Interview of Matsumi Kanemitsu Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait:
Matsumi Kanemitsu Interviewed by Marjorie Rogers

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

Contents

Use Restrictions

Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait

This interview is one of a series, entitled "Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait," funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and conducted from

July 1, 1975 to March 31, 1977 by the UCLA Oral History Program. The project was directed jointly by Page Ackerman, University Librarian, and Gerald Nordland, Director, UCLA Art Galleries, and administered by Bernard Galm, Director, Oral History Program. After selection of interview candidates and interviewers, the Program assumed responsibility for the conduct of all interviews and their processing.

Introduction

Matsumi Kanemitsu was born May 28, 1922 in Ogden, Utah, to Kichizaimon and Shizuma Kanemitsu, immigrants to the United States from Japan. He was taken to their native country at the age of three to live with his grand-parents in Ochimura, a suburb of Hiroshima, so that he could acquire a traditional Japanese education and prepare to head the Kanemitsu family of landowners and farmers.

Matsumi spent a lonely but happy childhood, and his memories of the mountains, countryside, and sunsets of Japan influenced his entire career in art. A neighbor and close friend was his first instructor in drawing, though his early ambition was to become a writer.

When the militarism of the Japanese government in the thirties reached out to youth in the schools, Matsumi rebelled against the strict discipline and drill work, which he sensed would eventually force him into the army. When his parents returned to Japan in 1937, Matsumi convinced his father to allow him, though he was only fifteen, to return alone to the United States. He failed however to overcome his language barrier in school in Ogden, and so he returned to Japan to complete his high school education.

He returned to the United States in 1940 and found work in a copper-smelting plant in Ruth, Nevada, then joined the U.S. Army, under its one-year enlistment program, in June, 1941.

Kanemitsu was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Still hampered by lack of proficiency in English, he was defenseless when, three days after the attack, he was arrested by military police and held in the guardhouse for lengthy questioning about his activities in Japan. In the months that followed, he was shifted from one detention camp to another; he ended up in Fort Riley, Kansas, along with more than 600 Japanese-Americans and a number of German and Italian prisoners of war.

Assigned as a custodian in the officers' service club Kanemitsu was given his own quarters there. After a difficult first six months, he was able to find some solace in his art: with art supplies given him by the American Red Cross, he spent his few leisure hours drawing with pen-and-ink and pastels. His first one-man show, which consisted

of figurative work and portraits, was arranged by the camp librarian, who had befriended him.

When he was transferred to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, he was able to spend weekends in Colorado Springs, Colorado, an art center of the Mountain States; there he met Boardman Robinson, who gave him his first formal art instruction. Restless with the situation in which he found himself, he volunteered for overseas duty in Europe.

Trained as a hospital assistant, Kanemitsu was sent to Germany, and then France, where, in Nice, he was placed in charge of the bar of the servicemen's recreation center. Here, he had an abundance of leisure time, which he spent bicycling around the French countryside, drawing, and meeting French painters such as Léger, Matisse, and Picasso.

When he was discharged from the service, Kanemitsu settled in Baltimore, Maryland, where he worked as a carpenter and learned the trade of the stone mason. A chance meeting with sculptor Karl Metzler turned his life in a new direction. As his teacher, Metzler introduced Kanemitsu to the artists, gallery directors, and curators of the city. Through these contacts, he found a patron and had a one-man show of his mystical figurative drawings at the Baltimore Playhouse.

He returned to France in 1950 to study at the Fernand Léger atelier but found its training incompatible with his own style. He then enrolled in the Art Students League in New York, studying first with Harry Steinberg and later with Yasuo Kuniyoshi.

Kanemitsu soon found himself in the world of the New York School, the garrets and lofts of Lower Manhattan. After the death of Kuniyoshi, he responded to the seminal work he saw around him in the studios of Pollock, Kline, Motherwell, Rothko, Marisol, de Kooning, Rauschenberg, and Reinhardt. His work in black-and-white and watercolors brought the fantasy world into focus with the unconscious line, while relating to the sumi painting of his childhood days. This became a central mode of expression for him and had a quality of mysticism which remains today. He experimented with stained-canvas painting, which was to become the predominant style in his California work in the seventies.

These exciting years in New York, in the social world of the poets, musicians, and artists who gathered in the Cedar Bar, were to be the springboard for Kanemitsu's acceptance as a professional artist. By 1960, he was exhibiting at the Widdifield Gallery in New York and the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, and he was getting national exposure in galleries and university shows. In 1962, his work traveled with the Museum of Modern Art show "14 Americans," and the Whitney Museum of American Art show "A Selection of American Watercolors." His works joined the

collections in the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as well as thirty-three other museums in the United States, Russia, and Japan. He was named artist-in-residence at the Akron Art Institute under a Ford Foundation grant in 1964. In 1967, he won the Japan Cultural Forum Award for young artists; he received the Longview Foundation Award in 1962 and 1964.

In 1961, Kanemitsu came to California on a fellowship at the Tamarind Lithographic Workshop, and he continues to use the lithographic stone as a medium. He does not consider himself a print maker, although he has been a very productive one. His California work has been a development of his earlier experiments with stained canvases and his exposure to the work of Georgia O'Keeffe and Clyfford Still.

He began teaching in 1965, when he accepted an artist-in-residency at Chouinard Art Institute. That association continued until 1973, when he joined the staff of Otis Art Institute as an instructor in watercolor.

Matsumi "Mike" Kanemitsu has the rare advantage of having lived in the ambience of the art world in New York, in a period of growth and constant activity, and also to have been a part of the artists' milieu in Los Angeles. In these pages, which consist of a verbatim transcript of taperecorded interviews, he recalls these experiences and makes firsthand comparisons between the two art scenes.

Marjorie J. Rogers

[Photograph of Matsumi Kanemitsu by Nancy Olexo]

1. Transcript

1.1. Tape Number: I, Side One (January 7, 1976)

Rogers

> Mr. Kanemitsu, why don't we begin with your giving us some of your family history, starting with your parents--their names and where they were born.

Kanemitsu

> Well, my father, the name is Kichizaimon Kanemitsu, and my mother's name, Shizuma. They both born Hiroshima, Japan. And my father and my mother married about fifty-four years ago. My father passed away in 1972, sometime in April. And I was born in 1922, May 28, and I lived in Ogden, Utah. And at

that time, my father is-- he's a barber. He had a barber shop in a hotel, and my mother [was] a housewife. But I understand my father's ambition [was] to be a diplomat, but he was not too social, and he was kind of antimilitarism, so, therefore, he couldn't fit into the profession, whatever he was looking for. So he was more interested in being a farmer. Naturally [it was] the Depression time when I was born, and he feel that any time of depression or wartime, the farmers [were] the only ones [to] survive. So I was about three years old [when] my family took me back to Japan to live with my grandfather and grandmother. And I grow up [in a] suburb of Hiroshima, Ochi-mura (in those days, [it was] small village in the countryside), with my grandfather and grandmother, and they were farmers.And I was very fortunate. I grow up with a kind of primitive life with these old people. So I [was] exposed to more nature. I was eleven years old [when] my father, my mother, and my brother came home. I never see my brother until then, and my father and my mother, I completely forget what they look like. They sent to me a photograph; they write to me. But everything in my childhood--my father, and especially my mother--is a fantasy for me. So suddenly I see my mother, and all my fantasies are gone. [They are] totally strangers. Yet I know this is my mother; this is my father. And somehow, I was more attached to grandparent. And I cannot communicate with my father in some way. And he want strongly emphasize that I shall be go to agriculture school to be a farmer. And that's only thing. He just made a decision. And he want me to take over the family, naturally--he was farmer. In our family, traditionally, [there was] the farmer. And, in other words, our family were traditionally, way back, landowners. And we have acquired some of the land. So he wanted to take it over. And my brother shall go [into] business. You know, he [father] decided everything. I [was] not necessarily against to be a farmer, but I have my own ideas. And [in] those day, I had on my idea, [I] want to be a writer and poet. So, naturally, my father deeply against it.And that time in Japan is in middle of Manchurian war, and the country itself is very much oriented militarism. And you go to grammar school; we have a drill, you know-- we have all this to learn. And I was a head of a class and I give a command, and all students, you know, like army sergeants. And that kind of situation I grow up. Naturally, [I was] very naive. But I was about fourteen the first time I was reading Marx, and, somehow, it hit me, you know, "Wow! Something go wrong," you know--the upbringing, to live in this type of situation in Japan. And I began to [be] involved more

strongly about idea to be a writer. So I began to read many Russian literature, and French literature, and all this. And then, slowly, I lost interest in to be in a school. And I say to myself, "What's the use? If I grow up here, probably, I have to go to military school to be a soldier." And I don't want that. So naturally, my grades began to drop, drop, drop, drop. And I hate to go in a school. And second year in high school--I was just about fifteen--I stopped going. And we have a big discussion with my father, and I said, "I'm not going anymore." So he said, "Why?" So I say, "I just can't go, and I cannot study. And my mental everything got stop." So he said, "Well, it's a law: you have to go to school. If not, you stay in the home to help me in the farming." So I said, "Well, I like to go to America." And he said, "If you think you're man enough, then go, and I give you the money." So he give me money, and I come to America--that's when I was fifteen years old.And the first I arrive in San Francisco, even [though] I have American citizen[ship], I was underage. So I need a person to sponsor [me]. Supposed to be, he's my family's friend who have a drugstore in San Francisco. Person supposed to sign the paper, immigration, to let me out. But he don't show up. So between this interpreter and me in trying to figure out who I know, then I remember my father mentioned a person that live in Utah, in Ogden city, Utah. So I asked the interpreter, "Please write this gentleman a letter to sign the paper." And they [get in] touch with him, and he come down to let me out and take me back to Ogden city, Utah.

Rogers

This was in San Francisco that you were waiting to hear?

Kanemitsu

Yes, and he come down to take me out. And he said he going to take responsible, and I move to Ogden city, Utah. In those days it take three day for train ride. I went to Ogden, then he say, "You got to go to school to learn English." So they put me in the first and second grade, and then after two months they get me in the fourth grade, and I was still fifteen years old. And I stand up like a sore thumb, you know, with all these people. [laughter] And I just cannot stand it. So meantime, I go to the library, in the school library, and take a dictionary, of course, and read some other thing--not interested in the

law, for the fourth grade. And I forgot her name, but this librarian said, "Well, you might as well quit. You have to have a private tutor."

Rogers

May I ask you: did you have any English at all when you came?

Kanemitsu

No. None.

Rogers

So you went to Ogden, Utah, and sat in the first and second grade room without knowing English, and you used the school library not knowing how to read English?

Kanemitsu

I can read it, but I can't pronounce it.

Rogers

How did you learn to read it?

Kanemitsu

Well, I guess, you know, that I . . . . When you interested in literature, you know, mostly in Japan, I read [and] translate. But sometime, a word cannot be translate, so I have dictionary. So that through by the dictionary, you can go by a very slow process, but . . . .

Rogers

Before we talk about your schooling in Utah, I'd like to go back to Japan for just a moment. You talked about reading Russian and French literature. These books were available in school libraries?

Kanemitsu

No, no. You have to buy. Then somebody passed on to me the Marxist books. Those days, if you read Marx in Japan you'd be arrested. So each page that you read, you have to tear them off or just burn the whole book.
So government was very strict at that time, very strong oriented fascism in Japan. No Marxism.

Rogers

Was there a youth movement involved with this?

Kanemitsu

No. They have, but the person who introduce, he probably underground person. He's the one who give me the book. And, by that time, [Japan] is anti-Marxism, socialism, communism, even democratic--they're against it. So you cannot talk about those kind of things. But the books are available wherever it is.

Rogers

When you were in Japan and going to school, when you came home from school, you worked on the farm?

Kanemitsu

No. My father liked to be, but you know. And I used to be late at night and look like I was studying, but I was reading for the all other material. And I was crazy about Proust and Kafka, and many, many . . . . I read everything I can get ahold of.

Rogers

You were reading them in Japanese?

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

What about your other activities as a child? Did you have any art experience at all in Japan?

Kanemitsu

Yes. When I was a child, I was a very lonely child and most alone all the time [because] naturally I grow up to grandparent. And my neighbor, he's a nice, gentle man (and gentle boy then)--but he's an idiot, you know; he never go school. And he taught me first how to draw a train and a horse. And we still good friend. [Komatsu]

Rogers

How old were you when this happened?

Kanemitsu

Last time I saw him, 1972, you know; he is already bald head, but he come to see me.

Rogers

How old were you when he was teaching you to draw?

Kanemitsu

Oh, I can't even remember. Since I was a child. And that's what he can do. He's a man and just draw. Today he doesn't draw yet, but he has to work in some factory for message boy. That's all he can do. He still live in mother, but I was the closest to this person. And somehow my first art teacher--people ask me--was this person.

Rogers

Did you go home and do work on your own then, too?

Kanemitsu

Yes. I did it, painting, drawing; that's just--I not painting become artist, or anything else like that, you know. I determined to be a writer.

Rogers

Did you write?

Kanemitsu

I wrote many thing, but it's no good, you know, because it is--they haven't stylized. And I wrote a poem.

Rogers

Can you remember it?

Kanemitsu

I published some of them in here, in Japanese newspaper here. We have a newspaper called *Rafu Shimpo.* Such a long time ago, 1938, '39. But you know, slowly I lost interest in become a writer.

Rogers

Did you learn sumi painting in Japan?

Kanemitsu

No. I'm interested how to draw or paint my way, but in Japan they have to teach you exactly what's supposed to be in their traditional style. And I never can do that. So that I decide I do my own, you know, instead of study then. Besides, I never interested to be that kind of type of artist. You know, I don't want to be that way.

Rogers

Did you try it?

Kanemitsu

No. I never did try. And in those days--I still have some drawing here I look through. Some American magazine I copy, you know: I have a Mickey Rooney water-color here--and I did a portrait of Mickey Rooney, and I still have it here--and Miss America 1938, you know. [laughter] Those kind of things. You know, actually I did it for the watercolor.

Rogers

You were working in watercolor, then, when you were painting?

Kanemitsu

Yes, because oil painting is so expensive. And so I worked in pastel and watercolor, naturally pencil drawing. But I never thought to become artist, you know. Actually, it's a dream in those days, teenage dream, you know.

Rogers

Were you active in any outside sports when you were younger?

Kanemitsu

Yes. I was very much interesting in judo but I'm not that great at it because of weight problem--because judo, you have to be a little heavier weight, and I was too light. So I switched the judo class to kendo, fencing. Then I study for karate. Those days, you have to take, you know; that's the school program. But the most thing I was good at is gymnastic. And I still love gymnastic. But you know I don't think I make a professional, out, but . . . .

Rogers

Did you compete in gymnastics?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I competed. And once I was a junior champion in the state of Hiroshima.

Rogers

How old were you then?

Kanemitsu

Well, I was junior champion; I was about between thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Three year I hold the title. And today I can't do anything. Those days, yes. [laughter] That's as far as I go to the sports. Of course, I love to just play around, for baseball and soccer and rugby. We don't have football, those days.

Rogers

You said that you lived on a farm. That puts you close to the earth and nature. What were your feelings as a child about living in nature at that time?

Kanemitsu

Well, that time--I don't think too much. But I know beautiful thing what's going to happen, you know, beautiful sunset. And in our town, you know, all over, in outside of our house, persimmon growing--beautiful, orange and red persimmon. And then the crows fly over--they eat persimmon--and in background the beautiful sunset. So the orange, pink, red sunset and the black crow fly all over-- and the green leaf and the persimmon. I can remember the color combination. And summer evening we have bat fly all over us to chase after the insect. And there were four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter. Constantly scenes were changing, changing; metamorphosis of nature to me is the most beautiful. And I wander around in the summer-time, go

fishing, and catch the shrimp, eel, whatever I get, and bring it home. And my grandmother cook. It's a very happy youth. And [I] climb the mountain and hills just to play. But mostly I play all myself. But I cope with that. And so today I remember like yesterday that particular time. And that's helped me for my paintings. So it come out. And of course, last visit in 1972, I went back. Now, this village become part of the city of Hiroshima, and I see that a beautiful hill, now they've cut down and flatten out. They made it apartments. And there's no fish in the river. Everything is pollution. It's sad; it's really sad.

Rogers

Did this village have a name separate from Hiroshima?

Kanemitsu

Yes. They used to call it Ochi-mura. And now that's changed to Koyo-cho. And time when I was there, Ochi-mura was the village; and our section, a place called Iwanoue. And that's where our house is.

Rogers

It's still there?

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

When we first talked about your parents, you said that your father was a barber. And then you had him in Utah. Was he a barber in Japan?

Kanemitsu

No. I think [when] my father come [to America] first, he's not a barber, no. He was just like students. And he went to school, and he wanted to learn English; in the future, he want to be somebody. But somehow [in] economic situation that he had, [he was] forced to work. And he say that he worked [as] a cook; he worked the farm. Many, many jobs he hold. Time I was born, he was a barber.

Rogers

He was raised in Japan, wasn't he?

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

When did he come to the United States?

Kanemitsu

He say he come to this country when he was about sixteen years old.

Rogers

He wasn't married then?

Kanemitsu

No, no.

Rogers

Where did he meet your mother?

Kanemitsu

I think the family arranged it. Then my mother come to him.

Rogers

And they settled in Ogden, Utah?

Kanemitsu

Yes. That time, my father was a barber. And those days the barber, the Western-style barber, have their own locker room. Many people--the railroad worker, miner, whoever coming to town--take a shower or bath, and then they get a haircut.

Rogers

That's where the railroad workers met from the East and the West.

Kanemitsu

Yes, yes, yes.

Rogers

Your father took you back to Japan and left you there with your grandparents, and then he returned to the United States, and you didn't see him again until you were eleven years old?

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

But there was correspondence between you.

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

Why did he want you to grow up in Japan rather than in Ogden, Utah?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think that his idea was [that] eventually he will return to Japan, so might as well give [me] solid education as a Japanese in Japan and live with my grandparent, you see, [and] then take over for my family. I was the first son.

Rogers

He wanted you raised as a Japanese rather than as an American although you were an American citizen?

Kanemitsu

Yes, but that's why he arranged it so that he [could]--those days, you can have a double citizen[ship]. Since you are born here, you are American. But your parent is Japanese; you can be a Japanese citizen [also]. But I had the two citizenship, double citizenship, until war broke out. Then I join American side of the army, so automatically I lost Japanese citizenship.

Rogers

When you were talking about your childhood, you said that you were lonely but that you had happy experiences with your fishing, your walks in nature, and your drawing with your friend. What stands out as one of the highest points of your childhood in Japan?

Kanemitsu

What's that mean, "stand out"?

Rogers

What do you remember as either the most unhappy or the happiest?

Kanemitsu

Well, most saddest unhappiness is my first grade. That my schoolteacher, she is so nice to me, and I feel I'm so close to her, just like my mother. And she quit the job, and she went to get married. And I was cry and cry [laughter]--my first-grade teacher, you know. Why she had to get married for? This was the most saddest moment. And most happiest moment? The most happiest moment is--my father said yes, I can go to America.

Rogers

When he came back to Japan when you were eleven years old, did he stay in Japan?

Kanemitsu

Yes. He never did come back again to America. And [also] my brother, three year younger, because he was eight years old--he couldn't speak any Japanese. He only speak English. Now all his life he stay with my mother and my father, and he still live with my mother and his wife.

Rogers

Were there any other children?

Kanemitsu

They don't have any children. But my mother had a sister, and the sister was the only one who actually followed my father wish on the other aspect. She was a businesswoman. She married to the president in some company, and she become also president of cement company, and etc., etc. And my brother is in health when my father passed away: that means he is going to took over Kanemitsu family. So everything work out.

Rogers

How did your grandparents feel about you coming to the United States?

Kanemitsu

Oh, they were hopeless. They getting older, and, naturally, they are very close attached to me. And they are losing me. And that's another sad part--when I left, leaving my grandparents behind in Japan. And I never feel sorry for I left my father or mother because I don't hardly know [them]. I don't have that kind of emotional attachment. So my grandmother call me. She say to me, "Well, I don't think I'm going to see you since you're going there." And I say, "Oh, yes, I be back to see you." Which I did after I came to here in 1938, and I stay one year here, then I went back again to Japan to finish the school. Then I stay in Japan for one year, and this time, I went to teacher school for training, grammar school teaching. So I went one year in Hiroshima, and I finished. I have a kind of license to teach under fourth grade. In other words, first and fourth grade I can teach. And then, just about 1940, [when I was] about eighteen, I return to this country again. I come here, in Los Angeles, and now I live in this hotel for a while to do garden work to help him [Mr. Okumura] out. Had to survive in some way.

Rogers

Did you know anyone here when you came?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I know that person.

Rogers

Who was that?

