye, how I'm able to see things. Those doors: I would cut those photos and put the photos together in a way that works. People don't know, look at it and don't realize it's stills. They don't even realize that some of those images were cut down and put together to give you the nice feeling of panning down the doorways. That man in the foreground, you know, who was sitting — there's a bench, and he's at the other end, too. I come up here, and it's the same man and the same picture, in all three shots.

WESCHLER

Or the shot that suddenly seems like it's a photograph and then the cat suddenly walks in.

ENGEL

And then the cat walks in. That's a surprise — that's very beautiful, to do those things.

WESCHLER

Are the scenes of children fighting acted for you?

ENGEL

They were just playing for us. They were just having a hell of a good time. I mean, that's the biggest thing to happen in that little place, you know, a couple of people with cameras.

WESCHLER

Exactly who was it? Was it you and another cameraman?

ENGEL

Oh, I had a camera. I had a 35 Eclair cameraman. In fact the whole fight was a hand-held 35. I'm not a photographer really. I don't know a damned thing about cameras, but they rented a camera for me. But, you know, if you have an eye, you see things; it doesn't matter, because you know when you look through, that the composition is all there. If you spend your life composing pictures, well, it's a hell of a lot easier to pick up a camera and all, because it's all there and it's just a question of getting those images. And then, of course, the next important thing is when you get into editing, how you juxtapose images. And again, that's timing, it's rhythm. It's something that you can learn, you can acquire; but some of it, you have to come with something to do that. This was, as I say, the first time I shot anything in live- action.

WESCHLER

To what extent was this a purely formal exercise, and to what extent was it trying to say something about that specific town of *Coaraze*?

ENGEL

No, it was commissioned by the mayor of the village, because this village is very important. All the poets come there. Once a year, all the poets of Europe come to this little place *Coaraze*. He wanted a film to be done which had a poetic presence, not a documentary, so also he can show that when the poets come to that place, to see what a filmmaker will do with that place.

WESCHLER

And how did the mayor feel about the film?

ENGEL

Oh, incredible, because it won the Jean Vigo award. This picture knocked out every feature that year; no feature film got the Vigo award. It got the Arnaud, got, oh, about a half a dozen important French awards. So naturally it was a beautiful thing. But the important thing was that the filmmaker would come and find in this place what you poets find in the place.

WESCHLER

Did you ever show it to the people in the village and get their reaction?

ENGEL

Oh no, I had to leave. He did, and of course that was a big thing. I mean, of them even being photographed, it was a big thing. So he ended up with something very special, very special, and very, very happy. But the interesting thing about this film, it's unique. I think the film is unique, especially to us. But everywhere I went in this country they wouldn't even show it. They wouldn't even show this film in this country in art houses, 'cause they said, "Aw, that's for beatniks."

WESCHLER

Really? [laughter]

ENGEL

Yeah. Incredible, isn't it?

WESCHLER

Is it being able to get shown more now?

ENGEL

No. I show it once in a while when I have a retrospective or things like that. Otherwise, I haven't.

WESCHLER

It doesn't go out on its own.

ENGEL

No. And yet, you know, the reaction to that has been beautiful from people. But, you take that into a commercial house which is an art house, and — So today I won't even try it. But I show it once in a while. So that's the only exposure that this might ever get. But, you see, if you work in terrain where you work with graphics, where you really have to sweat for composition and shapes, then when you pick up a live-action camera, you should be able to do wonderful things.

WESCHLER

Just naturally.

ENGEL

Because it's there: you don't have to draw, you don't have to design it. So it's a nice thing, especially on something like that where tons of textures, the beautiful textures, the old people and the young kids, the other people who were there, some are working, you know. The whole place is about that big. I had to do a tremendous amount of improvising with those steps, because that's what you get out of the place when you get there. You're always walking up steps, between walls that are this wide. So I wanted to capture that, and the only way I could was to take the steps and put them together, you know — maybe they're that long — put it under the animation camera and shoot it with the animation camera with the movements, you see. But I had to improvise all those ideas because the whole place was nothing. There was very little to it, except two old people who were very interesting. But I don't like to do that with old people, because I don't like to trespass on their property, which is their body. I don't like to do that. But just a couple of shots, the hands. But I resent it when people make pictures going into old people's homes and stuff like that. I resent that: they have no right to do that, just because they're old and they don't know what to say about it. I think it's nuts. That's a personal opinion, I don't think it's fair to trespass like that. But just a few shots.

WESCHLER

Well, I think that does it for today. We'll talk some more about your films when we talk to you next week.

ENGEL

Yes, but I think now you have something to go with.

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (December 22, 1977)

WESCHLER

Jules, we said we'd talk today about Oskar Fischinger. On your previous interview, you mentioned some of your work at Disney, but today you might talk specifically about your relationship with Oskar Fischinger.

ENGEL

Well, it was an interesting situation working at Disney. Especially lately when I hear people talk about their experiences, people who've been there thirty or forty years — I was only there three and a half-- But they generally have the comment that you cannot work at the Disney studio without it influencing your life or leaving some imprint on your life. I used that comment recently at an Annie banquet where we honor the best talents in animation, and I did say that for me it was the same thing-- it did touch my life. And that incident was meeting Oskar Fischinger at the Disney studio. At that time I was already beginning to do very small, pure abstract paintings, nonobjective paintings — it would classify today as a hard- edge, geometrical painting. But because of the circum- stances at the place, I had to hide the material, because there was absolutely no simpatico at the Disney studio for such art. And then I heard that Oskar Fischinger was working there on *Fantasia*, he was working on the Bach Toccata and Fugue. I heard about him from reputation. So we met, and for the first time I had found somebody at the Disney studio that was simpatico to my work.

WESCHLER

How did you meet? Can you describe it?

ENGEL

I met him during a lunch session in the foyer at the Disney studio. I knew what he looked like, and I just walked up to him and introduced myself. He was a

chubby--almost, not quite, not as heavy, but almost a little bit like an [Alfred] Hitchcock type of a body, a pink and white face, totally bald — a shiny, pink, bald head and a tiny nose--and always wore a black suit or a dark blue-black shirt, and always wore a hat, a black hat. It sounds ominous now, I guess, but it wasn't ominous, because his whole appearance was always very casual, and it was almost a natural kind of presence. What struck me immediately about Oskar was that he was very gentle, very gentle in his way of speaking. And a little confused-- because I think of the environment that he was in at Disney. In fact, I always remember him saying, "This is a strange place; there are no artists in this studio, only cartoonists." That was, of course, the problem, that he had no relation with anyone because they didn't understand him and he disliked their cute and very banal approach to graphics or art.

WESCHLER

How actually did they feel about him? Did they think he was a quack off in his corner, or--?

ENGEL

I think, if I would sum up the environment, they would think he was a quack or a weirdy or something very strange. I'll explain it in a little more detail when it comes to me, because then I think I can make more of a point. But the problem, of course, also was that Oskar had a very difficult time with the language at that time, a very difficult time. The man who was the head of the department, or let's say that section of *Fantasia*, the Bach Toccata and Fugue, was a Japanese man; and although he spoke well, I think that was a little with the language. And Oskar had a total problem. Also, Oskar 's concepts and ideas were so far out from their ideas that there was absolutely no relationship, no *simpatico* at all for him. So after so many months--I think he stayed there six months-- he came to me and quit. He told me he will leave the place because he just doesn't find anything to his liking. But, of course, he did not find the place artistically stimulating, there's nothing of that sort in the environment. But to me he was very nice, very good. He looked at my work, he encouraged me. In fact, he was the first person who had seen anything of mine and had a good word to say, almost to the point where he introduced me to a very important dealer from Europe whose name was Mirendorf . Mirendorf was very important, almost in the history of this country, because

he brought Braque, Picasso, and Klee material over for the first time, really, in volume to New York. So Oskar knew that Mirendorf was coming out to Los Angeles, and he immediately told me he'd pick me up. So I met Mirendorf, and I showed him my early work. What stays with me very specifically, because I had — these were small paintings about eight by ten by twelve — and on one I used air brushes. I remember Mirendorf was very taken with that texture quality of the airbrush. I at the same time was very surprised, almost to the point of being unpleasant, because everybody at the Disney studio was using airbrush for backgrounds on *Fantasia*. I thought it was incredibly commercial and phony and all that, but here was Mirendorf, who evidently had never seen texture of airbrush on painting, and he was taken with me. He remarked how interesting and unique, and of course I couldn't understand, because I disliked the airbrush (I only used it more to fill up the space, you know) . But the point is that that was Oskar, you see. He did help, he gave a hand immediately because he was so interested in that terrain of art. The other friend of Oskar, and also the right arm of Mirendorf, was Galka Scheyer. Now Galka Scheyer gave that collection of Klee and some Picasso and some Braques to the Pasadena Museum. Galka Scheyer then stayed out here in California; I don't know, really, her activities, but at least she felt this was like a new world for that. Because there was nothing like that, around here. Now remember, we're talking around 1940 to 1941. So Oskar and myself, we became very good friends, and we visited galleries together. And, oh, then I also had an exhibit, we had a three-man exhibit, Oskar Fischinger, myself, and Herb Klynn at the Clara Grossman Gallery on Hollywood Boulevard right across from the Egyptian movie house. It was a tiny little place in the back there, and that was Clara Grossman, the first really true avant-garde kind of a gallery.

WESCHLER

Who was she?

ENGEL

Clara Grossman owned the gallery; she ran the gallery; that was her gallery.

WESCHLER

Do you know anything about her?

ENGEL

She was there for years, and she'd run films. She had films showing in the evenings of very avant-garde filmmaking, and she had everything that you'd consider today new, in the world of painting, in the world of filmmaking. That was a kind of a hub. Imagine that: on Hollywood Boulevard, across from the Egyptian.

WESCHLER

Was Clara Grossman independently wealthy?

ENGEL

I don't know if she was independently wealthy. I don't think she was independently wealthy, because I think she also lived in a portion of the gallery somewhere. I think she had to go somewhere to take baths. There was no bathroom there, you know. I ran into her lately — I think four or five years ago — I ran into her in New York; she was well. But she would be very important if ever it comes to dig really in depth into Los Angeles art. Because she was on the scene and showed everything that was new in art work. So that's where Fischinger, myself and Herb Klynn had a three-man exhibit. After that I was with Oskar a great deal, and I used to go over to his house. I could never understand how he could work with about four flaming redheads crawling all over the place, over him, under him, on the table — and there was Oskar just sitting around and doing his work or talking to me. Nothing got to him. I was nervous and fidgety, but it didn't bother Oskar: he just went on as if there was nothing happening. And at that time he was showing me all kinds of ideas — two paintings, for instance, with a point, a circle on the one, a circle on the other, and if you stood in the middle of the painting back about fifteen or twenty feet, then the images would merge into one image. Oskar was an incredible innovator of that world, but he never flaunted his knowledge; he almost kept it back, unless he knew you well and knew that you were on the same world of painting that he was involved in.

WESCHLER

During this period, was he mainly doing painting rather than film?

ENGEL

At that time he was still working on film, but at the same time he was now getting into painting. In fact, I would say he's one of the few filmmakers where things went in the reverse. Generally it is a painter who turns into a filmmaker, when you look at [Norman] McLaren, Jordan Belson, Robert Breer or myself who are coming from the world of painters into film. With Oskar Fischinger, it was in reverse: he became a painter, and I would say the last ten years of his life or so, he did nothing but painting.

WESCHLER

Was that out of despair about filmmaking and how he couldn't get his films shown?

ENGEL

I think it probably was out of despair, because I have a feeling that Oskar was in the wrong environment. I think Los Angeles was very wrong for Oskar. He came because Paramount [studios] brought him; Orson Welles had contact with him. But I think Oskar should have been in New York, because he would have been appreciated, and I think a lot of good things would have happened. So out of despair, I think, he became a painter. But he would have become a painter anyway, because he loved painting, and I really think he did very fine work. I think he was really one of the early and the first optical painters, although not specifically that he wanted to do optical printing, but some of it would fall into that category, and he did it quite early. I would say maybe the work was a little uneven, but he was innovative enough, still, that he was there, he was there very, very early. So he became a painter, and that is the way Oskar 's life came to an end. But I also feel that he almost died with a broken heart, because of the loneliness that this city never recognized [him] or never gave him any accolades. In fact, in the last five or eight years, Oskar is really coming into his own, worldwide; they have big exhibits of his films and of his art all over the world, and Los Angeles still hasn't given this man a truly first-class exhibit, both of painting and of his films.

WESCHLER

Isn't that unusual, because L.A. has begun to have more interest in art, in other areas, and in animation also, at Cal Arts, for example? ENGEL : Yes, but you have to think about in the fifties. There wasn't much in this city that was

really much simpatico with that kind of work. Okay, you did it, like he did it, but there was no audience, and he was still looked on as a weirdy. If he walked into any of the animation studios, they would have absolutely no use for this man's talent. And so you have to tie him up with something what's happening today, you know, when a painter makes films, a filmmaker paints, and the whole scene is different. But we're back twenty years, and nothing, nothing happened then.

WESCHLER

Do you think he will be rediscovered in Los Angeles, in the near future?

ENGEL

Well, I think Los Angeles should do something for him. Now, I understand Filmex 78 will have a show. But I remember I tried very hard at some of the museums — I'm going back again fifteen years when I was promoting for him for an exhibit and film showing — and I couldn't get to first base anyplace in this city, just couldn't do a damn thing for Oskar.

WESCHLER

Was animation looked down upon by museums at that time? Was that a problem also, that it fell between and betwixt art and film?

ENGEL

Yeah, I think animation was looked down on as a medium of expression. But of course here we're dealing with abstract film which, even animated or not animated, is still an extension of painting. We're dealing with a painting in motion. I think today it's a little more understood than at that time, you see. But to go back to Disney, for a moment, and explain the situation why Oskar had such a difficult time at Disney, because I had the same problem at that time. I mean the word abstract was a word I couldn't use in a story session. Often my work was hidden before they came into the room, because the way I used color and figures was not really a conventional approach. So this is the only way I can tell you what the environment was at the place. And that environment really hasn't changed. It's the same today. It's the same in all the studios. You'll probably find one or two maybe in each studio that has a

different head; but most of the talent there is all in the groove of the Disney approach, or a Donald Duck, or of Road Runner. That's the terrain of the head.

WESCHLER

Do you think there are more people who are kind of like you today, in other words, who are interested in abstract things but for business reasons have to keep it to themselves while they're working in those studios? Or do you think it really is a case where the animators and the studios just don't relate to--?

ENGEL

No, it's nothing to do with business, because if you do this work, you do it for yourself, on your own time. But animators, I would say about 99 and a half per cent absolutely have no use for anything except what happens in a strictly animated cartoon. They have no eye or desire to experience anything else. It was true yesterday, and it is the same today. They still look at you as a weirdy; the whole environment is absolutely, totally anti-art.

WESCHLER

Why do you suppose that is? What kind of person goes into animation that that becomes the case?

ENGEL

Well, sometime back the person who came to that field was mostly a very, very poor cartoonist, typically a cartoonist who is just that and doesn't like anything else. Today you have better talents coming into the field, much better talents, but they're still a talent who would prefer calendar art to anything else. And the heads of the studios are even worse than that. They have absolutely no use for anything except a very trivial kind of calendar art. It's the character of these people: they gag people, they deal with gags. There's nothing wrong with that, because you could still have another part to you, but they just don't have it. And it's still the same today.

WESCHLER

Do you think it will change?

ENGEL

Oh, I don't think so. I really don't think so, because it hasn't changed the last thirty-five years, so it would have a difficult time. I've met a lot of new people who are coming into that field, and they haven't changed. We'll get more into that later.

WESCHLER

Some other questions about Oskar Fischinger: What became of his paintings after he died?

ENGEL

Oh, his paintings are in the hands of his wife, Elfriede. Elfriede has all that material. She has a very large collection of paintings. I would say she has about a couple of hundred paintings in the house. So it's all there; it's all there for somebody to discover it.

WESCHLER

Well, maybe somebody reading this will go looking.

ENGEL

Yeah. And it's interesting, because he should be exhibited. Very few people know about him, and the only person outside of myself, who has written about Oskar is his biographer. Dr. Bill Moritz. Almost everything that is written about Fischinger today is written by Dr. Bill Moritz. So that's the only outlet that Fischinger has to this world today, unless maybe a few words from me.

WESCHLER

[laughter] Well, do you have anything else you want to say about him? Maybe we can go on. We were talking a minute ago about the people entering animation today. I wanted to spend some time with you today and talk about your own activities as teacher and some of your senses of some of your students. You might first begin by talking about the world you live in at Cal Arts, what your day-to-day teaching activity is at Cal Arts.

ENGEL

Well, California Institute of the Arts is a unique place because it combines all the arts; it combines theater, dancing, music, filmmaking, design, some terrain of architectural design; it also includes, of course, photography, So it combines

all the arts, and it functions more as a large atelier than anything with school. It doesn't relate to what you call classrooms; it relates only to the activity of each artist. There are huge rooms where the dancers are rehearsing, a big stage for the actors performing, beautiful ateliers for the painters where they are painting, and very fine equipment for the filmmakers, both the live-action filmmakers and for animation. For the animation we have the very best Oxberry camera and an optical printer. But by having all the arts now for the first time the talent that comes into animation in my room have a chance to see all the other arts function. So the exposure is there. But I do think that today the talent that comes into animation are much more aware of the arts. Maybe it's just my area — I don't know if this would be true for the studio when a fellow walks in there — but in my terrain, when they come to me, they are very aware of all the other arts. Now, I'm involved at the school with what I call "film graphics and experimental animation," but that takes in everything, and character animation also, but not in a style of what you call a "Disney approach." Here the character animator works on a style that he or she devised. Let's say, it's a more sophisticated approach, more like a Bengelman or a Steich or the Frenchman like Sine would work. So the character animation is not the tradition, but it's completely against tradition. Then I have the others where you have the painter working in a medium; and now the work becomes an extension of the painter, because he wants to work with movement. Then I would have dance students. Kathy Rose, for instance, was a dance student before, and her interest came from the dance world. But they're all interested in film and what they can put on film, but not in the way that people have been conditioned when you mention animation.

WESCHLER

Some general questions about the program before we get into specific students or specific stories: First of all, just generally, how large is it? Are you the only professor in it, or are there other professors?

ENGEL

No, in my terrain I am the only one. I do have one person come in on Mondays for one day [Jack Hannah] . He will work with the talents that are more apt to be involved with character animation, again because his background would help them. But I'm the only one, and I have forty- five full-time students with

me, and my approach is to work with them as one to one. I don't have classes, but I do have seven-days-a-week and twenty-four-hours-a-day open studio, because the best experience is doing this work. You can have all the theory, all the logic, all the dialogue, but if you don't get to that board and you don't really do it, nothing happens. I mentioned earlier that the talent today that come to me are different. I used to refer to the studios as drawing-board-oriented, but these people are not really drawing-board-oriented. They come in and they ask you if you have Oxberry; they ask you if you have an optical printer. Now, that never happened before. No studio, no matter who the talent was, no matter how big a talent he is as an animator, he cannot go in to a camera room and shoot anything. These people almost start at the other end: They know the camera inside out and upside down; they know what it gives them and what they don't have to do because the camera will do it for them. So the type of talent that comes in, you see, it's different. Some might never get to the drawing board because they work under the camera, you see: Whatever they do, it's under the camera, not necessarily at the drawing board. Also, these people are not afraid to say, "I am going to see Martha Graham tomorrow," or "I'm going to see Merce Cunningham." They talk about it. Years ago if I said that I went to see Martha Graham at the studios, they would have said, "What the hell is that?" So this is a large change in the character of these talents that I have. Also, what's important here, these are not necessarily the people that fit into small grooves; I know one very fine talent of mine who said, "I don't want to be known as an animator; I want to be known as a filmmaker." I used that word filmmaker some time ago at a studio, and I remember when I left he asked another animator what Jules means, what he means by filmmaker . Because, see, I didn't categorize him as a layout man or animator or assistant animator or story man — I used the word filmmaker . That means he does the whole thing. And he didn't know what it meant, see. So these people want to be known as filmmakers. And as I say, they're not afraid to go to a dance concert and talk about it, or to go to an exhibit, or to go and hear a concert. See, years ago I would have been called an egghead, a queer, a weirdy, an intellectual snob, all that sort of thing, if I talked about that. But that's the change of the young talent today.

WESCHLER

It's also one of the wonderful things about Cal Arts, that it does give a place where people can be themselves in a way they couldn't have had a place before. Why don't you talk about some specifics?

ENGEL

Oh, that's Irene coming down the steps. [tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER

Okay. Returning to talking about Cal Arts, generally, one of the things that's interesting about Cal Arts in the context of our discussion is that it was in effect founded by Disney. In particular, I suspect Disney interests on the board of trustees and so forth were particularly interested in generating an animation department that would have fit what they thought was animation. Have you had static from Disney interests on the kind of animation that does take place at Cal Arts?

