A TEI Project

Interview of Craig Kauffman

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (May 21, 1976)

AUPING:

Craig, where were you born and when?

KAUFFMAN:

March 31, 1932, in Los Angeles, in Eagle Rock.

AUPING:

Which is?

KAUFFMAN:

It's between Glendale and Pasadena. I don't think it was ever an incorporated city, but I'm not sure. There's Eagle Rock High School. I was born there.

AUPING:

You went to grammar school there and such. What school? Do you remember what grammar school?

KAUFFMAN:

I'm trying to remember. One was called San Rafael, and the other was called—I switched grammar schools at one point. I wasn't getting along with the teacher. I switched grammar schools to another grammar school. There were two in the town, so I switched. I was having some trouble with this one teacher. It was terrible. I got along very well at the other place.

AUPING:

Do you remember much about your days in grammar school, besides the trouble that went on there, I mean: any specific incidents or teachers or anything like that?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, yes, I remember thousands of things, but I don't know if any of them would be particularly interesting.

AUPING:

Well, anything that comes to your mind.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I really didn't do too well, I don't think, in the first grade, and then in the second grade I did very well, and in the third grade I was doing very well. Then things just broke down with this teacher, and I just sort of dropped out for a while. Then I switched to the other school, and everything was fine.

AUPING:

It was, like, a trouble with academics, that kind of thing?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I don't know what exactly it was. I got into some kinds of trouble there, and our relationship deteriorated. She started disciplining me, and I went from being very good in class to being not very good in class. When I went to the other grammar school, it was sort of an experimental program, and they had what was called opportunity room. Like at Christmastime I had an opportunity for a long time to work on a big stained-glass pane for the back of the student assembly. I had this one teacher, whose name I don't remember. I was always

very good at drawing sort of realistically. She was really into sort of contemporary art, and that was my first experience [with it]. I didn't have any idea about this stuff. She liked it, always drawing in big blobs and these expressionistic things. She was always out doing freestyle dancing. She just didn't really like my very realistic pictures of airplanes and war industries and stuff. So, I got a C in art, and I'll always remember that. It was the only C I ever got in art. It sort of made me realize that there was another world out there, that sort of thing. That was very early on. It must have been about fourth or fifth grade.

AUPING:

Then you went to Eagle Rock High School. Were you taking art classes there?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I took a few art classes, but the thing I was probably a little more interested in off and on was—I took a lot of drafting courses and sort of freehand drawing, sort of architectural drawing. That was really the thing that I did. I mean, there was some art classes and painting, but I didn't really start doing paintings of any kind of interest until I was in about the eleventh grade or something like that. I did a few things in eleventh and twelfth grade that were sort of cubist paintings. Before that I had done oil paintings when I was a kid, when I was eight or nine—my father still has them—of sailboats and things like that. So, I was always working. I mean, I started making oil paintings when I was seven or eight years old.

AUPING:

Oil on canvas paintings when you were seven or eight?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. They weren't very good. [laughter] They were sort of primitive style. But, yes, drafting and architectural things—but I was actually a math-science major in high school. You had to take shops too, so I took wood shop and electric shop and metal shop. I was OK in all that stuff, but I was best at drafting. So, I just stuck with that, and I just took that semester after semester after semester.

AUPING:

Were your parents art oriented at all?

KAUFFMAN:

No. My sister—I have two older sisters, and one of them has died. (She was the one I was very close to. I mean, I'm close to both of them, but the other one is quite a bit older than I am). My other sister, Toddy [Wilhelmina], was three and a half years older than I was. She had a girlfriend in high school, and she was also very interested in art. The girlfriend in high school, her parents were named [Grant and Helen] Dahlstrom, and the girlfriend was Vicki [Anna Victoria] Dahlstrom. When I was in high school, early along, when I was only about, I don't know, seventh or eighth grade, they had a house built by [John] Lautner. It was quite a far-out house over in Glendale. So that was kind of one of my first experiences with contemporary architecture, So by the time I entered an architectural contest in my senior year, I was pretty aware of contemporary architecture. i was making sort of half-assed cubist paintings, watercolors, and stuff.

AUPING:

Why were you doing the painting? Just like a therapy kind of thing, or what?

KAUFFMAN:

It was something I liked to do. I think I still have one of the cubist paintings I did at that time. I designed all the stuff at school, you know, like the senior plaque and the sweaters for the sportsmen's club. It was sort of funny because it was supposed to be the Eagles, and they wound up looking very much like parrots because I just liked the parrot look better. Somebody called them the Parrots one day, so they got onto me very hard.

AUPING:

Were your parents native Californians?

KAUFFMAN:

No, my father [Kurtz Kauffman] is from Pennsylvania, Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, from a German-Dutch family who had been there for a long, long time, since before the Revolutionary War. My mother [Margaret Kauffman] is—Buchanan is her name. Scots, of course. She was from Texas and, before that, Kentucky, I think.

AUPING:

Why did they move out here? Do you know?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, my father was sort of a rebel, and he went to work his way through [Fairleigh] Dickinson law school. [He] worked in a steel mill one summer, and this and that. Worked on a farm at other times. He still has a big scar in a part of his back where—they used to throw these hot rivets. He was putting together trains or something like that, rails or something. They threw the rivet, and it went down the back of his shirt. I kind of remember that story. But he went to Dickinson, and he was involved in football and in fraternities and things. He went through law school, and then he just sort of decided that he didn't want to stay around the area where there were so many relatives. He could have easily gone to Philadelphia and gone into that kind of thing. I think one of the representatives in Congress was a relative. But he just sort of decided to come west. My mother was married in the First World War, and her husband died right after that from dysentery. Her whole family came out: her mother and her two brothers. They all came out to sort of make their mark. So, my father married her out here.

AUPING:

I see. Getting back to Eagle Rock High: I read in "The Last Time I Saw Ferus [1957-1966]" catalog, someone mentioned—maybe it was Betty [Turnbull] in her writing, or it was a quote—that you and Walter Hopps were very good friends at Eagle Rock and that Walter was your "agent."