Kanemitsu

Mr. and Mrs. Okumura. They don't live here anymore; they live in New York. But at that time I worked for them for three months. I cannot. I don't like the job, so I run away from them. And then I hitchhike to Utah, and then from Utah I went to Ruth, Nevada, to work in a copper mine. And then I got laid off, and they say they have a job for work in McGill, Nevada--that is Ruth, Ely, McGill, Nevada, and McGill has a copper smeltery--so I went looking for job.Then this drafting law--the American army, government, they start draft the people. And all the younger men, everybody, volunteered. They say,

"Well, we'll get drafted anyway. And we have a one-year drafting law." So I get a notice of drafting law. So they say, "Why don't you volunteer? After all, the one year . . . ." So I say, "All right." So I volunteer. Then I went to service in '41, in June. And six months later war broke out, so duration of the war I was staying in the army.

Rogers

Do you remember Pearl Harbor day?

Kanemitsu

Oh, yes. And that time I was in Thirtieth Division, Thirtieth Infantry, and stationed in Fort Lewis, Washington, just outside Tacoma, Washington. And it was a panic. I was in Seattle, Washington. It was Sunday. And then suddenly everything black out. Everybody jumped in the truck and come back to camp, and they put me for twenty-four-hour guard duties. And then from then on, they don't know what to do with me because I was the only Japanese in my outfit. So they lock me up, all alone, in the barracks. Then they put the guard on me. They just don't know what to do.

Rogers

Were you called in for some kind of interrogation during these first hours?

Kanemitsu

Yes. But first they put [me on] the guard duty. Then they stripped all my guns. Then they put me in the barracks.

Rogers

How soon after the Pearl Harbor attack did they do this?

Kanemitsu

About three days later . . . December 7, 1941 . . . so around about December 10. Then they waiting for the order to come in from Washington, you know, [as to] what are they going to do with me. And many people get a discharge in the army, American-Japanese. Immediately they are discharged. But in my case they cannot discharge me because I am a volunteer.

Rogers

When you were called in for interrogation, do you remember the conversation?

Kanemitsu

Well, that time, I don't know what's going on; nobody talk to me. But, of course, I remember that intelligence office constantly question me: what I done in Japan, who I know, who this, who that, who this. But I really don't know that much American-Japanese people. And in Japan I have very little connection. But I told them yes, I have military training in Japan, start out with grammar school, and in the time I went to high school I went through this. But it's kind of confusing, you know; everyone is confused. I don't know where I stand. I thought they were going to kill me. [laughter] I really did because they [had] heavy guard on me, you know.

Rogers

When you were in Japan, was there much anti-American feeling?

Kanemitsu

I think they had it, you know. But it's very strange; they still print American movie. Clark Gable, Hedy Lamarr, all those kind of movies--they still playing. And baseball is still very active. And I think that thing is they began to change name--you know, it's so silly--from English name to Japanese. Such as baseball, they changed the name to *ya-kyu.* And you know, they start taking all the English name out. But anti-American feeling, yes, they had it. But most people don't feel that way. I don't think so.

Rogers

Was most of your exposure to America through the movies and the magazines?

Kanemitsu

Yes, and magazines. And Sunday comic. My mother used to send to me all the comics.

Rogers

What did you think America was like?

Kanemitsu

Well, kind of fantasy. I thought that America is the most greatest country. And some people say, you walk in the street, you find money. And it is for true. You looked, you always find. San Francisco, or New York, I always find money. But kind of fantasy I had, America is. Back [with] my grandmother the time I last depart [from] Japan, she say, "I wish I can go with you because I always want to go, but I am too old." And she was saying that, "You go to America," she say, "be nice to Jewish people." So I say, "Why?" "Well," she say, "what I hear is all greatest people are Jewish people." I say, "For instance, who?" "Well," she say, "the first American president is Georgie Washingbaum, and famous other president name is Abraham Lincolnstein." And she said that Roosevelt is a Jew, Charlie Chaplin is a Jew, and Einstein is a Jew, so you have to be nice with the Jewish people because it's all great people. [laughter] So I think, yes, Einstein is, sure, But like she said Georgie Washingbaum. I know it's Washington, but, you know, maybe she's right and I don't know. That's why I got the message that time.

Rogers

Did she give you any other advice?

Kanemitsu

Well, otherwise, she said, "In America, you go there. People drink; people smoke. They fight in the street." So I say, "How you know? You've never been there." "Well," she said, "somebody else told me." And she said, "Don't you even marry American woman." I say, "Why?" "Well, you married to them, and they going to take over you," she said. "They are very bossy people," she said. And then I come to here, and I find it's not true. The men are real macho here. But it's a lot of propaganda going on.

Rogers

Where did she get her impression of America?

Kanemitsu

I guess everybody kind of put down idea. Then she loved Charlie Chaplin and movie. And she said she meet Babe Ruth, and Babe Ruth was in Japan once for visit. And so it's very strange. Everything's so confusing and abstract about

America. Nobody don't know really what it was. And my father and the neighbor talked about--you know, he's experienced in America. So I ask him, you know, what do they look like? Well, he said, "You find that out. You find your own way."

Rogers

So he had no advice for you when you left.

Kanemitsu

No, none. So he say, "Go to America, go to work, and you owe me about $400; you pay me back." So I say I will. And outside that, he hadn't told me anything.

Rogers

So within six months of your second return to America you were locked up in an army barracks.

Kanemitsu

Yes. Well, then they send me to Presidio, San Francisco, and then Camp Cook, California, in Lompoc, California. And then they evacuate all American-Japanese out including GI. And they [were] sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and then after one week in Leavenworth, they sent [them] to Fort Riley, Kansas. There was about 500 to 600 American-Japanese. And my job is to work in the service club washing dishes. And later, I can paint and draw. So they give me the whole army barracks, myself, to use as studio. And I paint many officers' portrait and officers' wife and children. And since it's a cavalry post, I paint a horse--you know, jumping [with] a horse or fox hunting, those kind of things. I paint to the officers' mess hall, officers' club. And then I had a show. That was my beginning of my career.

1.2. Tape Number: I, Side Two (January 7, 1976)

Rogers

Before they moved you to Kansas, how long were you confined in Washington?

Kanemitsu

Well, about two week in the barracks. I could not get out of barracks, and somebody bring in the meals for me. Anything I wanted by the PX, I give the money [to] the guard, and the guard go out to get it for me. And I really confused; I don't know what's going to happen to me, and they don't know themselves. And then after about two week, the order finally come in through MP [who] took me in train to Presidio, San Francisco.

Rogers

Before you were moved, did any of the other men in your company come to see you? What was the response or the feeling toward you from them?

Kanemitsu

Well, no one come to see me. They are afraid themself that they have to obey the army rule. I was a prisoner, so they cannot talk to me, except necessity--such as I want to get a chocolate bar, or chewing gum or cigarette or Coca-Cola I wanted--I give to them money, and they get it for me.

Rogers

Did you protest this treatment?

Kanemitsu

No. I don't protest, and I accept it. I accept that where to go. And later I did protest.

Rogers

When they first told you that you were going to be confined, did you ask why?

Kanemitsu

You see, in the army, there is no word for "why." You cannot say that. Superior officer say that, you gotta be that way, you see. Only thing you can say is, "Yes, sir; no, sir." You can't talk back. See, when they draft me in the army, I don't speak English at all. All I know [is] yes, no, hello, how are you, good-bye, how much--that kind of vocabulary.

Rogers

So when you were interrogated by the intelligence officers, you weren't really able to tell them too much in English, were you?

Kanemitsu

Well, they have an interpreter. And the person come in, and he ask me in English, and I couldn't understand what he talking about, then this interpreter . . . .

Rogers

Was he Japanese?

Kanemitsu

Yes, American-Japanese.

Rogers

But he wasn't interned?

Kanemitsu

No, he's also working for that intelligence, they call "G2" in the army--intelligence--and he can talk both languages. I shall say his Japanese is not great, but he must speak very good English. So whatever he ask in Japanese, sometime I couldn't understand this man, that Japanese at all. And then [there's] the dangerous character--if I was born here [and] never went to Japan probably I'm okay, but that time that my childhood in Japan [and] education in Japan, [I'm] a possible sabotage or dangerous character. And so I understand. Everybody have such kind of thing. And I thought I was a very loyal to America; otherwise I don't volunteer the army to begin with. But slowly, slowly [it] made me disillusion and depressed that strongly I become kind of antimilitarism. But I always keep inside--like a slush fund--inside. Then my slush fund is opened up when they put us, all American-Japanese, in the Fort Riley, Kansas, because there is a group. Before that, I was all alone, and when it becomes a group, the people become brave. Because they put 500 or 600 Japanese, and then they separate: you go this way, you go this way, you do this.

Rogers

How were they separated?

Kanemitsu

Well, people like--maybe this person is suspicious or true independents. Those group, they put in one barracks. And they say, "This [one] is okay," [and put] in other group. So they separate us. And when I was in my barracks, [everyone] is all suspect. And naturally, company commander is very strong anti-Japanese. And the person I work with in Fort Riley service club is a hostess who in charge. And this lady [is] also strongly against Japanese. Which I do for her, for working for the service club for washing dish, and I do clean up the service club before they have a dance every Thursday night. That's my job and our job. But she never call me just "Mike," or any name's okay, but she always call me "Monkey." You know, that's what that name was, and it's a hurting me. But [there] is a librarian--the only person [who] is so gentle and kind [and] something that I can balance; [one] person I dislike, but other person very nice. So I kind of Indian thing.But it's a help to me though, to do something. I can paint. That time I really seriously started researching in American art and European art. Just about then my idea is to be an artist. And my nickname is "Artist." And everybody, all GIs, call me "Artist." That's my name; that's all.

Rogers

The books you read on art were in the camp library?

Kanemitsu

Yes, this head librarian [was] very gentle and kind enough to order for me that magazine in those day called *Artist.* And I don't know that time if *Art Digest* was still existed, or *Art in America*--or some magazine like that. And she got for me Picasso, many Picasso, and Salvador Dali. The first book I read is *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali,* and I reflect, "Wow! This man can paint!" And naturally I went through that whole group, the art like Renaissance to Flemish art, and the Dutch, and all this kind of thing [in] this library.

Rogers

This was your first exposure to Western art?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Well, I had it but I don't know about what's gone on today (1942, that time and before)--you know, what American art is.

Rogers

This was the first time you had seen Picasso's work and Dali's work?

Kanemitsu

No, that I see, but . . . .

Rogers

Where had you seen Picasso's work?

Kanemitsu

In Japan. They had Japanese art magazines, and they're exposing many, many Picasso, cubism period, too, impressionism. They had it but I think that I just glanced through, and I never took that much seriousness. But this was the most departure to my life is Fort Riley, Kansas. I was in agony and miserable. But you see, I want to be an artist at that time [and] moment. That's the only thing to get out my anxiety and to escape my misery. So one year in Fort Riley, Kansas, is the best education I ever had. All self-taught, of course. And many GI go out on the town, you know, and I don't go out. I just stay.

Rogers

What were your living conditions there? What was your daily life pattern?

Kanemitsu

Well, since I am separate, and they don't think I'm dangerous character, but I'm eccentric--something wrong with me. And so they separate with me from the other group. In other group they have to get out. They have to be, like a drill--they had to march and all this kind of thing. Then they go collect the garbage can. They working, you know: American-Japanese is working with Italian and German prisoners together at that time. That was before Hawaiian and Japanese-American infantry organized. Then they give you a chance to be volunteer to infantry to go through that, you know, overseas. Well, I don't volunteer, and I like what I am. They give me such a beautiful . . . [laughter] barracks, all myself.

Rogers

How long after you got there did they give you that?

Kanemitsu

Well, the first, I shall say about the first six months, they are very hard on me. Then later, they just give me the barracks all myself to let me alone.

Rogers

You said that when you first got there, they put you with people who were highly suspect.

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

And you lived in that barracks for six months?

Kanemitsu

Yes.

Rogers

And you were mistreated?

Kanemitsu

Well, we all separate groups, and, naturally, everybody mistreat. Among the American-Japanese, you know, we are like black sheep. We have in the army the right wing, too--all the "anti-" thing, you know; there was a lot of protesting going on, and some went to the court-martial because they refused to salute the American flag. Only one condition we would join the infantry: you must treat us same as American GI and take our parents out [of] the camp. You know, they were all evacuated [from] California, and they were in the camp--in detaining camp, however they call it. Some people call it concentration camp. So they feel that their parents [are] in this camp, and they [the Japanese-American soldiers] are in the American army, and they do the same work as Italian and German prisoner have to do, and then they expect them to salute the officer and salute the American flag. That's very few, maybe five or six people, and they went to court-martial. And some people got dishonorable discharge. But it was a conflict time.But my case is that they find that, I think, they don't think I'm dangerous. But I was never off, to the other people. In other words, they go out, the group, to go on the town to have fun or something, or they have a three-day pass or weekend pass. And

naturally, they don't go out close by the camp, like Junction City. That's a typical army town. So they go to Wichita or Kansas City, Missouri, and that's where they have fun. But I don't go out. I refuse to get out [of] the camp. So they thought I was very odd.

Rogers

Why didn't you want to go with them? Weren't you in need of some . . . ?

Kanemitsu

I'm not interested in taking on those kind of thing. You know, of course, they sent me to the psychiatrist because everybody have a pin-up girl, you know (and this was before, that I take basic training in Camp Roberts, California). That is, every GI have a Ginger Rogers or they cut them out [of] the *Esquire* magazine, and they pin up girl on their locker. Then in my locker I have Picasso's picture and Dali, the picture on the bottom there [of the locker].

Rogers

Where did you get those?

Kanemitsu

I must have cut them off of some magazine or something. I don't know--I had it. And so my sergeant thought me weird, so he report to the captain. So one day, captain [tell] me I got appointment for the doctor. And so I go to see him. So I went up there, and this doctor said, "You like girl?" I say yes. "And I understand that we have a report on you that you are interested in bald-headed old man in a long big moustache. You are interested in a man--some strange old people. And you like old people." And I say yes. And he say, "You say you like a girl before, and now you say you like old people." Well, you know, I say, "I like them because I admire them; they are great artists." So he said, "You are interested in art?" I say yes. "And who is it?" So I say, "Well, one is Picasso, and one is Salvador Dali." So this army officer, psychiatrist, he started to laugh. And so he said, "I admire them, too. Go back, you're nothing wrong. And just hang them where you like it." Then somebody tear them off; somebody take that. Then they put male weight lifters in my locker room [to]

make a joke on me or something. But then I forget about it. But those kind of things happen in army.

Rogers

When you said that in the first six months they were very hard on you, was it mostly verbal abuse that they gave you?

Kanemitsu

Yes. If some company commander, captain, not supposed to be using those kind of words. And the person who was the hostess, who in charge of the service club, you know, they mistreat us. I worked day and night in officer service club [where] people coming to pay to eat. And then we have to clean up, so very little time for sleeping, actually.

Rogers

Who worked in the kitchen with you?

Kanemitsu

There were two gentlemen. One person, he got dishonorable discharge. [laughter] He's [in] export-import business. He was American citizen, but eventually he went back Japan. And other gentlemen, he's also export-import business selling small airplane. But both gentlemen I don't see [now]. I met them in New York one time but we can't communicate anymore because they're so different.

Rogers

So after the first six months things got easier for you?

Kanemitsu

Yes, because they figure that I paint so that can be useful, such as making all kind of sign, you know, the army needed. And [at] same time, portraiture, you know: officer like to have an oil painting. Then they always painting in masonite, and they supply me through the Red Cross.

Rogers

When you first took your canvas and your paint to begin painting, you did it completely without any formal training at all?

Kanemitsu

No [training]. But I had a show there and also in the service club. The painting is--of course, I experiment a lot--a kind of relation to the horse, but abstract. And too bad I don't have the picture, but this librarian who helped me to encourage it, her name is Virginia Hennessey. Later she married to cavalry officer, and she live in state of Washington, and I think I have her name. And recently, other GI buddy friend of mine, he still corresponding with her, and she told him that she still own my three or four drawings from that time. So she said if I need it, she going to send to me. You met this person's sister, Mrs. Sasaki. She come every Tuesday to help me out for secretarial work. Her brother, he's in the service with me, and he still corresponding with Virginia Hennessey.

Rogers

Were these charcoals? Pen and ink?

Kanemitsu

I think pen and ink. Or possible pastel. I don't remember what they look like--such a long time ago.

Rogers

And the American Red Cross gave you enough art supplies?

Kanemitsu

Yes, they gave me enough. Then it run out; then I have no money to spend. Because I don't smoke that much, and I don't drink that much, since Kansas is a dry state. That time, nobody drink anyway. Only officer get drunk. [laughter] But this meant we don't have not even a beer. But it's very strange. In one barracks I was staying after six months, I was in what they call special service. And special service mean for that somebody [was] professional before they come in the army--writer or musician. And many musician was there because they were working for army band. In cavalry they have a band, so their group [was] there, too, [and] I was with them. And that actor, Jackie Coogan, was there, and [Oleg] Cassini, [the] Italian dress designer. At that time, he was married to Gene Tierney, the actress. And I think he was sleeping on top of [my] bunk. And in those days in army camp, they separate the black soldiers to

the white--and service club same way. But in any case, I was with the special service group when I sleep. And that was the first I learned to smoke, matter of fact; I never smoked before. I thought the most strangest thing that was: why don't they go to buy cigarette in the service club? But all GI, you know, those musician, ex-musician, they going out outside in the field. They bring back a bunch of grass, and they dry in the barracks, and they took them off. Then they started loading this cigarette and putting it in a pipe. And they smell awful. And I say, "Wow! They strange cigarette they smoking all the time." So naive I am--this 1942. And even officer come in, [and] he don't know what we are smoking. That was my first cigarette I start smoking, and I get higher and higher and higher--I can't figure out what they're smoking. But I thought it cigarette. And it took me long time to find out I was smoking marijuana that long. But nobody suspicious. So those people in the camp, they're smoking, but no one detect it, you know. That time, everybody so naive. Never thought about people smoking marijuana. But the musician know.

Rogers

You had a lot of contact, then, with these people who came to entertain at the camp. How did these people accept you?

Kanemitsu

Beautifully. That's what I was the most happy moment. They played jazz and all this. I just listen. And some classical musician come from Philadelphia symphony or something. I forgot his name. He played the flute. Just me and him sat down outside in the beautiful evening, and he play the flute. And I just listen, and we smoke this kind of cigarette. [laughter] And the only thing [is] that we get hungry and hungry--naturally, you know--and I couldn't figure out why. I get hungry every time we smoke cigarette.And then I was working in the service club as a dishwasher, and they call service club "number two." And next door is army gym, and people go exercising and practice. I remember that time Jackie Robinson, the baseball player, was in the same camp, and Joe Louis. But Joe Louis cannot come in to have a Coca-Cola or ice cream in the next building, you know; this is all white men in the service club. So I remember Joe used to come behind the kitchen, and he would give me money to buy him for the ice cream. And [there was] that much, those days, segregation to the black soldier. And I don't know what's better, you know. As

Oriental, American-Japanese was in white side, but they treat us just as--kind of alien, you know.

Rogers

After your first initial drawings that you did for Virginia, then you started to do some portraits?

Kanemitsu

Yes. I started doing portraits, then also I did the pin-up girl for--some people did like to have.

Rogers

Did they pay you for this?

Kanemitsu

I don't remember. I don't think so.

Rogers

So you spent your spare hours painting. And you never left the camp?

Kanemitsu

I never left the camp. Only once I left the camp and went to Junction City--that's outside of camp--[with] oh, about six or seven American-Japanese on a Sunday. And there's no place to go. Sunday, the movie house [is] close. Nowhere to go. So we just walk around the city, then went to Greyhound station to come back to camp. Then next bus going to leave in hour or so, so group of us just walk around the city. Suddenly sheriff come in, put us in a truck, and they lock us up all night long. So that experience I had, I decided I never go out.

Rogers

After being so free and living on a farm in Japan, didn't you miss being out in the country again?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I did. I did miss it. Even today if I have a chance, I go to country.

Rogers

How long were you at Fort Riley?

Kanemitsu

I think to just about '43, and then they shipped me to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. This was a canine corps, nothing but 5,000 dogs [laughter] and some mules training for the mulepacking; they have an army, too. But this post is way out Nebraska; I think a town called Crawford, Nebraska, [is] nearby. The camp [is] a very small post that is training for the war dog. My job there is work in officers club [as] the bartender. I get fifty dollar a month plus army salary. And then I have a private room. And I have dog, naturally, some stray dog. And I have abasement, and I can paint.

Rogers

How did your show at Fort Riley get organized?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think that Mrs. Hennessey set [it] for me and put them up, and somebody else cut the mat for me. I don't think I cut the mat for that time. And they display in the library and in all the hall upstairs.

Rogers

How many?

Kanemitsu

I don't remember--quite a lot because it's a big place.

Rogers

Can you remember what the subject matter was?

Kanemitsu

Well, some painting, but I think mostly drawing. And I think somebody bought it; I can't remember. Somebody bought for ten dollar or something like that.

Rogers

What happened to the rest of them?