ENGEL

When the Disney [people] put the money up, they had two men, Robert Corrigan and Herb Blau, and they had the total rights to choose, pick, and do as they damn well pleased to put the staff of Cal Arts together. Now, when I was hired, I was recommended by Anais Nin. In fact, she took me over to Herb Blau and introduced me to Herb Blau as a possible talent for the film department. Herb was very nice, and they saw the films I had; and then Sandy [Alexander] MacKendrick who was then already there picked as the dean for the film school saw my film; and they said, "Okay." What they were looking for at that time was a person who had a larger experience than just an animator. My experience was because I came to them as a painter who had been exhibiting, a sculptor, a printmaker, a designer, a graphic designer, and I had films both in live-action and animation, plus all the years of experience I had at the studios, and also a quality of taste that they saw in the work. So on that terrain they hired me. Now the Disney people accepted, but they anticipated an animation studio that would furnish them with new talents. However, that was not in my head to do that, nor in the head of Herb Blau or of Corrigan at that time. So problems came big and heavy from other talents from the industry who all of a sudden looked upon us and said, "What the hell is he doing in a job like that?" And of course then came the bigger explosion from

the Disney studio. I had big meetings with them: they had me at the other end of the table, and they were discussing my presence and what I do with the talent and how I prepare them for the Disney needs.

WESCHLER

Who is the they in this situation?

ENGEL

Well, at one time I had at the table Frank Thomas, Ward Kimball, Mark Davis, Milt Milcall, Willie Ryderman, and some people I don't remember, oh, Layat from Story. The questions came at me like arrows, and I had to answer them. And then other people — I don't want to mention names-- from the industry in town were almost jealous that I had that job. But they didn't understand what the thinking of the school was, the philosophy. What happened, and what changed the whole situation, was that after the second year, while the school was in motion and everything was still rumbling, I was beginning to produce or get product or films from the talent, from my talent, that gave us, immediately, international recognition. And by the third year we were sweeping every award that there was, student awards all over the world. In fact, I would say that by the end of the year we established the Cal Arts animation-film graphics department as the most important new unit that was producing films of this caliber and of this consequence. When that happened — and it happened big and fast — well, all of a sudden the Disney people said, "Well, wait a minute. The only person who's getting recognition for Cal Arts is Jules Engel!" I mean, I was all over the paper pages, newspapers, all over. I was getting Cal Arts incredible presence. No one [else] was doing that. So that slowed them down, and they came to a conclusion, finally, which happened two years ago, that they're going to leave me alone and they're going to set up a unit — completely separate from Cal Arts practically, although it's in the building — sponsored by Disney (again, Disney money aside from the original budget) ; and they now have what I call a trade school to fit their need. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER

You were just talking about how they have a trade school of their own now.

ENGEL

I consider it a trade school because there it's something where they teach the talent-- No, no, I think this time I'm gonna use the word student. They teach the student how to do. Now, when you teach a student how to do things, it becomes a how- to-do school. That also means that the student never has a chance to reveal him- self because he's already following in the footsteps of whatever the father, grandfather, or the grandmother did well- In other words, they are being fed printed, digested, worked-over kind of material. But it suits their needs, and they're happy because now Cal Arts has a place where they can train for their need. Meanwhile, they give me complete freedom because my talents are now really known for this department, and they come in to me from all over the world.

WESCHLER

Do any of the students from the trade school — what we'll call "the trade school" — migrate over to your program?

ENGEL

Now, that's very interesting, because that happens. In fact, this year I think I have five of them coming over into my program; they're quitting the Disney program. That only happened to me once, when one of my students — he was so unhappy with me because he said, "Everybody's an artist around here and everybody has ideas." It didn't fit his personality. He was a student: he wanted to be put in the first or second or third row, and you had to tell him, "We're going to do this today and we're going to do that tomorrow." Also, some of these people are so taken with the environment like a Disney environment or a Warner Brothers or a Paramount that they want to be part of that so they can say, "Yeah, I belong." So I had one in eight years that I actually recommended to move over.

WESCHLER

Do you work in concert with the people in the trade school? Are you friends with the people who are teaching there? Or are they completely separate?

ENGEL

As far as myself is concerned, I am friends, we are friends. But the students there, they really separate themselves. Also there is this feeling of "They don't

know what the hell we're doing"; and again, "This is art or something; it doesn't take any talent" — as they would refer to it. It's again that same head that is in the studios; they are already what I call anti-art. They're already that, and they all seem to be cut out of little square boxes. They almost look like students; they behave like students. Whereas my talents, they are more individual; they are more each on his own or her own. They're more outgoing, and they are more the heads. You see, I have forty-five students: that's forty-five heads. Each head is different. The Disney people have fifty of them, but it's one head, one head, because what you tell this one, it goes into all the others. I cannot do that, because my talents wouldn't allow that. Each one is so different that I have to know each person individually, know where they're going, where they want to go, know where they're at. That's another thing: to know where the talent is, where he's at, and work with that. Don't push him, don't shove him, but go with that as his or her rhythm will allow. Because different people have different needs, they have different rhythms, they have different desires, and you can't put them in a box. So I gotta know each person from the very beginning, know what they're doing. And also I let them play. I think they should play. Especially if they're gonna be there four years, the first year I almost let them loose. That is, let's say, there is basic instruction, but even if a talent doesn't pay attention to it and wants to do something else, I let him do something else, because I think that aspect of just playing and finding out and having fun, having kind of joy, I think it's very important, it's very healthy. And besides, what's the rush? I mean, where are you going? Your lifespan is twenty-five years longer today than it was thirty or forty years ago, so you're going to get there anyway, you know. So I believe in this playing and not restricting the beginner.

WESCHLER

Speaking generally, then what happens after the first year of playing?

ENGEL

Generally, by that time I also begin to really see what's in this person, 'cause I have a lot of dialogue with each person. So then I begin to, let's say, push a little harder, or now I begin to set up a direction, because now I'm beginning to find out. But also, it's possible that after that year that person will say, "It's not for me," which happens, because a person finds now that it's much more

difficult, it's much more tedious, it takes a lot more than he realized animation is all about. So, let the person find out. It's important for me to find out that this person either means business or after a year he finds out "It's not for me" — and that's also natural. I also point this out to them at the beginning: "If you don't feel like continuing this medium, that's perfectly all right with me. Don't feel unpleasant about it. Just let me know when you're ready." But then you have the other talent who comes in, and he and she just starts from the first day. Then, of course, you have the painters with their art background. We have, again, a talk. I might give them some very basic introduction to animation, very basic. But then the minute he has that, he already wants to move. I say, "Move. Move, and when you need help, holler."

WESCHLER

Do you get more rigorous at any point down the line, the second and third year?

ENGEL

No, no, I never get that way unless I find that a talent or this person is really just there because he has no other place to go or he finds it a pleasant environment. Then I might get very heavy. But I don't find that, because these people who are coming there, they're already coming there because they want to do something. But once the person is on a project, because he or she wants to do this, then I get a little behind it in a way of, "Okay, let's do it" — in other words, "let's not stop in the middle; now we're going to go through with this." It happened last year with one fellow: he told me at the end of the year, he says, "Jules, if it wasn't for you, I would have never finished the project." Because I almost embarrassed him to the point that he finished the product more for me than for himself. Now, this is just my way of doing things .

WESCHLER

How do you embarrass someone?

ENGEL

Well, by, "Ooh, Bob! How are you doing? How are you doing? Hey, are we going to see anything next week, huh? We should see something by the week later; oh, there's no question that we should see something by then. Okay,

next Wednesday? Okay." So comes next Wednesday, he either comes in or [he says,] "I'm not quite ready but by Friday I am ready." But by this time I also know his character, I know his personality, I know that he will work that way. I don't care how he works, but I want to see that thing finished. So then he said he was so happy that he finished this piece, and he knew he finished it because I would stop him in the hall — never heavy, just easy, you know, almost jovial. He was happy because he'd finished the work; he was happy because he finished it. I think this is the only thing that is important: Don't let them get into the habit of not finishing, because even if it's not well done, it's completed — and by completed, he had to go through certain phases, he learned. So you learn during the process. It isn't where I would tell them all about things, how to do this. No, no, you just go into it and when you get to the point where you don't know what to do, then you ask. When you ask then, you'll never forget it, you never forget it, you see. But again — You see, there is Dennis Pies. Now, he was a painter, and he did four films in two years, and he has international reputation. Dennis Pies has international reputation: he just won first prize at Cing e Kreek; he is in [Robert Russett and Cecile Starr's] *Experimental Animation*, the book. You see, again, I knew him, and I knew that I don't have to push with Dennis. He would disappear for a month or six weeks--well, I'd see him in the halls--but then he'd say, "Jules, I have something to show you." So he'll show me, we go over that stuff. I might make recommendation, let's say, it's too long, it's too short, add to it, go on, build on with this, this is a good point, make it important, make this the heart of the film. Then he disappears for another six weeks; and then he comes back. And I say, "Now let's look at it." But then I know him: I don't have to worry about him. I keep an eye on everybody, and I know where they're at. And I work with them where they're at.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (December 22, 1977)

WESCHLER

A couple of questions just generally about the environment there: Do the students work with each other as well?

ENGEL

The students will work with each other from a point of view of helping the other one out in a certain area, but not necessarily where they would be working two or three on one film. Almost all my talents are one-man/one-film. But he might need somebody to help him in camera so he can go maybe a little faster, and then the person will come in. Let's say he does something on cell work that needs to be painted; he'll ask people to help. I create a very good ambience in the room: they are all friends, they help each other. There is absolutely no competition, that "I make better films than you do," or "What is this thing that you're doing, that's weird!" — no such thing. I make them understand.

WESCHLER

How do you do that? Because that does become a problem in other schools where students become competitive.

ENGEL

I have absolutely never had that problem, but never. And this is going into the eighth year. I have now about forty-five people; and some come in during the year, so they're new; and they sometimes don't even speak the language as well as the other because one chap is from Belgium, and another one from Persia, from Yugoslavia. But these things I can't really answer. It's just maybe the way I am put together. But there's absolutely no problem, no competition, and they're incredibly helpful to each other. Sometimes a talent is so good, for instance, on something that's mechanical, or technical, really technical, a camera. You notice very soon that this person's very good at that. So I just send Bob to Jane: I say, "Ask her, 'cause she knows a hell of a lot about this." I make them know each other; it's very important that they get to know each other. I would say, "Ask John Armstrong; he's very good at that stuff." So you see, now this stranger goes to John Armstrong, and the next thing they're sitting there talking and they know each other. I make sure that it's mixed well, and the best way to make them mix well is by knowing that the other person knows things that he'll need, and even I would recommend him or her. Now they depend on each other, immediately. Also, when dailies come in, I always call in every- body: "We got a piece of work from Niki Kaftan, dailies; come and look at it." They come in, look, but I don't ask for them to be critical. That I don't ask, because if they want to talk to each other when I'm not there

on that level, it's okay. I don't want it to happen in front of me, because I don't want to contradict people in the group. So when I see a piece of new dailies, then I generally say, "Okay, Niki, you wait." Everybody clears, and now what I have to say about her film, I'll say it to her, and then I can be, let's say, as critical as I want to be. But I would never do that in front of other students, never. The only thing I do in front of other students is praise one—that I'll do. But I will never be critical in front of another student.

WESCHLER

How critical are you directly to a person's face?

ENGEL

I can be very critical but not to the point where — In other words, this is a very sensitive area. You have to be very aware that you have a lot more experience than this chap has, or this young girl has, a lot more. So it's very important — for instance, when she or he comes to you and says, "I have a great idea, it's terrific," and naturally this idea you've done twenty years ago — it's very important for you not to say that you did this. That's critical. Don't say, "I did this twenty years ago," or, "Oh I had an idea like that but I didn't finish it." No, you say, "That's great, go ahead." You also have to stop at a certain phase of being critical because there's nothing wrong sometimes for a very young talent to fall down. If she or he insists, I say, "Okay, you go ahead." Because I'd rather have that person go through that experience and see it for herself — it's not working — than have me stopping her and she'll never know. And that happened many times. Now, I had a fellow there who was a painter, a very good painter, had a lot of exhibits, and he did a film. It's a very exquisite film, incredibly complicated. But there was an area in motion where two shapes are crisscrossing. He'd already gone into the work; he didn't check anything out; and it's not really — it's not good. Okay. Now, I saw the film finished — months of work. He's very happy about it, very happy about it. I don't like this part, but if I criticize him now, [then] I don't understand his feelings, I don't understand his moods, you're creating a generation gap, you see. No. The film has done extremely well for him. But some time later he showed that film to somebody, and he came to me and said, "So-and-so was commenting upon it; gee, that was a very good comment he made." I said, "Do you want me to tell you what he said?" He said, yeah. "He said to you that that particular

shape coming over across, that particular shape is not working." I said to him, "Now listen to me, if I had told you then, what would you have done?" He said, "Nothing." Now it was very honest for him to say that if I'd said to him then, "Don't do that," he would have still done that, you see. So that's where you have to understand where you stop being critical. Because if they were that good, they wouldn't be there. So the mistakes they make, frankly, they are not even mistakes, it's just a question of experience. As I said to one fellow, "You don't make mistakes. Later, when you're professional, when you're good, then you make mistakes. But now, there are no mistakes. This is all just trial and error; it's a process, and you're doing it, and that's no problem. There's no mistakes."

WESCHLER

When do you think a student — I mean, other than just say at the end of four years — when does a student graduate from you? How does a student know he's finished an education with you?

ENGEL

Well, there are several terrains there. I have to know whether he wants to get a job in a commercial studio, okay? If I know that, then I make sure, whatever he does for himself or herself, that if he walks into a studio, he can also do, let's say, what an apprentice would, a beginner, an assistant animator or an in-betweenner. So those qualities this person will know: how to sit at the desk and start as an apprentice at the studio. So he has a running start. He also knows camera better than anybody at the studio where he's gonna work, because he does all his shooting himself, he does all his negative cutting, he does A-B roll, he does everything. So he knows all that. But that doesn't mean you're going to get a job, because you have to sit at the desk and go through a certain process which is, let's say, in-betweening, or assistant animation, or animation, okay? I make sure that he can sit at the desk and do in-between, or move into assistant, which happens. They've all been working. They're doing work right now, commercial jobs on the side. And that's good. I encourage that. I encourage that a hundred percent. If you get a job, take it, because if you do a one-minute spot for a commercial studio and you do all the work, I consider that as work. Because, that's what's it's going to be all about, isn't it? So I encourage all of that. In fact, I call up and get jobs for them. And then of

course you have a few that maybe even that will be difficult for them; they might know all the techniques, they know all the mechanics, they can do everything, but they're still not going to be, really, of large consequence. Then you have the other half who do not want to go to the studios; they're not studio-oriented. They are the painters like the Dennis Pies. Now, there's Kathy Rose, an exquisite, also internationally known — like Adam Beckett is internationally known. These people are not student artists. These are talent today who are changing the terrain. She did four films in two years.

WESCHLER

Kathy Rose?

ENGEL

Kathy Rose. And again you're dealing with a talent that's not a studio talent. Yet she works with character. She puts six fingers on a hand, six! In studios you have three; she has six fingers. Now, it would have been easier for me to say to Kathy, "Maybe four; not six." But I don't do that, because this is the way she does it. She works as an open end: she starts and then she just moves on. There's no traditional approach to it, nothing. But in the process she did pick up all those other things that you should know about, you see. So again, you're dealing with this character who is not studio-oriented. She has no desire to go in a studio--she 'd rather as a secretary — but she's gonna make her films. Dennis Pies today is teaching and making films.

WESCHLER

What is Kathy Rose doing? ENGEL : Kathy Rose is finishing a film where she got an AFI [American Film Institute] grant of \$7,500; Eric Durst got an AFI grant of \$7,500. So these are not studio- oriented talent. These are almost the cream of talent because they are bringing new visions to the film medium as an art form. So this sort of thing, I got to know from the beginning, and then I go with them, where they are going. So if I know it's a studio direction, he wants a job, then I make sure that he'll know what he has to know to go in there. But that's why I say it's one-to-one, because this job doesn't end at five o'clock, you know. It's like a coach: when you work with a team of athletes, you sit on the sideline and you sweat, too. The only thing is that I never touch their work. I never touch their work. And I don't let them give me any credit. Now two

persons did in eight years: somehow they didn't hear me. They said, "Special thanks to Jules Engel," or, "Mentor, Jules Engel." I don't want them to do that, and I tell them at the very beginning of the year, because if the work is that good, they don't need no mentor's name up there, or anybody's name. It also brings the work down, you know, because I don't touch their work, I never touch it. I talk about it, I look at it, I recommend if they ask, you know, but I never touch anything. And I don't want them ever to give credit to their instructors because I think it's not fair. You don't see a painting of students in a painting school that is signed, "Joe Doe — thank you, Braque . " [laughter] You don't do that, so why should a film student give all his credits, like a kind of film board, with everybody's name on it. It destroys it; it brings it down. How do I know that this person made the film? So this is just again one of those eccentricities of mine.

WESCHLER

Let's talk about some of your students in specifics. Why don't you tell us stories about some of the more important students or yours?

ENGEL

Well, Kathy Rose. Kathy Rose came in, and she came in with a dance background, some live-action film, but primarily the films she had were predicated on more of a dance rhythm, and animation is what she wanted to do. She saw the work of Yoji Kuri, the Japanese animator, and that became her God. She worked straight ahead, in other words starting with the drawing and letting it evolve into other circumstances. I had to be very careful with her, because there was a lot there as a person, there was a lot there as an individual, and she had a weird, way-out approach to drawing. She had nothing to do with a classical approach; it was very personal, almost grotesque, but right for her. And it was consistent, it was utterly consistent. So I let her work, and I came nearer: we talked. At the very beginning, you see, that person must find confidence in you, and it's very easy at the beginning for you to destroy confidence by an attitude of you know everything and they know from nothing, while you've done everything, you know. And that's wrong. In fact, I think some of the not-to-do things are when the teacher would come up and say, "In the old days we used to do that." That's a horrible thing. Or he used to say, "When I was your age" or, "I did that years ago."

These are just a few. So anyway I had to watch her, watch not to approach her on any of these terrains. And pretty soon she began to listen and maybe make some small changes. And after five or six months went by, she said to me one day, "You know, Jules, you did something that I wouldn't even let my father do, or my brother." And that was very interesting for her to say that. She said, "No one is ever able to do that." In other words, that I make her change just a little bit and go certain ways which made her work easier without her losing an ounce of her natural talent. She said that, and I thought that was very nice for her to say that, because this is a strong person. Her father is a very fine photographer in New York and is in all the magazines; and her brother was teaching at Pratt, animation and things like that. But again, it's that touch, you know, that you have, and you know. And she turned into a beautiful filmmaker with four films, and she has won the Golden Hugo in the Chicago International. She recently was sole juror of one of the very big animation festivals. In fact she gave me a piece of paper here, and I would say that since she started, today she has won around thirty awards — thirty awards! And she's already being asked to jury animation shows. So this is one talent. And then you have a man like Dennis Pies, who came in a painter, with very refined work, very refined painting, very delicate material. I had no idea where he would go, but all of a sudden he began to show me things, because his talent to pick up an Oxberry and optical printer was so fast. He came in from Arizona, and he said to me one day, "It's marvelous, marvelous, because I see so many things that I've never seen; I didn't know such things existed!" Now, see, the exposure is very important for some of these people to see. And he again won awards immediately, and he's now teaching somewhere near San Francisco, experimental animation. So now you have a combination of a very fine painter, a very fine printmaker who now is into film, and he's changing, again, the terrain of film. Another man was Adam Beckett. Now Adam already had fan clubs two years ago with his films, already had fan clubs all over. Last couple of years he spent on *Star Wars*; he was doing special effects. He was a fanatic--not at the drawing board but more on the optical printer. The optical printer became his pencil. And he does things that are incredible things, what you see on the screen, what this man does.

WESCHLER

What was he responsible for in *Star Wars*?

ENGEL

In *Star Wars* he was hired very early to invent images or innovative ideas. Now I think they did use some of it. But he was also very unhappy, on the other hand, 'cause a lot of his image inventions were not used, because they pulled back a little bit. [George] Lucas pulled back, and it's silly, because they could have used his stuff and it would have been even bigger as far as the visual--

WESCHLER

Do you know of any in particular that were left out?

ENGEL

A lot of explosions and things that he had images for, and then they went back to regular explosions, you see. But here is a man who, really, has brought new ideas and imagery into film; I mean, he just opened up an whole world of images. He's going to be very interesting to follow, because he 's a very complicated human being. He's very unsettled with himself; he's unsettled of knowing which way to go: "Should I stay in the commercial, follow up *Star Wars*?" The other problem when you get on a picture like *Star Wars* and you see a two-hour film and all this excitement, well, all of a sudden, you with your six or ten minutes film begin to feel small, insignificant. So now you want to do something big, and that can be very destructive. So there is a fight sometimes in a person like this, of where to go, which way to move, because "I feel small." I can point out paintings by Vermeer, or Chardin, you know, I show little things — Look at Goya's etchings, I mean these are masterpieces, look at Cezanne's! But it's very difficult for them at this stage to buy that idea that it doesn't have to be an hour or two-hour film. It's also a very American experience. In Europe you can do a three- or four-minute film, and you can be a giant. But, you see, when you live in Hollywood, you're nothing, you're nothing unless you make a feature film. I think it gets to some of these people if they get into that field, if they get too close to it.