KAUFFMAN:

Well, he wasn't my agent. No, but Walter and I just lived three blocks away from each other, and during grammar school and high school we were off-and-on friends. I was more sort of a rough-and-tumble type, and he was more—he went in and out of private schools sometimes. But we got to be friendly for some time in grammar school. Then he went away (and I don't remember exactly) to some kind of private school along there at some time. But then about the last two years of high school, he was on the gym team, and I was on the gym team, and we were also involved with being on the physics team and the chemistry team. So it was sort of a funny mixture of being on

the gym team, which was a whole set of funny kind of athletes. They weren't the football players or the other kinds of players. The gym guys went to Muscle Beach on Saturday afternoon, and they were sort of oddballs. They were more odd. They didn't hang around with the rest—they were a little rougher kinds of funny guys in some ways, and in other ways they were a little brighter than the football players. I went out for a lot of sports in high school. I played basketball, and I went out for swimming, and I played tennis. I was probably best in tennis and gymnastics. I was our first tumbler, and Walter was on the side horse. We also had an intellectual life because we were both, I guess, fairly bright. We both got good grades. Walter got excellent grades. In fact, he won the Bank of America award in high school. He got me out of a lot of trouble, because I was always getting into difficulties with the authorities, so he sort of helped me out of those kinds of things. I got really griped at the gym team. It was the league meet, and we might have been able to win. It was the beginning of my senior year—I guess it was the winter—and I just didn't show up for the league meet. I went and played a tennis match instead. I just about got booted out. They had me up and just asked me why, I didn't want to do that. I don't know. I just had gotten sort of fed up with the whole thing. I just didn't want to do it. Everybody was just outraged with me. Walter sort of defended me a bit. Then the really big thing was I designed this program for the commencement, and it was cubist looking. The principal and lots of other people thought it was communistic or something. It was actually before they had those trials in L.A. coming out of the Greek Theatre art exhibition. There were several trials about that time about sailboats with—the sailboat in one of the paintings was supposed to have been some secret message. We had a lot of strange city councilmen in those days. I don't know. It sort of spread—this was only in '49 and into '50 [which] was when I graduated. It was a big stink around school. The kids looked at me like I was some kind of a creep or something, and Walter sort of went and explained that it had nothing to so with this. He made sure that the principal saw reproductions of Picassos and Braques and stuff [laughter] and sort of rationalized our way out of it. Then we were sort of on the outs; Walter wasn't so much, but I was. Then suddenly I won a second prize in a West Coast architectural contest, which really sort of allowed me to go right into USC architecture school, Walter won the Bank of America award. I won other things, drawing competitions and so forth and so on, and then everybody just couldn't put the two together. They really

couldn't argue with us after that point. So about the last three or four months of school, we sort of ran the place, in a funny sort of way. [laughter] They just didn't want to mess with us anymore after that because they couldn't do anything after all these awards came screaming in. They didn't have any idea we'd even entered any of these things. They just suddenly called the principal one day and [asked] him would we show up for this awards banquet and "Aren't you proud that your student won the award?" It was very funny. We had other friends that were very interested in all these things too.

AUPING:

When you talk about designing the commencement thing for school, were you thinking consciously about art at that time, or was it just like a fun diversion? I mean, the fact that Walter would go in and show illustrations of Picasso to explain to the—obviously he had some idea of art history and felt that you did too.

KAUFFMAN:

I had been reading some of my sister's books, I had read [Laszlo] Moholy-Nagy's book [The New Vision] in my senior year, and I had been to museums. Walter, of course, had been quite a few times to the [Walter] Arensbergs' home, and he'd taken a course at the Los Angeles County Museum [of History, Science, and Art]. I had never actually gone and seen all the things, but I got pretty much of a good cataloging. I just missed going to see the Arensberg collection, but I knew all the stuff that was in it. Yes, we were pretty aware of all that stuff. We started about the twelfth grade by going to all the local exhibitions and going to Frank Perls's gallery. Yes, we were pretty aware. But I mean, as far as my making art or anything like that, it wasn't quite clear what I was going to do with it. It was more of a Moholy-Nagy attitude, somewhere between design and architecture. I really wasn't so clear about all that sort of thing, but we had a pretty good working knowledge of a lot of that stuff by the time we were seniors in high school.

AUPING:

Did you have in your mind while you were in high school, all the time, that you would attend college, or did you have to make a decision at some point?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I had to make a decision somewhere along. We were going to have to have a college major [as] it was called. So, I was a math-science major, which was pretty broad. It was a pretty good high school, English courses were very difficult. I took Latin and physics and got as far as solid geometry and trigonometry. It was pretty hard and it was pretty good. It was a pretty good education, looking back on it. I particularly liked our chemistry teacher, whose name I can't remember,

AUPING:

But when you decided to go to college, then you decided on architecture. Is that it?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, you know, I hadn't really made up my mind all that much. The idea of just being an artist in those days was a pretty far-out idea, and it didn't really dawn on me in a direct kind of way like that. I really thought architecture was really a good thing to do. I was very interested in it. I was very lucky to get in USC because in 1950 95 percent of the class, 90 percent of the class were veterans. There were only about five or six of us, I think, in the freshman class that were anything but veterans. Most of the veterans had been working in offices and stuff, and they were all, like, eight years older than we were or more. So, the competition was really something. Frank Gehry was in my freshman class at USC—I've known him ever since—and several other friends of mine. I haven't kept up with them all that much. Greg Walsh, who works for Frank, was in the class right ahead of me. There were some good people around in those days. ' SC was really a hot architecture school in those days. It was very controversial. It had a very good dean [Arthur B. Gallion], who later on went to be the dean at Harvard I think.

AUPING:

You stayed there for the full [term]? Did you get your degree in architecture?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I just went for a year and a half. I really decided after the next summer and the next fall after that that I really wanted to become a painter. By the

next two years I'd already had a show in the old Felix. Landau; Gallery after I was a freshman in college.

AUPING:

That was while you were an architecture student that you had a show?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. I did a whole bunch of painting. I started painting, really painting, during my freshman year in college. I took a summer course the year before I started architecture school; I took it at Pasadena City College. I did that several summers actually, the summer before that, and I had really done realistic sorts of things. And this one teacher there—God, his name is on the tip of my tongue, and I just can't remember; he did sort of Paul Klee-like things; I wish I could remember his name—anyway he sort of encouraged me to do some experimentation, and I sort of started pressing stuff on masonite, You know, 11 would] paint and press newspapers and other junk on there and sort of find my own images in there and paint. The Los Angeles County Fair used to have an exhibit that was quite a big deal in those days. That and the L.A. County [Museum] annual were probably the two most important exhibitions. I got in the thing, which was kind of fun. There is a kind of a funny story connected with that. Rico Lebrun called my house and asked my mother—my mother just talked to him, and he thought I was some old man from Germany; I had that kind of style. When he found out I was some kid, he hung up. [laughter]

AUPING:

You're kidding.