Kanemitsu

I give it away if people want it; most people don't want it. Then after the show I throw them away. I cannot move the canvas [to] another camp.

Rogers

So you didn't take them with you to Fort Robinson?

Kanemitsu

No. But I take my art supplies with me.

Rogers

And you began to paint again while you were there, and you had your own studio in a basement there?

Kanemitsu

And then here again, that camp, we had no place to go, so only closest place I can go [with] my three-day pass [is] go to Denver, Colorado. And that time somebody introduced me to young lady, and I was corresponding. And she was living for Colorado Springs, and she was sociology major. So I used to visit her whenever I can get out in the camp with my three-day pass.

Rogers

In her home?

Kanemitsu

No, she was working [as] kind of housemaid. Those people also are collectors in Colorado Springs. And [in] their house that's the first time I saw that Kuniyoshi painting--later I study with Kuniyoshi. And these people had a Max Weber painting. I forgot their name, but it's a strange coincidence that my friend Emerson Woelffer, the painter here, used to teach there in Colorado Springs [Fine Arts Center]. He know the name these people. This person introduced to me the head of the Colorado Springs art department at that time, an artist and illustrator who is named Boardman Robinson. And I think he did illustration for *Brothers Karamazov* and all that kind of illustration.

Rogers

You said the head of the Colorado Springs art department. You're talking about . . .

Kanemitsu

. . . museum.

Rogers

. . . the Colorado Springs museum?

Kanemitsu

I think he was a teacher and a head. And then he start giving me lessons for drawing. So every time I draw at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, I go up to see this young lady, and I go to see Boardman Robinson to show my drawing [and] what I was doing. And I thought he was great. But today, now I look at it--he's all right, very good drawer, but [it] is kind of, for me, an illustrationistic kind of drawing. However, this man introduced me to some other aspect [of] what drawing is. So that was quite a help.

Rogers

You were doing mostly figurative painting at this time?

Kanemitsu

I do abstract, too, but mostly figurative, yes, because of Mr. Robinson is deeply against abstract, and I felt very strange. I don't know what happened to him after that, but sometime I go to library and I see his illustration.

Rogers

What do you believe he gave you?

Kanemitsu

I think that skill and draftsmanship and how to do composition, how you can put together for the figure. But he's a literary mind, naturally; he's a illustrator, basically, I presume. So he want me to emphasize to tell a story, in other words, a literary drawing, [only] more so. So he ask me to do it: everything that come to mind, I want to do--this person [and] relation to other person--put together. And he also encouraged me to do the sketch and go in nature and sketch this, sketch that, and I cannot do this. I still cannot do it

because I consider myself a landscape abstract painter, but mostly I do for inner landscape and subconscious thing. Those kind of landscape I do. But he say go on out [and] draw the beautiful sunset and draw the beautiful rocks and desert and tree. I just cannot do that, but I go there, of course, and then I just sat there and daydream. I watch the sunset--oh, how beautiful, you know. [laughter] So I never finished it. So Boardman Robinson say, "What [have] you done today?" And I say, "Well, I just sat there, you know; I can't do that. Just look in nature." And he say, one of these days I do. And that was very nice of him. His wife used to pack a sandwich, and I go on out. In Colorado it's so beautiful. So I really looking forward to get out at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, not only to see this young lady--you know, she's working all the time--but I did it to see Mr. Boardman Robinson.

Rogers

Was this young lady Japanese?

Kanemitsu

Yes. And later she graduate, and I think during the war she taught University of Michigan for the intelligence school, for the Japanese language school for navy officer. Then she met instructor who did the same and she was married. They still live in New York.

Rogers

If you weren't able to do the landscape sketches, what kind of work were you doing that you brought to him?

Kanemitsu

Well, mostly, the head, face, you know. My way to draw the head. And something come out of myself in a kind of surrealism type of thing, you know. And that time I was more interested in ugliness. Everything [that] people feel [is] ugly, for me it's beauty. So the people say, oh, this terrible very ugly face or ugly soldier, then I would do this. And Boardman Robinson, he not against all that but I just think he was [interested in] technical aspect. And so that's why I was doing this [at] that time. Also Mr. Robinson is a classical disciplined academician, and his own type of drawing [is] a different wet wash drawing. Whoever I talk to about art in a political discussion--you know, what's going

on--then I really cannot get along. I'm not so sure I cannot put to him that he's a fascist or he's a communist or that. But I got a feeling that he [Robinson] have a strong feeling for the socialism, and so immediately I adapt to him because I have a very strong background for socialism. And so that's draw [him] to me. But the same time, I don't draw or paint about social protest--in other words, social realism like Ben Shahn, and Philip Evergood, Harry Steinberg, Kuniyoshi, the social realists. And I was *not* a social realist. You see, in political point of view I do agree with him [Robinson]; in the same time, my work is different departure. That's what he was talking about, I presume.At the same time, that time, I was doing pen drawing with shoe polish, since in the service you have so much shoe polish. You have constantly shine the shoe and the boots. So I find that [is] beautiful media to work with on paper-- to draw the shoe polish. Just dip cotton [into] brown shoe polish and shade it with dark brown and black shoe polish. And he thought it quite an innovating idea, but that's easy way out--which [was] true, but for me, you know, something new. But he was emphasizing on pen drawing and ink wash. But later I master that. At that time, I was more interested in the shoe polish. And I understand. But I was very fortunate that he kind of adopt me.

Rogers

Did you do any abstract work for him?

Kanemitsu

He say, if you have it, go ahead, you do, but don't show it to me. I'm not interested, period. And also that time he introduced to me that Paul Robeson: he's a Negro opera singer. And it seems to me they are very close friend, and he visit--Paul Robeson. The first time I heard him sing, I thought, wow, this man has fantastic voice.Then I was back to camp, and I just cannot take any longer this isolation in the camp. I stay alone with the general and the captain and all these people. So I volunteer to go oversea. I was working for [the] husband of one lady [who] is now the head of the society list [in]-- what they call that Florida? Not Palm Springs.

Rogers

Miami Beach?

Kanemitsu

Yes, but nearby. Palm something. Palm Beach. And these people all there. But, any case, they say, "Stay, you don't have to go overseas." But I say, "I can't stand it." So I left.

Rogers

While you were there, did you paint for them, too?

Kanemitsu

Oh, yes.

Rogers

Did they pay you?

Kanemitsu

No. No one pay me. I don't think nobody pay for those kind of thing. Sometime some GI friend, they ask me to draw pornography for them, and I say, all right. And I do small pornography drawing for them, and they give me five dollars or something like that.

Rogers

Then your years at Fort Robinson were happier because you were more accepted in the army community there?

Kanemitsu

Well, I was a servant then; I was still servant for the officers because I was . . . . Several Japanese- American was there--some would cook--and some Chinese.

1.3. Tape Number: II, Side One (January 14, 1976)

Rogers

Mr. Kanemitsu, we spoke of your days in the army at Fort Riley and Fort Robinson. Is there anything you would like to add to that?

Kanemitsu

Well, in Fort Riley, two thing exciting happen to me. One is a tornado. [It was] first time I saw [how] the tornado impact nature and how strong the nature is. It lift up the army barracks, and I saw a horse lift off the ground, oh, I shall say

about two or three inch--just the air sucked up the horse. This was the most exciting thing I ever saw. So then I said to myself, "Wow! How powerful the nature is!"And another thing--kind of silly but funny sometime and angry--is that President Roosevelt visit in the camp for inspection, and they put all American-Japanese through the tank garage, and they locked us up until President Roosevelt finished the talk. Somehow they feel that's all right for security. But you know, I did admire the President Roosevelt, and I really [would have] liked to see him. Later, I met Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in New York, and I mention about that. And she said, "Oh, I don't know that." So that was about the most exciting thing that happen in Fort Riley, Kansas.I guess now we go back to Nebraska and Fort Robinson, Nebraska, and I volunteer to go to oversea, so that they sent me to Camp Ellis, Illinois, and this was the training for the medical corps. And Camp Ellis, Illinois, is just outside of Peoria, in Pekin, and I was training to be field hospital medical man. My job is medical illustrator, however they call it, but basically that I made nothing but the sign, you know. And that's what my job is. So I have not so much to do in the camp. [At] that time is a man shortage so that I can voluntary go [out] to work in Pekin, Illinois, in a Caterpillar factory [for] which they pay very well. So I used to go there Friday and work all night, all morning, and until Sunday. Mostly my job is to spray yellow paint on the tractor. Then I make extra money.Then we did go oversea, and first we go [to] Le Havre, France, and from then on, we heading for the north up to Munich. Then war is over. And of course, we went to so many different place, in the meantime, but I was station in Augsburg, Germany, just outside of Munich. ETO, European Theater [of Operations], war is over, but war still going on with Japan, so they sent us to Marseilles, France, to "staging area," and my outfit go to the Japan. And I was waiting for the order to join this. Then they decided that I can drop out--not to go to Japan--so I get out of the medical. Meantime they sent me to Paris, France, and from Paris to Nice in southern France. My job is, I in charge all liquor and provide the free drink for the GI. You see, after the war is over, before some GI come home, they give the one-week or two-week vacation. Enlisted men's is Nice, France, and officers go Cannes. And so when I was in Nice I was in charge for the all liquors to provide for the bar or nightclub. And that was very nice because I was staying for the Hotel Negresco, and I have a French interpreter.Also, the French beers are so bad that I think Budweiser company come in, Anheuser, to make American-style beer. And Coca-Cola company set

up, and I was in charge for that. Naturally American technician come in, you know, to make the Coke. I can get any kind of cognac, brandy, any kind of drink, champagne or wine--all I needed. So what I used to do is get the cognac and take [it to] the Coca-Cola factory and fill the Coca-Cola [bottles] with brandy [and cap them], and that was a special drink for among our friend. And many officers can't figure [it] out. You know, they drink for the Coca-Cola, and everybody was staggering on the floor drunk. And that was my invention, then.Then they sent me to be in charge in a bar at Grasse. In Grasse, the perfume factory there, and it's such a beautiful place. And then I started paint. And I met the French painter--I can't recall his name. He's a quite old man then. His father [was] a missionary in China and Japan, so naturally he speak a little bit of Japanese, so I become very close friend with him. And then I feel that I've got to start paint. So I was looking for all over a studio in Grasse, and he find me a small studio in this prostitute house. They have one small courtyard, and they have a room for studio. And I never see that, you know, how prostitute house, whatever they call it--whorehouse--they are operating. But I have a studio there so I get to know every one of them. And the madam is so nice. She's a kind of typical kosher-type of mother, and she's worried about [if] I had enough wine or bread. And I used to give to them C-ration and K-ration, something like that.I think that first time I went to the Catholic church [was] with them. You know the whorehouse closed every Sunday, and the madam [and] the girls dressed up, and they go to the church. And they were best customer for the Catholic church--big donations they give to them. So they drag me out. I say, "I don't want to go to Catholic church. I can't understand, to begin with." But the madam say, "No, you gotta come with us. Because after all, you are one of us." So I said, "I'm not a prostitute." And she said, "Oh, yes. You are a prostitute. You just don't sell the sex, but you're going to sell the painting. You paint; you're going to be a*social* prostitute. Rich people buy your work. You make a living." So that kind of realistic point--yes, I agree with her. So I said, "How I gonna confess to the father because I paint for picture? [Does] that mean my sin?"But anyway, this person [French painter] introduced me to [Fernand] Léger, and also I met and visit [Henri] Matisse. Matisse was still in bed then, and I saw how he worked. Then [Pablo] Picasso I met twice in Cannes, and Picasso really liked me. He said, "Don't go back to America. Stay in France." He know that I just about get discharged. So I said, "All right, I stay, but if I get discharged I come back again"--which I did. In

those days the sculptor students went to study with is Ossip Zadkine, and for painting is Léger. Atelier Léger [was] opening for the GI. But Picasso somehow disliked Léger, and he asked me, "Why do you have to be studying with him?" He said, "You don't need it. If you want to study the art, go to the museum--any museum. Just go on out and look and study old master. That the best education for you. And you can't learn art [from] the teacher; you have to [teach] yourself." And I was very naive, you know, those day. I try to draw. You know, I take up there, and he would laugh at me. "This not called drawing; this is scribbling." So I said, "All right." So in any case, I was oversea, and I met the most interesting people in southern France. And of course, I go in Paris, but I really don't like Paris at all.

Rogers

How do you remember Picasso? Could you describe him?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think that he's the greatest man. And his eye kind of hypnotized, you know, so intense and powerful man. The thing he [had] against me [was] that I smoked. He said, "Smoke [is] the worst thing for you." He no smoke. He said, "If you smoke, you can't make love." [laughter] Somehow he believed that [if] people smoke, man become impotent. He's a great--I shall call the macho type of man, and he's usually involved woman with his painting. So the woman is very important to him. Sex is very important to him because every relationship he had with his mistress or wife [was] what he's painting. Then he's switch to other love, [and] that's become another painting for him. So that for him his love, woman, is art supply. His woman is [no more] important to him than a painting tube or painting brush or canvas. You see, for instance, if I paint I have to have a can of beer and cigarette. It's a habitual thing. Those are my art supply, in a way. For him, is woman. So [getting] back to cigarette [smoking] --naturally, to him [it] is the worst thing for himself. You see, he believe he smoke cigarette, he feel impotent.

Rogers

Were you in his studio?

Kanemitsu

He don't show me the studio. He show me a painting. He just don't show me anything [else]. I forgot his manager's name, [but] he said that Picasso usually don't open his studio for everybody. So I say that's fine. He did give to me a sketch he did of my head, a portrait--very quick drawing. I kept it for a long time, and around about 1954, on East Hampton, Long Island, [in the] wintertime somebody broke into our house, and it was stolen--and [also] an Oriental rug and some of the old Madonna sculpting we had. We know who did it, too, but we can't collect it. It's not only my house they break in but also art dealer Leo Castelli. We come back [to that] later, but I had two Picassos stolen.

Rogers

How do you remember Matisse?

Kanemitsu

It was just before that mealtime when I went there, and he had a big bed, and he had a long stick, and [on] the top of the stick they had chalk. So he write on the bed, and there was paper there; that's where he draw--beautifully controlled. I think the nurse is possible White Russian descent, and I can't remember her name. But I met her later, and, of course, my French is very bad, so this is a problem I have.Most of the time in southern France I had a bicycle [to] go anywhere I must go--beautiful. Then I had such a beautiful job. You can go along southern France, and there you are. You live in a hotel room. And I have time to paint and all this. Then finally the order come in to get a discharge, and I got the discharge in Fort Dix, New Jersey.Meantime, I met this young lady, and I married her. Well, I don't know why I married to her, but I guess all this time I was in the service, the army, and I was very lonely, and she appeared to my life and to me as a kind of security. You know, I married to her [for] security because army [had] take care of me all this long. So basically our marriage is a disaster. There is no affection; love is not involved at all. I married to her and moved to Baltimore--that's her hometown--and started work in shipyard. That was, I think, Bethlehem Steel [who] had a drydock and shipyard, and I work as a carpenter. [I was] just like ordinary married man, to go in work and come home, but that don't last me too long because I can't be a carpenter for the rest of my life. So I got this apartment in a basement; I fixed it--it's my studio--and I started painting.The time is, I think, that shipyard

went to strike, so that's a good reason that I have more time to paint. Then somebody told me that stonemason and bricklayer made very good money. In Baltimore they have a construction school, a kind of "Trade Tech," so I enroll to study for bricklaying and stonemason. I got the license, and I always fascinate about how to lay in stone and brick. That was very good experience for me. At that time, I used to walk home quite a distance from school. And one day I was walking in street called Park Avenue, and here's art gallery, and here's a man with a red beard, and he's fixing the picture window on outside; he's opening art gallery. So I just peeking in, and then he look at me, and then he invited me. So he introduce himself, "My name is Karl Metzler, and I'm a sculptor. We are going to organize a group of artists, and open a gallery." The gallery [was] called 860 Gallery. So he say, "Tonight, we have all the artists and some museum people come in, and we [will] have a meeting." So I told him I paint and draw, so he said, "Tonight's the meeting. So why don't you bring your work up?" So that evening I bring all my work to show the first time to this group of people. And they said, wow, it's very good, so why don't I join them. So that time I met Karl Metzler, and Herman Maril, the painter, and Reuben Kramer, the sculptor-- later we become very good friends. [I met] the then-assistant-director of the Baltimore Museum of Art named Jim Foster. Later Jim Foster become a director in Santa Barbara Museum [of Art], and at present time is director at Honolulu Academy [of Arts].Well, anyway, Karl Metzler opened up my life. Then I come home that evening, and I talk to my wife; this the most exciting thing happened all my life. I can go back to paint. I get to know some artists in this town. Somehow my wife is very sad. She insecure about whole life, and she's just not interested. So I say, okay, I still work, but I paint. And they have an exhibition every year at the Baltimore museum, a jury show, and one year Max Weber is coming for jury the show, and I send my drawing and painting. Painting [got] accepted and my drawing also [got] accepted. Then this man named Mr. Martinet liked my work, so he called me; he liked to see my drawing. So he come to my place, and I think he bought about twenty-five of my work. But, of course, price was very reasonable. He's my first patron, Mr. Martinet. The director [of the Baltimore museum] is Adelyn [D.] Breeskin, and also she's [director] for the Martinet collection. So I have now some kind of security. He don't spend that much, but you know, I don't have to go to work and can continue painting.So one day I call Marty [Martinet] and I say, "I think I go back again to Europe." So he says

that's fine. And I think he give me about $2,000, and I have [been] saving some money, and I left to go back to Paris and study with Léger.

Rogers

Before we go on, would you discuss the work you were doing in Baltimore at this time and the twenty-five drawings that Mr. Martinet purchased from you?

Kanemitsu

I think that he purchased more than twenty-five, but most of the drawing involved the pen--line drawing. It was a fantasy, and some [were] of my childhood. Everything is a fantasy about the drawing. And those drawing [were] inconsistent--some [were] good, and some [were] bad--but it's his taste. And later--1956, I presume--that he says, "Adelyn Breeskin give you one-man show in the Baltimore museum." This was kind of a surprise and I was very honored--my first drawing exhibition. They have a two-man show, actually. [The] painting of Hans Hofmann [is half of the] show, and in other side of the room I have all my drawing. And Mr. Martinet bought every drawing and donate to the museum of Baltimore. Not only my work but most his collection went to the museum of Baltimore. You see, late in the year, Mr. Martinet commit suicide. Of course it's a big shock for me--he really help me out. And I think he commit suicide around either 1953 or '54, so that all his collection went to the collection of the museum of Baltimore. And mostly my drawing [is] either figurative or, like I say, the fantasy.

Rogers

Did you exhibit at Gallery 77 in New Haven, Connecticut, during 1953 and 1954?