WESCHLER

Do you think that for animators, for young animators, it would be better to get out of Los Angeles?

ENGEL

Well, I think — See, the point is this, Ren. Kathy Rose is in New York; Eric Durst was in Boston, is in New York; Dennis Pies is in San Francisco; Adam Beckett is here. So I really feel that some of it has to come from you as a human being. I am there, and I can make recommendations again. I'll say, "Go to New York." But some of it has to come from them. You can't be a father. It's very important when they finish films that they should feel everything in that film is theirs. They should never feel, no matter how much you help, they should never feel that you helped or you did it, never. When that film is finished, they should have a feeling it was theirs, they did it, so that then they can break away from you. I make efforts in that respect that they should not feel that they have to rely on me or on a teacher.

WESCHLER

But just abstractly, do you think it would be better for them not to be in Los Angeles, in Hollywood?

ENGEL

I think for some, yes, it would be better. I think the best environment for them would be New York, where they have access to the museums and to concerts more than they have out here, 'cause they need that. I can only expose them to a certain amount, because the environment at Cal Arts will expose them to a certain amount, a great deal of dancing, because it takes place in the hall; and there are exhibits. Or let's say I might show films of Leger or Man Ray or Picabia. Before I show the films, I run color slides of these people. I say, "Here is Leger; now here is his paintings; now he made the *Ballet Mecanique*." I don't do it with a heavy hand. I say, "Let's look at this stuff." And they look at it. Now, what I'm doing, I'm putting this in front of them; some will go to the library and will get a book on Leger, okay? Or the other day, there was this young girl and her painting was not-- She was very young and there was nothing really gelling. I said, "Oh, you know, I have an idea: I think you would like Sonia Delaunay, because I see you have such a wonderful color terrain, and I think you'll have simpatico with her." So I go and I check the book out from the library and give it to her, a big thick book on Sonia Delaunay, and I say, "Now look at it. There's nothing wrong, you're not copying, but learn from the masters. If you're gonna learn color, you're not going to be an interior decorator, you're not going to do textiles, it's got to come from your gut. So

the best way to learn it is looking at the work of a good colorist; so that's in a Delaunay, there's Picasso, there's Braque, there's Bonnard, check these things." See what I'm doing now, I gently bring this thing. She is working on a thing and I can see already that there is a better influence, and it's natural, you know. You're not copying, it's a natural influence, and that influence is good, and you're going to come to yours later. So this is the way I bring things to them, because we don't have a Museum of Modern Art or a Whitney or a Metropolitan where you could tell them, "Hey, go over and see the Cezanne show." Wouldn't that be wonderful to see the Cezanne show? We can't go, you know. So this is another approach.

WESCHLER

All you have is the library. I didn't get a sense of Adam Beckett as a student when you were talking a while ago about him.

ENGEL

Adam Beckett was a very difficult student.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

Well, in the first place he was six foot three, weighed, I don't know, 180 pounds, had a good body, but huge, huge, big. I think he was very, let's say, selfish and not trusting. I think he had the idea of a school environment, that maybe I was going to come in with heavy hands. So my big problem was again to make him feel that I am with him and not against him. So it was so important at the beginning when he did a lot of to say, "Adam, this is good, this is good stuff; stay with it; it's good." As time went on, he relaxed with me and he was more comfortable in the environment. He's good. It's interesting, because recently we were on a panel together. In fact, I recommended for him to be on a panel. People had to talk about themselves, their background and all that, and I was the chairman. He never mentioned that he went to Cal Arts. Now, I'm at the other end of the table, and I wouldn't mention it either, because I did not want to embarrass him. See, I was so aware that he did not say Cal Arts and that's where he made his reputation from that place. He

never said that. I was aware, but I would not say it, because I realized he doesn't want to be tied to any place. He's out there, and we'll see where he goes from now. But he was one of those talents that was very difficult, because he had so much going for him, and yet he lacked a lot of taste, taste-quality. That could come later; that could happen later. So, you see, I don't want to make a big deal out of it. But he'll do things. Like he did this one thing called *Flash Flows*, which is very good--it's incredible. It's a piece of pornography, but it's one of the most well photographed films, incredible imagery that he evolves. Then he did another one that again he goes into that terrain. But it's very bad, because the damn thing is too long and stuff like that. I can tell him, "Don't do that, it's too goddamn long, it's vulgar." But I let him go because all these things that are not quite right now, he'll find out much later. All I would do now at this stage, I would just disorient our relationship and create a kind of a wedge. It's very unnecessary to create that because talent is good, and what's not there today will be there tomorrow. I only push just so far, and then I leave it alone, because it's nothing wrong to fall down. There's nothing wrong with that. It's silly when a teacher--oh I hate this word, teacher - -when a mentor begins "Don't do that, it's wrong." Forget it! Forget it. I mean, you have so much time to improve and make changes. It's not that important; the important thing is the process and the important thing is to see a continuity. Like some of these people, like Kathy Rose has a film coming back, Dennis Pies has a film back, Joyce Borenstein was another beautiful talent who has a film coming back. It means they've done it after they left; that is a good feeling, that's nice. Because the others will disappear into the bowels of the industry: you're never going to hear of them. But at least we were able to put them on their feet. A lot of them have nice jobs. A lot of them never thought they could do anything, but they're working, that's an accomplishment.

WESCHLER

Are there any other particular students who you'd like to mention? You mentioned Eric Durst?

ENGEL

Eric Durst, I mentioned, and Joyce Borenstein, who is a beautiful student, a young girl, and oh, Paul DeMeier from Belgium, who won the Academy Award,

the \$1,000 grant from the Academy. Mark Kirkland, the year before won the \$1,000 Academy award. Niki Kaftan, a beautiful talent. Rick Blanchard, a very fine talent who's up in San Francisco, going to have a show up at Pacific [Film] Archives. These few at the moment come up. Oh! John Armstrong. Here is an interesting situation: John Armstrong comes in with a piece of Barbie doll, a Barbie doll with a Texas hat on. Well, I accepted him, but I said, "Jesus, what's going to happen here?" But sometimes I take these chances. I have to, you know. So he came in with that. He was a very quiet fellow, and he's working around, and pretty soon I see him lying, putting paper all over the floor on one end of the room ('cause I have a huge room). He's taking paint and squeegee-ing it onto the cells like that, and he's doing all kinds of stuff like that. He did a beautiful film, first film. So I said to him after a couple of months, I said, "John, I don't understand you. You came in with a Barbie doll; what are you doing, Jackson Pollock? How come?" He said, "Jules, I've never been exposed to anything like this in all my life." Contemporary art, he's never seen anything, nothing. The guy is incredible; he's been doing beautiful stuff. But this new material he's working on, it should be just magic. He has a wonderful head for technical, for camera, he knows more about camera than anybody else (again, I say, "Go to John Armstrong; he can help you") . His simple answer was, "I have never been exposed to anything like this." See how important that is, the exposure. So I took him on with Barbie dolls, and he's turning out to be something very, very special. This is again that terrain that you have to sometimes go beyond just what you see in a portfolio.

WESCHLER

How do you accept people or reject them? Do they apply? How many people apply in ratio to how many are finally accepted?

ENGEL

I don't know. I think I had something like eighty applying, and I accepted maybe twenty, twenty-five. Now, it's possible — There was a fellow, Steve Holland, who's a cartoonist, eighteen years old. He sent his stuff in, and I didn't like it: there was nothing there. But then I got a letter from him this long, and he's writing and drawing cartoons all over the damned place, [claps his hands] and then he writes another one. I say, if a fellow wants it that badly, I got to accept him. So I sent a note to him, you know, and oh God his parents

are happy. He's eighteen years old; he's a cartoonist, literally. He's a talented cartoonist; it's natural; you can't learn cartooning; it's either there or it's not there. I'm not a cartoonist; I couldn't do it. Nice fellow: turned out to be a beautiful human being, good guy, and he's doing nice work. He's going to be very good. There's no question that in the industry he'll be very good. And you see, by exposing him to all the other things — yet he's working on his own terrain where I want him to stay — his sensibilities, his head, everything, is getting better. Whatever he does, it will be better, because of the exposure. But the important thing is he's a good person, a lovely person. We needed a caricature of the president [of the Institute] . I got him a photo. He did one, and I didn't quite like it; then he makes another one, no problem. He took it upstairs, and they saw it upstairs — the president, secretary and all that — and they didn't like it: it doesn't look like [Robert] Fitzpatrick. They give him another photo. He goes down, he does another drawing. This time it was beautiful. He went back three times, did the whole damn thing over, and now the portrait drawing and the caricature was perfect. Now, you see, this is helping him. He didn't say, "No," or "Don't tell me, this is good." But now you've helped him, because on several levels it came back to him. He was able to go back and he changed it every time. That's very important.

WESCHLER

In general, what are the criteria that you use in accepting people?

ENGEL

Well, when they apply, if the drawings are there, that's already it. If they send the film, that's already it. If it's photograph and I like the photograph — Like Jody Meier has photographs that she sent, good photographs that deal with dancers, but a very unique kind of photography, not just a photo. I like the quality of the thinking, so I accept that. If sometimes a person wants to talk to me, and there's nothing but "I want to do animation"-- If I talk to that person and it's a question of the dialogue and I get something from that person, I'll accept that person. I accepted Darla Sal, who was twenty-seven years old — he was already a full doctor and he was a film buff. He wants to make animated films, but he's already in live- action: he's gonna do a live-action film which he'll do at the hospital. He sent in something; it wasn't much, but I said to myself, he's twenty-seven, he 's a doctor already; and I talked to him (he

had experience, he went to Yale drama school or something); so I accepted him. And yet it isn't a question of drawing, 'cause he doesn't really draw. But he did a film using a figure out of that white stuff, white foam, a ball in a womb and a child comes out of that, begins to walk. You should see that walk, the way it moves, because he knows the body: it stands up, starts to walk and becomes a dancer, and then from a dancer he gets older and older, old age, crumpled, and back into this ball. I'm telling you, he's never touched a piece of film, he's never touched anything! If I show it to you, you won't believe it. Now you see, I say if a person like that wants to do it, why not? I got a room, I have a big enough room. He's a doctor, you know; he can pitch in at the school; he helped kids with their health, you know. He was practically on call. [laughter] A nice person, Darla Sal. I accepted him. So, see, I do that. That's me, you see. Another person would turn a lot of these people down, and that would be a mistake, because there's a lot of wonderful things there which doesn't quite show. 'Cause I had that experience in the professional field: At UPA, I needed somebody to do background, and I hired a girl whose portfolio was nowhere near as good as a lot of the others. But she had a kind of a something. She not only became one of the best back- ground artists: she is today one of the best layout artists, the best story artists. She's terrific. So, you see, I didn't hire her on the portfolio, 'cause on the portfolio I would not hire her. It was simply I'm talking to her and there's something that takes place.

WESCHLER

One of the common criticisms that's made of Cal Arts is that it's an elitist school in terms of the finances and the people who can afford to go there. Are there scholarships available?

ENGEL

Oh, there are a lot of scholarships, oh yes, there are scholarships all over. Of course, some of the people can afford, like they would go to any other school if they can afford. But there are a lot of scholarships.

WESCHLER

You've never had to reject someone who otherwise you would have wanted to accept?

ENGEL

No, But it's easier for me. If I see somebody — About four years ago there was a storyboard I saw, the cartoony kind; and I saw that the chap was about eighteen years old. I thought, "Eighteen years old — that's incredible, this is wonderful stuff!" All the scholarships were gone, so I saw Bill Lund — I think Bill Lund was the president then, that was that rough time — I got to him and I told him that this chap is eighteen years old, that's an incredible storyboard. He went out, and he got money from a friend of his or somebody. The fellow came in--now I never met the guy — turned out to be a black boy, six-foot-two, you know. And he's working now — I think he's working at Hanna Barbera [Productions]. But I didn't know who he was, I got him a scholarship, and so that's it. I have not had any bad incidents. The only bad incident is when somebody comes in and really after a year or so nothing happens, and then they go out with their portfolio to studios and say, "I'm a Cal Arts student," and it's dreadful. I mean, that's the bad part of it, because it happens, and it can give you a very bad reputation. They say, "What the hell are they doing?" But luckily I had some wonderful people going in the same direction a year later, I mean such talents that they just drooled over them, so that they realized that this guy was, you know —

WESCHLER

Was the exception.

ENGEL

Was something very, very weird. I'd accepted him, but after a while I realized that the film that he showed me was not his, wasn't his film. Because when he had to do what I call in-betweening, which is the simplest thing, and I saw the drawings, I said, "No, if he can't do that, then the film I saw wasn't his." You know, as simple as that. So that happens.

WESCHLER

One other thing that's been really interesting to me in terms of just looking at lists of your students is the number of women.

ENGEL

Oh! That's good; that's a good question.

WESCHLER

Were there many women in animation at first, and has that changed?

ENGEL

What's happening — that's a good question — what's happening in animation is that the girls are discovering animation. Let's say twenty-five years ago, it would have been impossible to find maybe two girls in the industry. But they are discovering animation as a medium for themselves. So when I mention like Kathy Rose and Joyce Borenstein, Elizabeth Bechtold, right now like Niki Kaftan and Jane Kirkwood — I'm trying to think of one name that's very good, she's been working with Bakshi--

WESCHLER

We can fill that in later on.

ENGEL

And Elizabeth — there's another Elizabeth — and Karen, there's Ellen right now. There are I would say about a good forty to forty-five percent girls coming in. The medium is being discovered by them. In other words, all they need is a little table at home and they can make films on their own and they don't need anybody to help them. In fact, one of the best talents today, I think, in America is Caroline Leaf from Boston; she did three films at the [National] Film Board [of Canada] ; one is called *The Street*, the latest is Kafka's *Metamorphosis [of Mr. Samsa]* . I think she's probably the most important talent in the field of the narrative filmmaking, and the best credit is what you see up there, these two films, beautiful. It is something, I think, that they can work at it and walk away from it. You know, a man has a problem, because a man's job is almost always in a straight line: You go to work in the morning, you come home and sit down. But a woman, you know, is busy; she has the housework, she has to go out, she has to answer the phone, she has to pick up the children. You see how many little things she is involved in; meanwhile, she can sit at the animation board. But you, as a man, would find it very difficult, because you're much more oriented to a routine which is straight. Now, that might be a silly approach, but I think there's something in it. So that they can work at home, or anyplace, and don't need a studio. You can have a little set-up that you can fold like a book, [claps hands] you can fold it, open it. But also I think they have more patience, in a way, and they're not

so much interested as I find in getting to studios. It's more as something that they want to do . It's not always, "I want to be a big animator." It's something they just want to do. And they're incredibly dedicated to the medium, to the art.

WESCHLER

You seem to work well with them. You're very encouraging.

ENGEL

Oh yes, yes, because I think it's very important, because they bring a whole new terrain or experience into the medium, it's just another texture, it's another world. Oh, Brenda Benkes! I must mention that name, because she's been working with Bakshi, and she does a lot of — She's a freelance animator and a beautiful talent, beautiful. But she works more in the classical approach to animation, fluid, very fluid movement in her drawings, I was going to mention it earlier. But this whole new world, the women, are coming into the medium.

WESCHLER

Are they encountering resistances? Are the studios still relatively sexist?

ENGEL

I think they still are because this whole industry is so male-oriented. But then you have Tisa David in New York who — She did all the animation for John Hubley's films, so that's a real breakthrough, because she actually did all the animation back there. I think once they make the scene — they have to put themselves on the scene maybe a little more than a man — the studio will hire them. We always had very good talent in the field, but they were always either in storyboarding or character designing. So you had women in that field, but not so much in animation and not so much as a total filmmaker as they are now turning out to be total filmmakers. It's interesting, because for the male members of the industry, sometimes it's very difficult to take that, because they're still just animators but here's Kathy Rose, and she's a total filmmaker. She can show you half a dozen of her films, you know, and there's the whole damn thing. But I do encourage that aspect of it. Also it makes it much more interesting, much more interesting. And this year I have several very strong

talents, girls. But it's a difficult thing. Animation is physically very difficult if you really have to bear down on it eight to ten hours a day. It takes a lot out of you physically.

WESCHLER

One last question, because we're coming to the end of the tape, the end of our session today. We've talked a lot about you as a teacher: How are you as a learner from your students? Do you find your students —

ENGEL

Oh, really, I don't see that. The only thing I see that — I work continuously, as I always do. In other words, I work on my painting, I do my lithography, and I work on my films. And if there is an influence — Maybe there is, maybe I'm not aware. But the important thing is that I am in motion, and that's very important for them to see, that you are also a filmmaker.

1.9. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (December 30, 1977)

WESCHLER

Last week, Jules, you showed me some of your live-action films, and it was very enjoyable to see them. I thought today we'd talk a little bit about live-action films. For starters, you might talk about the chain of events that led to your doing live-action film at all.

ENGEL

Well, I think it's almost a natural event that when you work on films like I myself worked on animation, that somehow, sometime, you will get into live-action. Not that you were going that way, but I think it's almost more like as if it's coming your way. And that really happened in a way, because on one of my trips to New York, they were thinking, Martha Jackson, who is the owner of Martha Jackson Gallery — she of course died some years ago — she had an idea of doing a film on Paul Jenkins. They just thought that because of my background as a painter, as an artist, a designer, and my films through UPA, that they knew of me and that I would be a natural talent to do something with film that predicated itself on a painter. So in that sense the event was a natural continuity, a natural flow. I didn't have to go out of my way to look for

anything. It just came my way. The project was right because I was dealing with a painter whose work was in motion while he was working. So it was a natural texture for me to work with, because I had been working with movement, so capturing characteristics of a painter like Paul Jenkins was a very comfortable experience for me. The important thing for me was that I should not inject any other image into the film: by that I mean not inject cross-dissolves or overlaps of imagery, because if I had done that, I would have then put another image into the film that the painter had nothing to do with. I would therefore completely destroy his art, because if I had two images overlapping and I had long exposures, then I am bringing in another type of image that he never had on his canvas. So I had to be very careful. On this, of course, I'm very keen: I almost take it as a dogmatic approach, because I have seen many art films of painters where the filmmaker was putting images into the film that you would never find on a canvas. So I predicated this film on straight editing, never mixing anything else into the content, the image content of this film. But at the same time and even with the editing, the picture must have a flow, like his work has a flow. And I think that was done: the picture has rhythm, it moves, and it captures Jenkins at work. I was not trying to do a documentary, because that's not my bag; I'm not made that way. What I wanted to do here was like a piece of poetry, to just take you near or in the environment of the painter. If you like it there, then I would assume that you will, on your own, go out and seek him out and find out more about him. All I wanted to do is put his effort, his work, his process, his way in front of you. Also, another important aspect here was that the musician worked very diligently at trying to come up with sound that would really work with the color. In other words, he was aware of the yellow, he was aware of the blue, he was aware of the red and the orange--let 's say just these few--and he tried to come up with sound, somehow, to match it. Now this was his contribution.

WESCHLER

This was Irving Bazilon.

ENGEL

It was Irving Bazilon, a very fine composer who's done a lot of films and has always been commissioned to do large works of art music for individual

conductors. He liked the work, and he enjoyed what he was doing. I gave him a total free range, as I always do for people who do my music, because I expect them to come back with something very special that I would nowhere near have the idea to do. The only thing I asked him to do in the film was that when Jenkins was on the screen we will not have any sound. In other words, I wanted the painter to carry the scene through his personality, through his presence. And it worked very well. I think it did a good deal for the film. However, when you saw only the character of the color or the shapes moving, forming, dissolving, then the music was very comfortable; and really it's more comfortable for the viewer. I think an artist really would not need a sound background, no more than he would need a sound back- ground when he goes into a gallery. You go into the gallery, you don't have music. You walk through the gallery, you stop, you move, you come back to an image. But there's no music. Yet if you put the same images on the screen, it's incredible: immediately people want music. It's just one of those things. But anyway, it worked out well here with some areas where Jenkins was on the screen that he would be working without music behind him.

WESCHLER

I'd like to ask you a few specific questions about this movie, *The Ivory Knife*. First of all, you mentioned Martha Jackson; did you know her before this, or did she seek you out?

ENGEL

No, I really didn't know Martha Jackson before that. I was recommended to her by a mutual friend. The relationship was a very good one; she didn't get in my way; and when she did, at the very tail end of the film, I was able to convince her that the film was working as it is. So the relationship was a very good one.

WESCHLER

What was she like?

ENGEL

Oh, Martha was a very bright, brilliant person who loved art. She lived art, and she had a lot of ideas. Even the idea of doing a film on a painter at that time--

I'm talking about '65, '64--was quite unique because she was thinking of using the film and then sending the film to countries where Paul Jenkins could have no exhibit but could have a display of his work through the film. This was her idea. So she was on the threshold of something very important, and this was the kind of head that Martha had. But a person who really loved art; that was her total life.