KAUFFMAN:

No. But it was funny.

AUPING:

So how did Felix Landau—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, he saw a painting in the thing and asked if I had any more, and by that time I had. I don't remember exactly. I think it must have been that fall that I had a show there. Already by that fall, I was doing bigger things out of enamel

paint and really sort of splashing around. I had already seen abstract expressionism. So half the show was these Paul Klee-like things that Felix liked a lot, and the other stuff was the stuff he just didn't want to deal with at all. So our relationship was kind of short. He sort of sold some of the Paul Klee-like things, and the other stuff nobody really wanted to deal with. We really sort of were somewhat alienated after that.

AUPING:

Where did you see the abstract expressionist things?

KAUFFMAN:

There was a big exhibition, at the Los Angeles County Museum that came through called "American Vanguard for Paris," and I went back a lot of times to see that. At first I was very upset by it and didn't like it, but I went back again and again and again and wound up really liking it. So by the time I started UCLA, I was, like, a half-baked abstract expressionist. I was doing other things too, but I was sort of going into that.

AUPING:

Why did you decide to go to UCLA instead of some-place else?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know. Walter was going there. He'd gone to Stanford, and he and another friend of ours, Jim Newman, had gotten kicked out of Stanford in their first quarter because—I guess it's semester—because they were on the Chaparral and it was really a dirty issue. So my other friend, Jim Newman, went to Oberlin College in Ohio, and Walter came to UCLA and started bacteriology. He and another friend of mine, Ronald Horowitz, had an apartment over off Santa Monica Boulevard near Beverly Glen. It was quite a different area in those days—hasn't changed all that much—and I went over there a lot. Also my girlfriend, who'd gone north to college, was going to go to UCLA too. I don't know. It just seemed like a logical thing to do because my interests were in Los Angeles and my friends [were in Los Angeles]. I really didn't see anything else to do.

AUPING:

Do you remember what, say, the UCLA art scene was like at that time?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. It was pretty bland. There were some good people. Clinton Adams was a very interesting man, and he left. I don't know what happened. He got involved in this and that, and he had to—he just left; went off to New Mexico, where I think he's been ever since. He was a very good printmaker and a very, very sensible man. I liked him. Then John Paul Jones, who now teaches with me down at Irvine, came when I was there. He just sort of let us go. We could do anything we wanted to. He was sort of, well, not forced to leave, but it got so uncomfortable for him that he had to leave. Then there was Bill Brice, whom I knew pretty well, who had very catholic taste. But really the sway of things was really—everybody really worshipped Rico Lebrun. They really did. I wouldn't say all, completely, you know, all the way, but that was still very much of a preoccupation with them. The training was very, very classical. You would essentially draw from a figure. There were still anatomy courses. I just sort of stumbled through all that stuff. They just sort of tolerated me. At least, they tolerated me. There were good people that came in the summer. [Adolph] Gottlieb came one summer, and John Farren came one summer. The regular faculty didn't think much of all that, but it was fine for me. [Richard] Diebenkorn came one summer, although I didn't take a class from him. I mean, I went up there to show him things and had some kind of contact.

AUPING:

Did you get your M. A. from UCLA?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I just went right on through. I did somewhat figurative work, and then I also did very abstract work. Well, I kind of remember it in two different ways. I made a lot of good friends. A lot of my artist friends today are still—Ed Moses was there when I was there, and a good friend of mine from New York, Allen Lynch, and quite a few others. There were quite a few talented people. James McGarrell was there when I was there. He still is a figurative painter, but I know he was fairly good. He was probably better than any of the instructors in painting like that. The dean was very good, and [Frederick] Wight was there, I think. They put on some good exhibitions in the gallery, Wight did. There was a big Matisse show while I was still there. John Marin show. So, it was not in any way an unsophisticated place. I didn't agree with what they were doing,

but it was not unsophisticated because they had a good gallery program and people coming through and so forth.

AUPING:

Were you exhibiting professionally, shall we say, while you were getting your M. A., or did that come afterwards?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, before I got my M. A., Walter and I and Jim Newman and Ronald Horowitz and Ben Bartosh and a few other people had organized an idealistic kind of thing. We wanted to show work that we thought was interesting. We sort of clamored for space; we wanted to organize exhibitions. We as a group, including Jim Newman, who was at Oberlin, had put on jazz concerts professionally. I'd done the programs for it and stuff. Mainly Walter and Jim did the organizing. We did one at the Ebell Theater, We did one in downtown Los Angeles, that was really good. They were good jazz concerts. We got to know all the jazz, lots of jazz musicians at the time, which was pretty interesting. It was fun, and I got to be pretty good friends with Dave Brubeck and people like that. I didn't know him as well as Walter did, but you know, you'd go to their places—Gerry Mulligan—when they were really just emerging. That was a preoccupation of ours. That's something that held us together was the interest in jazz, that dated back to high school too, because Walter and I had been really interested in jazz. We'd tune in on the radio stations from San , Francisco: Jimmy Lyons's, listening to Dave Brubeck and stuff. X remember we went to a Key Club convention in San Francisco during high school, and the only thing we could do was put on our overcoats so we could get in and go over to the Blackhawk—oh, no, it was the Burma Lounge in Oakland—and hear Dave Brubeck on his first professional date. We got in, and we went over to the city, to the Blackhawk and got in there because we had overcoats on. We decided that was the secret: if you had an overcoat on, you could get in and get served. Anyway, we didn't go to many of those Key Club things, but we saw a lot of jazz. That really was a real concern and was something that this little group wanted to continue doing to help support the gallery thing. So along the way Walter and I and some other people took a place in Brentwood, on Gorham Street. It was called the Syndell Studio. This funny guy had made it all out of telephone poles that were covered with tar. If

you poked the paint, this tar would sort of leak out. The floor had this padding underneath it, so that if you moved anything around, it would make a big mark on the floor. The backyard was full of toilets that he scrounged somewhere. He was really quite a character in Brentwood, and the people just wanted to get rid of him. He was kind of a wheeler-dealer in real estate. Even in those days it looked really pretty far out, this old building built out of telephone poles (which is still there; it's a really funny place). You never could quite get the walls white. So, anyway, for a time I had that as a studio. For a while Jim Newman lived there. For a while one of my other friends lived there. For a while it was a bit of a gallery; we didn't have any formal shows there, but it was sort of a warehouse for us collecting stuff from San Francisco. We started going to San Francisco when, as I say, we were in high school. Then Walter started having some contact with the area, of course, when he was at Stanford. We started going up there because the kind of art we were interested in was in San Francisco. So we went, just went there and made contacts with people. We were kind of nervy kids and just kind of went up there and went to their studios. Walter was as smooth then as he is now and just walked in. Mission Street was where people had lots of their studios. You know, [we] met Frank Lobdell and Hassel Smith and Sonia Gechtoff and Jim Kelly. It was really sort of a going concern already. People had already opened independent galleries and co-op galleries. That's when all that contact started. So, out of the Syndell Studio, we organized the Merry-Go-Round shows in 1955, and that was while I was a senior in college.