Kanemitsu

Yes. A friend of mine and a student at that time--a business major--[was] named Jerry Garston; and Jerry's hometown is New Haven. He was decided to become artist instead of become businessman. So Jerry and his wife, Lois, open a gallery in New Haven and call [it] Gallery 77. And I had a show, I think, two or three times there. And, of course, in those days, my work is still involved in fantasy. Oh, yes--before that, Mr. Martinet arranged for me to have the show in Baltimore Playhouse ('53 and '54).So Baltimore is another

departure [in] my other artist careers, because you know, I can be staying in Baltimore. And I say to myself, well, Baltimore is very nice, very close to Washington, D.C. I used to go to Washington and Phillips Collection, and the Phillips Gallery is one of my educational ground, too--all contemporary masters. The Baltimore museum [was, too, with] the Cone collection of Picasso, Matisse, etc., and the Saidie A. May collection involved with surrealism and Dada. So back to the point, the best education I got [was] in a museum, like Picasso told me. That's the best place you can learn in. And I still believe that, and [tell that] to many of my students.Well, anyway, I go back to Paris to study with Léger. Then I began to be disillusioned. I say, "Why I have to study with Léger?" I admire his work, but it don't relate to me at all in my work. That's completely day and night different. His sensibility and my sensibility is just so different. So I dropped out.In the meantime, I think I fall in love with Elyane Oballe [?], a French woman. She was a law student in the Sorbonne. And later she married to painter named Sy Boardman, New York painter, who also studied with Leger. And I think at that time is that Sam Francis, late, he come to study. But I was one of early period. So I came back. Then I talk to my wife that I going to move to New York. [I said,] "Baltimore is nice. This where your hometown is. But for me in my career as artist, Baltimore is not the place for me because everybody know me. It's a small town, and I feel that I don't want to be big frog in a small pond. I want to go to that heart of New York, to be a little guppy in a bigger ocean." So my wife agree with me, "Okay, you go first. Find a job and set `em up, and I'm going to come after you."So I agree, and I move to New York City, and first I have to find apartment. So I find apartment at Sixty-ninth Street and Central Park West. And then I have to find a job, and I could not find it. I have to take any kind of job, so I got a job as a dishwasher and helping the cook at kind of cafeteria somewhere in Twenty-third Street and Tenth Avenue.I still have a GI Bill of Rights left over, so I decided to go back to school again. So I enrolled at Art Students League in New York, and this was in May, 1951, and, I think, summer, 1951. First I study with Harry Steinberg. And then fall session, 1951, September, I enroll to [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi's class. When first I get into school there, I have already maybe two or three one-man shows, and somehow I feel like kind of professional artist. Then I enroll at Kuniyoshi class, and I find it's not only me, but many, many professional artists are there. And this was a challenge.First one I become friend with is Paul Jenkins. In those days Paul

come to school in Brooks Brothers suits, necktie, and white smocks, and he paint small canvases, but very meticulous and very elegant in paint. And I observe him. Another person who already had a showing--his name is Daniel Maloney. He's a magic realist, and his painting usually take three to four months, maybe a year to finish--meticulously he work. Another fine artist. Then one beautiful young lady, Marisol Escobar, can draw and she can paint. Another artist in the group is Howard Kanovich, a photorealist today. Those [were the] people in the class. And there's another group of artists, like Johnny Hultberg, who were in the school those day--and Joseph Glasgow. Many, many artists [in] those day studying were mostly GI students. I really learning from them in school.Meantime, my wife is in Baltimore; she visit, but she don't like New York. Naturally she don't want to move it. She have a home and her friends and her parents in Baltimore, and that is about [when] we began to cooling off our marriage. And I think that Thanksgiving 1951 I called to Baltimore that "I like to be with you but I have to work Thanksgiving evening in a restaurant, so I cannot go home." So she said fine. Then, the restaurant people call me up, "No, we're not going to open today, so you can take a vacation." So I say to myself, well, it's a good idea to catch a train and go to Baltimore. So I catch a late-in-the-evening train, and the train usually take three hour to go to Baltimore. And from the station to my house I catch a cab. I went back to home, and I saw that my dog was there, but nobody answered. So I figured she must be out. So I went next door, and our neighbor said, "Please don't go in the house." I say, "Why?" They say, "Please stay with us." I say, "Why? It's not necessary. I can go the back door in the kitchen--always the window open so I can just open the window and get in." So I opened the window in the back door and walked in, and everything's so quiet. But I hear some noise--some doors open and close. And here is a gentleman--you know, she was with him. This I don't know about. This was the biggest shock for me in all my life. But how naive I am, too! [laughter] So we sat and talked, and she said that she have an affair with this man for a long time, and now [it is] time to talk about a divorce. So I'm speechless. But, anyway, I went to see Karl Metzler, the sculptor, and talked about it with Karl, and he said, "Look, you'll forget it." And I talked to Marty, and he said, "That's the best news for you because this way you don't have no hang-up, no responsibility. [You can] continue to work." So I had a little Scottish dog; that's my dog. So I had to take this dog back to New York the next day. And then we get very

simple divorce in Baltimore.So I was happy and sad in the same time, and I really don't have any money. But now I don't have to work anymore [in] the kitchen or anything like that. So just to go to school on GI, and my friend Marty helped me to buy the art supply. In other words, every time I go to art store to buy the material, I have to send him the receipt, then he pay the art store. Then we trade for that amount for the drawing. And meantime, I study Kuniyoshi. I did admire Kuniyoshi work, and you know, he's a very fine gentleman and good person. Everybody loved Kuniyoshi. I become closest friend with Paul Jenkins. And naturally, we were studying for Kuniyoshi; so everybody influenced by Kuniyoshi, and we all paint almost alike. And Paul Jenkins [was] outstanding person in our class, and he already had a studio of his own.

1.4. Tape Number: II, Side Two (January 14, 1976)

Rogers

You were speaking about Paul Jenkins, Mr. Kanemitsu.

Kanemitsu

That was the most closest first friend I had in New York. Basically I went to the Art Students League [because,] number one, Kuniyoshi was teaching there, and I like to get to know him better and how he teach; and second reason is naturally for that GI Bill of Rights. I get it for something like seventy-five dollar month; that money I needed. Well, the more and deeper I get to know Kuniyoshi, the more we become very closest friend, but he have a feeling that he was anti-abstract-painting, especially for the New York School. The more he against it, is more I become curious.So I know that those artists' hangout is Eighth Street and Avenue [of the] America[s]--that's Sixth Avenue--and right on the corner is cafeteria called "Waldorf-Astoria Cafeteria." And today I think they have a bank there. So I used to go there every evening, every weekend, to get to know these people because Kuniyoshi is so much against their work. And first person I met is a poet, and this poet is eccentric bohemian poet, and I can't think of his name, present time [Maxwell Bodenheim]. He from Chicago originally, and later he was murdered by a sailor. But everybody knows this poet. He used to come in cafeteria. He just get hot water, and he put ketchup in hot water; that's his soup. And I was sitting all alone and observing people,

and he the one introduced me to the first artist, Franz Kline. And I still very naive. Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, and many, many other artists at that time I met there. And I began to see their work in different galleries, and I am very much impressed with their work, but at the same time I listen for Kuniyoshi advice: he say, that dangerous. But, of course, I never tell him that I met Jackson Pollock or Franz Kline. But they liked me, and they know that I'm serious, that I in their group then. Then 1953, Kuniyoshi passed away, and after he passed away I just quit school. I moved to first studio in Second Avenue and Allen Street, and from then, someone told me that there is big loft in Willett Street, and Lower East Side is open there. So I went to this place, and there is about three or four artists in whole building live there. And first artist I met is Bob Rauschenberg, and he have a studio there. So after Kuniyoshi passed away, my work was, somehow, drastically changed, and I started going to the Cedar Bar in University Place (that's where all the artists hang out). And that's where I met and renewed the friendship with Franz Kline, and [Willem] de Kooning, and many, many people started coming to the place. You know, just name the New York School--"Who's Who" is always there.In any case, after Willett Street studio I move to Front Street. Front Street is right off the Fulton Fish Market, between [it and] Wall Street. And I rent the second-floor studio. This lady rent the whole top floor of the building, and I get to know her. We started going together, but we lived in the same building. Her name was Lenore Pettit, and she was a fashion model, and she just get divorced to the senator from Vermont; I forgot his name. Then she married to commercial artist named Howard Baer, and that end in divorce. So we started going together, and she have a house in East Hampton. And so, naturally, I go with her and help her to fix the house, carpentry and all this. And those days, East Hampton is artists move in, and the first person I met is our neighbor, Leo Castelli; later he open a gallery. Leo was there, and Bob Motherwell--he bought a place--and they were our neighbors. And across the pond, called Georgeca-Pond, is Alphonso Ossorio. And in those day, I remember Franz Kline and de Kooning rent house at Bridgehampton, so I get to see them very often in East Hampton in the summertime. Then de Kooning and Franz and Jackson Pollock, I naturally see often there in the summertime. And then [they were] closely associated with Harold Rosenberg, art critic, and Clement Greenberg.And I think that 1956, or '55, this art dealer name Eugene Thaw have a gallery called New Gallery. And he was showing most of the time

German expressionist artists and New York artists. And he come in to see me, and he say that he going to give me a show. So that he's my first major art dealer in New York.Meantime, we spend every summer at East Hampton, and in the fall we move back to New York. And I think that sculptor Phillips Pavia suggest to me to join the artists' club [The Club], that's for "New York School" people. So I say, fine. So I join The Club; naturally, automatically I have [been] accepted by the New York School. And so I go to the meetings and panel discussions and all this. Then I meet more artists through these people. But the friend I'm most close to is Franz Kline after that time I moved to studio in Twenty-second Street between Avenue America and Seventh Avenue. On Nineteenth Street Philip Guston, the painter, had a studio. And so I see him a lot of time, and we have lunch together. But most time I go to Fourteenth Street to Franz Kline's studio. Franz Kline is a very lonesome person, but he had a tragic life. I think that his father committed suicide, or something like that; then his wife at that time, she's in a mental hospital. And Franz is always standing by the young artists or different people, and basically [it is] that Franz is afraid going to sleep. You know, some people have a phobia with this. Well, later, I find that he have heart trouble. You know, some people are afraid of going to sleep. They have insomnia [because] they have a fear to die when they sleep. And I think that Kline had this.In 1956, I think that in the summertime, my wife and I [were] in East Hampton to go to the grocery shopping in supermarket, and my wife said she have to get gasoline. So I stand by in front of supermarket, and here is Jackson Pollock with Ruth Kligman--that his girlfriend. And they both waved to me when they passed me. Then they come back again, and they say, "Are you coming to Ossorio's party tonight?" So I say I might go there. And he say, "Maybe I see you there." And in Ossorio's party that evening, they have some kind of music they play--kind of very boring. So I left it, and Jackson Pollock and Ruth Kligman and Ruth Kligman's girlfriend left it to go back to their house in Spring. I went home, and then suddenly somebody knocked on my door frantically. So I open, [and it] is that old-time painter named Julien Levy. And Julien Levy said, "Mike, hurry up!--Jackson has die." I say, "What?" "Yeah," he said, his car has crashed!" So he drove me up to Spring, and I saw the car [and] that he's dead. And Ruth Kligman's girlfriend, she die. You know, she's a completely innocent person. Ruth Kligman [is] the only one alive, but she in hospital, too. This was a big shock for me. Jackson Pollock's wife (they were separated at that time) was

living [in] Paris. Janice and Alphonso Ossorio call to Jackson Pollock's wife, Lee Krasner--she's also a fine painter. That was a big story; we had a funeral.Jackson and I become much closer friend in time that he was separated [from his wife], and I used to go to the East Hampton--they have a small railroad station. Right across the railroad station they have a grocery store and next door is a bar--a local bar, I think called Caviano, or something like that. Anyway, bartender is look exactly like Mussolini, you know, so we used to call him Mussolini. Often Jackson Pollock and I meet [at] that bar early in the morning. Jackson Pollock, if he don't drink, is the most quiet and shy person. Then, if he start drink, he change the whole personality. So I used to meet him about ten o'clock in the morning in the bar, and he was just sitting alone and sad. I remember his face very well; he just sat there. Then he was drinking beer or scotch [and] then slowly he's alive person. But early in the morning, he's very sad man. And, of course, Jackson Pollock's most fear is his mother; he is scared to death of his mother. When his mother used to visit him, he hid. You never find him-- terribly, terribly frightened of his mother.But anyway, so just before he passed away, I become most closest to Jackson Pollock. And I used to go to his studio and see his painting. And he always give me one-- "Take this, take that." But I never took them because he was drunk; you don't do this kind of thing. Anyway, late in his life just before he passed away, I was very close to him.Right after he passed away, I think that Lenore Pettit ask me to, you know--"Let's legalize. Everybody think we were married, so why don't we gonna marry?" So I say, fine. So we visit her mother and sister in the Bronx, and we look in the Yellow Pages, and we find justice of peace in Yonkers. And we married that place [Yonkers]; then we drove back to East Hampton. Then three months later, she die. Before Jackson Pollock [died] my friend (the patron in Baltimore), Mr. Martinet, commit suicide, and then my wife die. And she don't left any will. I stuck with her house--well, actually, our house, too. So I had to get a lawyer to put this beautiful house in the market. I cannot take care, and so we sold the house. Then we give money to pay the lawyer, and I give half of the main money to her mother, you know, because she's old lady, and to Lenore's sister, [who is] a cripple (you know, she's a polio in her childhood). They got to have something.So that, after that, Franz Kline was crying [when] I told about this news about my wife. You know, I can't figure out why he weeping and crying like little baby. And I never see Franz crying until my wife died. And I find out [it was] because my wife had

rheumatic fever in the heart (heart condition), and Franz had the same thing but he don't tell anything, you see. So that's why.From then, I could not paint; you know, just [I am in] shock. And I just don't know what to do with myself; I can't concentrate. And I got apartment on Fifty-ninth Street between Park Avenue and Sixth, and then I find a studio in Twenty-second Street. In the meantime, right after my wife passed away, Sam Francis come to see me [with], naturally, his closest friend, Norman Bluhm--in and out, in and out, from New York to Paris. Later, Norman Bluhm and Sam Francis become enemy, and up to today, they still don't talk to each other. I don't know what the reason. And in the meantime, Paul Jenkins constantly write me letter from Paris, and I know exactly how he live and how he begin his career and success in Europe.I was also close friend with David Smith, the sculptor. And I think that he mentioned that someone wrote a book,*David Smith* by David Smith, or something like that. He used to come to New York; he stayed at Chelsea Hotel in Twenty-third Street. My studio [was on] Twenty-second Street, just one block away, so that we see each other all the time. And usually--I don't know it's right to name them now, but most our friends call Dave the "human garbage can." He is the most chowhound I never know. And I saw one time he eat three big Long Island lobster, about four or five potato, and a whole bread, and salad. And after he finish he want to go to Chinatown to eat some more Chinese food, but he's a huge man, and he love to eat. And it's very exciting to see the people who can put the food away. [laughter] And I was a very small eater--kind of nibbling type of eater--and I really fascinated. But he know that every time I go with [him] eating, I'm not going to pay for his bill, because he eat about three or four people meals. [laughter] So he pay all time.And then I meet Barney [Barnett] Newman, and we never got close friend, but we know the openings, meet all time. And Mark Rothko--I see him all time, usually in Chez Madison, the bar in corner of Sixty-ninth Street across that Martha Jackson Gallery; that's where he come. And I used to talk, you know, to Mark--not about painting, but spiritualism. He was very much interested in mysticism and religion. And he told me a lot about Judaism because he's an expert, and he know that Hebrew very well. So I find quite a lot of thing about religion through by him.Also I was very close friend of Ray [Raymond] Parker, the painter. And Ray [was] the one who introduced me to go to his gallery, the Widdifield Gallery, in 1958. And I had a show in '59 at Widdifield Gallery. And Ray Parker moved to Kootz Gallery. And Ray is a good friend of Ad Reinhardt,

so I get to know Ad Reinhardt very well. Ad Reinhardt is a scholar of Oriental mysticism and Oriental philosophy; that's what he teach in Brooklyn College. He's expert on Zen, Buddhism, Shintoism--just name it, this man know. And anybody know me in New York group because I was the only Japanese descent. Of course, sculptor Isamu Noguchi was there, but I don't think he never joined The Club or something like this. Anyway--I guess they know me--I was a street fighter; I'm fast and light, and in New York you have to protect it [yourself]. You had to do that--terribly violent in those days (even today in the bar). But used to be that artist was a target. People from New Jersey come in kind of Hell['s] Angel[s] type of group. They come on motorcycles in Greenwich Village, and they beat up artists, and they took off. So you have to protect. So I think I get my reputation as a good judo or karate man. And so Ad Reinhardt told me, "Hey, Mike, I used to be the champion [in] college day for wrestling. You teach me judo, and I teach you Greek and Roman wrestling." So we used to go to YMCA. We both wrestling together. And he is good, real good. So he's a very interesting man, Ad Reinhardt--completely different type from de Kooning or Motherwell; every people so different, you know. That was Ad.Anyway, at one time it was very funny. I don't know if you know, [but] New York School, they split into two different group. One of the group is Harold Rosenberg group; the other group is Clement Greenberg group. The Harold Rosenberg group is definitely de Kooning, mostly action painting--that's what he [Rosenberg] named it. The painter, Larry Rivers (I get to know him a long time ago in East Hampton, and he's a second-generation New York painter, and he's a very known), wrote something [in] *Art News,* and Clement Greenberg attacked it. They both kind of enemy--different school, naturally. De Kooning, naturally, he don't like Clement Greenberg. And so, one day Larry Rivers asked me to come over to dinner to his place, and he want to talk to me something. He said he run into Clement Greenberg in the street. They almost start a verbal and fist fight. So Clement Greenberg told Larry Rivers, "Don't you ever touch me because I studied judo from Mike Kanemitsu." So Larry ask me, "Is that true?" So what can I say? So he said, "I want to study with you, too." He never studied with me, but his son did it. But [it's] so funny--like little children! They're all grown-up artists, you know!Those people in New York School group is very, in a way, true American art; that's what it is. The [same] type of thing like early French impressionist group, like [Vincent] van Gogh, or [Paul] Gauguin, [Claude] Monet, [Pierre] Bonnard, and all those people. In this

time in New York this was the first American art. And these people, de Kooning and all these people, are real macho. That's the reason we call [it] "guts" painting. And they are tough.Naturally we have love affairs, usually kind of incestuous--this woman, a girl from de Kooning, later on happen to Franz Kline, and all this. The woman just keep going. It's really incest. And naturally Cedar Bar is a very strong place to be and a fun place to be, I guess. You can meet everybody. And some young lady come from Cleveland, Ohio, just to see what Franz Kline and de Kooning look like. Then they can go home: "Wow, I slept with Franz Kline!" They can talk about it. So Franz Kline always have a group with him, mostly ex-students from Black Mountain School or some of his friends, like Herman Sandberg--especially Herman. Young lady come to visit [and] want to know who Franz Kline is, we always introduce Herman as Franz Kline. So that . . . . [laughter] It's a dirty trick! But this young lady go back to some college or the university and finished her BA or MA, whatever it is, at school, and she can put in her diary that she slept with Franz Kline--it's not true, you know. She always slept with Herman, you see. Well, those kind of things happen in New York. It's funny, but it's true. And like I say, they have many fistfights.

Rogers

In your discussions that you had with Pollock and David Smith, and the discussions you had at The Club, could you tell a little bit about what their philosophies were?

Kanemitsu

Well, Jackson Pollock--or mostly the New York School never talked about art. They usually talked about either food or baseball or football or car--like any other people. And I don't think they don't want to talk about art; they have it, you know, full [in] their head. They never discuss anything about art, but only thing they talk most is their dealer. Always dealer is the target, and, naturally, [the] art critic. Target is Clement Greenberg. And Motherwell is also target. He'll drift between both sides, but he's more close to Clement Greenberg's side. And naturally Motherwell can't get along with Franz Kline or de Kooning. He was a close associate of Jackson Pollock. And Barney Newman and Mark Rothko [are] always neutral. They don't play the both side, just be there. And Ad Reinhardt, naturally, was completely all by self. So we don't talk about

philosophy. Usually they talk about how terrible the dealer is, how cheating the dealer is, and everything about dealers, and the dealer. And if it's baseball season or football season, that's what they talk about-- and boxing. So woman who date with man like Franz Kline have to be expert in sports. They have to.

Rogers

What were your experiences with the dealers?

Kanemitsu

Well, it's happy ones; some of them unhappy ones. You have to go through the dealer, and always dealers is give us kind of paranoia. We always feel that dealer is going to cheating us, yet we cannot live without a dealer. And very few artists have a happy relation with art dealer, unless dealer happen to be either their boyfriend or girlfriend; that's something else altogether. So this is biggest problem.

Rogers

You mentioned that your work changed when you came to New York.

Kanemitsu

Yes. I think actually my work changed after Kuniyoshi passed away. And naturally, that most strongest impact I got from the people that work like Franz Kline, his energy for the brushstroke. This, for me, the most strongest influence I had was his black brushstroke. And in the same time, I was also strongly influenced [by] Jackson Pollock [and] his stain--he used stain for the painting, for enamel painting, which I really admire--and then that soft openness of Mark Rothko that kind of give you a quality of mysticism. In those days, yes, I think that all those influences combined to come to me to type my work. And always I could not escape the kind of Oriental calligraphy and mysticism [that] was involved with my works. And after so many years here I am--whatever they call me-- [a] California artist, Los Angeles artist, and at the same time they not call me abstract expressionist or abstractimpressionist anymore. Now they call me Pacific School, which involve that mysticism. The Pacific School is such artists like Mark Tobey, Morris Graves--those type of artists. And it's possible that today Sam Francis is considered more Oriental artist, and his work is Oriental idea.But the time I was in New York, what

influence [me] is bigness and energy and speed--those kind of things is fascinate [me]--and color, and black and white. All this, you know--everybody in New York doing their thing, and [by] every person work, I am influenced, such artists as Helen Frankenthaler, Paul Jenkins, Stanley Twardowicz. Many, many artists I did admire, and naturally that's what happened. And I think at that time New York and the New York School, for me, is *life!* Everything, from morning to night, is something that I live on. And I was very proud of that time I was in. So I can't point to each person [and say] I got this and I got that [because] I don't know, but I did work with them, see their work, day and night, which, naturally, opened for me the new light, and that was my interest. And I also learning from them how to go about to have a show. And they don't teach you like in a school, but I learning how to get organized and have a show. So naturally, my first, the Widdifield Gallery show, Steve Radich was in charge. Later, Steve Radich and I become very close associate, and he was my dealer.In the same time, a friend, Frank O'Hara, was very loyal to us artists, and he used to catch a cab from Museum of Modern Art to come to my studio at lunchtime to have lunch--to have a can of beer, eat a sandwich. I used to show all my painting, then I asked [him] to help me to title my painting. He took me in[to] a party, and he also helped me to arrange my exhibition outside America. The Museum of Modern Art would always organize a traveling exhibition, and some of my work he always include to show in France, Italy, Poland, Iceland, all over Asia, India--all this kind of thing for which Frank O'Hara was responsible.