WESCHLER

Can you talk a little about the actual mechanics of filming a film with Paul Jenkins, what he was like?

ENGEL

Paul was very comfortable during the filming because he had quite an image of himself, that he's a rather attractive man, and I think the whole idea for him was a very pleasurable one. And when he saw himself on the screen, of course, he looked well. He had almost like a Christ figure, and he was very comfortable to work with, comfortable in front of a camera. I tried not to have too much of him; I was more interested often in the way he worked his hands. There's a shot at the very beginning of a large painting where two yellow stripes come down and you see his hands and they're working. I was more interested in that aspect of it, really, than him as a painter, because this sword has two edges. In other words, I could like his work and I could not like his work, but the experience of doing a film with somebody like him, because the way he works is an interesting one. In total it was a good experience. The only problem, really, if we're talking personalities was really Bazilon. Bazilon was a problem because, coming from Los Angeles — Naturally, he tagged me immediately as a Hollywood character, and this had to be straightened out. He had a couple of unpleasant phrases about that, you know, throwing at me before we started. But once the film started, Bazilon as a personality was then very beautiful. He worked like a dog, and he was then really a beautiful talent, once he got over that idea that I'm Hollywood and he's New York. Frankly, if I have anything unpleasant to say about this man, he was more Hollywood than some of what we call "old-timers". He really was the Hollywood type.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

Well, because of his whole attitude, the way he talked. Somehow, although he was a younger man, still he had what I call the Hollywood-of-Yesterday in attitude about a great many things. In other words, a guy who knows everything: you can't tell him anything, an incredible ego who would love to talk about himself twenty-four hours a day. This kind of a heavy, driving ego, you know, which is not around here as much as it used to be. So he would really strike me more as a Hollywood type.

WESCHLER

Was Jenkins a talkative type?

ENGEL

Jenkins is not a talkative type; he's rather quiet, very slow. He's very deliberate in his speech, and he's very much in the terrain of a zen approach of painting and thinking. That is really his philosophy.

WESCHLER

It strikes me that his painting seems to be a very private kind of activity and that it would have been very difficult to do it in front of cameras with other people in the room. Did that seem to be a problem?

ENGEL

Well, that was never a problem for him because he's quite a bit of — He's a ham. He also wrote a play at that time, and so he was very keen of the world of the theater. He was very aware because he was functioning in the theater with a play. In fact, at that time I was the only one that he even told about the play that he wrote (which has been published, by the way) , and the reason for that was because again the restrictions in this country that if you're a painter, you have to be a painter, and if you're a lithographer, you're a lithographer. People used to resent an artist who'd be involved in other arts, especially on the American scene. So he wouldn't dare tell anyone in the art world that he has a play that he has written and which was performed in New York, because then they would have said, "Well, what the hell are you doing with writing? You're a painter." But he did. To me he always seemed very quiet, very gentle,

but incredibly at home in front of the camera. Because I think with one eye he always had that direction, probably because of his looks.

WESCHLER

Did he have any say in how it was edited? Did he talk to you about what he wanted from it? Or was it very much your own personal--?

ENGEL

No, no, Paul told me absolutely nothing about how he wanted it or what I should do. What I did at the very, very beginning of the film, which you saw with those pots — There was one shot there where if you had seen that, you would think it was Miro, but just a coincidence, you know, the way thing's dropped. I showed him that part of the film immediately, because I wanted to make sure that whatever is on the screen he feels comfortable with it. He saw that and immediately mentioned he would rather not have that. I saw that even before that, but I wanted him to see it, and then by doing that I'd get his confidence that I'm not going to do anything against his feelings. So that was the only thing that I did.

WESCHLER

Eventually you put it in though?

ENGEL

No, no, that was another shot.

WESCHLER

Oh, I see.

ENGEL

It went out, because if you had seen that, that was really Miro. It was just a coincidence, but it was obvious. So immediately that went out. So the only thing that Jenkins would say is if there was something that he felt uncomfortable with. And that was the only thing. The rest of it was okay. In fact, he was very, very happy with the film. So was Martha. They were very pleased, because the film did win them first prize at the Venice International Film Festival, 1966. It won all kinds of awards; it played to good houses. Oh, also, I had to be very careful, very careful not to make his work look easy.

Because it would be very easy for people to see a film like that and then go home and begin to do finger painting and stuff like that. So that is where I had to be very careful not to make it look like that. So in that sense, the film was very successful. If anything, I think it gives him a very large presence, maybe even larger than you see when you see his paintings.

WESCHLER

Just out of curiosity, the paintings that he did while you were filming him, were those eventually sold? Do you have any idea what happened to those?

ENGEL

Almost all those paintings were sold. As far as selling, Jenkins practically sold out every show at that time that I was with him or around him. He was selling everything except paintings that were-- You see, he worked with the primary colors, as you notice, the red and the yellow and the blue and orange and the complementary — purple. So he was very comfortable: those colors are very easy to live with, so he always sold. Now he had another group of paintings that he did sometime later. Those were very beautiful, huge paintings of grays and whites, and I don't think he ever sold any of those. But these paintings, yes, he had absolutely no problem of practically selling out every show he put on. And that's a lot of money in there.

WESCHLER

So some people own paintings where they could even have a movie of how the painting was made.

ENGEL

Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. And then the book came out by [Harry N.] Abrams [Inc.], a huge book on Paul Jenkins. He does mention the film in there, I think there are even some little pictures here and there from the film. But as far as that terrain of selling is concerned, he never had any problem.

WESCHLER

You mentioned his primary colors; do you think that his art is unusually photogenic for a filmmaker?

ENGEL

It's very photogenic; that is another reason I realized from the very beginning that this should be visually very beautiful, because you're dealing with colors that will come off extremely well. The color plus that things were in motion, that was enough for me. And then, of course, you look at the man and he looks like Christ. I mean, you had a beautiful combination of material that was very filmic, you know?

WESCHLER

Moving from him to the other film that you showed me the other day, the film you did, *The Torch and the Torso*.

ENGEL

Torch and Torso, Berrocal.

WESCHLER

Could you explain how that came about?

ENGEL

That again came about in a very interesting way, because [Miguel] Berrocal had been trying and hoping to do a film. When he knew I was in Paris, he had someone come to me, and we had a meeting. The fact that I was from animation and dealt with movement and shapes and forms, he thought I would be the ideal person to do a film, because his sculpture is put together sometimes with as many as fifteen, eighteen, twenty, thirty pieces. They fit together almost like a jigsaw puzzle. Because we were working with these many shapes and sizes, he thought because of my background I could do well. Now, I had to be very careful with his film again, because at first he wanted to make it funny, to have these pieces move around and jump and come together. But I would have destroyed him as an artist; and his direction was not to be funny at all, not when you see those colossal, heavy, ponderous pieces. They're incredibly powerful. There's nothing funny about this stuff. So if I made him funny, as he thought, well, he would have come off as a clown. So I had to talk him out of that. Although there's one little moment in the film where pieces jump around. But that's just enough, it's very little, it's small, it doesn't hurt him. Also what was interesting here was that I would go to black and white, because everything of his was stainless steel, it was steel. The

originals that you see in the film are all unique pieces. Those pieces were done by him. They're gray, silver, high polished; and I would not go into color because, I mean, there was nothing there. Even when we went to his foundry in Verona, the whole place, the whole interior was black and white really, black and white or gray. So why destroy this wonderful color with a color film? It was just a natural thing. But the reason again I came to do this film was a strange coincidence or situation that sometimes bring you into these experiences, you know. In other words, sometimes things come to you, and often when things come to you, even if you don't like a project, take it, because there is something there that's right.

WESCHLER

Can you describe Berrocal a bit?

ENGEL

Berrocal at that time I think was about thirty-six, and he represented Spain at the Venice Biennale. He's a charming fellow. He loves huge cigars. He has a walk like Groucho Marx; I noticed that on him immediately; I don't think he's aware of it, but I was. He loves to live well. He always had a big, beautiful car, big homes. But he's a very hard worker. When he's going into a show of his, he spends four or five months, twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours a day, steady, in the foundry. A hard worker, strong and accurate. His background is architecture; that was the first thing he did was architecture, then into printing, then into painting. Nothing really worked until he touched sculpture, and then it worked. From the very beginning it worked. And then there was nothing else for him except sculpture. It was a wonderful thing to work with him because, as hard a worker as he is, he still loved living well. We would go out during the shooting; we did the film in Venice, and we always spent two hours for lunch and had the best of food. I remember once we had to rush a little bit with lunch, although the lunch was already very, very good; we walked around the block, and next thing I know we're going into a little bistro or someplace because we forgot to have an after-dinner drink. So I had to have after-dinner drink, he had after-dinner drink. [laughter] It was too strong but, you know, when you're working with him, you play with him.

WESCHLER

I notice in both *The Ivory Knife* and *The Torch and the Torso*, there's no narrative voice. There's no voice that tells you that the artist was born such-and-such, or that his studio is located in such-and-such and so forth. Do you have a particular bias against using that kind of voice?

ENGEL

I felt that the way we are going to put the films together, that, just viewing it, it will explain itself and you don't need anyone to tell you. I find it's very redundant when you're looking at something. It's all there, it's all in front of you, so why then have someone tell you what you're looking at? I feel that the picture is put together in such a way that you can see the process. Again, all I do is take you into the environment and show you his workshop, show you his foundry, show him handling the material, so you see what the man is all about when he's at work and then you see the finished product. And if the art doesn't explain itself, then it's already too bad, because if you have to explain art, there's something wrong with it. In other words, in art you're doing something that you cannot put into words, and that's the whole idea. Even in Jenkins or Berrocal, those things cannot be put into words: it has to be seen, it has to be felt, it has to be touched.

WESCHLER

One of the nice things about *The Torch and the Torso* is a kind of tactile quality to the images.

ENGEL

Yes, I wanted to capture the shine, the spark that it had, so I put them in front of black velvet and practically no light, or very little light, but it picked up what was there. I wanted to just give it back to the viewer, that that's the way I saw it, and this is the way I'm going to show it to you.

WESCHLER

One thing interests me in your comments about art being a nonverbal thing is that I know that you are not yourself nonverbal. You're very articulate, and also you have a great love of words. You were telling me the other day that you love plays .

ENGEL

Oh yes.

WESCHLER

You have a whole shelf of books on theater and so forth. So that is not a negative attitude toward words per se at all .

ENGEL

No, my hobby is I love to read plays, and I love the dialogue. In fact, some time ago, before I started to do any kind of a painting, I would read a play or read at least one act. I would have very special plays like [August] Strindberg's *The Father*. I would read the first act and then that would put me in some kind of mood that I could go into my work. I think it's very unusual. I don't think there's any other painter who reads plays before he starts to work.

WESCHLER

What is the relationship between the work that's produced after you've read a play and the play that you've read?

ENGEL

Well, I think it's probably the structure, the structure or the way a good play is written, the way the words fit; it fits like a piece of building, and my work is very much structured that way. They're very architectural, and I think plays are very architectural. They have a structure, and this is what puts me in a good frame of mind.

WESCHLER

Will a dark, somber scene in a play produce a dark, somber painting?

ENGEL

No, no, it's not so much of that. It's more the continuity of a dialogue, the way they overlap each other and the way they fit or go around each other and then come back from another point of view. That is the character of a play that makes me feel good, and it puts me in a mood with my work.

WESCHLER

Returning to live-action films, we've talked about *The Ivory Knife* and *The Torch and the Torso*. This is a list of the other ones, and I just thought you might

briefly mention any others that you might want to include, besides the Tamarind film which we'll get to in a second.

ENGEL

Yeah, well, we did talk about *Coaraze*.

WESCHLER

Right, we've already talked about that.

ENGEL

We did talk about *Coaraze*. Then there's *New York 100*. It's another film that was done for Martha Jackson Gallery, and it's the work of John Hultberg. Hultberg, of course, was not as quiet or as delicate or as simple a film, from a point of view of approach, of working situation, as the Jenkins film because, see, because here we're dealing with flat paintings and there's no movement, no flow of painting. So you were back into a very characteristic terrain when you work with a painter, although there was one painting that he was working on at the time — So you get some idea of him being in motion while he paints. But the joy was not as much as it was when I worked on the Jenkins film, because he was really, really truly a filmic painter. *Light Motion*, it was done for Esther Robles Gallery here in Los Angeles. The idea about this film was that instead of taking photographs over to Europe with her on her trip to Europe, why not take a fifteen- or sixteen-minute film and show the gallery and show the artists and see the work; and then you can move around the work, because a number of those were in motion, you know; and some had sound. So why not make a sixteen-minute film? Then she'd have something to take back to France or Germany, and people would really have a chance to see her stable.

WESCHLER

So this was all the people in her stable.

ENGEL

All the people in her stable, yes.

WESCHLER

Were there any particular ones that come to mind?

ENGEL

Oh, [Robert] Cremean was in there; Cremean was in there.

WESCHLER

Was Claire Falkenstein in there?

ENGEL

No, no, but Cremean was in there, and, let's see, who else? Oh I'll be damned. Pat O'Neill was in there as a sculptor, and, oh, some of those artists I don't even remember.

WESCHLER

We can fill them in later.

ENGEL

At this stage, but I can get names on them, yes. And then recently I did a film on Max Bill, the Swiss painter and architect and designer and politician [*Max Bill*], That was done for the Comsky gallery, for Cynthia Comsky. I very much liked the work of Max Bill, but the situation here was very complicated, because we were going to do a film on his work, but the work never arrived. It was some- where in customs, and we had the cameras and everything all lined up.

WESCHLER

Here?

ENGEL

Yeah. So what we had to do — and Cynthia improvised the idea — we stretched huge canvases all over the gallery, and then Max Bill just started to make drawings on the stretched canvases. It was very impromptu, you know, almost like a happening kind of thing. He did talk about things. This was very interesting from a point of view, because you never knew what he was going to do, because we couldn't set him in motion in the way of saying, "Now, Max, you stand here and you stand there and the camera will be — " We told him, "You do what you damn well please, and I'm going to work around you." So that was the process. I had two cameras to work with, so I put them in the

positions where I got the most out of him at work. And the filming was finished. Then I had to go up to San Francisco, because he had a large exhibit there, and take a lot of still photos of his exhibit in San Francisco. So then at the end it all ended up in the editing room and had to be put together, really, at the editing table. But it's all right. I like to work that way, where you really don't know where you're going to be the next shot, so when you come to the editing, that's when the whole picture gets put together and you have a lot more freedom. But it has a good continuity and it is Max Bill at work.

WESCHLER

Can you describe him by the way?

ENGEL

Well, he was very pleasant, a very gentleman, as to work with him under these conditions, but I really don't know how he is when the conditions are different. But he was very pleasant and very kind, had a kind of a humorous face for the camera. But, oh, it was very interesting because, what I did, I looked out the window (we were on the second floor) and there's a shot there of the street, you know, red lights and the green lights and a lot of lines, you know, just stop and lines for the cars to stop. It had a wonderful Mondrianish quality, looking down. So I had a shot taken of that, and we showed him the rushes. He said, "Oh no, that's not me, that's Mondrian." I wanted to use the shot in the film, because here we are in the studio, see this man work on a wall, and I had the camera turn and just pick up a shot, you know, where he is. But all those lines, you see, he wouldn't have that. But naturally you have to go with the talent, because if he tells you, "No, I feel it's wrong," it's wrong.

WESCHLER

Sure.

ENGEL

So I mean, in that sense you have no choice. But it was a good situation. Filmically, it would have been a very nice, nice thing, you know, go from the lines in the street back into the lines back in the room.

WESCHLER

Just a couple of questions about pure technical matters of filming. You have camera people along who do the actual manning of these live-action cameras, or do you do that yourself?

ENGEL

No, no, I'm not a cameraman. I can take still photos, and I can do pretty well with that, but when it comes to really work like this, then I prefer to have a couple of cameramen. Sometimes I just need one, sometimes I need two. Because I work with a great deal of speed. In other words, if I walk into a place, like for instance when I did the Berrocal film and I walked into the foundry, I just walked in there once, walked through the place, looked at the corners, the windows, where people were working, and from that moment on, I know what I want to do. I had the shots pretty well in my head, even from a point of view of continuity, how I go from one shot into another. And then also I like to do a lot of shots which people would say, "No, it will never work, you're not going to see anything, it's going to be too light." Then I'll take all those shots, and also take the shots I know will give me the film. Then, I will also ask the cameraman, "If you see anything here that you want to shoot, shoot it, and we'll see what we get back." But I'm always looking for this happy accident that you don't find much in film, because everything is so structured. The cameras are structured, the cameraman is structured, and they have taboos: you don't do this, you don't do that, this will never work. I've never done it before, but I like to find accidents. There's not too much of it in live-action, but sometimes something happens that is so wonderful as an image and I can still make it work, you know, in a total film. But on Berrocal, I shot one shot of everything, I never shot anything twice. I don't have to, because if I look through the camera and I have the composition that I want and it's lit well, the light is right, then this is it. And as I say, I'm putting a film together at that moment already.

WESCHLER

Do you use editors?

ENGEL

I use editors, but they don't edit my film. I use them as splicers; they splice my film. But I don't say that in front of them. Because that's when I put the film

together. I put a film together when I edit. That's when I make a film. And what she or he will do is, I pick the material, I pick the footage, I pick the length of each shot, that this is what I want. I will ask once in a while, "Do you have a recommendation? Do you see anything that I don't see?" That's okay; if a person has an idea, sure, I listen, and why not? But I make the film when I edit; that's the only time. Because when I shoot, I already [shoot] with that in mind, what will follow and how it will work. But I don't like the process. I don't like to sit at the editing desk, because what I like to do while I edit like this is I like to walk around the room and glance toward the image. And I do that, I walk away, and I almost feel like as if I was painting, you know, how you walk away from a painting, you walk back and you look at it. I almost use the same process when I edit, and that's why I need someone who only splices and I say, "Okay, let's run it." And I walk away and I-- Even when it's running I might walk away and turn around and look. That's maybe a strange way of doing things, but I have to be almost a little bit in motion when I'm working on a film and not be sitting in front of a table.

WESCHLER

Well, why don't we move from talking about the live-action films, to talking about — Have you covered all the films?

ENGEL

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

WESCHLER

To talking over lithography, and then we'll talk a little about the time that you did. But first of all, what was the first time that you went to Tamarind?

ENGEL

In 1960.

WESCHLER

So, you were one of the very early people at Tamarind.

ENGEL

Early, early, yes.

WESCHLER

Let's talk a little about you and lithography first. Had you done any lithography before you went to Tamarind?

ENGEL

No, no. You see, when I had a call, or a letter, from June Wayne — [tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER

Well, starting up again about Tamarind, how did you know June Wayne, or did you?

ENGEL

I knew June Wayne because I was exhibiting at that time very extensively here in Los Angeles, so she knew my work. And although I had never done any lithography or printing, but that was the whole idea of June--this is where she was very bright--is to pull in people into a medium where they've never done anything, to introduce them to a new field, not just to go to people who've been doing it, because if they'd been doing it, they'd be doing the same thing they did yesterday. Her idea was to get people in there who'd never touched the medium and see what they'd come up with. That was very good.

WESCHLER

So one day you got a letter from her?

ENGEL

So I got a letter from June Wayne, telling me about it, that they were offering me this Tamarind scholarship. And it's a strange thing but, you know, I really turned it down, really turned it down. But two months went by, four, six, nine months went by, and she still was asking.

WESCHLER

Why were you turning it down?

ENGEL

Well, because I'd never done anything with print, and the idea of doing something where you have to wait and go through all the process and see what it looks like was something I wouldn't enjoy. Because when you paint, it's a point of view, you're in it, you're part of it, you're seeing what's happening. But the idea of doing something and then to have someone else or even yourself push it or poke it or whatever you have to do, and wait, you know, that to me was very alien. But this strange [thing] happened. After a while, I said to myself, "Now, wait, wait, there's something wrong. This thing is coming your way. Why are you turning it down?" You see, that's one of those strange things you can't explain. Then I said to myself, "It's wrong for me to turn it down." So I called up June and I said, "Okay, when shall I come in?" So, okay, we made the arrangements. Now the arrangement was a very strange one, because it's a two-month situation. But, you see, I was working at UPA and I could only come in on Saturdays and Sundays, which was all right with her, but it lasted like a year and a half. For a year and a half I went there on Sundays and the studio of course then was cold — I think I ended up once with a pretty heavy cold. But I stuck to it and I came out with about six or eight or ten, and some were really full-size, full-size prints. But at the beginning it was very difficult for me, because, as I say, I had no idea about the medium. But that was the whole object of hers, is to have people go in there who are painters or sculptors and see what they do, even if they fumble or bumble.

WESCHLER

We have an interview with June Wayne, but we don't have an interview with anyone describing what that process of the early confrontations was. You went there, and what was it like?