AUPING:

And that was work from San Francisco?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, mostly. There were some L.A. people. Gil Henderson was from here, and a guy named—somebody else. We just kind of combed under the rocks to find what we thought were far-out painters in those days, and we mounted a show at the merry-go-round building [on the Santa Monica pier] while Walter was still in the army. So Ben Bartosh and I and my wife at the time and a few other people helped, just about did it all. I mounted it physically, and then Walter came for the opening. It was quite a show. It was really quite a nice show. There were lots of things in it that were of interest.

AUPING:

But you felt like most of the energy in terms of your kind of art at that time was in San Francisco?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, there wasn't much really here; there really wasn't. The people that were to emerge, in, like '57, the whole sort of Kienholz people he sort of got together, really were still in school, A lot of them were in school in San Francisco at that time. Then people started coming out of the woodwork fairly quickly.

AUPING:

Did Ferus develop directly out of the Syndell Studio, or was there time in between?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, Walter joined up with Ed Kienholz, and they had a gallery called the Now Gallery, and they met, and then they got together and organized the Ferus. I was in San Francisco during that time. I also went to Europe right after I finished college for about six months and New York for about three months. By the time I got back, it was already kind of going, not the Ferus, but their organization. Then Walter's gang sort of met Kienholz's gang; it was kind of like two gangs coming together. That's the first time I met Billy [A1 Bengston] and John Altoon and [Robert] Irwin and a whole bunch of people, and then my friends Les Carr and Ed Moses and others.

AUPING:

Before we get to all those stories you have about Ferus that I've heard about, what did you do in Europe?

KAUFFMAN:

Well,. I went to New York to kind of see what was going on.

AUPING:

Art-wise?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. It was summertime. I went through the M. A. program in just a year and a summer school [1955-56]. (I think they just wanted to get me out. I kind of got that feeling. I mean, I don't know whether that's true or not.) On the same day I took my exam—you know, it was a very formal kind of presentation for your M, A. in those days: you had to have people outside of the discipline meet, and you had a show, and they all discussed it and were very tough on you—and the very same day I did that (that was in the afternoon), I took my physical for the army in the morning and flunked it. I didn't know what was going to happen with my life until that very day. Right? And in one day it was kind of like, God, I could just paint now and not have to worry about all this shit. There was a lot of trouble with all that in the early fifties, I mean there was Korea. Walter had gone in the army and pulled lots of stunts to try to get out. I'd been in the ROTC. I did ROTC, depending on which college, all the way to my senior year until I finally just said, "Screw this! I just don't want to have anything to do with it," which was probably foolish, but I just saw that three years of service coming up. I didn't know. I just thought I'd better take my chances as a nut. In those days it wasn't so hard, I guess, to get out as being a kook. There weren't that many people doing it then. I was half-crazy in those days anyway.

AUPING:

So, you got out because they thought you were nuts?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, you know, I knew how to answer all the questions right. I didn't have to stretch it too far. I was a very straight-looking kook, though, which probably helped too. So, then I just said, "God!" I got a little money together. My marriage had broken up just that spring too, so it was quite all at once. So I just took off. I got to New York, and it was summer and hot, and I stayed at the YMCA, the Sloan House on Thirty-second Street. It was OK in those days. I passed it not too long ago, and it looked pretty grim. It wasn't so bad then. You had a little cell-like room. I proceeded to go to the Cedar Bar and start meeting people and fooling around, Everybody was leaving town for the summer. So I went to Provincetown. I said, "Well, that's where it's at," so I went to Province- town. I went into Hans Hofmann's school, looked around, got a little room, got some paints, and started painting and met some of the

artists that were around in the town. Then I went to Europe for about six months. I spent most of my time in Paris, but I traveled around a bit. I was sort of planning on staying longer, but I don't know; I got sort of homesick. When I was there, I met Sam Francis and Joan Mitchell. Then I came back to New York. I just missed getting a place there [in Paris]. I was really thinking of staying there. I had my heart set.

AUPING:

In Europe?

KAUFFMAN:

In Europe, yes. I had my heart set on this place. By that time I knew quite a few people there, and I felt kind of good there. I almost got this place, which I don't think I would have ever given up, I just missed getting it, I was very discouraged with that. So X came back to Los Angeles. As soon as I got back to Los Angeles, I moved to San Francisco for about four or five months, something like that. That was the first series of mature work I did. I did three paintings when I was there.

AUPING:

In San Francisco?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, and it was a real reaction against what was going on in San Francisco. Up until that time I had tried all different kinds of things, lots of different kinds of paintings, and that was the first real reaction: real white paintings with very fine black lines and just a few little color areas. The paintings which I was later to show at the Ferus were actually very similar. It was funny: one of the paintings which I later sold out of the Ferus Gallery, the first painting which I ever sold there, I actually had rolled up when I was moving back to Los Angeles and thrown away. Later Walter was in the car, and he said, "Well, why don't we go pick that painting up?" It was in back of a moving place. It was on linen, and it was kind of rolled up there in the alley. I got back to L.A. and stretched it up, and it looked pretty good, [laughter] That was a painting I had in the opening show at the Ferus. It was also reproduced in Art International. I sold it to a guy named Lackwitz. I can't find that painting. I'd love to get ahold

of that painting, I've got people trying to trace it down. Actually, out of all that series, it's one of my favorites. I've had people trying to trace it down but can't find it because he died. He was living in Palm Springs, and no one really knows what's become of his things and where his relatives have moved. It's too bad.

AUPING:

Why did you decide to move back down to Los Angeles?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I don't know. I was up there, and it was very, very lonely. I don't know. Ferus was opening and—I mean, I sort of liked the beatnik scene, but I didn't like it all that much. I wasn't all that interested in all the poetry stuff. It was kind of fun, but it was a very lonely, dismal movement in a lot of ways. There were hardly any girls on the scene. Jim Newman was living down the street from me in a little place with another guy. I don't know. It was just sort of dreary. There was a bad earthquake that fall, I remember, and the walls all cracked. It was really dreary that fall. I don't know. I sort of moved back to Los Angeles and got a little, funny place on Beverly Glen, which I kept for quite a while, and set it up in a very Spartan manner and proceeded to start painting.