Rogers

What was his position at the museum?

Kanemitsu

Oh, at that time he was curator. Outside of his curating at the Museum of Modern Art, he's a poet. And we always go together for the different party, you know. The most closest person to Frank O'Hara is that Larry Rivers. A tragic thing happen to Frank O'Hara. He passed away in a car accident.

1.5. Tape Number: III, Side One (January 28, 1976)

Rogers

Mr. Kanemitsu, last time we were discussing your New York experiences. But before we continue on with it, I'd like to go back to Baltimore for you to discuss your studies with Karl Metzler, the sculptor.

Kanemitsu

Well, Karl is a very good wood and stone sculptor, and especially I like the way he carve wood. So I decide to study as a GI Bill of Rights, and I learn from him especially the wood, since he's a very good carpenter. And usually carpenter know the age of the wood and the grain of the wood, etc., and he introduce to me to rosewood, cocobolo, and ebony, and he show me how grain is running. From then I just carved my own. Usually carving and sculpting is very physical work, and once you made a decision to make a form, that where you go. And mostly [what] I enjoy [in] the stone carving or wood carving [is] the physical thing, and also, you know, what come out--very exciting. And I think that's what I learning from him. And Karl is also a very good frame maker, which I learn from him--how to make a frame. All this kind of basic thing I learn from him-- the materials. We don't discuss about too much--ideas or what's going to happen or the form of the art, no, we haven't discussed at all.

Rogers

How do you remember him?

Kanemitsu

Those days, he was very physical and kind of macho idea, and he liked to show his muscle, and he's always kind of seminude. That's what I remember. Sometimes he shocked the people, you know, of course. And that was a long time ago, of course. And after ten year, he had to go in the hospital about alcohol. Then from then on he given up his profession for a while. And he go back to school again, Johns Hopkins, and he become psychotherapist, specialize in color. And still he do now. Recently he lost his wife, Zora. He wrote me later, and he was very well adjusted and still working in the hospital. So that's what I remember about Metzler.

Rogers

When you last spoke on the tape, you ended by saying that your good friend Frank O'Hara had been killed in a car accident. Shall we pick it up from there?

Kanemitsu

Yes. When I was here in Los Angeles, at that time he had accident on Fire Island, Long Island, and it kind of shocked [me]. But before that I know Frank very well. And he was very nice to me. And so one day I have a Roman coin, and I don't know where I got it from-- you know, long, long time ago, I kept it. And Frank is very fascinated by my coin, so I present to him. That was his good luck charm, and wherever he make a trip, he always carry the coin. And one time, I remember him at the party in Norman Bluhm's studio [which] Norman give for, I think, Jean Tinguely, the kinetic artist. And he [Frank] was there, and he was quite drunk at that time. We both come downstairs, and Frank thought that I took back his coin. He lost it, and he was [in] a panic. So we search all over his pocket, and he find it. That [how] much he attach the coin, and he was kind of superstitious, I shall say.But Frank give me kind of support. He always come into my studio at lunchtime. At that time he worked Museum of Modern Art, and lunch break he usually catch the subway or taxi to come see me to have lunch. And we have beer or something. He want to see everything what I do in the painting, of course. When they have a circulation exhibition, which they call the traveling show, he always include my work, which I was very proud to know he [had] done to me. Of course, he had so many other artist [who were] his friend. He was very close to Larry Rivers, Michael Goldberg, Norman Bluhm, Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, and [Robert] Motherwell. And he was involved with, naturally, many other poet. So it's a kind of strange kind of friendship. We are kind of distant, but we close, and I think that he really needed friend. That's what he need. He's a kind of lonely man; he don't show this, but he is. And also his attraction was [that] I was in Baltimore, and he from Baltimore. So that I think he feel close to me somehow.

Rogers

In John Gruen's book, *The Party's Over Now,* he mentioned that Frank O'Hara made everyone feel as though they were his best friend, and he was always encouraging them that they could do it--to keep on. Did you get this feeling from him?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Somehow that I really looking forward to see him, and whenever I do my works, I know that Frank going to come to see me. And I shall say Frank [was] the kind of older brother or father image to me, but he's much younger than I am, of course. And since he's intelligent and knows about art, you like to feel him around--you know, what he think about my work, what he thinking about. Of course, he never say he like or he don't like this. He just look, you know. So you just wonder what he was thinking about. But it's fine. Artists need some kind of support. I don't get no financial support, but spiritual support. That's what we're looking for. And nobody think in those days for selling a painting. Like I say, maybe sometime some people might buy, but I was lucky if I sell for $600 a year. It's not only me; it's everybody--even de Kooning or Franz Kline. In those days, I don't think anybody sell that much, so that I guess every artist have some kind of income coming outside; either their wife was working or they inherited money or they have a part-time job. You have to do something.And my profession--naturally, I played poker. In big game, I usually get $10,000 commission to play with somebody else's money. And a small game--it's fine. I just go around, all over the place. And since I live very close to waterfront and the fish market and the longshoremen, those people I know very well. And sometime I rent my studio for them to use in shooting for the dice--every payday night. I clean off my studio to leave it empty. So those people come in to shooting the dice. Usually for payday night, I get fifty dollars, which is very good. My rent is seventy-five dollars [a month and I get] fifty dollars just to rent out overnight. So you always find some way to make a living. And naturally I know the longshoremen, and they bring me a lot of thing. I don't say they steal. But you know, especially like United Fruit--all kind of fruit, banana especially. I used to get sick and tired to eat the bananas. And then the fish market is open early in the mornings. They always give me the fish--lobster or the clam or oyster, depending on the season, or shrimp--so that I always have free fish. So only thing I have to buy is vegetable. And for vegetable, you go to Essex market. All vegetable that they had to throw them away they sell two cents, three cents--cabbage, or anything else like that. You had to take the outside off; the inside is still good, you know. So I used to make a bouillabaisse--all the stew, and all this, that--to not only feed myself but to feed the other artists.And so that time in New York, anywhere, most artists' problem is how to pay the rent. That's the only thing you had to hustle for the money. The food is no problem. And I don't have no hot water, so the

only problem I have is taking a bath or a shower. So usually people who invited me to dinner or a cocktail, I used to take a towel with me, you know, towel and soap, so that before the party began at night, take a bath. There they understand it. Every people know. If I coming, they know that I going to take a bath. So it's no problem at all.And, of course, wintertime is very bad because it's very cold in New York. And you cannot heat your studio because heat costs so much money. So I make my own bedroom--no draft, soundproof, and all this. And if it get too cold, I just go in bed. Only thing keeping me warm is the electric blanket. It's no problem. I don't think it's only me--in the wintertime, it was very hard for every artist, just the idea to keep them warm. And naturally, in order for to keep warm, they drink, or they find bed partner to keep them warm, you know. I don't know how serious Franz Kline [was in] talking about it--he said, in the wintertime it doesn't matter, he found any lady, as long as she keep him warmer. In summertime, he become a little choosy. [laughter] So that, you know, it's a terrible thing to say, but they saw it through. In the wintertime you're looking for the lady just to keep you warm. And you know, I guess, naturally they drink a lot to keep warm also. But at the same time, they work; it's very interesting. I don't know how they manage to have time to paint, but they do. And I realize myself, if I have a show coming--or it doen't matter, show or not, you just paint. And I think the reason New York is stimulating for the artists is that [you are] among the other artists. You know every time the artists must stop over, so you want to show your painting to the fellow artist--what you're doing. So that basically, I think we are painting for the other artists. Naturally, you paint for yourself, but the idea is to be accepted. You want to know what the other artists' opinion is. And if your work slack--you don't paint, you know--other artists going to drop you. They say, "Wow, you don't paint anymore. What's happened?"--all this kind of thing. So a visiting artist is very good thing. Every artist come in the neighborhood. Franz Kline come and look at work, or sometimes de Kooning. And Philip Guston [was] my neighbor, and he come in to see my work, and I go to see his work, and he's showing me, "Look, I paint three paintings. What you think?" That kind of thing is the New York stimulation. Then you don't know when you're going to be invited for a group show, or any kind of show, so you have to have enough work to stock up. That kind of stimulation is New York, and I had it.Since I moved to California, those kind of stimulations are gone. Very few, almost none, of the artists ever come to see me, to my work. Only

time they see is opening for the exhibition. I never go to other artists, to the studio, to see their work either because I guess we have here, in Los Angeles, kind of location hang-up. Every artist is so spread out, and you don't want to just go and drive up to Venice or to some other area just to see the artist's work. But New York--Manhattan is a small city--practically everywhere is walking distance to see the artists. And artists, even working, they would come to the studio. Sometimes I was walking on Twenty-first Street or Fourteenth Street, I want to see what Franz is doing, and I knock on the door, and he's working--doesn't matter; he let me in. He say, "Sit down. Have a coffee," or "Open the refrigerator, and we have a beer." And he's working there, and he stop, and we start to talk. And you know, there are no secret formulas or secrecy for their process and their work. They trust you, you know. And then you sit down and watch his painting, and sometime he stop working and say, "Let's go to opening," or "This party they have"--let's go this and that--you know, very informal and friendly way we had. That [is] another thing in the stimulation we have--to observe other people's work.And naturally, art critics, like Clement Greenberg or Harold Rosenberg, have that kind of phenomenal power they have, [and it] is very important that I should get to know him. Harold Rosenberg, naturally, respect other people's work, but his only interest is in [Arshile] Gorky and de Kooning, as we know. That was his aim. And he like other artists' work, but I think there are three people that he really felt himself--Gorky, and de Kooning the most, and Hans Hofmann. Three people. Harold Rosenberg is a huge man. Every time I see him in a party or anyplace I go, I hate to talk to him because I'm smaller, and he's so tall. My neck hurts every time I had to talk to him because I had to look up. He's so tall he kills me, so that every time that I see him, I ask him to sit down so I can talk to him--impossible for me to stand and talk. He have kind of macho idea, but he's very brilliant, and he have that way of presenting himself. He's a strong personality, and he is like black-and-white type of man--no in-betweens, you know. He don't like, he don't like, and he say; that's it.In another sense, Clement Greenberg is kind of flexible. I don't say he's sneaky, but you got the impression that Clement Greenberg, you can trust him or not, and that kind of feeling you received all the time. Of course, Clement Greenberg is very brilliant, and he is mostly come from Jackson Pollock and David Smith. Later he introduce Washington color-field artists, such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland--you know, those people he bring in to the art scene.

Clement Greenberg don't tell you how to paint, but he introduce the pigment, such as stain painting, of Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis. All these people use a magnacolor in stain painting, and I think that Clement Greenberg emphasized, "Use this"--you know, this is it. So that at the same time, Clement Greenberg not only write about his people, but he also promote it. He go around to dealer and make sure best dealer that his people get, and it disturbed all artists, all different place he spotted. And so I shall say, Clement Greenberg is a businessman, and also he's a fine art critic. So that if you are in Clement Greenberg's group, in other words, "in-group," then you are all set, because he do for you; he work for you.

Rogers

Where did you feel that you fit in?

Kanemitsu

Well, actually, I don't fit in anywhere, but it happened that I much closer--I get to know Harold Rosenberg, so naturally, I was all the time with the Harold Rosenberg group. And at same time we lived in East Hampton, and he's close by (he live in Spring). And even today I'm closely in touch with him; and of course, his daughter Patia is godmother for my daughter, Patia--a kind of distant relative kind of thing in a friend.So that these persons' personality are very interesting. And I think that Harold Rosenberg is still all early twenties kind of Marxism idea of the poet, so he don't show his bourgeois life, and he still live in Tenth Street since I know him--you know, down in the Bowery. In the meantime, Clement Greenberg live in uptown in a penthouse. So there is that type of personality, too. However, these two people are the most important people--I shall say, they are not our leaders, but they are spokesmen for the artists--for the New York group.Of course, at that time, Tom [Thomas] Hess is editor of *Art News,* and he is also very important person. And here again, Tom Hess is, naturally, very close to Harold Rosenberg; and both persons say about the same thing about their ideology and their idea of art--what they call abstract expressionist or action painting; and both, I think--I'm not so sure--are anti geometric painting and pop art. In New York, naturally, we have the *New York Times,* and Hilton Kramer work there at that time--and also [John] Canaday--as art critic, but they're all different. So we don't think about the *New York Times* review those day

because they're strongly involved with figurative art. And I think Clement Greenberg or Harold Rosenberg don't exist without artists. They need us. And at the same time, we need them. So there is kind of yin-yang concept they work out of very well. And I don't know how close friendship Harold and Clement Greenberg have. I don't think they liked each other. But they still go in same parties together because you can't . . . . In New York you are enemy or friend. You had to be all way. Ex-girlfriend or ex-wife, you had to run into--[to be] together. You had to live with, and you had to cope with. That kind of togetherness was there, at the time I was there. So from here, what else you want to talk about New York?

Rogers

What were your dealings with galleries and some exhibitions and selling experiences?

Kanemitsu

Well, forget about the selling aspect. Well, usually, like I said, I can get food, you know, any kind of food. Even butchers gonna trade meat with artists. So I had a butcher. I give the drawing, and he asked me, "How much a drawing?" And I say, "This drawing be $120." Then he keep the book. So that every time I gonna buy--I need one pound of stew meat or hamburger, ground beef or lamb chop or whatever I buy--he deduct. He had a book. And dentist and doctor is also trading work. And even clothes-- you know, somebody traded you suits or shoe, and you get it. So that it doesn't matter if you sell your work or not. So that only thing we had to sell to make money was just the rent and buy art supply. Even art supply--like Bocour's color--he give artists all oil painting you need for creating a painting. So that is no problem. You know, I used to throw the fantastic party twice a year, and even liquor store and wholesale liquor people trade you the work. So I can get it for, maybe, five cases of champagne if I want to. So it's no problem, you see.Of course, sometimes you very happy; you sell the work. Well, I think that first major show I have, one with good gallery, is New Gallery, and I remember we sell about two paintings there. But that was a friend or something like that. They feel sorry for me, I presume; not necessary they like my work. At that time I was a student in New York at Art Students League, and we have a Christmas sale, student exhibition, [in which] I had two paintings. Then Dorothy Kilgallen

and her husband Dick Kollmar (Dick Kollmar is a producer, and also he's a radio personality, "Boston Blackie") started buying my work from student days. Then later, they wanted to buy everything. And they open a gallery in Madison Avenue called Little Gallery, and naturally they specialize for the show people and show personality. Then, later, he open [an office] for that very close to Times Square for interviews [of] all young New York artists to buy their paintings. And they set him up office, and you should see the people lined up [with] canvas under the arm and portfolio to sell to him. Naturally he don't pay too much. If the painting [is] $150, he pay $75. It's okay still. So, if I really need the money, I paint. Naturally he buy the figurative work. And sometime I sign full my name or just sign it "MK," or sometime I just sign "Charlie Chaplin," or, you know, just this different kind of name--you just give it. And so many painting I sign "Fu Manchu." People don't care about your signature; the picture's salable. And it's very important, too--the idea is just to pay the rent. End of the month [is] most of the time that I get panic, and I guess every artist do at the rent time. And usually New York landlord, they don't trust you. And they waiting for the outside the door to observe you when you get out. So I usually get out through the back door and the fire escape. And landlord, he get to know how I get out of the house, so he always waiting for the back. So I sneak out the fire escape while he's standing there. So he say, "Mike, your rent is due." So always I say, "I'm gonna pay next week," He say, "You better; I be there." And he's there. And in the meantime, either you borrow the money from the dealer or friend to pay the rent. So I don't know--people think that a lot of artists were selling the work; it's not true. We were lucky. Sometime people like California dealer, Virginia Dwan (I started to show for '58 in Dwan Gallery), come in; and they buy sometime, which is very nice. And all that Michel Tapié in France, art critic and dealer in France, and he buy. And I don't remember I sell that much work.

Rogers

Did you have any dealings with Steve Radich?

Kanemitsu

Yes, Steve Radich is working in Widdifield Gallery before; he's the director. And Mr. Widdifield sold his business. So just before he sold the Widdifield Gallery, I had a one-man show. And my friend Ray Parker, a painter--he was in

Widdifield Gallery. He put me into that Widdifield Gallery. And then Steve was director. He bought the gallery, I think around about 1960. Then I was associated ever since until Steve Radich close his gallery. He was a very generous and kind person toward the artists, and that's why he don't make it--too kind and too generous.And it is trouble. Sometimes the dealer is involved with the artists, and they like the art, and they could not sell. And a good dealer we call is unsympathetic, you know, such as [Sam] Kootz or [Sidney] Janis Gallery, both whom were in New York, and those people were hat salesman or shirt salesman before. They see the artist's work as a merchant. So naturally they sell as a merchant. I don't say they have a sympathetic for this artist's work or not, but they see, so they can sell. They know how to promote. So if there are any dealers who love so much the artist's work, they cannot promote artist. So usually successful dealers, I shall say, see that art, painting or sculpting, as a merchant--just like a hat or shoe or, you know, shirt.

Rogers

Do you believe that a work of art has a life of its own, that it can be bought and sold and increase in value and . . . ?

Kanemitsu

Well, this is the thing that we are talking about. Naturally, the people who buy is while they're cheap, and artists know this. But they have to sell, like I say--we have to pay the rent or buy the art supply. Such as Walter Chrysler, he was buying artists' work; not only two or three, they buy the whole studio with a package deal. Then what they do is just put it in a warehouse until artist going to be coming out. And many artists did sell to Walter Chrysler for that. Oh, he have everything-- and very cheap. I never sold that many work to Walter Chrysler, and he had to buy through my dealers. So I think he own about five of my painting, but he never come to my studio to make a bargain; I don't let them do that. I hear about his reputation already. And there's many collectors like that--I don't know Mr. Hirshhorn, but I understand Hirshhorn has a very similar idea to buy the artist's work-- not only just to buy one, maybe ten or twenty, and so much. In other words, okay, they ask you how much this painting, and I say, "Well, this is $3,000." Then they say, "How much is this?" Then, "I buy this, this, this, that. How much discount you give to me?" This kind of thing. Well, after all, you cannot help but to bargain. And even I see

this going to a auction. If they sell a Picasso for $200--sure, I buy because I know what the value is. And so, naturally, the collector's tendency is to buy the young talented artist, and to feature them in their market. And sometime yes, sometime no; you never can tell. But they are also taking a gamble.

Rogers

Last time we spoke together, you mentioned Paul Jenkins. Did you see very much of him during your New York years?

Kanemitsu

Yes. I see Paul practically every day, and he go back and forth to Paris and New York. And every time he come back to New York, we get together, almost every day. And we have very close friendship, so naturally, I know more about Paul Jenkins than what Paul Jenkins know himself, you know. And probably vice versa. He know me a lot. And I really respect Paul, his energy. This man really had energy. Not only he is a hard worker, but he is enjoy for the good company; he enjoys a party. I don't enjoy that much a party, but Paul does; he just go and go and go to party. And he always make himself keep busy. If he don't paint, he editing for his biography or he write. He's a very good writer, too; he write play. All this, and he just keep himself constantly occupied and busy. And he have most talent to observe people and to convince them to respect his knowledge--kind of hypnotize idea. He really do. I saw how he operate, and I don't like to say "operate" but that way that he talk into men and women. People have no knowledge about abstract painting, but he sell, and he talk. But he don't talk like cheap salesman type of talk. He was talking something else, and people fascinate about him. And Paul know almost any subject. He's a well-read man, and he can discuss about anything--about writing. (And he know about astronomy and astrology, many mysticisms. He'll study.) And only knowledge that he lack is probably music. He don't know very well much music. But the rest of fields, he know everything.And most artists, they don't like him, personally, because I think that the reason they don't like him, Paul, is that he's so elegant--well dressed and well spoken. That kind of artists want to be like Paul, but they can't be. So, therefore, the jealousy [is] involved. So they call him a phony or all this kind of thing. But there is no such thing as phoniness in Paul Jenkins. And I know him since student day. He haven't change; he's the same person. And actually, Paul's the one who

helped me financially. He started buying my work in student day. So it's a help to me to, you know, pay my rent. So I don't know how much Paul Jenkins own my work. But he own quite a lot. He used to buy my work in order to help me. And he can afford it. So it's nice to have a friend like that.Of course, Paul is always know that society, you know, jet-setters, and all these people. It was very important to him. I guess for every artist, it's very important to get to know these people, high-society people. But somehow Paul have kind of personality that high-society people accept him immediately. And same kind of personality Andy Warhol had. Andy have that. And I shall say almost same kind of background, that Paul and Andy Warhol have. It's very funny, but I read the woman magazine, *Cosmopolitan* (I read it quite a lot, and every woman magazine I read since I have to take care of my children, so I have to know this-- *House Beautiful,* and all this). And so other day I was reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine what Andy Warhol say, "I never sleep with a boy; I never sleep with a girl; and I still go to church every Sunday." You know, I thought that a beautiful statement; that means he sleep with everybody. But what he say is "I still go to church on Sunday." [laughter] Well, Paul, I never see him in a church, but, you see, I think his grandfather was a preacher. So he have that kind of religious background. Then, also, before he become a painter, he want to be an actor, so he have acting training. And you know, I used to be just to listen to him talking, just fascinate. And I say, gee, I wish I can talk like Paul. And also, Paul is interesting person,that he always talk [about] other people very good--even he dislike the person, he always say nice thing about him, or nice thing about her. And I guess that some people, that's why they were suspicious about him.