ENGEL

When I went there, all June asked me was if I have an idea. And I said, "Yes, I have an idea." I think the idea I had at that time was that I would have Ray Bradbury write the material that would be like a book, or a large portfolio; it would have something to do with — I think at that time, the Bomb was already in motion, this kind of a wild explosions that was leading up to things. I knew Ray Bradbury well. But I never got to that, because as I started to work with the medium, I said, "Oh, the hell with that book and that portfolio. I'm

just going to go wild and just do what feels natural as far as this whole new medium is concerned."

WESCHLER

What kind of facilities were at your disposal for you to go wild with? Was there a printer there?

ENGEL

Oh, at Tamarind you had printers, you had master printers. Now the whole idea, again, of June's was twofold: First, to get people who never touched a stone, who'd never done any printing, that was one, but that was really not the important thing. The important thing was to develop master printers, because that's what lacked in this country: you had no printers. So that was the key drive at Tamarind, and that's how you have Gemini [Editions, Limited], and that's how you have Cirrus. I just mention two, and there are several others that came out of Tamarind. So what she did, she really developed master printers. She had the best printer then, a fellow by the name of "Bobitch" [Bohuslav Horak] that she brought over from Europe. And under his guide other, let's say people who were involved in print but not there yet, they were working with Bobitch, and they were developing as master printers. So I had the best printer, and I had the best equipment, any paper I wanted, any paper, stones, anything and everything. She had everything the best, and that was June's way of doing things .

WESCHLER

Already in 1960 — it was that way from the very start?

ENGEL

Oh yes, 'cause don't forget, you also had Clinton Adams there and Garo Antreasian. Now, Garo Antreasian was a printer, and you had these two men there who were really June's right arm. So she had a beautiful shop: it was all set, all organized, and it was strict and very articulate.

WESCHLER

How do you mean strict?

ENGEL

Strict in that there was no monkeying around there, it was not a playpen, it was a workshop for serious work. The only problem was sometimes that talent — Adja Yunkers was there. Well, I remember that time, he used up something like \$800 or \$900 worth of paper, just looking and feeling his way around. I mean, that was a little too much. I mean, you could do as you damn well pleased, but that was unheard of, using that amount of money, just, you know — And nothing! And I think that's when June began to put, let's say, guidelines or something down, where if you wanted a paper, if you wanted a paper, if you knew anything about papers, it was there for you, but the environment was that of very serious work. I mean, you can have fun and all, but it was not a toy shop and the people who came there, they meant business. Because, after all, two months, if you come from some place, is not a long time, and you wanted to walk out of that place at least with, let's say, eight or ten prints, any size, and twenty each. So let's say if you walked out with 160 prints — let's say, eight different images, twenty of each — I mean, after two months, that was a beautiful thing. You could work there ten, twelve hours a day, so you were able to be productive, and naturally the talent that came there, they wanted to be just that. And June was a real strong influence. Oh, I mean she never got involved in your work, but when the work was ready to be signed and sealed with the Tamarind stamp, then she really looked at every print. I remember I had colored print, not too big, had I think four or five colors, and a printer by the name of Joe Funk--even that name gives you an idea what was wrong there--his hands were dirty and he was sloppy. Well, after I had these eighteen or twenty prints ready, they came in front of June Wayne, and June threw all of them out, because there were little spots on the white, and that was Joe's doing. That's what I mean, that she really was--

WESCHLER

She had very high standards?

ENGEL

--on top of you for that aspect. Not what you're doing, but the finished print had to be really right.

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WESCHLER

Can you describe this woman. It's rather a remarkable thing in 1960, to have a woman running a very--

ENGEL

I can be sketchy, but the idea was at that time the Ford Foundation was going to give out some grants to different talents, and June was one they were going to give a grant to, and June said that's the wrong thing to do, that's not the way to go about it. (Now, I'm just telling you as I remember.) They said, "Well, what do you mean it's not the way?" She says, "No, it's not the way. The way to do it is to set up a shop where you're going to train not just this one artist, but you train master printers, plus you have art coming out." At first they said, "Well, that's strange, and it's a very big order?" But she stuck to her guns, and she did have some people on the grant committee that more or less were beginning to go with her; and finally she convinced them to do just this. Now, the next big hurdle was after she convinced them that this is the way to go, then she said, "Okay now, the place will be in Los Angeles, 'cause that's where I live." Well, they said, "No, no, no, Los Angeles is not a place for anything like that; it's the wrong environment." She said, "Well, if it's the wrong environment, then good-bye." Again her friends came to her aid, and she finally had her way. They gave her the money, whatever it was, and the shop was put up. And it's interesting, at that time, I think Henry Seldis had an article in the [*Los Angeles*] Times saying that it's not going to work. Well, I think a year and a half later. Tamarind had it's first exhibit at UCLA, and the article started out by saying, "I apologize, because it works . " Now the good thing about June was that she could have gone to New York, 'cause that probably would have been more ideal, or someplace else. But she said, "No, this is a good place as any." And you see, again, what was good about it was that she didn't look for a self--

WESCHLER

Aggrandizing?

ENGEL

— aggrandizing, because if she went to New York, she would have been near the top of the heap, and she would have been a great lady and all that. So she didn't do anything like that. She opens a shop here, and she asks a lot of

people who did not, at that time, have international presence. But that didn't mean anything to her, because she also called people in that had a large presence at that time and people who didn't. But she believed in that. So in a sense she believed in Los Angeles also. And this is why I'm still a champion of her, because I like this feeling where you believe in something and just because it doesn't have a presence, because you don't have the kind of publicity- like the New York scene, she believed in it, stuck to it, and she proved that it can be done, and it was done. This is something very special about her, 'cause so few people here in Los Angeles have really stayed with the city or helped the city, they always hang on a coattail of New York or some other place. You have to give her this credit, that damn it, she did it here,

WESCHLER

Was there a small bias towards Los Angeles artists in her selections of grants that she gave?

ENGEL

No, I don't think so. I don't think so, because as I remember they were coming in from all directions. There was no such thing as one of a type or a direction, no. I think the variety of talents that she pulled in from the city were a cross-section of anything and everything, where the performance was right.

WESCHLER

Can you describe how she ran her place. You mentioned her staying away from the artists and so forth. Was it clearly though June's workshop?

ENGEL

No, it wasn't June's workshop, it was Tamarind Workshop. If you worked there, you started at eight-thirty or eight o'clock, and generally you worked till five or five-thirty. If you came in at ten, it was all right. But I did find that most of the people who were working there, doing printing, they were very much on time, and it was to their advantage to be there on time. She would come in sometimes and look at your work and maybe say a word or two, but never that I remember would she ever put any effort or say no, not this way, or do it that way. If you ask her, she would maybe comment, but there was no such thing. If she came into the shop, she came in because she wanted to talk

about something to somebody or check the equipment, because maybe something was going wrong with the equipment, and that was her activity in the shop then.

WESCHLER

Was she in command of the whole operation, or were there other people who shared it with her?

ENGEL

Yes, she was in command, and her two big helpers were Clinton Adams and Garo Antreasian. I mean, they were really chiefs, let's say. I think at that time Adams and Garo were really what you call the master printers, and they ran the shop. But even from them, there was never any interference; however, if you wanted to ask them or get advice, you know, technical advice, they were always there and would be very helpful. Well, that was about their activity. Garo already was printing his own stuff. So they were also working in the place on their own work, which always makes things pleasanter. They're not just people who walk around; they were practicing artists. So they were working with you.

WESCHLER

You were talking about your own work there. It wasn't going to be the Bradbury idea?

ENGEL

No, it wasn't, because I felt if I had a Bradbury it would be a little too much for me at this stage. I realized I wasn't ready when I was tackling something that for me was just very new. So I started on a rather small piece which was predicated on the character of an explosion, and — What was that first one? Alamogordo or something? Something like that name the first piece was.

WESCHLER

Something like that, yes.

ENGEL

Then all of a sudden I find that its characteristics were very comfortable for me, and that I didn't go into a terrain — what I call a hard-edge — that I was

really familiar with and that was really my terrain. At that time I went into this other thing which was loose and explosive. In a sense I was really feeling my way with the medium, and that, at that time, for me was the most comfortable idea to work with. Later, when I did a film on *Look of the Lithographer*, — now, this was sometime later — but by then I was very comfortable with the medium. I relaxed and I did several prints which was really more characteristic of my work. But that happened later. So, you see, when you go into someplace like that and you're really new and you don't know and you almost don't have a total simpatico, at that moment you really are not doing what is you, but you're looking, I think, a little bit out. It's a little bit more comfortable terrain that you're working.

WESCHLER

Well, let's talk about *The Look of a Lithographer*. How did that film come about? And how did you get involved in it?

ENGEL

Oh, what happened there, it began again, June started the film with a man by the name of Ivan Dryer. He was on the premises, he was almost like an artist-in-residence, but he was not an artist, he was a filmmaker, like a filmmaker-in-residence. And they worked like a year and a half or two years, he was shooting and stuff like that. But June didn't like the material. Again, when you're dealing with a man like Ivan, whom I used later — He's a good photographer, but he lacked certain ingredients, 'cause he was working with images, art images and stuff like that, and he couldn't quite connect. So then June asked me if I would like to come in and take the project over. I said okay. Then I talked to Ivan, and I saw footage that he shot, and there were tons of it, my God. In reality June wanted me to fire him. Well, how can I fire the man? He's got dozens of reels. I mean, I need him because he's the only one who knows where things are, you know, I don't know. He also knows what's been shot. So I had to have him. And he was a very nice fellow and a very good photographer; he just needed a little more experience, visual experience of seeing things. But he was very good. And see again, June, not understanding the medium, she didn't realize that this guy was all right but he just needed this other something. So I came in and saw the film, and then I started to shoot material. The interesting situation was that when I began to point out

certain things — Not that I'd point out but I'd say, "We'll shoot this" and "We'll now shoot him, we'll get a close-up on him." My God, a couple of weeks later he was doing it very well. He caught on, and he began to see things a little different. Like at the end you see all those people, when the artists are being introduced. Those are nice shots, comfortable shots. I began to do this sort of thing in the shop, and Ivan is very good, because he caught on; he began to open up his vision, his visual articulation and seeing composition. So then I think I worked on it like eight weeks, in total, I think it was about eight weeks, maybe a little more, but things were moving then. And the minute I began to edit, that's when I put things together that there's a flow there. So then everything was okay with June and with Ivan. We were on the move until toward the end, when June began to put a little more pressure on the film because she wanted certain things in a certain way to suit her need. As I was a little more a poet on the film, I didn't want it to be so pedantic and so obvious. But if this is what she wanted and this will work for her, okay, that's her film, she's going to go out with it and try to make something of it. So at that moment I would pull back and I would relax about it and go with what she wanted. I think in total that it worked out pretty well; there are things in the film today that, naturally, I would throw out.

WESCHLER

You were mentioning when you [saw the film the other day] —

ENGEL

The very beginning of the film, of these printers walking toward Tamarind Workshop and of girls coming across the street, I would throw all that stuff out, because that looked like a home movie. The lights were bad, and these people are not talkers, not when they're facing a camera. There's a little problem there. All that stuff I would just junk today. The interesting situation was of course that Nevelson was the key actor.

WESCHLER

Louise Nevelson.

ENGEL

Louise Nevelson was the key actor in the film, so she gave the film the glue. I call it the glue that holds [everything] together so that you can work from her and go away from her, come back, you see her working, then you see somebody's taking her print, developing her print, back to Nevelson. So she became a good ingredient, the center of the film, and she was wonderful to work with, and she enjoyed the adventure. But we had to be very careful with her because she, [laughter] she always wanted to pose. Once I asked her to walk across the room and, my God, she came across like Sarah Bernhardt. I said, "No, no, no, Louise, not like that, just natural, natural, like you are. So this is the terrain of retakes. Sometimes when I got a camera on her face, she began to pose. But the other people in the shop, the printers, the workers, were very beautiful, and they worked with us. And there was no problem, ever. It was a long film. But I think if you look at the film today, for someone who wants to go into lithography, who wants to do something with the medium and wants to find about mechanics and techniques, I think it's really there in that sense.

WESCHLER

An awful lot of information.

ENGEL

Yeah, really a lot, and it's good information. It has a good insight, because it not only talks about the stone, what they do on the stone, but it takes you into the terrain, talking about the paper, how to handle the paper, how to carry it, even how you dress for the job. All that stuff is very, very important.

WESCHLER

The narration is June's, is that correct?

ENGEL

It was written by June, yes. I think probably today some of that could be dropped also, because there's a lot in front of your eyes that you just don't need that. But, as I say, you're working for somebody, and that somebody has to be pleased, and that's what you're doing. But I think there are moments in a film that are really lovely: when they pick up that cheesecloth —

remember — they pick up the cheesecloth and you look through it. Things like that.

WESCHLER

And the grinding of the stones is beautiful.

ENGEL

Oh, that is very lovely. Ivan was the photographer, but I would pick the spots for the point of view of the composition, and I would pick up little things like you got the stone when wet and you picked up the bulb above in the stone. Those are lovely little moments. I wanted the film to have a character where you can walk through a place like that and maybe you can even bump into things, and when you bump into a corner, let it be there, don't take it out. This is natural, a natural flair or texture still with a nice sense of structure, the two work together. Because I did a film where — I don't know if I mentioned it, I did a film, *American Sculpture of the Sixties* --that was a big exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum. And I had people coming toward the camera while we were shooting, and they were waving and things like that, and I left that in the film. Because what are you going to do, are you hiding the camera? And it's nice. Then I had a wonderful shot in there: I remember we were working here, and a kid was outside someplace, he was coming through this glass door and it was locked, and he was hitting the window, trying to get somebody's attention to open the door. I have that in the film also. I think when you deal with those activities, like an exhibit or a Tamarind show or going into a workshop, that little things happen that sometimes I think you should leave in there, because then you know that it's being photographed, and it's something very warm and wonderful and friendly, that sort of thing.

WESCHLER

I wanted to move on to some of the other lithography workshops you've worked at. You mentioned both Gemini and Cirrus. Can you describe what they are and also how they were different from Tamarind?

ENGEL

Oh, Gemini at that time — What was the name of that fellow?

WESCHLER

Ken Tyler?

ENGEL

Ken Tyler was running Gemini. And of course, he was from June Wayne. I think he had a lot of the characteristics of June's: in other words, he ran a very articulate and very well put together shop that had the same characteristics as Tamarind. In other words, it was a serious workshop. Although I think there was a little more play, because Ken Tyler can also have fun, more than June Wayne under the circumstances. But the shop was very well run and very serious, very serious. He himself did two prints for me, and the working relationship was good. But I think he had a lot of June Wayne, somehow about him. I also worked with him a little later when Jasper Johns and [Robert] Rauschenberg and [Frank] Stella was there. I did a lot of still photography for him on these people, and that gave me a little more insight to him and to the shop, because I did spend quite a bit of time.

WESCHLER

What kind of insight?

ENGEL

Insight of how he related to the artists. Because, for instance, with Rauschenberg, the works were huge, we're talking about big, big shapes. Whereas June never got near the stone, you see, Ken Tyler was on the stone. He pulled the prints, he did the work, he did the whole damn thing himself. So he was not only running the shop, Gemini, but he himself did the work. Whereas June ran Tamarind, but of course June never came near the stone. I mean, she was not a, like a master printer, she could never function like a master printer; whereas Ken was functioning as a master printer, and his relationship to the talent, like Stella and Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg — [Claes] Oldenburg was there, too — was very comfortable. I think also what made it very comfortable was because by two or three in the afternoon, these people were — I know Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg, they were by that time pretty well—how would I say that? — they were very looped, they were drunk, ah, not drunk, but I mean they were — What's another good expression?

WESCHLER

High?

ENGEL

They were — Well, high is a good word, but I mean on liquor.

WESCHLER

Smashed?

ENGEL

Smashed! That's the word. That was a new experience for me. In fact, I have pictures where Jasper Johns is working and at the other end is the glass. And they were just drinking straight stuff, you know. But they kept up the work, and they never fell down. But, you see, this could never take place at Tamarind, because June would never allow bottles of liquor in the shop next to the stone, whereas Ken had an ambience that was quite different: very serious, but at the same time the ambience was much more playful or comfortable for these artists.

WESCHLER

Was there tension between Ken and June after Gemini got started?

ENGEL

If there was a tension, I really don't know. I know that, from my point of view, I feel that Ken does not like to be referred to him as a Tamarind alumni. But, what the hell? That was what he was, you know, that's where he learned, that's where he gained his knowledge. That's why Tamarind was important, because it produced people like him, and that was the key factor for Tamarind, to produce.

WESCHLER

Can you describe Ken a little more specifically? I don't have an image. What does he look like?

ENGEL

Oh, Ken is a rather short fellow, short and sort of husky. He likes to look like the fashion of the moment. He dresses and has an appearance almost like a grand artist. So I think he likes to get into the pictures that way, because he

does consider himself, and he was one before he turned into just a master printer. But he likes to be on the scene. If they're going to wear sandals, he's going to wear sandals; if they wear blue jeans, he's going to wear blue jeans; if they're going to have hair down to their ankles, he's going to have hair down to the ankles. So he likes to look at what the going rate is. I mean, that's him. But I always find him very friendly and pleasant. Also, I think he really enjoys the printing world: he enjoys it, it's part of his blood, that's in him. And this is Ken. My relation with him was always good and very friendly and warm.

WESCHLER

Why did he leave L.A.? Do you know?

ENGEL

Now, that I don't know. I think there were problems. There was a split between him and a partner. Maybe he wanted to go back there to New York. Because you got to remember that Ken dropped — Really he dropped all the what you call local talents. The minute he got Rauschenberg, everybody was out. He did two prints for me, and I had about six other drawings ready. 'Course he liked my work, he liked my sculptures. In fact he had one on his desk all the time. He had things going for me, so I prepared drawings, I had about four or five drawings ready. And then all of a sudden he got this deal with Rauschenberg, and that was the finish of the local talent. I think later, naturally, he came back to some of the talents that he worked with, but primarily he then hung onto the tailcoat of the New York scene, because then came Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Oldenburg, Stella, and I think he was finished with this area. So again, you see, this is where June was so important to Los Angeles: because she could have people from all over the world — she did — but she constantly had people from here working at Tamarind. Whereas Ken sort of put an end to that. So I was there with all those drawings, and they were never printed .

WESCHLER

How about Cirrus?

ENGEL

Well, Cirrus again was a product of Tamarind. I met him [Jean Milant] at Tamarind. He opened his shop and he did a lot of prints. I did a lot of prints with him. But the terrain that he was going in was a terrain that was much looser and let's say more organic and nothing like my work, which was the architectural, hard-edged, geometrical shape. So the relationship you had was not a good one. I mean, good as far as a person to person, but I realized that this was not the terrain that he enjoys, there was no joy in that for him (this is my point of view) . And naturally I don't work the other terrain. But I think his shop was good; he's done some good things. But, of course, nothing like Gemini or Tamarind. It was much looser, and it was more like a shop that an artist would put up in his garage if he can open up the place. So that was another scene, another world. But the work was good, because he himself is a good master printer. But, see, whereas Gemini could go in any direction — I mean, you go to the American hard-edged color field painter. . . .

WESCHLER

Kelly?

ENGEL

[Ellsworth] Kelly, Kelly, you see, Gemini could go in that direction, could go in that direction with [Josef] Albers, no problem. Cirrus, I think there was a problem; it was something that was maybe not difficult but not comfortable for him. The other terrain is the terrain that I think he enjoyed.

WESCHLER

What kind of artists are in the terrain that he liked?

ENGEL

Oh boy, I have a problem here, because, see, most of the talent that he was working with were new to me and I really-- I don't know if Stephan Van Huhn had a print made over there that I liked and admired, I think it was Stephan Van Huhn who had this one print that I know, but I don't know. I think he did something with Cremean again. But the work in general was much more organic and loose. And I saw very little of the other kind of work.

WESCHLER

Moving from talking about the different printers, let's talk about your sense of lithography. I'm sitting below a very impressive one right here. What is this one called?

ENGEL

This is really a litho I like to call *Homage to David Smith* and it's very interesting because there you build up the stone. In other words, you put a piece of shape on the stone which is like a — You know when you do woodcut? You take a piece of linoleum like that, and you put it in a stone, and then things happen, a lot of paint gets into the crevices, and that is something very nice, and that's where sometimes things are accidental. Well, of course again in printing, it's a nice thing to have that happen. Because when you work on prints, generally you're so articulate that your drawings, everything's so measured, it's always going to be in. Whereas here things can happen because there might be more paint getting into the crevices or less paint gets into the crevices, and you're looking for that wonderful thing, as I say, that I like to see happen, the discoveries. Whereas the other one, what you see, actually, that's —

WESCHLER

It's more geometrical.

ENGEL

Yeah. And I like that but —

WESCHLER

What's that called?

ENGEL

I call them the *New York Facade*. There you know pretty damn well that nothing's going to happen except what you have on the paper and what you want to happen. I'm much more comfortable with the medium now. I do like it, and also it's a wonderful thing to have twenty at once sometimes and not just one, you know, it's a nice feeling.