AUPING:

Did you feel like there was really something beginning to happen in L.A. ?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, right. Most of the San Francisco people were a lot older than I was. They were somewhat friendly, but not all that friendly, and I was sort of reacting against what was going on there. I had gone to the San Francisco annual that year, and I really said, "Oh, I'm just tired of all that mud stuff." So, I came back, and then I really got to be acquainted with Bengston and John Altoon. They were more my own age. Not that there weren't some people in San Francisco that weren't my own age, but this was more my kind of style, I guess. So I was here for a while and shared a studio out there on Sawtelle with several people. We really had a pretty good time for a couple of years.

AUPING:

When you first started up with Ferus?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. We really had a good time. Then I moved back to San Francisco because I'd met a girl up there. That was one of the reasons. And then Jim Newman and I got a neat apartment on Fillmore Street. It was a floor-through place. We each had a bedroom, and then I had a big front room for a studio, two rooms connected with those big sliding doors for a studio. It was really quite a nice studio, good light. It was like fifty dollars a month for this place, and it was not in a bad neighborhood at all. The four apartments there were all—Jay DeFeo and Wally Hedrick lived next door, and Michael MacClure and his wife lived next door, and then downstairs Sonia Gechtoff and Jim Kelly lived. There were really some times there. I mean, Jay DeFeo and Wally gave some incredible parties. The same apartment that Jim and I had we later passed on. Ed Moses had it, and Les Carr had it, and I don't know who had it after that. Then they tore it down.

AUPING:

This is in San Francisco? Fillmore Street?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, right. That was '59, into '60. Then I got married again, to Vivian.

AUPING:

So, then you stayed in San Francisco, or you moved back to L.A. ?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I went away. Then Vivian and I went to Europe for almost two years. I was really gone during the time that Ferus came under Irving Blum, you know, when it moved across the street to its next home, I was really gone during that time. There's sort of a hole there—a bit in my career too.

AUPING:

Where you weren't doing art, you mean?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I was making art, but I sort of lost my way there for quite a while. When I returned in, like, '61, it didn't take me long to take up the pieces, and I had

learned a lot in between, but I really wasn't doing what I wanted to do. I sort of doubted my first work and kind of came under the influence more directly of New York abstract expressionism, which I saw a lot of in San Francisco. So, my first series kind of fell apart. I started making darker, bigger paintings with more mud in it and so forth and so on. But in Europe I made lots of watercolors which had brighter colors and were more quickly done and so forth.

AUPING:

Did you save those watercolors and show them sometime?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I have them. I've never shown them. Then I came back to Los Angeles. I went back to my older work and started a new series with a very different scale, much bigger scale. Then I quickly went into the flat plastic pieces. I sort of missed a time, a little bit of time there, when Bengston and Irwin and some of the other people and Kenny Price (who wasn't really involved in the early Ferus; he was a friend of Bengston's whom I had met but wasn't all that close to) had really sort of taken the next step while I was gone. I came back, and I really had to catch up really quickly, which I did because I really liked that look. I remember I saw a Bengston and a Ken Price at Martha Jackson's when passing through New York on the way back. The work just had a look to me that I knew just where it had come from, and it all looked kind of right to me. So I came back and started up very quickly.

AUPING:

Had you become very close friends with the Ferus group at that time?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, yes, we were very close friends. When I came back—it was sort of funny—I kind of had to "re-learn" my friendships with a lot of people, not Ed Moses so much, but with some of the other people. It was kind of like they almost didn't want to see me come back. I think one of them said that to me, "Why'd you come back?" [laughter] Like there wasn't enough room for one more. But as it turned out there was a lot of room; there weren't that many people around sawing away.

AUPING:

Who did you feel closest with, in terms of the Ferus group?

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (May 21, 1976)

AUPING:

I think when we stopped I asked you whom you felt closest with in terms of the Ferus group.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, the people sort of from Walter's side of the fence, although not at the beginning, were Les Carr and myself and Ed Moses and a few other people and the San Francisco people we knew. But we rapidly got acquainted with Bengston and John Altoon and later on with Bob Irwin. During the later fifties, when I was out there on Sawtelle, I shared the studio with Bob Irwin and Ed Moses for a period of time and also another guy who lives in New York and Europe now, Allen Lynch, who still is working. Les Carr moved to New York in the early sixties and has sort of given up painting since then. He was quite a good painter and quite an influence at one time in Los Angeles.

AUPING:

Was it a give-and-take situation between you?

KAUFFMAN:

Lots of fighting, arguing, carousing, and parties and things, you know.

AUPING:

Did everyone, from where you stood, have pretty much the same ideas about art?

KAUFFMAN:

No. At the beginning I think it was pretty confused. Most of the stuff was pretty derivative, I think, but not bad. It was not bad at all. Then we rapidly moved out of that. I hadn't seen a group of it in a long time like I saw at Newport at "The Last Time I Saw Ferus" show [March 7 - April 17, 1976]. It still has a nice, clear look to it, all that stuff, the L.A. stuff. I still had about the

same opinion of what was going on in San Francisco then, except for the exception of Hassel Smith's painting, because of making paintings with thick paint and muddy coloring and all that stuff. I mean, Jay DeFeo's Big Rose is kind of an exception to all that, but I mean, the general kind of thing I just didn't go for.

AUPING:

Sort of what I'm trying to get at is, did you feel at the time that an L.A. sensibility, if there is such a thing, was developing?

KAUFFMAN:

Not so much in the fifties. I mean, I guess some people looked towards my first show [June 6-July 5, 195 8] there [at Ferus] with some kind of real interest. I did too, but I sort of went back on it in kind of a funny way, whereas the other people picked up on it more than I did. Then, later I was just able to find my way back to that and then on from there.

AUPING:

Could you tell me how you felt about those early paintings, those ones in the late fifties that to me sort of look abstract expressionistic? I have a hard time figuring them out: what your concern was in those?

KAUFFMAN:

I just wanted to do something very, very sparse and get rid of a lot of splashing around and things. And also I had other interests. I also was interested in other kinds of abstract art too and also with kinds of funny shapes and things.

AUPING:

Where do those shapes come from?