Rogers

His work was done mostly in France?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Well, present time he is back to New York, in between, for his studio. And in France. And you know, for me, Paul Jenkins is a very important person. We both studied with same teacher, and we both had the same kind of feeling, direction. And I really learning in Paul Jenkins. I have some influence to Paul Jenkins, and I have so many people I influenced. But the one person that I influenced--Paul.

Rogers

You mentioned that the stained canvases were becoming popular while you were there. Did you do some work with stained canvases?

Kanemitsu

Well, off and on. And I was involved with stained painting from kind of experiment point of view, but I never had a deep fascination and involvement with stain painting. And at that time, I was very much involved with a kind of painterly painting. And for my painting those day, is edge; between relationship to other color, the edge is very important for me--the kind of Clyfford Still ideas. And, naturally, I have influence to Clyfford Still, too. And I guess that, mostly, I do for stain painting is that after I move to California. Seriously I worked on it.

Rogers

When you exhibited at the Dwan Galleries in Los Angeles, did you attend the opening?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Virginia Dwan used to send me plane tickets to come to attend that opening. My first show in Los Angeles in Virginia Dwan Gallery, 1958, then '59, '60, and '61 and '62. So I get to know the first in California through by Dwan, and naturally I come here. The only person I know is Jules Langsner--he's art critic--and then Emerson Woelffer, the painter. And, naturally, at my opening, I met many, many young California artists, like [Billy Al] Bengston, Ed Moses, [Edward] Kienholz, and Larry Bell, and Ed Ruscha--they were students at Chouinard or just graduate in autumn of 1958. They were upcoming young people. And they had some kind of life in California around that time, '58, '59, '60, '61. Barney Beanyard Barn [Barney's Beanery] on Santa Monica was still operating. Many, many artists are coming. And you know, I guess that is a flair and a energy I see at that time, and I never intend to move to California in that time, but I really thought something happen in Los Angeles. Those people I know, and I see their work. And this was a very exciting experience. But still, I feel that from big city New York to come here, and activity on La Cienega, and few galleries they have, I feel that still is local, like a regional idea. But I see the artists' work is very exciting. It was something; they were doing something

there, and they are working. And, of course, Dwan buy some of my work, but I don't know who they sold to--this is a problem--or maybe they never sold it; I don't know. They don't tell me.But I remember that my first painting, actually around about 1961, is sold to Gerry Nordland. And I think Gerry came to New York that time. He remembered one of my paintings I show here, and he ask if I still have that painting. Title of that painting called *Tavern on Red.* And I say yes. Well, he say, "I don't have much money, but I would like to buy the painting." And he give a down payment. I think Gerry was the first one. And the first time I went to the store, I bought a corduroy suit, and I still have it. And other day I saw Gerry, and I show to him. "You know when I got this?" [laughter] So he was actually first collector I had. That's why I guess I get to know him better. Like I say, I just come here to the opening, attend the party, just to go around, and then back to New York.

Rogers

Did you see a difference between openings in New York and openings in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

No, it was the same thing. Opening's an opening; you know, nobody look at a painting. I remember that my first opening is, a lot of artists come in, and they looked. But people they invited, naturally, it is kind of social gathering, you know. It's no different than New York. And so my review is, naturally, Henry Seldis, and he is the first one to start reviewing my work since 1958.And 1961, in February, I think, I come here for one month when June Wayne invite me to come to Tamarind [Lithography Workshop], and that was my first experience with the lithograph. And so that in one month's time, many thing happen to my life. I think I met Carol [Donovan], and I married in 1964--that time I met her. Her older sister, Patricia, was working Dwan Gallery, and so that's why her sister introduced me to my wife (my ex-wife). And I stay for one month, then I went back to New York. And I think that two or three months later, my wife join me in New York. And when I came back, 1965, Emerson Woelffer was chairman of the painting department at Chouinard. He go four months to Turkey, so he ask me to take over his class. So I come to here for four months to teach, and ever since I'm here in California, you see. That's what happened.

Rogers

How did you like being a teacher?

Kanemitsu

Well, you know, you can't teach art. You can't make them artists. So only thing you teach is, well, the media. What kind of media they have to do. And also teaching is like internal doctor or something--to find what's wrong with this person. Then you find it; you send for specialist, you know. So in other words, the person finds the style and what kind of work he should be doing and what he like. Then you give a little bit of push; then he can go his own way. And, of course, teaching is also like farming. Some seasons we have very good years, you know, like corn's growing, tomato's growing, lettuce is growing--everything, you know. Harvest, real good harvest we have. Then some other years, nothing. And, usually, if you have one really good student artist, then he can light the match [for] the whole class--then everything come out. And if you don't have that, and you have a lemon, then you have all lemons, the rest of the class. It's very sad. Those kind of classes you involved; you really exhausted. You feel like you waste your energy. You know, you just bang against brick wall. I have that, too, sometimes, some class. And some class is so exciting that I just forget, time pass by. And I forget to come home sometime--so involved, so interested.So my experience in teaching is, [whenever] I have a new group of student, I spot one artist, really good, and he have something to say (and usually you can tell). Then another artist is terribly bad and a stubborn one. So I select these two end of a person, and that the two people I concentrate, for them to grow. Then you don't have to worry about the rest of them; the rest of them, they follow, one end or another. So I always watch either extremely good student--good work, good artist--and terribly bad student. So if I have that, like bookend, then I'm okay. And sometime, it's all nothing, just in between. And it's very sad, that's what happen. So teaching for me, if you have a good student, is very exciting. And, naturally, I teach in the morning or the daytime; you know, daytime class, I like it. Then I teach in the evening class, and this I really don't like it. They are very serious people who come in for special painting class. Naturally they have their job. They working, and then they have after seven to ten, they come to painting. I understand this; they are serious. And some people drive from Santa Barbara; some people come from Newport Beach--it's a long drive--just to come to study with me. I understand this. But my personally, I don't know--

something psychological problem I have, I don't know that--I just don't like to teach in the night. So I was thinking that this would be my last semester I am going to teach in the evening class--take my energy away, somehow, and besides it's not worth it; I have to get a babysitter.

Rogers

How did you first meet June Wayne?

Kanemitsu

Well, I don't exactly remember. But June said she met me in Paris, at Ossip Zadkine's studio. And I may-- I don't know. I don't remember. But I remember her, in 1960, she come to New York to look for artists. She had the Ford Foundation grant to open Tamarind, and my friend Rose Slivka, editor of *Craft Horizons* magazine, she throw a party for her. So she ask me to come over the party. So I went there, then June was there. So June started to talk to me. "You want to come to California to do lithograph?" So I say, "Sure. But I don't know how to lithograph." "Well," she said, "it doesn't matter. Because we like to have a person with no knowledge to experiment the media, with lithography. And we have a master printer for you just to work." So that's the way I get to know June Wayne. So probably I shall say 1960 was the first time I met her, and maybe I met her before that; I can't remember. And June have a good memory, so she probably can tell you the exact date.

Rogers

So you came to Tamarind and started to work?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I started work in '61, and most New York artists, they laugh at me; they are against the idea of doing print. And I think those day, anyone do a print, you know, why you have to do the print for? You can do just as fast for ink wash drawing or anything. And they thought anybody doing for the print is kind of waste of time. Now they don't think so. And I think that the time I was there in New York, artists who doing lithography is Bob Rauschenberg-- he already started doing this--and Jasper Johns. But very few the New York School--however they call the New York group--who do for lithograph. And so, naturally, today is everybody doing for print. But at that time is most artists to

put people down who do for the print--and teach. They thought artists who teach is the worst thing. It's kind of cop-out. You are artist; doesn't matter you starve, but you still paint. Some way, you can survive it.I guess when I moved to California is that time my wife is already pregnant, and that scare me, probably that the reason I accept the teaching. In other words, I faced reality. Of course, if you can survive with your painting, that's fine. What else can artists do? You have to teach or do something to survive. And, naturally, the first I move to California, I was so homesick for New York. And I used to go back to New York twice a year. Then slowly, slowly shaken down, and I guess I become Californian. But the first year I have a hard time for painting, because location change, light change--too bright. So naturally, the color begin to change. And slowly, slowly my work was changing. And if I still live in New York, I don't know what kind of painting I would do, of course. But somehow, the type of the painting I do here in Los Angeles, is I never dream I ever do this type of work. I think that nature, wherever you are, influence you. And now if I go back, I visit New York, I say to myself, "How come I live such a long time in such a filthy, dirty city?" [laughter] That kind of feeling, you know. It is. I don't know how I did it. Of course, New York is very exciting; there's a lot of activity going on. But it's fine; Los Angeles is for me. After all, I'm here ten year now, so I get adjusted.

Rogers

How did you feel when you first went to Tamarind and saw the stones and the challenge that was presented to you?

Kanemitsu

Well, the first time I went to Tamarind I saw other people's work, and it's very interesting for me, naturally, and I just walking right to directory--they told me just like you paint in a canvas or paper. It just happen to be stone. Only thing different is that if you use a color, you have to do color separation. And lithography is painter's media, because [of the] directness; you can work direct to stone or direct to canvas. And you have to make a decision first in what you're going to do. It's kind of scare, you know, first time. Because if you doing a canvas or a paper, you can always work over again; and you work in stone--that's it. For instance, you make some kind of mistake, they had to grind all over again for the stone to start a new one. This happen sometime. And I think

still I have to learn a lot more about lithograph; it's endless, you know, the media. More you work, more confusing, and I guess I learn a lot. In special, I learn from the master printer, of course; those people know this. And I don't consider myself a printmaker, of course. But I like the lithograph media.

Rogers

Did you find yourself doing new and different things when you tried this new medium?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think that I started to do lithographs and print--naturally you work in ink, in tusche. You work black, the first, such as light black, medium black, dark black. Three--you have a jar [for each]; you already mix it, so you can give the tone body. Well, in those kind of things is a technique I work in with lithography that helped me to do my watercolor. And I think that my work was helped and improved through by the lithograph. And the first I start doing lithographs, I never thought about, you know, lithograph influenced my other work. But this process in the work and know how to do a wash painting, such as black-and-white wash, that it's really helped what I doing now. So I'm glad. Whenever I do lithograph, it's helped me in my other work.

Rogers

One of June Wayne's premises for reviving lithography was not only to reestablish it as a medium, but also to explore new ways to use the medium. Do you feel you had done something that had never been done before?

Kanemitsu

I don't think so. Most of my work that is successful print is, naturally, wash. And they feel I working for that lithocrayon, or the ink, line. And I work kind of traditional style and my own idea. I never innovate something new to the print, and I think that any kind of print, somebody else done it before. They always have it. They have particular limitation to that. So I don't think that I done this first or innovate that in all this thing, which I don't think any other artist done, either. Such as the photo process--this is what have been using commercially for a long, long time--and airbrushing technique; they also have been done before. I don't think that nobody innovated. They have, of course,

so many different way they work. Each artist work is naturally so different; they have own personality and whatever person good at it, that's what they work.

Rogers

Did you find your associations at Tamarind were stimulating to you? Who did you meet there?

Kanemitsu

Well, I don't meet, you know-- [just] mostly master printer in Tamarind. Since I move here, probably I went about four or five different time to Tamarind. Whenever they have open space for me, they ask me to come to work. So it's great help; it cost fortune to do a lithograph, if you pay for--pay for the master printer, you have to pay for ink, paper--all of that costs, which I can't afford to pay. And I was very thankful to June Wayne. You know, she invite me to work there, and without Tamarind, of course, probably I never touch the lithograph at all.

Rogers

How was it, working with June Wayne?

Kanemitsu

Well, she was there. I don't work for her. She director. And I just work with master printer; that's all.

Rogers

He's the one that instructed you?

Kanemitsu

He's the one to negotiate with. I work with him. They don't instruct me. You had to work together-- cooperation. The printer ask the artist what color I want to use it, what kind of paper I want to use it. They don't instruct how to paint, or this. They work in artist. And artist just work, and we decide how many color going to be run, what kind of paper we going to use, and all this. So it's a cooperation. So sometimes master printer and you have personality gap. You know, some person you dislike immediately. Then you never can work together. It's like a marriage--the same thing. You have to trust each

other, and you like the person first; otherwise, you can't cooperate. You have to work with the printer, and some printer are just impossible for me to work with, and naturally, we do bad print. You have a good master printer, you really like him, and then we can work out together beautifully. A good print come in. And printer don't like me and don't like my type of work, and I don't like his attitude, and we just don't get together. Naturally, registers are off, colors are off, and all this kind of thing happen constantly. So it's very important, the person you work with.

Rogers

What would you do when that happened?

Kanemitsu

Well, usually that you make very short edition, small edition. First, if you have twenty, you would decide to do just twenty, maybe just to run eight or ten print. Even so, it's so bad; I usually destroy it, after. It's impossible just to look at yourself. It's just a bad print.

Rogers

What are your impressions of June Wayne's work?

Kanemitsu

I think June Wayne is very meticulous. She don't like to have any kind of accident to come out; she have to control the media. She do sketch after sketch; she want to have exact, the print. See, she's a printmaker-artist. And printmaker, we call graphic artists, is different because they are deeply craftsman-oriented and they know the media very well. They know exactly what they are going to do. That's the way they do. So the mystery is gone because step by step, they know exactly they doing. The painter who print, you can easily tell, you know--this person is graphic artist, a print specialty artist, or he's a painter, happen to be doing for the print. They're two different types.Well, talk about June: she know the media, no doubt about it. She's--I think, come to the lithograph, she know more than anybody else. She research; she wrote a book; she know everything. So, therefore, is the mystery is gone. And that the way she organize. She organize Tamarind the same way, step by step, exactly what she want. And naturally she's the hardest worker I

know; day and night she work. And she also know how to supervise people. She set the people, the specialty. This person good in this area--she use it. She have leadership, and if she happen to be in the service, the soldier, she can become a general. And if she is involved in the business field, probably she become a president of a bank or something. She is that kind of person. Remarkable. And so, naturally, most men, they couldn't get along with her. Most men think macho idea; they hurt their pride, man's pride, because she is too smart. And I don't see that June as a woman. I know she's a woman, but I just see another person. I don't see she's a woman at all. Naturally, she's a woman, but I see just a person. So that's why I guess we get along very well. So she help me a lot. I borrow money sometime--all this. If I really need it, I can ask her. And I think that she's a great organized person; no doubt about it. You know, most unusual person, I shall say. Of course, she have a paranoiac about she's a female, because she say, "Every man against me; they gang up on me." That kind of thing, she told me. So I'm not happen to be in competition, or comparative. In other word, I don't trip her. If you trip her, you out. She cut a person off. That kind of person she is. So that's why we're friend. We don't talk to each other every day--maybe once a year. Whenever she feel like she want to meet, come to her studio to use for the litho press, she just invite me, "Mike, come over. I'm not working now; use my press"--which is very helpful. And she have party; she invite me to that. So I see her about, maybe, once or twice a year. You know, many people ask me, "Why you so friendly with June?" People cannot understand it. But I think that most people, they don't know her. And it's trips them, that's all. She's tough; no doubt about it.

Rogers

When did you first meet Emerson Woelffer?

Kanemitsu

Well, first time I met Emerson is in New York, and he's wait to go to Italy. And I was in the Cedar Bar, and Emerson and his wife, Dina, come in. And I immediately spot that they come from out-of-towner, you know. But I know they are artists, some way. So I spoke to them. I introduce in the bar. And somehow, he want to meet Franz Kline. So I told him, "Emerson, I bet you are looking for Franz Kline." They say, "Yes, we'd like to meet him." So I say, "I

introduce you." Then Franz come in and sat down at our table, and I introduced him. I guess this was around about 1957. And later Franz Kline introduce Emerson Woelffer to the [Ellie] Poindexter Gallery, so that Emerson Woelffer going to have a show there. And I guess I haven't seen him until--oh, yeah. Then I come to here 1958; I saw him party here. And every time I come here, I see them. So that's why I get to know Emerson, and since then we are very close friend. I think I see him more than anybody else. Naturally, we teach in the same school.

Rogers

Do you have any association with other art teachers in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

Well, I see a lot of them. But I don't go to their house or anything like that--just in school.

Rogers

What do you think the quality of teaching in Los Angeles is?

Kanemitsu

Well, the first school I taught, Chouinard, is one of best schools I ever--I say "best of schools" meaning that I have more freedom there, somehow spiritually free. The students are very talented, very bright. Again, you associate with only people you work in school. At the present time, probably those I see in Otis is Charlie White, black artist, or Emerson Woelffer.

1.6. Tape Number: III, Side Two (January 28, 1976)

Rogers

When you first came to Los Angeles after being away for so long, and you saw that there was an art scene here that interested you in 1958, did you see something different, something that seemed to be just "California"?

Kanemitsu

Yes. A group here--I thought about the most interesting painter is Richards Ruben. And later he move to New York, but he was here. And Richards's work, I was fascinate. And [Edward] Kienholz's works. But the first time I met

Kienholz, he was working at Dwan Gallery. He was making picture frame, crating the painting, stretching the canvas, and all that--that's what he was doing. But I saw his work there, the Ferus Gallery, and I think that Kienholz very interesting work. For me, the real Southern Californian artist kind of feeling is, maybe, Kienholz and [Billy Al] Bengston. Not necessary I like Bengston type of work. I think that kind of decorative and lightweight, I call it--not in depth. There is no mystery there. But it's California; I understand it. It's different than the East Coast painter. California artist--you have a Californian type of thing, you know. But [those were] the three people work that I am very much interested in at that time, whatever they are doing. And later I thought that Ed Moses was doing very good works. But first time I never thought about his work, is not that much interesting for me. And then other young artists, like Larry Bell and his sculpting, I thought very interesting. But somehow I feel that these people were doing something exciting for California, and, somehow, it excited me. That is because is so different than what I see in New York. And now I understand it, you see. Because you come from New York, and suddenly you move here. And like I say before, I cannot paint because weather, number one; we have beautiful weather all time, sunny day and naturally light. You don't work in dark New York loft. It's very bright here. So it took me long time to adjust it. And the climate, I presume, and environment, you have to be adjusted. Now I see why California artists work like this. Before that, I just had a fascination. But not necessary I really crazy about their work. But those artists, seems to me that they are doing beautiful work.

Rogers

After that first year of adjustment, you started to work again?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Naturally, my work began to change. Is kind of that myself, to discover a new direction, I presume. This is very exciting. And I guess you get adjusted to the place, and then you start work. Before that, is so quiet at nighttime here that I just cannot work. So I taped New York: my studio, the sound, you know, subway, fire engine, all this. So I used to put in the tape here for the sound of my studio so I feel of New York. That's when I start to break in. Now I don't need it anymore because I got so used to California.But I think it's good and

bad also that there is no stimulation here, and I often look right up from the palm tree and I say to myself, wow, almost like me, like any other artist in California. They keep growing, growing, growing, tall; nothing there, just bark. Then right at top, leaves going to come in. And that kind of frighten me, the palm tree, and I see myself that I be like that. [laughter] So every time I look at the palm tree, it make me work, because I don't want to be like that. Life is too easy here; the weather's so nice.

Rogers

It was a complete change of lifestyle for you from the gay café night life, party life, visiting other artists' studios, to come to California; and you were married now and a father. What did you do to fill that gap? You were teaching, and you spent some time at Tamarind. What else did you do?

Kanemitsu

Nothing else to do, but at the same time, I become very close to my children, the closeness, and I play with the children a lot. Then I go fishing in Santa Monica. I go to Santa Monica pier, and I catch a boat--three or four hours and go in a boat just to go fishing. It doesn't matter I catch or not, but the idea is just to get away. What most fascinated me in California, we have beautiful ocean and desert. I go to Palm Springs or Palm Desert area, just to see all desert, in which is fascinating space. And I think that I become kind of nature lover. I go everyplace to observe nature. And in California I have it. We have snow, we have mountains, and I guess that is more that since I become appreciate the nature so much that influenced me to present my works. So like I say, I go fishing. And I don't know too much about sports. I think I only went one time to baseball, Dodger Stadium, here. And one time I went to see the USC-UCLA football, and Gerry Nordland took me [to] that. That was my first and probably my last football game. [laughter] And that's it. Mostly that I did much in the home.

Rogers

Did you go to openings?

Kanemitsu

I only go to opening that my friends, the artists, we have a show. Or sometime my former student have a show, I usually go there. In other words, I stop going to opening.

Rogers

So the stimulation was gone from other artists. What replaced that?