WESCHLER

How does the lithographical work relate to the painting, on the one hand, and to the sculpture and also to your animation work?

ENGEL

No, I don't think I could pull animation into this, although the end one over there, if you look at it, has a sense of movement like those verticals are running up and down.

WESCHLER

In a way, both of these remind me to some extent of the *Train Landscape* in terms of the sense of shape and so forth.

ENGEL

Yes, well, I think larger shapes I work with, and I carry them into my painting or into my prints or into my sculptures. But I don't really push that or bring it, although even there, on the second one, you see things grow from the top to the bottom, so you have a progression of movement, as if your camera is picking up there and then comes down.

WESCHLER

And reads that way. And then it also has this strange kind of way of reading, obviously in perspective, too. It keeps on popping back as though it is a building facade or something.

ENGEL

Yes.

WESCHLER

And then it's kind of startling to realize that it is very simple shapes that are very —

ENGEL

Very simple, yeah. But I think as the camera moves down on the building — you're up there and you move it down — this is what will happen. In other words, I could go below this and see the bottom, and then everything would look different on the top. So I think once you work on film as I have been, which is a long time, you almost instinctively sometimes have this creeping into your work. The continuity idea gets into your work sometimes. But I think the important thing is that today I'm comfortable with the medium, I can work

with it, and I don't have any problems like I had at the very beginning where I felt, "Well, when will I see a print?" That doesn't exist anymore. That's just a part of the process and I accept it. [tape recorder turned off]

WESCHLER

Well, okay, we've just been talking about how to end this tape today. We've covered a lot of the things you've been doing in this very diverse and sort of versatile career. Where are you today? What are your horizons in terms of your art?

ENGEL

Well, today I'm of course very much involved in film, films from a point of view of a painter, from a point of view of a graphic artist. Of course, the magic of movement is so important for me. It always has been, because from the very beginning I was very aware of the world of the dance. That will always be a part of me and a part of my painting. So I think what will happen, I will be working on films, but at the same time I cannot ever quit painting, because I still have a big question in my head in front of me about films. As much as I do it and I enjoy it, the question mark is a big one.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

"Is it really a medium of consequence?" Because I don't find film as large a consequence. Now, I'm not talking about abstract films where you deal with whether the art is working, but I'm talking about films that I've been involved in, maybe involved in tomorrow, and the whole medium for me still looks very thin. A play, a good play, a well-written play is timeless; and then, you see, a painting is timeless. I mean, look at this situation: A friend will say, "I'm going to see an old film." "Oh, an old film. What are you going to see?" "*Citizen Kane*. This movie house shows nothing but old films." Now, he keeps talking about this word old. Now, if I said to him, "I'm going to see a Picasso show," I say, "I'm going to an early Picasso exhibit," or "I'm going to see an early Cezanne show." But I never can say to him that I'm going to go see "old paintings by Picasso." You see, so this is the question. It's a very big one.

Because you take *Citizen Kane*, which is acclaimed as a picture of consequence, yet you refer to it as an old film. And it is old, when you look at it. In many ways, it just looks like an old film. But you can go and see a Cezanne exhibit — I saw fairly recently some early Cezannes--and even now I mention the word early ; I don't see old Cezannes, but early --and damn it, it looks like a painting that was done yesterday and it's going to be for tomorrow. This is a very, very important situation here, of looking at old films and looking at early art works.

WESCHLER

Films seem to date faster than —

ENGEL

They date faster because they're not well done. They date faster because the ingredients that make an artwork very special is not there. Also, you're dealing with seeing for the moment, which, naturally-- See, in film the costuming, the clothes date the film, the haircut would date a film, expressions will date a film. But I think the total ingredients of a film as a film art is not there yet. Now, there's nothing wrong with that. After all, I mean, when we're talking about paintings, we're talking about four hundred years ago, Giorgione, I don't know, four or five hundred years ago. When we're talking about film, we're talking about 1920 — 1920, nothing — we're talking about 1934. So it's good, because we're dealing with an art form that is so new. Also there are a lot of other things about film that are still strange. Because when you look at a screen it's empty; then you run a film, and then the screen is empty again. So this is a strange situation. Sometimes if I see something very good on a screen, I would like to take that screen off the wall and wrap it up and take it home with me, you know. I don't want another film on that screen. Which is a horrible thing, you see. They've already destroyed something for me. But these are large questions, because the character of the film is very mediocre, and also the aspect of music. Now you can see a heavy play--you can see *The Death of a Salesman* on the stage, and no matter what happens, there's no music. In other words, the music is not there to help the actor. On a film, the music is very important, because so often the performances are so bad that it's the music that really hooks you into enjoying the film. So that's another aspect of it. As I say, on the stage you don't have music to help the scene, to

help a situation. So that's another strange thing. Another thing is also, which is not unpleasant, but, you see, the fact that you have music so often in a film, that means that it has a choreographic character, that somewhere there is a dance in that scene because the music — How often do you see people walking from offices and you have music under it to emphasize the walk? Now that's already a choreographic character which the film takes on. Then you have people like Chaplin, as a performer, which is something very, very unique. When you're that unique, you become an art object; not many actors have that. In other words, Chaplin could turn his back and walk away and he's still Chaplin. But he's so unique, therefore, that he becomes an object of art, see? Now, that is unique. A good dancer has that on the stage, if he's that good, or she's that good. They become something more than just being a human being. They become objects of art, they're that good. So these are ingredients that art has, stage has, but film doesn't have these things yet.

WESCHLER

Or rarely has them.

ENGEL

Or rarely. Or often they are like illustration of a text; they function more like illustration to a script. Now, this is good — It's not good or bad, it's not important. But what is important for me [is that] I find a medium that has not arrived yet as an art form, whereas the world of painting, you know-- You just never go to see old paintings; you see early works. But if you see an early work of a film director, regardless of his talent, they just look like old films. And films do destroy themselves, because the camera's changing, the light is changing, the approach to filmmaking is changing. The world of painting's changing- you have cubists, you have impressionists, expressionists-- but they still are works or art that stand time.

WESCHLER

How about something like Oskar Fischinger's films? Do you think that they'll age as badly?

ENGEL

Well, Fischinger cannot age, because you take *Study No. 7*, you're dealing with pure lines, you're dealing with shapes that are classic. It has a classical character: a line has a classical character, a square is a square, a circle is a circle. Those are classical shapes, and nothing can destroy those shapes or forms. Nothing can destroy a movement, see. So you're dealing with something that's close to art; I don't say I'm going to see "an old film of Fischinger." It's no old film. That's an early film, because you're dealing with an artist. That's the early work of an artist.

WESCHLER

That is the level of film that you're aspiring to.

ENGEL

I'm looking for something where I can say, "I'm going to see an early film" of somebody and not "an old film" of somebody. And I want that early work of a film- maker to be an early work!

WESCHLER

Are we getting closer to that, do you think?

ENGEL

No! No way! No way. Maybe there are moments. But you see, in film, sometimes when you see a film — Film is almost a one shot from a point of view of viewer, because that thrill that sometimes you get out of a film when you see it for the first time, those brilliant little moments of diamonds, the second time they're not diamonds. They fade, because that first experience was so right, and the second or third time they disappear. Also, films slow down; when you're working on a film and you're looking at a film for the first time because you're editing, you're putting it together, there is time there and it's wonderful. The second time, third or fourth time-- [snaps his fingers] those things disappear. Where at first it was brilliant, the second time you look at it, it's not. Because your in- take is so deep, your first intake is so deep that you remember, Whereas when you look at a Cezanne landscape, you can sit for one or two hours and you go back a week later or you go back six months later, and you discover things! Now, of course, somebody would say you can

discover things in a film, too. But I don't find it so. I still am going back and seeing an old film, and I see an early Cezanne.

WESCHLER

So in your own work, while you are doing film, you will also retain the painting and other things as well.

ENGEL

Oh, yeah. Because as I say, the question mark is there, and it's a big one. So you have a foot in that, and a foot in other things, and you wonder which way. Yet you can't help yourself. You're working in both directions. But film as a medium for the painter is important. It's a must, because you have to work with movement. Now, this movement is a very interesting situation. You know, years ago, when you had singers entertain you on a stage, they stood still; now today they move — groups are moving. Very few singers or groups will come on a stage and stand still. So this aspect of movement is very important, and it's very much of our time. That's why I think *Chorus Line* was incredibly successful, because people who went to musicals or went to theater, they had never really been exposed as if they had gone to a ballet. Why did they love it? They loved it because it moves. The first time on that stage when they're getting into position and when they're in position, you know — Have you seen *Chorus Line*?

WESCHLER

Yeah.

ENGEL

Well, the first time they stand in position and all of a sudden they turn around and make a move, [claps his hands together] you know what happens in that theater? [He gasps, imitating the audience.] Now why? That was just a simple turn and a move. There's something about this aspect of movement that people today relate to more than they ever have. I think *Chorus Line* is probably the largest example of it. I see an incredible continuity here between the first Disney, ah "Whistle — "

WESCHLER

"Whistle to — " oh whatever.

ENGEL

Yeah, an incredible continuity here from that early Disney — I think 1927 or '29 — and a *Chorus Line*. Because there for the first time people saw on the screen the movement and sounds, but so beautifully integrated that it was something very special, you realized it was very special. That's what happened with *Chorus Line* today, because people had never really been exposed on this very popular level to that aspect of movement, you know? So movement for me is very important. So film for me is very important, because I have to go that way. In other words there are sometimes when you have directions to go and you have no choice.

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (February 16, 1978)

WESCHLER

Today, we're here with you at your studio at Cal Arts, in your office. Outside there are many people scratching on their animation boards and upstairs there 's a whole show devoted to your student's works. It's a good place to talk more about animation.

ENGEL

Yes. What I'd like to do first is talk about some- thing that often people ask when they see [my] work. They ask, "How come you're doing this? How come you're working with this kind of a straight line, this kind of hard-edged, architectural approach to paintings?" It's always been a mystery to people what makes a person go on that terrain. Generally I have no other words except my answer has always been that I think that if you are that very specific in your direction, it's because you had no choice. You had no choice. So then, how can you back that up? You have choice, I mean, you can say, "You could change your mind." But I think if I go back a little bit, then it becomes obvious that in the early, early stage — I'm talking about when I was thirteen or fourteen — that certain things happened, and now, when I think back, it's an indication of a direction, and therefore there was no choice. One of my early recollections was that I was with some friends, and we went to visit some people back in Budapest, and there was a painting on the wall. The painting had a door, and from that door three dogs ran out, and they were in the air — One was in the air, the other landed, the other one was on the steps. But

underneath there was a lot of space, and the space went back, and it had lines on it. Now, what was interesting in retrospect is that the dog didn't interest me: the empty space to me was interesting. That was what I was looking at, the space that went way back and it had lines on it. That to me was the something that grabbed me, and I looked at it. I never looked at the dogs; it was the space and the lines. And another interesting experience, again back in Budapest. Again I couldn't be more than twelve or so; I never knew anything about automobiles, and I couldn't care less. I couldn't tell one from another, and I never really saw that — It was something that moved. I remember one day I came around a corner, and there was an automobile, and I stopped, and I said, "I like that. This I like." You know what was that? I saw the front of a Rolls-Royce. Now, the front of a Rolls-Royce was square, the old grille.

WESCHLER

The grille, yeah.

ENGEL

Now, it hit me so hard that I said, "Now that I like, I like that car." By seeing that front, that square front with the lines in the grille, it again was something I took to. Now why would I take to this when I couldn't see a car? But the shape, the design hit me; there was something already obvious. And then I think a third experience would be when I saw Early Masters, let's say Rubens or Rembrandt and the large portraits. It wasn't the head that fascinated me, but around the edges, where he left things unfinished, where you could see the texture of the brush, that portion of it fascinated me. Now, you see, these are three experiences, and I'm talking about when I'm around twelve, thirteen, fourteen, that that was the thing that grabbed me. So therefore some- thing was already in my gut, had to be, because at that age, why wouldn't I look at the faces? But I looked at this unfinished canvas, and even the surface of the canvas was almost coming through, and I felt, now this is a painting by itself that you could put a frame around. So this, and the front of a Rolls-Royce where you had these straight hard edges, hard structure, a piece of mechanism, that I was aware. So this is what I mean. And then, from there on, it just happened that later when I began to give it more thinking — now I'm talking around the age of seven- teen or eighteen and not been exposed to anything of what you'd call abstract painting of any kind, of nothing — I was

beginning to feel and think that I could put a straight line or a circle, or I could put anything on a piece of paper, and it would be a painting of itself, of its own. It would have its life, because it came out of a human being. So I started to do that kind of art work, and I mean I'd never seen anything like that before, but the feeling was that it's got to be right. Now, what's interesting here-- Because I later discovered Kandinsky, and Kandinsky came on this theory by coming home one night, and he saw one of his paintings upside down, and he said, "God, it looks right." Yet the content in that sense is gone. And [Frantisek] Kupka was another man who came to his terrain of nonobjective painting by eliminating more of the image, because he was almost a very decorative illustrator at the beginning. But they came through all that process somehow, whereas the thing with me was that I had none of that, and had not even been exposed to contemporary art, and yet I was beginning to put just lines and squares and triangles on a piece of paper. So this is the way I'd like to just explain that it's got to be there somewhere in the gut. And when you are on it at that early age and you stay with it, you have no choice.

WESCHLER

Have you ever thought about how it was in your gut at that early age? I mean, were there were any kinds of support for aesthetic ideas in your family? It's a rather remarkable thing to find a twelve-year-old having that interest in space, or having that interest in a grille.

ENGEL

Yeah. Well, you see, at that age I had no idea, I had no words for it, the grille, or I had no words for it — "it's space " — but it fascinated me, that feeling of space on a canvas. Never the people: that was of no consequence. It was always the space. It's the feeling of mood, the dramatic mood of maybe light and dark. And for that I have no answer, none whatsoever. I had heard a lot of music at that age, because there was music around the family, and there was music around that world. In Europe, you were exposed to music. So that was the only thing. But the art that I was exposed to — Naturally you went to the museum and you saw the old Masters .

WESCHLER

Can you describe your family a little bit, about what kind of background you had.

ENGEL

Well, my family background, I would say, was rather simple; the only thing is that my mother did play the piano. So there was that sound, that musical sound. That was the only exposure, let's say, that came out of the family to me. Otherwise there was no other artistic environment.

WESCHLER

What did your father do?

ENGEL

Father was like a semi- jeweler-designer , but not of consequence, and not of anything of value. There were no drawings around the house. It was probably just at work when he did that; it was a combination of that kind of activity in that world. But that did not expose me to any kind of drawing. But it was just in the head, so that when I was in high school, for instance, Emerson High School, and every- body had to go out on the field to draw the trees and landscapes, I told the teacher--her name was Miss Goff — I said, "I would rather just stay in the room and make my own drawings and not have to look at trees for that purpose." And I don't know what prompted her to agree with me, because she said, "You can just stay in the room and do your drawings," whereas everybody else had to go out on the field and do the landscapes. Even at that time I just couldn't under- stand why I had to look at something to make something on a paper of artistic value. Now, again, I can't explain these things, but this is what I mean when you have no choice. You're going on something that is absolutely unexplainable . Now there is such a thing that you could say therefore that I'm a primitive, because I didn't come out of studying Kandinsky or by studying Kupka or the Bauhaus or Klee. So then you could say, "Maybe he's a primitive." Whether it's good or bad I don't know. But these are the principles that some- times guide a person into a terrain that you can't always explain. Or you say, "He did that because Picasso was doing a cubist painting." That is something I just wanted to put down on paper as a record, and for what value I don't know. But there it is .

WESCHLER

When did you first encounter Kandinsky? Can you describe your feelings?

ENGEL

Yes, I encountered Kandinsky in Los Angeles one day, and it was a tremendous influence.

WESCHLER

Under what circumstances?

ENGEL

I think he had an exhibit on Wilshire Boulevard someplace. I think Hillary Bay was there as I vaguely remember. And for the first time I saw —

WESCHLER

What era would this be?

ENGEL

Oh, I think it had to be around '39, I think '39 or '38. I saw Kandinsky for the first time, and then I realized that my thinking, or whatever I was doing, was really okay, because there it is on the walls, and it's real, you know?

WESCHLER

Did he have a reputation in Los Angeles? Had it reached out here that Kandinsky was important? Or was he a relative unknown at that time?

ENGEL

I think he probably had a presence with painters, but I think it was some kind of a strange situation that Hillary Bay — I don't know what was the contact, how she came to this city. But there was the exhibit, and how I even got there or who told me to go there, I don't even recall that. But there it was, and for the first time I realized that such art existed. Because up to that moment I would hide my work and really not show it to anyone, although then much later you know I showed the work to Oskar Fischinger. But it was still at the very, very beginning. By that time I knew that such things existed. But it's way before that, those experiences that I think are of consequence. So therefore, as I say, sometimes you have no choice, you know, no choice.

WESCHLER

Have you ever looked back and thought about what it would be like had you gone a different route?

ENGEL

Looking back, no, I couldn't have. I could not have gone another route, because that particular direction of feeling was so strong that I had absolutely no desire, for instance, even to pick up a pencil and try and draw somebody. Although I did go to life classes and did some life-study work in class. But it was to me something I pushed myself, because I felt I should do that because everybody does it, it has to be done. But I could never get into any kind of a real effort to make that thing important. 'Cause I always felt that that's not me, that's not me, and I'd have to go back to just drawing those straight lines and circles and have this kind of activity on a canvas. That to me always felt right, felt good. Even now I might draw a little bit, but, you know, throw the pencil away. It's like drinking something that doesn't taste good and you spit it out. That's me. Because I know another person next to me can be drawing away, and I can admire--I do admire other works, you know, there's no problem there — but when I get to the canvas or a paper, I cannot do that other work with any kind of conviction and generally I always end up by just tearing it or just throwing the pencil down. And this is I think something that's very special and very beautiful, because often you hear other people, other artists — I heard Jacques Tati when they asked him why did he do comedy, and Tati faced the whole audience at the academy and said, "I had no choice." And I heard that from several people. In fact, I made notes at one time, about six or seven pianists, very famous jazz pianists and some other people, and it was interesting: they all came up with that answer. 'Cause they said, "How come you didn't go into classical music — Brahms, Schubert, Bach — why do you do this?" I forgot his name, the very famous jazz pianist--

WESCHLER

Dave Brubeck?

ENGEL

Somewhere of that area, and that person again said, "I have no choice." So I'm not the only one who ends up at that conclusion.

WESCHLER

Can you describe, by the way, your work method when you're working on an animated —

ENGEL

Abstraction?

WESCHLER

Abstraction. I mean how do you actually work? Do you work in the morning, do you work in the evening? How long do you work at a time? What's it like?

ENGEL

So then this work, this abstract work eventually goes on into animation. By that I mean it had to go into movement. I generally have an idea, and sometimes I make a continuity board where I might plan this thing step by step. But I always give enough space or time that if I want to change anywhere in the middle, although I have a structure there, I can change. And if I change, then I let that thing happen and go until it exhausts itself before I get back to, let's say, the continuity that, originally, I planned. I like to work in the mornings. That's my best time. I can sit down at seven o'clock and do work maybe until one, two, or three in the afternoon. For me that's the best time, for me. And then during the day or any other time, if I have ideas, I sketch them down, I make notes. It can come from many sources, although when you see the material, it's pure abstraction. But the inspiration could come from various places, could come from listening to a good play. I remember when I saw *Uncle Vanya* in New York with George C. Scott, the rhythm of the speech was so special that that turned me on, just turned me on to wanting to do — By "wanting to do" I don't mean I copy or interpret, but it turns me on "to do." And then I sit down and get into motion. But, as I say, that some- times for me is something that motivates me. Or, then, of course, my paintings, ideas come from my paintings or maybe other paintings that I see that might kick up an idea for me for an abstract film.

WESCHLER

One of the things I was really struck by in your abstract films that I saw was how they felt like thinking. I mean, they had that process of transformation

that is like a person thinking about shapes, movement and so forth. You mentioned that you can change while you go along, but generally do you have the whole idea for the film almost in reels in your head that you then work out on paper, or do you get the ideas as you're working with the paper?

ENGEL

Some segments I would have in my head, some segments Others, I work out. And other areas I leave it — it's like an open end — I leave these things to happen. Or let's say you move into a direction that you would never even know is there, but by moving in that direction, you open up another avenue of ideas. That's why it is good to be open-ended. But when I finish, it's got to have a sense of structure. Not necessarily a beginning, a middle, and an end, but it still has a sense of structure, so that you feel a sense of completion, or it ends. I think in these abstract films, it's really important the way you start, and I think it's even more important sometimes the way you go out. It's as important as how a person on the stage leaves a stage: you can leave a stage and yet you'll still be there for some time before you're out. And that aspect of it will be also in my film at the very end. It's got to be that way. And that is in a sense the structure.

WESCHLER

And that sense of structure is there from the start, do you think? Or it becomes apparent as you're working on it?