KAUFFMAN:

A lot of different sources. They come from some sort of dada influence, things that are around my apartment, and things I was interested in: kind of sexual, biomorphic mixture with mechanical things. Funny combinations of influences: I mean, Mondrian and Duchamp and dada and biomorphism and abstract expressionism all at once. But I really just sort of wanted to really

have things really sparse looking. I sort of really did them out of instinct, but they look OK to me now. As I say, that's where I really took off from.

AUPING:

And then when you went to Europe with your wife for two years, how did the watercolors develop in terms of formal—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, they went on with a very, very quick kind of drawings, where they almost came out being like Zen drawings. That's sort of the final stage they went through. They were really quick kinds of things. I really couldn't transfer those into anything else at the time at all. They were that finally. I was drawing a triangle in a circle in about one second, and that was it. Of course, painting was moving in a very different direction by that time. I felt very lost there for quite a while.

AUPING:

Did you pick up any major ideas when you were in Europe or New York that you didn't see going on in L.A., that you may have brought back with you?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, not really. I saw work of some of the younger people. I mean, I saw [Kenneth] Noland and [Jules] Olitski, Noland and Morris Louis mainly, Frank Stella. I saw the first shows that they had there. So I picked up on that pretty quickly. I had a positive reaction towards that, although I didn't feel drawn to participate in that right away. I'd seen Jasper Johns in Paris too.

AUPING:

Yet you say, when you came back to L.A. and saw Bengston's paintings, you were immediately drawn to that.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I was drawn to the aesthetic.

AUPING:

Why do you think that was, that you were more drawn to that?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know. Because probably I'd come out of the same, shared some of the same outlook on things.

AUPING:

That was when you first started working with plastic, right?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, well, I did some drawings on paper first and then painted them. I did a couple of small ones on glass, because I knew if you put the line on—see, I wanted to draw this nice, neat line—and if you fill it in on an ordinary surface, it kind of messes up the line, unless you mask it all off and everything. Then, if you put it in on glass, you can paint the line. on, and then you can put the color on in back, you know, like sign painters do in back; it doesn't mess the line up. The line remains very crisp. I kind of liked the shadow box effect because the forms I was doing had that sort of somewhat three-dimensional look to them anyway. Then I started doing shadow boxlike paintings.

AUPING:

On glass?

KAUFFMAN:

On Plexiglas. I immediately thought I might as well do them on Plexiglas. There was a lot of encouragement to go to good scale right away. At first I just used paint. I painted with a brush, sort of lacquer. Billy by that time was spraying, and he said, "Why don't you just spray that stuff on? It will go on better." And that was true. So, I started with spray cans at first, and then I got a compressor. By the time I was finished with the flat plastic ones, I was into compressor things.

AUPING:

Now you're talking about the 1962 pieces?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes.

AUPING:

What you have called the "hockey stick" pieces?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. I didn't call them that. Someone else called them that.

AUPING:

I've heard them referred to as that. Had you ever worked with plastic before that? Did you have any experience in working with plastic?

KAUFFMAN:

No. I just did a few things on glass; then I didn't see any reason why not to use plastic. I bought some sheets of plastic. And you could just draw right on the masking, because it comes with that paper masking. Then you cut it out. I could just cut out the line, I'd make a big drawing, and then I'd just reverse it. I'd just flip it over and trace it out and then draw the line and then spray the line on, and then I'd look at it from the front. I'd take the masking off the front, but I'd leave it on the back; then I could see the line. Then I'd choose the colors, and then I'd put the colors on.

AUPING:

And the forms, whatever—the hockey stick forms, shall we call it?—were those forms basically the same kind of forms you were thinking about in the earlier paintings when you were getting out of abstract expressionism?

KAUFFMAN:

It was sort of an extension of those things, yes. They kind of became a little bit more mechanical and a little bit more pure just [because of] the medium I was working with and things and kind of how things were going. So I did those. I shared a studio with Ed Moses for a while there, back in the old neighborhood, back there on Santa Monica right near Sawtelle. Then I got a studio down on Venice Boulevard in Culver City, which I kept for a long time. I just sort of figured I had to have space. It worked out very well. So I just sort of made that decision and moved in there, I finished those pieces there and did the frames on them. The frames were quite complicated to do,

AUPING:

These 1962 pieces: they weren't vacuum-formed yet?

KAUFFMAN:

No.

AUPING:

But your next series, in 196 3: were they vacuum-formed yet?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, right. That series was vacuum-formed.

AUPING:

How did you come to the decision to start vacuum-forming?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I'd seen sort of resin decorative things, where the color was sort of transparent and rounded out and so forth. In fact, there's one at a restaurant called Jan's on Beverly Boulevard near La Cienega. I used to have breakfast there once in a while because the apartment where I lived for a while was right near there. Then also I'd seen a still life vacuum-formed out of very cheap acrylic by some commercial person who'd poured resin into one that was vacuum-formed to make sort of clear grapes and stuff. That really intrigued me. I liked that a lot. Then there were two big pop machines that bubbled and spewed stuff out. They were right across the street from my studio, Ed Moses and I used to go in there and have doughnuts. Grandma's Something or other. (They were the worst doughnuts in the world.) And these two big—It was a grape and an orange, and I always liked those colors a lot. I thought, Jesus, that would be really great to have colors like that in my paintings. It was kind of hard to learn how to vacuum-form the things. I had to go to factories and kind of by rote learn because there weren't any books on it really or any kind of information. I asked questions, and people were kind of too busy to tell me. Then I hunted down some transparent acrylic paint. My wife really did a good job. She really kind of found it. I got all these beautiful colors that were really, you know, not just car colors acrylic lacquer but were really paint that was made—like cobalt blue, these beautiful colors. I bought some from these people who were spraying these kind of worldlike things for one of the fairs or something. The guy was sort of a nut. He really had to have good colors, and so I was able to buy some colors. I still actually have some of

those colors left today. I don't use them right now, but, you know, sometimes if I have to go back and repair something, finish up something, [tape recorder turned off] Then I got these transparent colors. I used opaque and transparent colors on that series. They started mixing optically inside because you get a shadow from an angle of one color on a background, and you'd look through the other color, right? Then, when I did that, I said, "Wow! That really looks terrific." Then, for the first time I really thought I had an idea there. The shape just looked a lot better, a lot less stiff formed than they did flat, although I still like the flat ones. It just sort of naturally kind of went like that.

AUPING:

Did you know of anyone else working in plastic at that time?