Kanemitsu

I think that teaching, I presume. But I guess it's nothing. What else you can do? I cook meals for children; by that time so exhausted, just go to sleep. Sometime I paint, and I really don't see that many people.

Rogers

When did you go to Japan, and what was the occasion?

Kanemitsu

Oh, 1972. My father passed away, so that I went for funeral--that's all. I stay there three week, and I came back.

Rogers

Do you find the dealer-artist relationship different in Los Angeles than it was in New York?

Kanemitsu

Yes, quite a lot. It seems to me, maybe, but my association in art dealer here is very cold one here. In other words, they don't come see the artist's work. For instance, last I had a dealer, they never see my work for over one year, after I had one-man show--never come to see my works. Those kind of frustration we have. New York, at least, every other day, or every day, dealer call you. He ask you what kind of work you doing, how you doing this, and all that--they're going to know. Dealer make sure. Soon the painting's finished, and I call them: "I just finished this." And immediately dealer come to look at artist's work, and if they have opening or they have a party, dealer ask me, "Want to go to the party?"--or take me to dinner; all this kind of thing. They are very close related. And here, in this town, you never saw one-man show. That's it. Kind of one-shot deal. And from then, they say, next two years, we give you a show again. And they never come all that time, never come to see artist's studio.

And it's kind of frustration, you have to go through. And museums, for instance, like [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art], I personally don't even feel like to go there, and I just disliked that museum. I don't know because the physical structure or the curator or the policy--I really don't know. Somehow, seems to me, we have several museums, but UCLA and the Municipal Art [Gallery] museum, you know, Barnsdall--those museums are more interesting for me because they have particular budget on show, but somehow the work is what the artists want to see. And the County Museum, I go there, and I enjoy the tar pit there more than to go on inside. And I don't know; I shouldn't blame anybody or anything else like that. I just don't like the senior curator there in the County Museum [Maurice Tuchman], and he's very unsympathetic with the artists.

Rogers

Then you say that the dealers here don't seem to have any kind of daily or social or personal interest in the artists, that it's more just a job with them?

Kanemitsu

Well, dealers here in this town, they are stale; they are thinking very small. And they have a tendency, instead of their promoting artists' work, they like the artists to promote them--you know, artists bring the customers, then they can get a commission. That kind of attitude they have. I don't say all of them, but most of them are. And they see the artists as the kind of star image. You cannot help--this town is, you know, Hollywood. So naturally they have artists, but their membership in the gallery is person, not the artist's work. That's what I trying to say. They collect artists, but not promoting for the artists' works. And it seems to me they are, I don't know, very lazy or they don't know how to operate gallery. I really don't know. And we need it; we need a good dealer in this town.

Rogers

Do you believe that there is a public that will collect in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

Well, the public need somebody to promote in education. The public will buy--sure, they buy. They like it, they buy. I don't think it's no problem; some

people spend chandelier for $2,000, coffee table for $5,000--all this, so then what's a painting? They can buy the painting, sure; they can afford it. But the trouble was in this town, we have (I guess any time) such as [The] Akron and all production painting. They sell in supermarket, anyplace they sell. So that's where most people spend it, you know, painting under fifty dollars.And in this town there is very few doctors or dentists to trade with my work; they don't take it. New York is different: they call you. Total strangers, doctor or dentist, they call artist. They say, "Say, I saw your exhibition; I like your work." And you want any dental service they might pull all your teeth in order to get that painting. [laughter] That's what happen; that always happen. In this town, we don't have this. I did try, and sometime doctor come to look at my work, "Well, this not my taste." So what are you going to do? But I think maybe something will happen soon. Like Palm Springs, they just opened a new museum, and we need it.

Rogers

What do you think the County Museum could do to change or help?

Kanemitsu

Oh, I don't think they cannot change it, because they are county, and they have the budget. But I think that they should concentrate more [on] Californian artists. And, of course, they have a new talent show and all this, but it's not enough. And I don't like their interior to begin with, in the galleries. It's a terrible space. I was talking of architecture point of view, exterior and interiors. And the staff, a member of the staff--I shouldn't be criticize because they do their best. I got the message that the museum is a one-man operation, one person's taste.

Rogers

So you feel that if the galleries are not going to do the job of showing contemporary California artists, and the museum is not doing it, that there has to be a new avenue for the public to be exposed?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think so. I find that I can't any longer associate one dealer, in other words, exclusivize. So I have about, at the present time, four or five dealers

work for me. And it seems to me that private dealers do better work than people who have a gallery. The economic situation is [such] that most gallery cannot afford anymore to open the public in the gallery, so I don't blame them. But in the future, maybe that so many gallery now open in somebody else's home, private home, or somebody else's apartment. So art never going to die--still keep moving, you know. In order to survive and preserve the art is, I presume, the museums' job.

Rogers

These students that you see who are talented that came out of Chouinard and out of Otis now and Cal Arts, do they ask you for advice on what to do with their future? And what do you tell them?

Kanemitsu

Well, I always tell the student before they finish the school, you have to find something to back on yourself--in other words, a part-time [job]. If you can't get a teaching job, maybe this person will be very good bartender. Then I say just go to bartender school or some kind of part-time job to carry on, because most artists, everybody, after finished art school, they always have some kind of job to make a living.

Rogers

Would you advise them to stay in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

Well, I usually tell them to go New York to observe it. And see what happen, what's going on there. And, if you like to, stay in New York and then get a dealer, and then come back here if you want to. In other words, they get contract with a dealer; it doesn't matter, since he have a contract. And California's all right, but still, I like to see them to see New York and see the museums and how they operate a gallery, and how the artists make a living--those kind of things. I think that if artist is good-doesn't matter, you live anywhere. And always that dealer are going to come in to see their work. But it is sad, people who go to art school, they get BFA and MFA--it usually take them four to five year to finish, then the man start driving a cab or truck, become a truck driver, or they become mailmen. And the female, naturally

they start work in an office or waitress or even artist's model in order to survive. But I think I always tell them, "Look, you drive a cab or truck, doesn't matter. You're different--you're MFA licensed truck driver." [laughter] "You know, you should be very proud." Other truck driver might be just a high school dropout truck driver. They all kind of people. So it's personal. We cannot guarantee the student, "Look, you got MFA; you can teach in so-and-so college or high school"--this, that, that, that. No, we cannot guarantee this.

Rogers

You mentioned that Los Angeles was a city of stars. Do you think Hollywood and the film industry has affected the art in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

I think so. Somehow, that people have a kind of fantasy. For instance, person who made money, then moved to Beverly Hills. Naturally they gotta have a swimming pool, new furniture, and they gotta have a painting. Well, but in this town, seems to me that however they call themselves collector, they like to collect artists, not his work. In other words, they casing you first; they ask you that. Somebody say, well, you buy so-and-so artist's work; he's good. But they feel, well, I got to meet him first or meet her first. So they might invite you to dinner or cocktails; they case you. If I like you, then I going to buy your work. So they have to be kind of fantasy, like a star imagery, about artists. It's not like a big city [where] usually they go to the art gallery, they see the painting, they like it, they buy. They don't even know what the artists look like. But it seems to me this town they have a tendency to meet the artist first, then they buy the art work. Well, I call that kind of fantasy, star image kind of thing: personality, very handsome personality, naturally that flair.

Rogers

And you don't feel that they have an educated taste?

Kanemitsu

Well, the trouble was, we have a show, we have educated-taste people, they don't have the money. That's true. The majority of the people buy the work, and they don't have the taste. Somebody has to tell them that this is good; or they say, this is good investment. So naturally, I know a lot of people have very

good taste and are intelligent young people, but those people, they don't have the money. I guess anywhere, you know. And very few people, [if] they are very wealthy, are intelligent and have good taste. It's very few, in this town. But we have so many rich people in this town; you'd be surprised. Look at all the movie stars and all the show-biz people. No problem for the money. Go into their house; they collect the seascape, or clown--somebody go for the circus clown--and those type of paintings. So it's kind of shocking to see that people's taste. Sure, we have some with very good taste, like Edward G. Robinson--you know, he have good collection--and the singer, Andy Williams; he started collecting me from the time of unknown day. I remember he bought my work in New York with my first show; he bought one. But he bought many, many other people's works. And the people who have a taste and money don't collect with unknown artists; they like to collect very known artists--what we call "blue chip" artists. So you know, I guess people who interested, for instance, in my works, they usually are not wealthy people at all. They put in for down payments, so much, so much.

Rogers

Do you believe that Los Angeles has an Oriental influence in its art?

Kanemitsu

I think so. Here again, Los Angeles has influence from New York or France, European art, and then Oriental art and the kind of mysticism they have there, but it is totally different Oriental. Maybe in Los Angeles, I shall say that different kind of flavor, kind of eccentric. Usually Los Angeles art is, I say, decorative, but not too sweet decorative kind of thing. I don't know how to explain, but kind of funky--not the term, "funk art," but funkiness. And I shall say that it is lightweight, not heavyweight with very muddy color and umber. Those kind of painting, California never can produce because for the sunshine. It's different; that's what I say before.So Los Angeles artists are totally different than Northern Californian artists, the Bay Area artists. For instance, the good example, like Richard Diebenkorn--he was painting in Berkeley or Stanford or whatever it was up north, Northern California, and when he moved to here, his work would change, altogether different. And I think that it is California, Southern California, climate. And Oriental art? Yes, I think, some extent, yes. Space, I think, especially for the Oriental painting, space and

mysticism and those kind of thing are digested here, not directly borrowed influence--I shouldn't call it influence--but we have it here already. I don't say that the type of my work is the typical type of Los Angeles painting at all. Somebody say that I belong to the Pacific School like Mark Tobey or Morris Graves, you know, those kind of Oriental, then Western direct influence combined. When I see that Sam Francis's painting or Larry Bell and his sculpting, you know, somehow I can't help to think that the strong Oriental influence is there. And still it's mainly California. And I look at Ed Ruscha's work, and it also have a kind of Oriental space; you know, I don't say he influenced . . . [by] Oriental art or not, but kind of Oriental thinking space. And Bob Irwin's--I don't know how they call, painting or sculpting a kind of nothingness, Zen ideas. So we have it, you know. Southern California has a very strong indirect influence, I shall say.

Rogers

Would you agree, then, that there is a California school of painting?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I think that California is still new, and I think New York is a little older, for artists and traditional art and art school or art gallery and museum. So I could not tell what California art is, but I think a good example of Southern Californian art is Ed Ruscha. His work is, I feel somehow, made in Los Angeles. Other artists, like the late John Altoon, he come from California, a Los Angeles artist, but he still have some European and New York influence. And again, Kienholz and his sculpture is also kind of Californian and, also, European idea, so that his work have nothing to do with New York or East Coast idea at all. And Ed Moses--his art also have a strong influence in Oriental, no doubt about it. But still Oriental in other side of Pacific, can't produce like Los Angeles art; it's so different, totally different, than Los Angeles. And New York today doesn't matter. They don't have a particular art made in New York anymore--kind of internationalize. So that, sometime, Los Angeles artist have exhibition in New York, and New York artists might influence, somehow, that Californian artist.

Rogers

Would you find a trend of young people from all over the United States coming to California, to Los Angeles to study, rather than go to New York?

Kanemitsu

Not necessary. Depend how the student are. I have some student come from the East Coast to here to study, but most art students prefer to go to school in the East. Naturally, we have native Californians usually come to school. But I find most young student, it seems to me that they don't have a utopia or romantic dream about artists or what's going to be art; they don't have that. They kind of [have a] very realistic point of view. They come to art school to get a degree or, "My parents sent me. As long as I go to school I don't have to go to work"--that kind of idea. Or they just want to get a degree so they can teach the grammar school or high school or junior high school. They don't say, "Well, I gonna make it; I gonna be a artist"; there's a very few people that have it.I think that's why I mentioned that [about] the museum--encouragement is lost to the young people. Some kind of encouragement, they need it. So I don't know, I observe my day art students and present people's art students--they don't have no flair, in other words.

Rogers

You talked about some students who were very talented and some who were strictly no-talent. What is bad art?

Kanemitsu

I don't say "bad" or "good"; I should say, "I like" or "I don't like it." You know, there is bad art, meaning for the immature--in other words, nonprofessional--and, also, bad taste. And it's hard to explain what is bad art. A good example is, like I say, department store and supermarket and parking lot--they sell painting; you see that. And in the park every Sunday they show--Santa Barbara and Laguna Beach--is the type of thing that I shall say that, for me, it's bad art. For some people it would be good art. And so, I shall say that I don't like it. I like you, I don't like *it.* That's what I shall say. You can judge. If you're involved in fine art, you know what is good and what don't. It's hard to explain, very hard.

Rogers

In the Los Angeles art community, do you believe that there is an elitist group of artists--perhaps older, more established, accepted, selling artists--who keep down the younger generation of producing artists?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I think so, because the original group in like Ferus Gallery, or that later become Blum Gallery, and that group (and most people they is a member) who work together for that, museum curator and dealer and collector, some people call them the "Venice Mafia." Well, those people constantly have a show, the same group, and they got the corner of the market in this town. They know everybody, everybody. And you know, it's like kind of Frank Sinatra group (they have their own group). And this group in the town, the Venice group, used to be. I don't think now; I don't think so because some people already spread out, moved to New Mexico, and all this. But it was very strong "in" group.

Rogers

Who would you say would be in that group?

Kanemitsu

Well, I think that [Billy Al] Bengston in-group, I guess, that was very strong, and Ed Moses group--all together once. Now they're kind of split, but still, I think, they have power. In other words, [it is] their territory. And therefore, for the younger group to get in, they had to be accepted to one of the groups, to be in this group and a member. And I guess it's very interesting that people who went once to Chouinard and were friends in the school would graduate, and when they all get out, somehow every one of them made it in the one group. So I think that person operate by himself alone, you cannot do it this town, because they have group [which is] naturally stronger. I guess younger people going to really have a hard time to start out here. This is the problem.

Rogers

When you lived in New York, you had The Club; you had the Cedar Bar; you had the Waldorf Cafeteria. Do you see that kind of a scene in Los Angeles now?

Kanemitsu

No, they don't; this is the problem. For a while they have the place I mentioned, Barney's Beanery, the bar they have there. I used to go there, sometime; I see the artists. Now, I don't know. Artists is more sophisticated, and they don't ride motorcycle anymore. Used to be like--some artists like Hell's Angels, and now they have well-cut, tailor-made suits. [laughter] I guess, you know, scene change; people get older and wiser, I guess.

Rogers

Have you ever thought of working commercially?

Kanemitsu

I did work in commercial art in New York for a while, especially for Christmastime--paste-up or retouching, all this kind of thing, layout. But I never can make it. I just hated the whole idea; it's not my type. I think that John Altoon used to be working in commercial art; he's a very good one. And probably Ed Ruscha--his work is very popular. He relate a kind of commercial feeling, his art is.And that's when I met John Altoon in New York, time he was working in commercial art. Then John and I become very good friends since I move in here, but he is the most strong personality and character, is John Altoon. I think everybody know John Altoon. And other day I look at all the artists in the photograph. We used to go to the beach and have wine together, and those day, we have happy moment. And John very interesting man. And he's--this one really can draw. That's his field--drawing. Fantastic drawer. And, of course, he have a bit of problem adjusting his mental problem; he have disorder of some type, you know. Since I know him, he had death wish, tried to kill himself and all this trying to hurt himself. But late in his life, he is very happy. His marriage is going very beautifully; he was happy. And then he died. When he was much younger, he constantly torture himself and kill himself all the time. But I like John.Somehow I lost two of my closest friends here. John Altoon--he's a painter. (And the reason I really can't get around with him because he's so free, so open person.) And other person is Jules Langsner; he's art critic that I mention. And he was the very closest friend I have.California is, I think, that by accident I move to here, but, naturally, there is the family idea since I get married and I have three children here--all born Los Angeles. And I think only thing that Los Angeles, like I say, islacking is stimulation for the artists. [tape recorder turned off]

Rogers

How did you meet Jules Langsner?

Kanemitsu

Well, first time, I had a show in 1958 at Dwan Gallery, and before I leave New York, my friend Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish, the sculptor, and Herman Cherry, the painter, say that I must look up Jules Langsner. And I understand that Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish all went to school together here with Jules. So the first time I met Jules is at their introduction when I come to open in Dwan Gallery, 1958. Then every year I come here, and I look him up, you see. And I remember he was, for a while, he was going with June Wayne; he was June Wayne's boyfriend. So naturally we go out; the three of us go out to eat all the time. And in 1964, Paul Jenkins and Paul Jenkins's wife, Alice Baber, my wife Carol and I all went to Japan together. And Jules Langsner was in Tokyo at that time, and I think he have some kind of researching for the Ford grant. So we had a good time in Tokyo, in Osaka, in Kyoto, and I was kind of his interpreter then. And he's a kind of gourmet; he love to eat, I remember. So he took me to lots of different restaurant. I think he's a very warm person, and he like to tell story about their young day with Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish and those people, and mention about Jackson Pollock. And time I was an artist-in-residence at Honolulu Academy of Art in Hawaii--that is about 1967; I think I was in Hawaii--that the time he passed away, and I was kind of shocked when I hear this news. So . . . .

Rogers

He wrote about your work in a very favorable light.

Kanemitsu

Yes, I think he mentioned something about my work in *Art International* or *Artforum,* or something like that. I don't remember exactly what he say about. I usually say it's very nice that some critic liked my work, he write about it, but I don't keep the clip. Henry Seldis write about very nice too, but, you know.

Rogers

You believe that the role of the critic is more to educate the public than to educate the artist?

Kanemitsu

I think that more for people who are interested in art. Yes, they like to read about. Like I read a newspaper, and in the baseball season, I want to see who going to win, or sometime I look up about Santa Anita or the Hollywood [Park] race, and I read the sports section, and I read what horse are going to come in, and this kind of thing, I look at it. And same thing other people look at it for the newspaper, or what the critic have to say; that's it. At least some people really interested in a particular person artist's work; they want to follow up. That's something else altogether. I feel that best art criticism review is longer and big space, cover the paper. So that either they for artists or antiartists. I think the impact is much stronger that art critic really hate a particular artist; he just cannot stand it. So he just write, write, write, write. Probably, maybe, one page. That is the most impact. When they just say, this good, this da, da, da--there is no impact there. Same thing you see the movie. You always remember the bad guy, the gangster, the same way. Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart--they stick to your mind.

Rogers

Do you think a critic can make or break an artist?

Kanemitsu

Some critic, yes; some critic, no. Might be he introduce artist to public--very important. But I don't think that whatever critic have to say today is not too much impact on the museum people or collector. This don't help at all. But some of the younger artists, probably might be very important to them. I think that what most artists is looking for is, naturally, exposure; they have to continually have a show and financial assistance, I presume; that the most important. But reviews is that second thing-- what the critic have to say. But you know, it help, of course.Like my friend, Gerry Nordland, he is very sympathetic and really help me a lot. He give very good advice, and he really care for artists; this is very important. Very few museum director just go around to see what artists are doing. Very few people do this. Gerry's one of them. He keep contact constantly with the artists. He go New York to make a

business trip, the first thing he see is other artists' work. We need more like Gerry Nordland type of director. I say earlier about Frank O'Hara, you know; it's stimulating. I don't have any stimulation. But sometime Gerry call me up, and he say, "Well, Mike, I'd like to see what you're doing; I stop over." It feel good, you know; somebody care for you. You feel kind of neglect. And sometime it really shake me up. I get up in the middle of the night, and I say, wow, what I doing? You know. What I doing this town? My future is just I go to teach in the Otis, come back; what is it? And is it that this is my life? And I raise my children, and I don't want to become educational mama or something, but to start to worry about the kids, how they're doing in school. I think it's important for the human condition, but for the artist's point of view, it's kind of scare, you live in this town. And I feel, you know, left out or something. I missed something. I always feel this. So I say to myself, well, maybe I find a good baby sitter, then I take off for maybe three, or one week, to go to New York and recharge my battery, you know. [laughter] You need it. Even from here, I go to San Francisco. It's good for me. You cannot stay in town like this. Here it is almost end of January, we have eighty degree weather here. I think that still my mind, wintertime, January, cold, snow, and all this. But here is like summertime.

Rogers

Have you made any contact with the Japanese-American community in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

I don't, but they contact me. Whenever they contact me is they need me, such as donation for the painting, group show, which they have there. Outside that, I don't have no contact at all.

Rogers

There are no collectors?

Kanemitsu

I guess there is a few collectors here, but it's very interesting that American-Japanese, second generation we call Nisei, and those people should have money--they worked very hard. And kind of middle-class American idea, so

their taste is very strange. They might collect and buy the print or something, but something that they can understand. So people who sometimes buy is people from Japan who happen to live here, such as doctor or business people who happen to be in this town, but native Japanese-American, no. They don't mind going Las Vegas to spend $2,000 or $3,000 for the dice game--they don't even feel that--but they going to support Japanese artists? No. And I sold very few to American-Japanese people, maybe one or two, some lithograph or print, something like that.