ENGEL

Some of it is there from the beginning, and some of it will just present itself. Because I think the beautiful aspect is that you must discover something while you're in work. You've got to discover new ideas and new avenues. Otherwise you lock yourself in and nothing's going to happen except what you already planned. But I like to discover these other ideas or shapes of forms, gestures, by always leaving time and space for you.

WESCHLER

Do you find that your initial inspirations for films take the form of something like a premise for a film, like "In this film I'm going to retain this triangle

through various permutations? Is it that kind of verbal premise, or is it something that's —

ENGEL

No, I think it's something that should be that way: You work with the same image and you bring it back, you send it away, bring it back from another point of view and give that shape other opportunities. Because it makes all the difference whether a shape comes in from the top, goes in the side or comes in from the bottom, or goes back into space, comes back in front of you from space. This aspect of repeat is very important, because it's very important in music: you repeat the melody, you repeat the tune. This I'm very aware of, and that is why I repeat. Dancers do that: they do the same step or several steps, and some- time later they come back and they do the same step again. I think that's very beautiful. It makes the whole thing more together, it's structure.

WESCHLER

It's definitely the case that in your animation abstracts that I saw the other day, when a shape leaves your space, leaves the frame, you have a definite sense of its presence out there waiting to come back in; or if it doesn't come back in — It's not at all just what goes on in the frame; it's as though the whole room becomes filled with it.

ENGEL

Yeah, because when you work on a film, you have to immediately realize that although you're working for a canvas which is immediately in front of you, but in film there is a space, the canvas is endless. So whether it's right, left, top, or bottom, the space is there, and the space is around the canvas. I say canvas , I should say screen . Every time I move anything, if it goes out a certain way, it also sometimes has a natural rhythm which has to turn around. It has no choice, 'cause the way it goes out, it will come back in a certain way. It has to reappear. Therefore when something goes off the screen, it's either waiting in the wings, because then it comes to a total stop, or the going out has such rhythm and style that it has no choice because it's going to make a turn outside the screen and come back again. Oh yes.

WESCHLER

Do you have fantasies of the turns and so forth that are going on off the screen that you aren't drawing? As you have several shapes go out, do you imagine the pirouettes that are going on?

ENGEL

Oh yes, because when I design and I have a screen, if a shape is going that way, then I know that the natural rhythm will be here: it either comes in here or it can come here, but I already establish a natural rhythm. Now, if I have something that goes up, chances are that that might go up to infinity and that can go away, or it can stop and wait in the wings. But if I have any kind of a rhythm, obvious rhythm, then that rhythm has a life out there, so it has to come back. So I'm very aware of this aspect of it, which I call natural rhythm.

WESCHLER

Looking at the walk that we took upstairs in your space, what we had were several pages from your animation that were hung on the wall almost as if they were drawings themselves, to be looked at as paintings or drawings. How do you think generally animation should be read when it's in a situation like that, when you're showing your stuff up there?

ENGEL

I think when you see animation in continuity, which already is in the work, and this is a by-product of a film, I think you should be able to enjoy them, sometimes separately. Sometimes they become a piece of art; sometimes I take a piece from that and make it into a large drawing or a large painting. But also I think it has more presence in total continuity when you see the progression and you see the process of movement; I think then it has a life of its own. Because if you take out a single drawing it is a complete item, that's it. But when you see a group, then you have an idea that that one drawing is of no consequence. The fifty is of consequence.

WESCHLER

Do you see yourself-- This is kind of a silly question but it leads into a whole other set of questions. Do you see yourself as an artist who makes films or as filmmaker who does paintings, or--

ENGEL

I think I see myself as an artist who works into the film world. It had to come first. I mean, for me it had no other way. The drawing aspect of it, the design of it, it came first, and then film was the next natural step, because so much of that stuff has a feeling of movement in it. And also it was, let's say, also part of me. My first exposure to art was through the ballet, so that was a very important moment for me. But the drawing had to eventually move, it had to go someplace.

WESCHLER

And yet throughout this whole process of moving into animation, you've retained your painterly side and your lithography and so forth as another facet. How do you see those two related to each other? You mentioned that occasionally you take images from your films and work them out in painting. Does it work the other way also?

ENGEL

No, but mostly when you work with animation and you work with shapes and you move them around logically, which is the natural rhythm, the natural turn, then you come upon compositions which you could no way get there, no [other] way that you could get them.

WESCHLER

As an example of the things that you couldn't anyway get to, you showed me some geometrical shapes that started out to be in animation but just weren't going to make it as animation.

ENGEL

No, it was much too complicated and much too difficult, and I just couldn't really go with that. But I came on some wonderful images, and I made those images into prints. Again, that's the beauty of this thing: these two mediums help each other, they give. Because here I'm working on animation and I arrive at ideas that I can turn into art work as separate objects or pieces by themselves. So they give to each other.

WESCHLER

I think later, at the last session, we'll look at the specific art pieces, paintings and so forth, and talk in detail about structure and so forth. But it would be

helpful for me, independent of talking about them, to talk about the history of your relations with dealers and that kind of thing. I think it would be helpful for people.

ENGEL

Yeah.

WESCHLER

I noticed in looking at your resume that you particularly had dealer relationships with Paul Kantor and Esther Robles.

ENGEL

Yes, I had a dealer relationship with Paul Kantor; that was my first gallery.

WESCHLER

Can you talk a little bit about him and about the shows that you did there?

ENGEL

Well, Paul was the first one on the Los Angeles scene that was showing contemporary art work. He was a difficult person. I think he still is, but he was good for Los Angeles because he opened up the whole terrain. I think I had about six or seven one-man shows with him. He always had a lot of simpatico for the work; he liked the work, and the relationship was good between us. But Paul also had other ideas, and I think the stock market was one of those big items.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

Well, I think he was beginning to buy a lot of stocks. Then things began to happen to him which was not very pleasant, because it just made him so damn nervous that he began to itch. That lasted for a couple of years. But I think he helped the city in the sense that he brought really contemporary art on the scene. He was one of the first ones that had a large presence. But the thing about Paul was that he never really promoted anybody. He was not like the New York dealers, where they had artists and they would see that the

artist would have a chance to go to other museums, or take the whole exhibit and make sure that exhibit would go to universities. Maybe it was too early for Los Angeles to think that way. But, anyway we never had that. It was always just have the show, have the exhibit, which lasted approximately a month, then the exhibit would come down, and then he would hold maybe half a dozen pieces for sales after the exhibit would come down. But we never had any plans, any ideas of how to make the next step, where to take this material. It really just came off the wall and went into the closet.

WESCHLER

You describe him as difficult. Can you flesh that out a little bit?

ENGEL

Well, you know, you don't want to be unpleasant about it, but he was very difficult. By that I mean that he really never had much good or friendly comment about other people. I don't know what made Paul the way he was, but he was always more tearing people, clawing people, and not where he would build a person or try to develop or encourage. That was not there. In fact, I think that was a reason I had to leave, because to go in there on weekends or other times and not hear something where he would be building, it becomes very tiring and frustrating, and eventually I had to move.

WESCHLER

Do you think he was a powerful force in the city besides with the people he dealt with?

ENGEL

I think he became very powerful.

WESCHLER

In what way?

ENGEL

Both as a dealer and also as a connoisseur, and also I think people were beginning to trust him to recommend paintings to buy. I think when he had his first big [Ernst Ludwig] Kirchner show, I think that was practically a sell-out. It was a big Kirchner show, and I think that really set Paul up big. I think after

that he became somebody that serious collectors would talk to, ask him advice. Eventually he became a legend practically, sometime much later. Because if you look at him in a few years, a comparatively few years, look where he's at. I mean he's out there at Sotheby [Parke Bernet] , buying Degas and Cezanne drawings for collectors. He's had to, because he bought two or three drawings which ran over a half million dollars. So he's established himself.

WESCHLER

Was he as gruff with his collectors as he was with everyone else?

ENGEL

I think he was in general, maybe until he found out that there was something very lucrative there. Because generally people would come in the gallery, and often they left and said, "That's the last time, no more!" Oh yes. And so this is what's interesting about him: he was that difficult and rough, and still he maintained a presence that grew into large importance.

WESCHLER

Do you have any particular anecdotes about things he said, things that come to mind?

ENGEL

No, I don't have anything at the moment. But he had a very good eye. He had a very good head and a good eye, because I remember I think they went into hock to buy a de Kooning and either a [Theodore] Stamos or a [William] Baziotes. I mean, really, to go and borrow money from a bank to buy those things, you've got to have some insight. And this he had, because, after all, he came into the art from the newspaper--he was writing for the cannery [workers union] — and from that he moved into opening the gallery. So, again, you see, you had that something that you can't explain, and it was there. Because he put on the first [Richard] Diebenkorn show.

WESCHLER

Was Josephine Kantor part of the operation actively?

ENGEL

Yes, Josephine, his wife, was very much part of the operation. In fact, this is a good story. [laughter] We were up at one of his collectors. Josie had a habit of getting kind of drunk, and when she got that way, she would just say anything. I remember we were sitting at this bar of this friend who had a lot of paintings from the Paul Kantor Gallery, and Paul was just going on, talking about art and all that stuff. And then he stopped, and Josie just looked and said, "You fucking philosopher. That's what you are, a fucking philosopher." [laughter] And it was so funny, you know, because here we are sitting in mixed company, and Josie — just pow [still laughing] blasting him. At the same time it was very cute and very funny, but it was so honest! I think she was a--what do you call? - a sensitive person, very sensitive. It's again — Where the hell did that come from? Because I remember when I first met them they lived somewhere near Exposition [Park] , somewhere near the museum, and I think their room was not much bigger than this, or maybe a little bigger. The kitchen was that big. And they had one reproduction of a Picasso on the wall. That was their total art, you know? And yet at that time we were already going to galleries together, you know what I mean?

WESCHLER

Right.

ENGEL

And here's this one lousy reproduction of a Picasso on the wall. The whole thing started with that.

WESCHLER

Why do you suppose he stayed in Los Angeles if he had so much contempt for the local scene?

ENGEL

I think he went to New York, and he lived there and all that. But in New York there's another type of human being, and I think after about two or three years, I think about two or three years, he came back. I think the way people are out here, whatever that is, the chemistry was just working better for him. He came back; he didn't like New York. New York is quite different; I think you need much more sophistication, and I think you — He had no manners, you

know, not really, and I think in New York you've got to have that. He just didn't like the scene, although he thought that would be for him, because by that time he became a private dealer. It turned out to be not the place for him. So there is a difference, a texture difference between the New York crowd and what we have out here, which is very primitive. And a lot of it is not honest, this feeling for art — it's not really honest.

WESCHLER

You mean in New York?

ENGEL

No, here: it's not really honest. Not that you don't have some; you do, you know. But we're talking generalities. There are just some kinds of people who just have to buy things because either it's going to make them look important or because it costs a lot of money, but it's not really to live with. Whereas in New York I met a lot of people, and they love it, it's their life, you know? They wouldn't let a painting go out of their apartment, because it would be just like a child lost out there someplace. That's something that's an honest, honest love for art.

WESCHLER

Does it bother you when a work of yours is bought by someone who you don't feel is going to really appreciate it?

ENGEL

Oh yes, yeah. In fact I have turned down a lot of opportunities like that. Not even mentioning names, but I remember some time back when this man wanted to buy paintings from me, and I kept telling him, "You don't like my work; you're gonna buy because I'm a friend, and that's no good. That's absolutely no good." So I have a very strong point of view on that.

WESCHLER

The other major dealer you had here was Esther Robles .

ENGEL

Esther Robles, yes. From Paul I went to Esther Robles. They were very pleasant people, but I think my work has not much simpatico. This kind of work that I

was always working with is kind of a hard-edged, almost architectural approach. The simpatico is not really here. It's never been really popular with a lot of people, let me put it that way. But I think not much here either. The Robles are very nice. They are people who are very sweet and nice to be with, and they were very gentle people and all that. But again, I don't know why they went into the gallery — Because it was business, I guess, but that other texture was missing again. Again the same thing happened as with the others: you put up the exhibit and it came down. You put up forty paintings, and the exhibit is over, and it went in the back into the closet. You see, again, there is no movement, there's no motion. It doesn't have the professional presence like a New York dealer. A New York dealer, when you have a show, they want to make sure that this exhibit will go travel someplace, so they call up people and say, "Come on in; I have something to show you." There's a commitment. And again, you see, with the Robles it was just putting it up and taking it down. It always was like a dead end.

WESCHLER

Are there any dealers in Los Angeles that had the kind of intensity that New York dealers have had over the years?

ENGEL

I think maybe the best person was at one time Felix Landau. I think Felix had that feeling. And then later on this other fellow came, Blum, David Blum.

WESCHLER

Irving Blum.

ENGEL

Irving Blum. But by that time I think the whole scene — See, then, it took on a whole different character. By then people were New York-wise, and all of a sudden that thing that had never occurred to us before now began to take the scene; all that is important, you know. But I think Felix, because he was before Irving Blum, he had that some- thing, you felt that. But Irving Blum, I think, was the first one who was really working on that way. But then, you see, the whole scene changed, the whole art scene. Art became important. You became a celebrity all of a sudden. Art meant big money. And now the

publications were beginning to come out from New York. Now you have Stella and Noland and Jasper Johns coming on the scene; and all of a sudden, it explodes. So I'm using the experience of New York-wise, of knowing that you have to go there. Whereas when I had exhibits at the Whitney Museum or at the Chicago Art Institute, we would never think of going there, to be there, you know? But see, then it changed, when you realized, you've got to be there, I mean you have to go. So you see what took place. That took place. That's why so often you hear people say, "Nothing happened here before 1960." A lot of things happened here, but what happened was very naive, and very simple, and very honest. But it changed. And then you realized that oh-oh, oops, you made a mistake, you should have gone to Chicago [laughter] , you should have gone to New York when you were at the Whitney.

WESCHLER

You did go back to New York.

ENGEL

Oh much later, but not when I first was exhibiting there.

WESCHLER

Was it partly the pressure of this need to be in New York that made you go back?

ENGEL

No, later on I wanted to go back. I realized the changes, the necessity, that it had to be, you had to go back. If you had an exhibit, you should be there at least ten days before so you had a chance to meet the people. Also, the New York dealers function different, because they introduce you, they give you dinner parties, whereas here those things didn't happen.

WESCHLER

How about actually working in New York? Was it important to do art in New York, as opposed to Los Angeles?

ENGEL

Oh, I really don't think so. I think if you go back there and you stay a couple of weeks and you have a chance to view and talk to people, I think then you can

do it anyplace. I think then the further you go away some- place, the better off you are: you can then be quiet and be on your own. Because New York can be very nice by going to so many places. Your phone rings at eight in the morning, and you get invited, and there it is. No, I think you can work anyplace; I can work anyplace, I know that. But it's good to go, to see. It's very important to see, it just gives you that extra something that you would never have.

WESCHLER

So you would recommend to your students here, for instance, that it's important for them to go back to New York?

ENGEL

Oh yeah. I tell my students to go back to New York and look at things. But then if you go back, see every- thing, go and see plays, go and see dance concerts. That's the big difference, I think; they go today, and they under- stand. Maybe it's easier to travel today than it was then; today's students, they go to Europe. Well, twenty, twenty- five years ago, you couldn't really see high school kids just pack up and go to Europe. But today they do.

WESCHLER

Do you miss the naiveté, the innocence of Los Angeles in the fifties at all? Are there things that are lost that you're sad to see gone?

ENGEL

Well, I think it's just like growing up: When you're a child, you function as a child, you know. [phone rings]

1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (April 1, 1978)

ENGEL

[I was] just commenting on my coming into the world of painting and so early into the world of what is pure nonobjective, and from that moving onto what became my world of imagery, with the hard-edged, geometrical, architectural construction. I think what is important here, because almost all the painters or people who set the trend — I mean, you take a man like Kandinsky, who came to his way of painting, which is nonobjective, through a process of elimination. He was painting and then he came to this idea, especially this one point where

he came home one night, and a painting was upside down, and the room was dark, and he realized that he had images there that were working without the content. And also then you take Kupka, one of the early ones, who again came to work into nonobjective world through a process of first working at all other ideas. And fairly recently after the cubists, there was a trend, a direction, or Mondrian set a direction. But I never had that approach, I never had that process. I think, therefore, I could be classified as some kind of primitive. Because my background was always — Well, when I was living back in Budapest as a child, [my exposure] was purely classical as far as seeing things. We went to the museum on Sundays and saw nothing but the classics, the Rubenses, the Rembrandts, the Titians, and that world. Of course, I was, you know, early, I mean, twelve, thirteen years old. But later, in high school, here, I started to have an idea, again, which is the mystery. The idea was, why couldn't I just put a line or two lines on a piece of paper and it would become a painting, it would become a piece of art? A reason I mention this is because, see, I'd never seen any abstractions or anything of its kind, but the mind was already telling or pointing the way of there must be other directions, there must be other ways, there must be a new visual world, so there also must be new discoveries. And for that there is absolutely no answer why at that early time in my life, never been shown or seen, been exposed to this kind of painting, and yet there I am in high school and I'm working with the squares, the triangles, and the lines.

WESCHLER

And this is in the middle of Illinois.

ENGEL

Evanston.

WESCHLER

Evanston, Illinois.

ENGEL

And what was interesting was that there was a teacher who I don't think she really knew what the hell I was doing, but she let me just go ahead on that terrain and she never said no. So when other people were handing in trees

and nudes and still lifes, I would hand in drawings of lines, and lots of circles and squares.

WESCHLER

What year was this about?

ENGEL

Around 1938, you see, '37, '38. And she never resented or stopped me from doing that. But there I was doing this kind of ideas, and the concept was simply, why must a drawing be something that you look at? And that was just — That came from the gut, you see. That came from the head, as I say, without any previous process of going through a certain kind of painting development and arriving to that. So that is where it all started. One interesting experience I can recall now — it's more interesting now than it was then, then it was meaningless — is when I saw an automobile for the first time that there I really was taken with it and it stopped me cold. It was the front of a Rolls-Royce. Because it had the square and the straight lines. I looked at it, and I said, "This is a beautiful automobile." I knew nothing about automobiles, I couldn't care less. And yet that shape struck me as something very exciting. So this is that small texture that once sometime you hang on and you say, "How come you didn't respond to the curves or the Venus or all the other borrowed things you find in Middle Europe?" This was the only thing I responded to, was this square nose. At that age, you see. So then, later, when I was putting these ideas on paper, I was very much alone. I wouldn't even show this stuff to people because I felt that was so strange, or weird, that people would just not have any simpatico with that kind of world, painting, or drawing world. Then, of course, I kept that going purely instinctive and not even what you call any kind of a hard intellectualization. But all of a sudden this idea of a straight line became — A feeling of hard-edged, architectural was something that became part of me. And I kept working with that. Then, of course, when I realized later that there was a Kandinsky, then I felt, let's say, a little more comfortable with the idea that in a sense I was not alone, that these things have been in motion with other people doing it. But at that time, I think it was around 1940 when I first saw a Kandinsky exhibit in Los Angeles, by that time, and then I realized that he was on the right track and there is

nothing strange about it. There's nothing weird. And it's around us. So naturally then nothing stops you, and you feel that you are right.

WESCHLER

Much later there was in Los Angeles a whole group which was called a hard-edged group, the "[Four] Abstract Classicists" show at the L.A. County Museum [in 1959] , for example — Lorser Feitelson, Karl Benjamin, John McLaughlin, for instance. Did you have any particular simpatico with them personally?

ENGEL

Well, I had exhibits way before that. I had a first exhibit in 1945, a one-man exhibit of geometrical, hard- edged painting. That was way before Benjamin or any of these people who are doing anything like that. Way before Feitelson was doing anything like that. So actually they came on the scene much, much later.

WESCHLER

When they did come on the scene, did you converse with them, or did you work with them at all?

ENGEL

Well, I knew Feitelson very well. But Feitelson still was not working in that direction. Feitelson still was not working in that direction. Feitelson was still working with like a head of an ox, you know, with surrealist dimensions. So he wasn't working in that way at all. I was the only one in that scene. And of course, Frederick Kahn, who no one knew and knows, who had a gallery on Sunset Boulevard. He was a hard-edge, geometrical painter, a very sweet kind of painting world. He had an art school later on Melrose, where now you have [Cafe] Figaro. So he was there. The only other person at that time was Fischinger. And with Fischinger I had an exhibit. But Karl Benjamin came on much later and Feitelson, much much later.

WESCHLER

How about John McLaughlin?

ENGEL

John McLaughlin was on the scene, but I think he also came after, I'm pretty sure, came after '45, '46, or '47. But it was already then an introduction that other people of Los Angeles were working that terrain. Of course.

McLaughlin's work for me was a little too close — It's not Mondrian, but it's a little of that terrain, the incredible simplicity and a feeling of space on the canvas.

WESCHLER

Did you know these people personally? McLaughlin?