KAUFFMAN:

No. As a matter of fact, when I made the first ones—I'd known the history of people who worked on plastic, and, after all, in high school I'd read Moholy-Nagy, who, I knew, had done paintings on plastic and stuff. [I knew] that [Antoine] Pevsner had done some things. I was pretty aware of what the history was. So, in that first flat, plastic series, I made a point of running an ad in Art International saying, "Paintings on Plexiglas," just to do that. [laughter] I think there were a few Europeans doing sculpture that were bent out of Plexiglas. When I started vacuum-forming, a year after that, I heard other people were doing it. They didn't stick with it very long.

AUPING:

People like [DeWain] Valentine, [Larry] Bell, [Ron] Cooper, and those people: were they working in plastic yet?

KAUFFMAN:

No.

AUPING:

As far as you know, you were the first L.A. person dealing with plastic.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, and they all worked with resin. And Bell never did anything in plastic, just glass.

AUPING:

They're both industrial materials. 1 Did you ever get together and talk about the fact that you were using material that wasn't paint on canvas?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, well, it was just sort of a thing; like that was what you were supposed to do. It wasn't some sort of thing. We just said, "Well, you're supposed to use these kinds of materials." It was sort of simple minded: "This is what's happening. Use this stuff." And it was just accepted very quickly. At first, it was kind of tentative, and then it just picked up momentum really quickly. It's funny because Bengston and, I guess, Ken Price had that first, like, candy-coated spray stuff. They really never got any further into industrial materials than that. I mean, that was it. Then everybody else, all the rest of us, just sort of went really quickly in a really much more sophisticated way of dealing with things. That was sort of the basic look that everybody liked. And everybody went into different directions. Some people cast resins; some people worked with glass; other people did this.

AUPING:

Do you feel that the material itself did something to light that was sort of special and maybe akin to California, as has been suggested before?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I liked the color. I liked the color a lot. In fact, even in my new paintings, which are just acrylics, I still use a lot of the same kinds of colors. They're transparent and let down with kind of a medium and that kind of thing. I don't know how much of a case I'd like to make out of that, but I think there is that kind of color, you know. It only looks a little weird when you're away from here and you see the work somewhere. I've done sort of nutty paintings since then, but somewhere there's always a color that's a little transparent. It's a different kind of color sense,. Colors from other places, except for maybe France in other times, seem to me—New York color seems to me to be harder and more direct.

AUPING:

New York color?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. There is that transparency to a lot of the stain painters, that kind of atmospheric quality. But it's kind of atmospheric. I don't think the color from California is atmospheric; it's just sort of transparent. I never felt any atmosphere in any of the colors very much. I wouldn't call it that kind of thing.

AUPING:

So many people have talked about that period in California history, in California art history, and how it's the first time that a true L.A. sensibility emerged and such. What were your feelings at that time regarding working in L.A. versus working in New York, and the kind of art that was being made in New York at that time, color field and other things, versus what was going on in L.A. ?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think most of us had a pretty negative reaction to color field painting. There was a lot of tie-up in the pop art thing because, after all, some of the pop art painters were from California. When the big pop art show came out here, it was called "Six" and, then, "Six More," or something like that. It included [Ed] Ruscha and Joe Goode. And by that time there were other directions going in Los Angeles art besides that sort of thing I was involved in, and Bengston was somewhat involved in that too. So, there 'was that side to things too.

AUPING:

Did you ever look at your work as possibly being pop art oriented?

KAUFFMAN:

No, not really.

AUPING:

Because you mentioned the fact that commercial advertising and electric plastic signs

KAUFFMAN:

I guess there was a bit of that in some of the sort of sexual imagery in the flat plastic things, that sort of suggested some of those things. I'd done some collages with sort of pop material in them, things from Frederick's of Hollywood and stuff, a lot of those forms almost come out of the blow-up bras and all that stuff. But I never used it really directly. It was always pretty abstracted. I didn't feel drawn in that direction very much at all. I wasn't hostile to pop art at all. In fact I kind of liked some of it, but I felt I didn't—I know Irwin was asked to be in that big show that was organized by Clement Greenberg ["Post Painterly Abstraction"], and he turned it down. His paintings at that time really fit, to some extent, into that aesthetic: the ones with the stripes on them, his plain color with the stripes, which he was doing by that time. But I saw the show—it came to the Los Angeles County Museum [April 23-June 7, 19643—and I didn't feel much one way or the other by that time. I sort of liked Stella to a certain extent. I sort of felt closer to maybe him than anyone else; I always have since then. Off and on I felt better about some periods, but I've always thought he was an interesting artist. But I never really felt very close to the painting of the sixties, really, not very much at all, I don't know why; I just didn't. I still don't, except for maybe Stella and a couple of other people. I thought it was kind of overblown and decorative. It's very impressive.

AUPING:

Getting back to the chronology of your paintings: after the '63-'64 series of vacuum-formed, test-tube-like pieces—at least that's what I call them—you did a number of monochrome wall pieces.

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, yes, sort of "washboards." That was the nickname for those.

AUPING:

How did they develop?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I don't quite know how to express it. I got interested in the idea that paintings for the most part were elevation views of things, kind of like elevations of a building, and I thought what it would be like to have a planned

view of something, other than a cross section. Then I got this idea of frontally being assaulted by something, sort of having a frontal thing instead of sort of a side view of something. I'd seen reproductions of some of the stuff that was going on in New York, some of this newer sculpture that stuck out from the wall and had a more objectlike quality to it. I've always pretty much thought of my things as paintings; I really didn't think of them [as sculpture]. I kind of wanted a different view of that. They're still sloped to the side and have lines on them. I wanted to keep the lines. So, I thought of them as relief kinds of things, sort of like a section through one of my forms, as a kind of cut thing. Then I did a little one that I looked at for a long time. It sort of assaulted me in a frontal sort of way, which I liked; things were on sides instead of on the front. Then I went and did the series. There were: three sizes of those things. Also at that time I just sort of gave up spraying and tried just using the colored plastic as it came from the factory. In other words, I used cream. I used all these funny colors. There was cream and yellow and red. I painted plain stripes at firs t, and they didn't seem to work very well. Then I had to change the stripes to rainbow sort of striped things, so that it undulated with the form. They were sloped on the sides, but they were sloped differently—one slope was different from the other slope—which kind of gave you a cockeyed view of the thing too, and I liked that. It was a very hard form to make. It was very difficult. The first ones were very delicate on the edges; they broke very easily.

AUPING:

That was 1966. Then you went to the bubble.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. There were some little steps in between all these things. I would kind of take little steps and do some little models, and unfortunately a lot of those things have gotten lost. I would do some little models and do some in-between things. I mean, I would never really do a whole series of them. I'd just sort of do one, a small mock-up. I haven't saved a lot of those things unfortunately. But there were little in-between steps and then I went to the bubble thing.