Rogers

How does the future look for you in Los Angeles?

Kanemitsu

Well, like I say, I don't have any. I really don't have any. I just do my thing, just paint. And they say possible I going to have a show next year in the museum, and I say fine. Something I can look forward to. But mostly is that the depression: now we have terrible economic situation going on--you know you not going to sell. That's the thing. If you sell some, maybe just to broke even, just to have a show. And I guess those kind of thing, most artists, depressing, I guess. Very few people buying art today. So, naturally, that it's like an echo that younger student are depressed, too, because they see that professional artists have very difficult time to survive. That's a good example--you know, all brother.Now I divorced, and I have two children in my custody, and it's very rewarding to take care of the children. And you know, I started for the young boy; he's one and a half years old when we split, and I was changing the diaper and other daughter's diaper, which I really find how hard the woman's job is. And you know, you have to cook, and you have to do laundry, mending, socks, and all this kind of thing, clean the house, and wash the dish. It's so boring, sometimes. [laughter] But you observe the children keep growing and growing; it's very rewarding. But anyway, I know I learning more about the woman, and the duty--however they call it, the woman job or the housewife. I know enough now. I know how to shopping and what kind of bargain sales they have, you know. I run out and buy for the children the shoe and underwear and all this. And naturally, past four year, I read all women magazine, you know, *House*
*Beautiful*to *Cosmopolitan* magazine, *Playgirl* magazine, everything. Even

the *Times* section, I look in for the Thursday edition; they have all that recipe, and I cut out some recipe for cooking. Those kind of thing that I have never done before, now I doing so. But the only thing that I hate taking care of the children is PTA meeting, and that I avoid the best I can. But outside that, I do everything that the mother supposed to do.Anyway, what I want to try to say is, you know, we have a beautiful marriage in the happy moment we had, and I want to very thankful to my former wife. She really helped me out, and supporting my ego, big macho kind of feeling--she made me feel like a man. And I really thank for her, and I also really thank for that she let me have two of the children, which I was very thankful for. And one children live with her [Zoe]. And we see each other's children, visiting, and everything work out so beautifully. But something that I'm looking forward to is that children grow, and I like to see how going to be.But the painting, right now--well, you know, I paint myself, but also that it's kind of funny, but one day my children be appreciating, so I painting for all of the children. And when I was bachelor, day in New York, I remember one *New Yorker* magazine cartoon, and I laughed at this cartoon because here is that artist, and he had a beard, you know, bushy hair, and he have a little boy in his lap, and he show all stack after stack of painting, and this artist say, "My son, one day, this all yours." [laughter] And I don't have children; I not married then. But I thought it's very funny, you know, with the father, that's true. And now I the same way: stack after stack of painting. I can hardly move around the place, so naturally I put it in storage, you know. But it's good feeling, though. Of course, it's ecology to them. Well, that's one way to look at life, you know. And I did enjoy what I am. But I think I'm happier, really happier because [of] these children, you know. Day after day the children, so it give me a particular strength. If I don't have no kid, I don't know what's going to be. So life itself is like yin and yang: they balance, negative and positive, everything they balance--just like sunshine, moon, the same way, night and day. Like I say, I like it. I really like what I am now, never before. I really enjoy myself.

1.7. Tape Number: IV [video session] (February 18, 1976)

Rogers

Matsumi Kanemitsu. This is Marjorie Rogers visiting him this afternoon in his Berendo Avenue studio-home. It is in an older part of Los Angeles, on a street

that at one time was a fine example of the stick-and-shingle architecture of Los Angeles. The neighborhood has made a great change since you've lived here, hasn't it, Mike?

Kanemitsu

Oh, yes. You know, about ten years ago, first I moved into here from New York, is that we are the only Oriental here. My oldest daughter, Patia, she is born and only one children in whole block. And since then, past ten years, people move and move out, and first is that German and Hungarian refugee, and later, the Cuban refugee. And meantime, you know, we have South American, Mexicano move in. And then the Korean people move in for past three years, and then they almost dominate population in this neighborhood. And recently, is that I think that Vietnam refugee just move in, and, you know, it will change. We have very close to fifty children since then.

Rogers

With your children close by you all day long, how does living and working in your home as a studio affect your lifestyle?

Kanemitsu

It's very difficult, you know, because your workshop, and you have to concentrate on your work, and meantime, children come in and going out, come in--the neighborhood kid come in. It's very hard. But I begin to adjust it. I can turn on myself, turn off and just do my work. And after I put my children in bed, then I can work, you know, more myself late in the evening and early morning, etc.

Rogers

At the beginning of the film, when we were showing the street, one of the last buildings we saw was a Vietnamese Buddhist temple that has just opened up across the street from you, which is a very good example of how the neighborhood has changed. All the time we've been talking in the last interviews, we have not said too much about your work. I'm hoping that during this informal time that we have together that we can see some examples of the evolution of your work, and I've asked you to put together

just a few examples. I think you have up here what you said was one of your very first pieces from your army days. Would you like to tell us about it?

Kanemitsu

Yes. Before that, I'd like to explain that we show most small drawing, and drawing [is] a very direct media, and beside, you work in drawing, and then, later, painting come in. And so that in those day, is that for me, drawing is very important. And this piece here is a woodcut [untitled figure study] I done for that 1942, in Fort Riley, Kansas. I was stationed there. And I don't know anything about woodcut, and I research in library because I want to do woodcut. And this is a female figure, and I think I made about five editions on this--five or six. And very primitive tool I use it--spoon to rub into the back. Now I look back, without knowing anything, this very much look like Edvard Munch, Norwegian artist, in the kind of expression there. I really don't know how I do it but that's what happen. Then, from then on, then out of the service, of course, I hadn't done too much. And this is the time, you know, is that good example, of the time I live in Baltimore, *[The Street Sleeper]* and I was doing for that type of drawing [pen & ink wash] in a painting, and here this guy is sleeping outside, and I sketch this man. And this is a little dog in this drawing, Pekingese dog. *[Pekingese]* And this is the type of thing, you know, is that before I move into New York. And it's too bad, I can [not] show that most paintings I done or also sculpture I worked with that period. But you got the message on that, and I think we took this out.And, in time, I move into New York, and it's like this; this was just about I finished out at Art Students League, and this kind of fantasy painting *[To the Baltimore and Goodbye]* I used to do, and this, the drawing, of course. Then after, oh, '54, then I started moving to kind of metamorphosis. And this is example *[Changed for Man]* for that; I did it for the Kafka, *Metamorphosis.* And you know, this a spider; the man was changed, and all this kind of thing-- and went to that. That's the one period I went through very much involved with the metamorphic. And from then on, then I went to this. This [circa 1954] was a type of thing [untitled casein], matter of fact, I do now. But, you know, maybe I do just the detail--is black and white in the painting, and also drawing I did.

Rogers

This looks very Jackson Pollock, very New York School, with the abstract expressionist feeling to it. I wanted to ask you just a personal question right here, because you intimated to me that, perhaps, your nickname of "Mike" came during this period. Is that correct?

Kanemitsu

Yes, you know, most people can't pronounce the work, "Matsumi," my first name. And Jackson Pollock started calling me Mike, and pretty soon everybody started calling me Mike, and you know, I leave on, up to today. I adjusted my name to Mike. That's all.

Rogers

Did you do any large paintings like this?

Kanemitsu

Yes. I have it, I have a large painting like that.

Rogers

In color?

Kanemitsu

Yes--or black and white. This is, you know, one example. And from then, [circa 1962], you know, started show in New York, you know, painting, the black and white, and it usually come like this [untitled ink #QZ-5] you know--more involved with brushstroke and space, you know, this kind of thing--just involved. This was late fifties and sixties. And then I went to kind of direct thing, just black and white [untitled ink #S-23]. And from then on, I just move out, and . . . .

Rogers

Mike, let's wait a minute, and talk a little bit more about New York and your feelings there. I wanted to ask you whether you knew Earl Kirkham.

Kanemitsu

Well, Earl is most inspiration among the artists. He's a kind of decadent artist image, and he's a real bohemian, you know, real bohemian type of person. And that, his profession, he believe is his painting and art, and how to survive

it. And I think it's beautiful. So Earl Kirkham is a inspirational artist for . . . . Not his work--I know he's a competent painter--but he's a personality. The way he survive it, you know, [had] greatest impact for many younger artists, those day, in New York School, especially.

Rogers

You mentioned also that you had known Harold Levitt.

Kanemitsu

Yes. Harold Levitt is a playwriter and my schoolmate in Art Students League, and he was really helping me for many things--you know, a good friendship. In present time, he teach in Hunter [College], in New York. And . . . .

Rogers

When you started to do this completely different type of work, did you receive inspiration during this time from the artists that were working there? Is that where you got your inspiration from?

Kanemitsu

Well, sure. New York, at that time, you know, only way we are involved with a particular type of "ism" school, however they call it. Naturally I work in black and white, so, naturally, is that Franz Kline and [Robert] Motherwell and a few other people work in black and white. Even de Kooning work in black and white at that time, and also color, so . . . .

Rogers

Patia, come on in! Patia's just coming home from school. This is Mike's oldest girl, and she's ten. This is a big surprise for her. She didn't know we were going to be here. [laughter]

Kanemitsu

Well, "Number One" come home. But, anyway, is that, what I done, right now, what I doing for the kind of education, everything for the, what I pass through, you know, in my life.

Rogers

You mentioned on your tapes earlier that when you were with Kuniyoshi, you were under his influence, and then when he died, you went into something completely different. And this is a good example *[The Street Sleeper]* of what you were doing before he died, in '52, and then after he died, which is just a completely different approach.

Kanemitsu

Yeah. Well, I think we have to go through that. I already changing, you know, but somehow, Kuniyoshi is that kind of--I think that he's anti-nonobjective art or abstract painting. So that I just don't show to him what I do.

Rogers

That was a lot like your first early teacher that you had when you were in Denver, wasn't it? You didn't show him any of your abstract work. Did you ever talk to Kuniyoshi about Zen Buddhism and the Zen philosophy?

Kanemitsu

Well, I don't mention, you know, because I don't know enough about it. But he was talking about it sometime. But I, personally, and he, himself, he natural-born person for have a Zen idea, but aesthetic real literal meaning, you know, I don't think he don't know. But it's not my position to say, you know, how much he know Zen or not. He's just a person, you know.

Rogers

So you began to lose your imagery--that is, the realism and the figurative--and you became almost a pure abstract painter from this point on?

Kanemitsu

Yes, I think so, you know. But you know, it doesn't matter, I still have to draw the figurative if I want to--you know, I just do. I don't isolate myself for whatever I want to do, you know, I must do. It's a lot of meaning to that, and I usually forced to do.

PKanemitsu

Hey! Daddy, look at Daddy!

Kanemitsu

Shhhh. It's a tape now. So then I move to California, and then, that time, in a more light, kind of abstract, state, but more erotic, you know, is that environment is going through, you know. [untitled ink] So that period is a very strong--let's say, 1966--then I was in Hawaii, then, you know, the artist-in-residence there for five months. Then it's a lot of combined, combination, you know, I was doing erotic things in Hawaii, naturally, the beautiful nature, tropical nature, that color also influenced me. Then, from then on, is probably--sit down, please! [to Paul]--went through a lot of psychoanalytical changes, I lost kind of expressionism in type of work, and then slowly, I went to a kind of mysticism and what we call the Pacific School--you know, the Pacific School, many relate to Orientalism, and you know, California West Coast. And so, you know, that work began to change toward the mysticism, and '75, is more like that [untitled sumi]. And the present time, I was involved with more like a tonal--tone and mystical contrast. And I want kind of real subdued in the tone, and that's what I looking for at the moment, now. So that after there, then we come out, and work like this [untitled sumi and watercolor]. Then I go into the most subtle color, you know, instead for contrast.

Rogers

Yes, now this is not really a black and white as much as it is tones of gray and white and off-white, and one of the shortcomings of a black and white film is that it inhibits our showing your beautiful work with color. However, all these examples that you've shown us, you also have examples of the same type of work done in color, and we've seen some of it on the walls in your home here and in your studio. When you work, what satisfies you in your work?

Kanemitsu

What satisfies me is that, naturally, I feel up to carrying out what I want to do. Then I say, I finish, you know. Or I stop. Is that more mental thing is stop. It's a very strange way, but it's kind of mental orgasm, you know. That's it. Just come out, and then that's satisfied. And sometime--well, most of the time--they don't come out right, so, you know.

Rogers

You're very critical of your work.

Kanemitsu

No, I don't, you know. I just, you know, my work, because I'm a product of nature. And so, naturally, for that, whatever I do for the visual art, in other words, I am painter, so I do painting. When it come out it should be natural, the momental thing where you feel what you want to do, right? That, sometimes, you cannot do. And that way, also, I think the artist hang up. So you do everything so perfect, everything come out exactly what you want it, then you've given up painting.

Rogers

Your work at Tamarind has been a kind of an ongoing thing for you for about ten or twelve years, hasn't it? And in that time, you've worked with many different printers. Could you talk a little bit about the chemistry between a printer and an artist, and if you ever feel you lose control over your own creativity when you work with another man?

Kanemitsu

Yes. The printer, the master printer, you know, you collaborate with, and you have to work with. Usually, the work with the master printer is totally master printer--in other words, the craftsman; in other words, nonartist, just a person who happen to be printer. Then you can really work together. But if it happen to be the person you have for a printer have a master-printer license, and he have a, you know, MA or MFA or whatever they got, and they have art training, and the person happen to be artist, also, and printer, then you don't work very well because, you know, their personality come in. But you work with, you know, completely, just professional printer, and that's the best way to work with.

Rogers

We have here an example of the work that you did while you were at Tamarind. It's called *Oxnard Madam.* It's a very intriguing title. Does it have a story behind it?

Kanemitsu

Yes. You know, when June Wayne invited me, in 1961, and I think I come in February, and my friend, art critic Jules Langsner, and he and I were invited for lunch at Santa Barbara museum. So Jules start driving down, you know, to

Santa Barbara, and we pass through Oxnard, and he mentioned, "Hey, Mike, I want to tell you something very interesting about Oxnard." During the Second World War, in Oxnard is a center for the training for Seabees. And many construction worker, roughneck people come in the town, and in the same time, is a young black man, workman, and this black man come in the town, and he took over the whole scene in town--in other words, bars open, bootlegging open, then is prostitution, you know, all this kind of thing open. And it seems to me he bribed the mayor down to that--who know?--the congressman, senator, whoever it is. And this person was so power, even the Mafia can't touch this man. And so I understand that there is a tax problem, that the United States Navy, whoever he is, to prosecute this person. And he was a guilt, naturally, and then he went to the woman penitentiary.

Rogers

Why did a man go to a women's penitentiary?

Kanemitsu

Well, it's because this person is that transvestite--everybody thought, she black lady; happened to be black man.

Rogers

In all the time that he was working in Oxnard, he was posing as a woman, and he was arrested as a woman?

Kanemitsu

He was arrested as a woman, then he went to that woman penitentiary. Naturally, they have to give you physical examination, then it happened to be a man. And so, you know, I say why? That's a fantastic story. So next day, I went back to Tamarind, and I did this print, and I title *Oxnard Madam.*

Rogers

Is there any imagery involved in this at all?

Kanemitsu

No, no, no. You can tell that, you know, this black *tuckus* there, in the back, and is moustache grown, is that male. And then at the top of the scene is bread, money. That what it is.

Rogers

Oh, I see. What effect have women had on your art?

Kanemitsu

Oh, a lot, you know. First place, you know, my mother give the birth, and I don't want to come out such a warm place, mother's womb, but it happened to come out. And especially for the Georgia O'Keeffe. Georgia O'Keeffe give to me--not, you know, positive impact, like Jackson Pollock, or de Kooning, or Franz Kline or Clyfford Still and all these people give it, you know, power, because since we are both male macho, so we get impact there. But the woman influence come from very slow. And you know, I don't realize that in how much I was influenced by Georgia O'Keeffe. And I really admire her work, and you know, that is where all my roots is, Georgia O'Keeffe.

Rogers

Do you think artists are different from other people?

Kanemitsu

No different. We exhale, inhale the same oxygen. We eat the same kind of food. We drink, we smoke, and all this--no problem. But if you happen to be an artist, I think the artist is different because outside the nonartisan, nonartists, they put us different. But we're perfect citizens, no different than other people. But, of course, any artist selected for the profession of the artist, he don't make money, or you know, and make unhappy for their parent because they become artists. I think that's different. But we have to deal with conformatism. An artist, there isn't any longer; non-exist in society. Most non-important existence, profession, is the artist.

Rogers

Does an artist suffer in bad times as well as in good times?

Kanemitsu

Artists suffer all the time. If they have a good time, they feel quilty because, "Why?" you know, "I make a lot of bread, you know, I sell a lot," and then artists think, "What's wrong with me?" You know, it must be wrong. Because you know, this person, artist work, have public appeal, so naturally they're

going to sell. If you don't sell any work. So nobody care, not interested. You know, artist's work. So either they're a success or nonsuccess. Either you make, or you don't make nothing. They're both bad. Artists always suffer. You know, one good example like Mark Rothko; he commit suicide. He was successful, material[ly], and successful his achievements for he's noted for his art. But why he kill himself? There's many, many thousands unknown artists commit suicide, too. So you know, what is it? Because that's the way I figure. If you sell too much work, you feel that, you know, you're guilt because your work become commercialized. You don't sell, then the same thing. So you know, artist always the masochist.

Rogers

Do you have a special time . . . . You mentioned that you like to paint at night, is that when you do your best work?

Kanemitsu

Yes, you know, the witch hour--twelve o'clock--then, from then the best time for me to work with.

Rogers

In the work that we saw this afternoon, there didn't seem to be any themes that ran through it, other than just your own moods that you felt from within, and I'm wondering, do you paint in a series or do you paint topics?

Kanemitsu

Sometimes. Sometimes I paint a series, but most of the time, you know, I just go by . . . . It's like a journal or diary, you know, for my day, my mood, you know, what *I* feel. That moment I have a canvas or a sheet of paper, that's it. You know, that's what I want to do, do. So that I don't have that. I don't have this and that kind of feeling.

Rogers

Do you feel in the mood right now to give us a painting?

Kanemitsu

I'm not in the mood, but since, you know, we have a tape, we have to go into, or video, then, you know, I try, you know, I try, you know. But I have no idea

what I want to do. I never set them up in advance, what I'm going to do. And as soon as I see the material, then I just walk in; I just go and do, that's all. [music begins]I like to work with the music. Most music I deal, and I dig it the most music, is progressive jazz. I really like it. And most of, you know, the jazz musicians I know from New York, so something that relate to me--mood, timing, space, you know, tempo. All this is beautiful. So usually I work, and I paint, is that, you know, healthy habit, jazz music. You know, I like that. Many great modern jazz musicians used to come and play with me; they have jam session in my studio, such as Miles Davis, [Thelonius] Monk, and many, many people--it's a beautiful time I'd spend. I need it. I need solitary; I need the space, but music gives to me something to go along. I don't think about it, you know, how music influenced my work. Now it is habitual. When I paint, I got to have a drink, and I got to have a cigarette, and the music with it me together.

Jockey

Lee Morgan's classic "Caramba," Lee Morgan on trumpet, Benny Moffatt on tenor, Cedar Baldwin on piano, Reggie Murphy on drums, on KBCA, Los Angeles.

Rogers

You never really know what's going to happen to that paint when you put it on the paper, do you?

Kanemitsu

Oh, I know. I know exactly how it's going to happen, in this picture. I can't photographically tell you but I know what's going to happen.

Rogers

It's very wet right now.

Kanemitsu

Yeah, we have gravity there, you know, then what area pigment going to run there.

Rogers

And as it dries . . . .

Rogers

It's been fifteen minutes since you painted this for us, Mike, and it's changed. It seems to have taken on a life of its own.

Kanemitsu

Yeah, yeah. Painting changes, you know. Like, you know, so does life. Every minute in life it changes; so does painting. That's all I can say, you know. What else I can say?

Rogers

Patia Kanemitsu, what is it like to have an artist for a father?

PaKanemitsu

I don't know. Fun sometimes; sometimes not.

Rogers

When is it the most fun?

PaKanemitsu

After he does a painting. We get to go places and have fun.

Rogers

When is it not fun?

PaKanemitsu

When no one sells his painting, and no one pays for it for a long time.

Rogers

When no one buys his painting or does buy it and doesn't pay him? So we have a family portrait minus one. Paul.

Kanemitsu

Paul! Come here.

Rogers

Matsumi Kanemitsu: artist, poet, printer, philosopher and a very busy father. What does the future hold for you, Mike?

Kanemitsu

I don't know future. Nothing.

Rogers

But you have goals.

Kanemitsu

Tomorrow's another day, that's all.

Rogers

Well, we appreciate your letting us come into your home and seeing you with your family. It's been a great inspiration for us.

Kanemitsu

Thank you very much.

Index