ENGEL

Yes, I knew him, but just in as far as meeting him at the gallery, because he was then quite an elderly gentleman. I always admired his work, and I felt that he was something very special in Los Angeles. Karl Benjamin, also. I knew Karl because he was showing with the Esther Robles Gallery where I was showing. And I think he had some very good work going then. I don't really know when Feitelson started his first hard-edged paintings. But when I had my first exhibit in the city, no one was working that terrain.

WESCHLER

Did you feel left out of the "Abstract Classicist" show? It's striking that you weren't included in it.

ENGEL

I think the reason was because, if I remember well, I think maybe I was in Paris then. I was not in Los Angeles. I'm pretty sure. That's when that thing came on. Because also the word "hard-edge" was initiated by Jules Langsner, you know. And Langsner knew me well. But I don't think I was in the city. I think that happened when I was away in Paris. Even now, or lately, when you have exhibits like that, or they're talking about it, it's very seldom that I get mentioned. Because, now, the 1949 Chicago national show, which was called "Abstract and Surrealist American Art"— That was Mrs. [Katharine] Kuh who was then director of the museum. She invited me. She saw my painting which was very hard-edged but small shaped and very structured. That was in there, and that was in 1949. But I think after that, something happened. Maybe

because I left. Or maybe because I was also in love with films, like UPA, I felt there was a resentment there.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

Because I was involved in films.

WESCHLER

Who resented it?

ENGEL

Well, we don't want to put it in print. Feitelson, I think. Because Feitelson was quite a champion of mine at the earlier stage. I'm going around 1946-47. He was quite a champion of mine. Let's say he was an elderly gentleman, and he was promoting me or recommended me. But I think the thing came about that I was working in films. At that time that whole area had a very bad taste if you worked in films; and I think I was really then sort of pushed aside or left out.

WESCHLER

So you were thought of as an animator who also occasionally dabbled in painting, as opposed to —

ENGEL

Yes. But it was more [than] that, because I had an exhibit practically one every two years. Always with at least thirty or forty paintings. But continuously. And was showing in international shows, American shows, you know. So I was working all the time. It's just that some people can do that and some can't. I think all it really takes is a kind of energy that some of us have. You know how people go home at five o'clock and they say, "I'm beat." Well, I never had that feeling. I was able to work, you know, maybe twenty hours a day, and maybe have four or five hours of sleep.

WESCHLER

When were you doing your painting? Specifically, what times of days would you be coming in to work?

ENGEL

Well, I would be doing paintings anytime of the day or nights, or early mornings. My best time was always early mornings. In other words, if I start a painting at six o'clock in the morning, you know, and go till nine o'clock, for me, that sometimes was enough. Because I don't work, I never did work all day on things. I could only work maybe half a day. The rest of it would be maybe sketching or thinking or doing other things. But it's just the way you're put together that you can manage that, and a lot of people can't. I don't understand. I've no answer for all that.

WESCHLER

We've talked about the origins of your painting and your imagery, and we've talked about its reception here in Los Angeles. Can you just give us a general overview of some of the major themes that you've worked on in painting? Also, perhaps chronologically, what phases of your painting would be important to think about?

ENGEL

I think the early part would be the terrain where I would call discovery. Of discovering things: shapes, forms, sizes, the characteristics of the canvas, the edge of the canvas, you know, all that. I think the first years was that. The quality of paint, and how it sits on the canvas. And the raw canvas, working on the gesso board. And then I got more and more involved working with gouache. Again, it's a terrain of discovery. But primarily, it was always a sense of putting structures on the canvas. I could never really get involved talking about edges, because, what the hell, you're locked into a canvas anyway, and you have the edge. So I couldn't see making a big deal out of that space. You have a sense of construction, of depth, or foreground ideas. All that I think was part of my thinking. Primarily a feeling of getting depth with color, that is the terrain of thinking. Or the other one is to put these hard, straight lines, edges. Because for me, I always felt that the straight line, the really straight, is the most civilized thing there is. That is really, truly an invention of a civilization, the straight line. And I think that goes back to architecture, the straight line. Because nature is full of curves, you know, very baroque, very beautiful. But if you see a landscape, then you see a house in it, one house, and that house has an edge, that's your straight line. And that is done by

human being. That's a man creates that. Now, I don't know if I'm not going to be way off here, but I remember when I saw Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, is that it?

WESCHLER

Right, *2001*.

ENGEL

I realized one thing. At the very beginning you have an incredible landscape which is all curves. Then those monkeys or whatever; again they are full of that, curves. Now what was that thing that frightened them? It was a straight line. That shape that came into their landscape frightened the hell out of them. Now, it's interesting that no one ever commented on this. But that was the only shape that a human being can make. That's civilization. Whether it's good or bad is not the point. The point is that that straight line is the most civilized kind of gesture or comment. Maybe that is something that appealed to me. Because if you go to another terrain which is a curved line, which is a sensuous world, maybe that wasn't my world. Although often when I had exhibits, let's say with that kind of structural thing, or like this one — [points to a work]

WESCHLER

What's this called here?

ENGEL

That's *The Roman Windows*, that's Rome. And still on that the critics were commenting, although I worked with that kind of structure, still there is a kind of sensuality in these paintings.

WESCHLER

Which also comes out later on in some of your animations. You get curved lines and so forth. ENGEL : Yes. And I'm very aware when I work with a curved line in that world that I am in this other terrain which is the terrain of the sensuous. I often like to contrast that with the straight lines, which stand as the pure intellect, the most civilized pieces of creation, the straight line.

WESCHLER

It's interesting that you bring this up, because I've often, looking at the things in this room while we've interviewed, particularly some of these lithographs-- What is this one called here?

ENGEL

That's *New York Rhythms*.

WESCHLER

Well, some of these other ones, and then also *The Roman Windows*, are really architectonic in a sense. I mean, really *New York Rhythms* reads like buildings at one level, even though it's just black and white shapes.

ENGEL

I think it would be then a natural thing because the only thing that attracts me are the cities. I love the cities. I love New York; I love those tall buildings. The only place that I can really relax is when I go to New York; that to me is relaxation. If I have to go to Hawaii, places like that, I would go just out of my head. I can't relax there. I can relax in a city, and it fascinates me.

WESCHLER

What makes you relax in the city? What about the city?

ENGEL

Just the presence, just the very presence and the environment that I'm walking around in. I mean the streets, the length of the streets, the buildings, that fascinates me. It gives me a sense of well-being. Another interesting thing with the straight line for me, always has been, is now when you have a straight line, a straight line is full of possibilities.

WESCHLER

How so?

ENGEL

Because everything starts there. The minute I bend a straight line, I'm already committing myself to a direction or to an action or to a movement. So when there is a straight line, I can look at it as the most forceful and the most active part of a composition, because of what could happen there. Everything else in

the scene is committed already, except that straight line. Now, I might even go a strange direction. For instance, [Rudolf] Nureyev comes on the stage in the middle of a dance scene and he stops and he stands still: that to me is often the most exciting moment, because of the expectation of what will happen now. The minute he moves, he's in motion, the commitment is already there. And although it is very interesting and exciting, the commitment is there and you're in motion and the expectation is now, already, left behind. Now, I am paralleling these things with the straight line because I haven't heard much comments on that aspect of it in this character. So when people see straight lines and say, "There is no movement," and stuff like that, I don't think they understand what the possibility is, what it hides.

WESCHLER

What it contains.

ENGEL

What it contains, yes.

WESCHLER

Certainly another element besides, just looking at some of the things in your room here, besides the level of the straight line and the civilized form is your pigments and so forth which are more parallel to your animation. For example, I'm looking at the lithograph you did at Tamarind over there, and that is kind of almost an animation on a single — There's so much action and so much movement, it's —

ENGEL

Yes. It's called *Red Poppies*, it's a Tamarind print. Again you have all that action, but at the same time you have these very hard edges. The structures, which could be a building, if you want to read that into it, but that holds everything somehow down and everything else is just moving about.

WESCHLER

Tremendously dynamically.

ENGEL

Yes. But again, I need that terrain that I can work around. This kind of thing that settles down and, pow, puts a strong presence on a canvas. But at the very beginning, when I did work at Tamarind, I didn't know the technique, or I didn't know the mechanics, so I went into terrain which was very loose, because I just didn't know what to do with the medium. It was sometime much later when I went back that I did things that were much more related to my thinking and feeling. But it's a natural thing, I think, when you go into a new process is that you work another terrain. Another thing is when you work in a new terrain or you want to create new dimensions and you're looking for things and you want to create new visual forms: I think it's very important to realize that often you come to that terrain if you throw away all the material that you worked with before. In other words, if you realize that Jackson Pollock became a Pollock because he threw the brush away, that's very important. If he stayed with the brush, the drips would never have come about. So it's not always that continuity from one painting to another. No, he just threw the brush away. [Pierre] Soulages did the same thing, [Franz] Kline in a sense did the same thing; it's not as obvious as Pollock. But if you realize the important thing was the man threw the brush away and whatever he picked up to work with, a new world of images was born, you see? That's a very simple statement, and yet people have not commented on that. It's simple. Let's say if you came to a studio and you wanted to do something, and you said "Oh, damn it, I left my brushes home," but you got to do something, you know? So you pick up something and you work with that; that's very important. That's what happened. Now, again, today you see the painters are picking up their brushes because they're going back into magic realism, stuff like that. What are they using? They're using the brush, you see?

WESCHLER

Going back to what we've talked about, the early stages of your work, I'm again trying to get a sense chronologically what different phases you're concerned with. We talked about a period of discovering. How did that evolve? What became the next phase of your work?

ENGEL

Well, in that world I think I was a bit in limbo. Sometimes you are locked into some ideas and you have a difficult time giving it up, which sometimes can be

tragic. So I was working very loose for a while. Maybe that lasted for three or four years.

WESCHLER

What general period is this?

ENGEL

That would be before I started going back to my hard-edge; that was before '62. It's something that you have to do. At that time, there's no control. All you know is that you have to do something that although you don't like it, but you do it. It's almost a kind of getting rid of a lot of bad thinking. They were very loose, very emotional paintings, and stuff like that, but I had to do that. I think I just wanted to get rid of something. And then, all of a sudden I just, boom, went back to what I was before and where I am today, the very disciplined structure, as you call it, the architectonic approach.

WESCHLER

Is that, for example, these paintings here?

ENGEL

Yes. I think at that time I took off for Europe and Rome, and there it was again, you see, the city, the big city. I think if I have maybe a thing here, I think in California I was getting in a sense too California-like.

WESCHLER

What does that mean?

ENGEL

That means that the vegetation, the green — You know, we had no high-rises, no Century City. That maybe had some influence; that's why I went on that terrain. But the minute I dropped into Rome, and I was in the city, then to Paris, then the right feeling came back. Maybe it's a clue also, because the stuff was very landscapish at that time. I think I have some slides someplace, but I don't have any actual paintings. But the minute I hit Rome and I saw the buildings, then I knew where I had to go. And then of course Paris. And then of course spending more time in New York. I felt that I am now what I should be, you know? This idea of what you should be is sometimes very difficult to

explain. But you have sometimes no choice. But again, in the city, you're back into civilization, because the only place that anything ever happens or comes to a lot of consequence is always in a city. It never really happens in the suburbs. The beginning is always in the city, the important events. Then later on, when artists are well-fed and comfortable, then they go to the South of France. They still work, but that's another texture.

WESCHLER

Given your need to be in cities and so forth, why do you live in Los Angeles, which is the least city like of cities.

ENGEL

Well, it's the least citylike. Because I think eventually you get accustomed to the climate. It's very comfortable, and it gives you physically — It's a good thing. Also because I always made my living, which is a very big factor, here.

WESCHLER

In animation.

ENGEL

In animation, yes. In animation, but in the thinking terrain of the film. Because if I lived in New York, I'm sure I would see every play, because I like that art world. But it was the film, the film texture was here. I was interested in film fairly early, so naturally you came here. And then, after a while, the climate and everything seduces you, hooks you, and you live here. But every year I have been out of Los Angeles in either Paris, Rome, London, or New York, but always New York, every year I go back.

WESCHLER

Do you get kind of your creative energy from those trips and then you bring it back here? Or do you now have an independent source of creativity here, too?

ENGEL

No, I think I have an independent source, because eventually you must have that, it's got to come from inside. But going to those other places, it generates and helps it to grow and get healthy and well. I think that's a very important thing for an artist, whether you're a painter, whether you're a writer, or a

musician, you must travel, you must travel. But New York has always been an incredible source of inspiration for me. Or any city. I only go to big cities when I'm in Europe; I just don't enjoy villages or other places.

WESCHLER

One of the things I was going to say is that the *Coaraze* film, although it does take place in a small town, emphasized the citylike aspects of that town, the lines, the walls.

ENGEL

The doorways. You see, there is your square--the windows, the steps — there are all your straight lines. So the visual structure that I've taken in there from my painting is in character.

WESCHLER

That brings up the question of what the relationship is between your painting, your lithography, and your animation. Do you find that you're working on essentially the same kinds of things? For instance, the period from any given year, are you working similar issues in both? Or do you reserve certain kinds of issues for your animation, and certain kinds of issues for your painting?

ENGEL

Well, I do think that I have taken more from the painting world into the film that I've been doing, I would say, during the last twelve years, rather than the other way. Because actually when you work on a film, you're dealing with spaces, and infinite space. When you work on a canvas, then you're always locked into that size of that shape. Now, you're also locked into that screen, that box, but I can move to the right or to the left, I can move north and south. I can show you more space, and all of a sudden you discover that my right side is endless, and my left side is endless on the screen, you see?

WESCHLER

Right.

ENGEL

So that's a big difference. And also it has space around it, it has space in front of it, behind it. Whereas a canvas is just it. So I do think that maybe the

inventions of my head go into the painting and then go into the film. But I can enlarge it. I can enlarge on this character of the shape of form or size on the screen, you see, because I have an infinite canvas there.

WESCHLER

Do you find that you first work images in painting that a year later begin to show up on the screen? Does it go that direction?

ENGEL

Oh, yes. Often I have sketches, hundreds some- times, and eventually they make their presence felt or seen in abstract film. Because when we are talking animation, we have to realize that we're talking about painting in motion. But it's very seldom that I get much from that world into the painting world. I can take a lot more to the screen, because the screen is so new. It's only — what? — sixty, seventy years old. Whereas in the world of painting you're dealing with four or five hundred years. And also we're dealing with giants in the world of painting. Whereas in film we have no giants. It's empty, it's an empty canvas.

WESCHLER

Recently your film things are beginning to show up on gallery walls, or at least on the walls here. You're showing me this idea that you have of taking some of the sketches from your animations--

ENGEL

I think what's happening is that the painters today who've discovered film all of a sudden are beginning to come to that idea, that they can take that onto a gallery wall. And they're doing it a lot in photography also. There's ten photos —

WESCHLER

A sequence of photos.

ENGEL

And I think that's where the film has been a very large influence on the painters and definitely on the still photographers. Whereas I think that I would

still prefer to go the other way, because the opportunity there is enormous, it's endless. Space is endless.

WESCHLER

Well, looking ahead generally, to your next phase of activity, do you see yourself spending more time with animation or more time with painting? Or is it roughly the same?

ENGEL

I think it's a question of energy, of how much you have left. Also sometimes you move from one to the other for relaxation.

WESCHLER

How does that work?

ENGEL

It works in such a way that if I work on several abstract films I can get very tired of the process, and going back into painting is much more relaxing. Also because I'm not involved with mechanics. I'm not involved with a lab. I'm not involved with the projector. I'm not involved of having a dubbing session. So in film you have all those other mechanical characteristics, so that going back to painting and drawing is very relaxing, because also the result is immediate. I don't have to wait three days to get it back from the lab; it's very important, and therefore it's very relaxing.

WESCHLER

That sounds particularly impressive in light of your work now towards the [1978 Los Angeles] Filmex retrospective, which has you so involved in working on film. You sound like you need relaxation.

ENGEL

Yes. And people don't realize that when you finish drawing, then you have to go and have it shot, then you have to wait to have it come back. You have an incredible lot of mechanical process in film art and often you don't know where you're at. Because a lot of stuff came back from the labs recently all ruined, full of dirt, full of little snow drops, or it looks like snow. What do you do? You have to sometimes draw the whole damn thing over. So you have a

lot of terrain where--how can I say?--you're on the edge, because you don't know. It can happen even when you have, a good dubbing session, and the music comes back, and something is wrong someplace. That's the magic of painting, that's why you want to go back to it. Because you see it in front of you, it's there and it's yours, it's totally yours. You don't have credit for photographer, you don't have credit for mixer, you don't have credit for anybody else. You just sign a painting and it belongs to you. It's very important to do that for me, because although the other work is mine, still there are a lot of other people that I have to rely on and a lot of other people are involved. You want to get away from that, you really do.

WESCHLER

What kind of painting imagery are you dealing with these days particularly?
What are some of your most recent paintings like?

ENGEL

Well, my very recent ones, like that one —

WESCHLER

What's that called?

ENGEL

Let's see, they were called *Landscape*, just *Landscape*, and that's the last one, the last terrain of painting. I had about two dozen, and then I had others that grew out of that. But then again, if I would start tomorrow, I would still hold onto this kind of structure, but it would not be that.

WESCHLER

Can you describe the structure for people?

ENGEL

Well, this is what people refer to as the grid. But again, the way I use the color there, it's really color fields. They are color fields, playing one against the other.

WESCHLER

It's almost a harmonic effect.

ENGEL

Yes, but see, that red still pops. It takes a position next to the other colors, but at the same time, all the other colors hold a position with that color. It's a very structured, what people refer to as a grid, although I never think of it in that way. At the same time, there's a touch of film in there, because if you move, you can move from one shape to another, and there's a continuity there also. So today that aspect of thinking begins to creep into paintings of mine and at the same time it still holds onto the city character, the straight line. Some people might read windows in that, you know. But that's their problem. I never work with that really, in mind. But what was important to me is the color relations, they're very subtle and it's one note. Not quite —

WESCHLER

Like the Tamarind piece, the *Red Poppies*?

ENGEL

Yes, yeah.

WESCHLER

Well, this has been very exciting. Are there any other notions on painting that you would want to talk about before we close?

ENGEL

Well, I think at the moment it's very complicated, because this idea of going back to magic realism and stuff like that that's going on, I think that's something that will never really work. You can't go back. There's no way that you can go back. Art is like a river, you know, you put your foot in it, take it out, and you put it back, and the water is not the same. It's very much like that. You can't. And it's sad, for me it's very sad to see these people trying to do that. You can't. And it's pretty bad, it's pretty bad stuff. So I just have to see if I can really get hold of something which is tomorrow, which is things in motion, and still have something of that in the world of painting without all the futurists, without doing *Nude Descending [A Staircase]*. But that's also interesting, because I think Duchamp, when he painted *Nude Descending*, I don't think he was aware but I think he was already doing something which dealt with space in time. Because for that thing to come down, that was time

and that was in space. I don't think that people were aware, but he was doing that.

WESCHLER

He was anticipating animation.

ENGEL

Yes! He was anticipating almost the film. Because if I take a group of drawings of mine and put it in the light box as I function as the animator, I would get that. In fact, if that existed in his time as accurately as it exists today, I doubt very much if he would have done that. But it's interesting to go back to Duchamp's *Nude Descending*, which is pure animation, that somebody was doing that, but again not being aware. You just do it, you see. Just like I came on these ideas that it must be a drawing that doesn't relate to anything that you look at. I had no preconceived intellectual thinking there. And yet he was doing that. As you say, he was prophesying possibilities of that. But at that time he was not aware that it's possible. So somewhere there-- See, I'm going back there to see what's there that relates to today because of the motion of film and to see where I can tie the two together.

WESCHLER

Are you hopeful for painting now?

ENGEL

Oh, I think so.

WESCHLER

You have despair for magic realism and so forth, but do you generally feel--

ENGEL

No, I think magic realism is here, but it's a kind of a — Maybe the galleries are frantic and they have to do something. But you can't do that, because so many of those just look like retouched photos. There's nothing wrong with retouched photos, but it's that. There's no invention.

WESCHLER

But you think there's room for a young painter starting out today to find a voice that isn't — Some people say that all possibilities have been used up, that there's no more room for somebody to start out. You don't feel that way?

ENGEL

No, I don't feel that way at all. I think possibilities are always there. It just depends. The right person will come. But I think it's there. Of course, it's a little more difficult than it would have been two hundred years ago. That's why maybe the film is so exciting for the painter, because he doesn't find any Picasso, there's no Matisses, no Braques, there's nothing. So that is why that terrain is so exciting. Whereas the painter has this incredible background, tradition.

WESCHLER

The weight of history.

ENGEL

The weight of history, all that. And he bucks that; he looks at it. Whereas in a film, where I'm doing work, I'm working, there's nothing. I can set a whole new avenue or boulevard that's not walked on. But I still feel that the painting or the graphic art has its place. It's got to have its place, and it will continue. Maybe today is a time when we look things over in the world of painting, sort of settling down. Because we had this enormous upheaval with de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Gottlieb, Rothko. Maybe there's a kind of a simmering now. But no magic realism: that will not do it! [laughter]

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