AUPING:

And you went back to spraying, right?

KAUFFMAN:

Right. I tried making the bubbles out of solid stuff, and I tried making them with transparent color. Then I got into this Morano color that changes color as you change the angle of how you view it. I wanted it to kind of pulsate and be very vague about what it was. Irwin was getting into being very vague about where things were at that time too, and I liked that. I liked shadows too and that sort of thing. Also they had to be lit in a very special way with one spot to kind of make it pulsate. If you get them lit right, they kind of [vibrate].

AUPING:

Did you still consider that a painting?

KAUFFMAN:

I've really always considered everything I've done, just about, a painting. Very few other people see it however. I have been in all sorts of sculpture shows, and I never could figure all that out, but I went along with the game. I wasn't going to turn down being in a show because they wanted to call me a sculptor. I imagine I kind of disappointed some people in some ways; they probably thought I was going to go into real environments through sculpture or something. I've really sort of gone in the opposite direction, really gone more back to painting. I really always thought of them as wall things. I never did anything that wasn't a wall thing. I thought about it, but I never really did it. I did a lot of bubbles, did a lot of them, I enjoyed making them. They're very imposing things. They take up a lot of room, not so much physically, but really they dominate a space. That was one of the ideas about them, to a certain extent too: that you can have something that's just slightly three-dimensional and really have it dominate an area.

AUPING:

Would you say that those are the works that up to this point have probably found the most acceptance?

KAUFFMAN:

The bubbles? I don't really know. I haven't really been at what I'm doing now so long. I guess since then. There was a lot of good reaction to the next series,

which was the loops. Then some of the other series that I've never shown anywhere but Europe [inaudible].

AUPING:

To get back to the bubbles: they're formed so that they have about—what?—three different elevations and then one indentation in the center. How did you—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, those were the early bubbles, the brightly colored ones with that sort of organic shape in the middle. When I say "the bubbles," I usually mean the really round ones.

AUPING:

Right, and they came later.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. That form was the form which is sort of semi-oval. It was very weak, and I had a lot of trouble with the form on that. I made it out of wood, and then I made it out of metal and braced it inside. The plastic thinned out in certain sorts of ways and put certain stresses on it that made it weak. So, there's only really one of the larger ones of those surviving and very few of the small ones.

AUPING:

How did you arrive at that form with the indentation in the middle and such?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it was sort of a part out of the washboards, and some of the other forms sort of transferred onto this flatter thing. I think there were three big ones like that, and they all got broken, except for the one at the Los Angeles County Museum. That's the only surviving member. Big attrition rate in a lot of my work. Somebody told me not so long ago that one of their things just came plummeting down off the wall and broke, one of the early form pieces, really a nice one. It just smashed. That used to drive me crazy: absolute nightmare about breakage and stuff. You said "the bubbles." I really don't have a nickname for those and the in-between ones.

AUPING:

After these indentation-in-the-center [works] come what you consider the bubbles?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. The reason I call them bubble is because they weren't formed over; like a male mold, which is a positive mold. They were sucked into a big box like a bubble, and there was a stop in there to stop it. So, it went "blop, blop," and a big bubble at the bottom. It was like a big bathtub, and it had to be reinforced on the outside with huge beams because you were getting atmospheric pressure. So, they sucked it in the thing until they—they had a string across the top that said it was the right depth.

AUPING:

Sounds like an awful lot of work.

KAUFFMAN:

I always made the forms myself or had parts of them made and pretty much took the things down to the factory and worked with the factory. At first I worked in downtown Los Angeles, but that didn't work out very well. Then I found this place in Paramount called Planet Plastics, and I worked with them for quite a few years. They were very nice to me. They'd do it. They wouldn't do it right away: they would have a lull period where they weren't really doing something; sometimes I'd have to wait two or three weeks before I could get something. They would just kind of work it into their schedule. They were sort of curious about it too. Some people kidded me about what I was doing, but it wasn't bad.

AUPING:

How much time did you usually put in on your art in the mid-sixties?

KAUFFMAN:

I've had off-and-on-times, I'd go for periods where I'd work like crazy and then not work very much, I'm still like that. I'll go for weeks and just work like crazy and then kind of goof off for a month, I don't really have a schedule. I guess I should. It would be better if you put in four or five hours every day, you

know—you really can get a lot done doing that—instead of working in fits and starts. The last two years I've been better about that.

AUPING:

After you got out of school and started showing professionally, did you have a job, or did you basically live off your art?

KAUFFMAN:

I lived off my parents for a long time. [laughter] They gave me a very, very small amount of money. I'm trying to remember. It went up a little bit at one particular time, but not very much. [After] I finished high school, I had an allowance. I think it was $200 [a month] for a long time. Then it went up to $250 or $300. But I lived off that for a long time. I didn't really start making much money off my paintings until about 1966, '65. It was never a lot. I mean, a couple of years there was a bit, but nothing spectacular. I lived on that for a long time; we're talking about fifteen years. So I think there's a lot of carry-over from that. I've always lived pretty spartanly, and I still have those kinds of habits to a certain extent. I'm not a real big spendthrift, although I can go out and spend money on food or something. Although I own a house now, I rent out the front; that pretty much covers the payments on the whole place. I've always felt very uncomfortable with having a big outlay of money every month, like a big nut to cover. I always felt that didn't offer you any opportunity to do anything else. Then, in about 1969, I got a teaching job at [the University of California] Irvine. I've taught off and on since then, nearly every year for a quarter or the whole year,

AUPING:

What was the situation at Irvine when you first started there?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, Tony [DeLap] called me up one day—and I didn't really know Tony all that well—and he said, kind of, "Would you like to teach a class?" I think I started out teaching two classes, which was sort of a part-time thing. And I sort of enjoyed it. I'd been a T. A. in college. I'd kind of wanted to teach, but I'd applied for some teaching jobs, and nothing ever happened, so I just forgot about it. Then I was just offered this job. I went down there, and I did it, and I

did it the next year. Then I was sort of taken on semipermanently I guess. Then, when Alan Soloman was there, he got the dean to offer me a job with tenure, I mean, just offered me a job with tenure, and I turned it down; I didn't want it. Later I sort of wanted tenure, of course; I don't quite know why. It was like I had to come up in front of the board and do the whole more formal thing. Before i it was easy. I just sort of turned it down because I wanted to go off to New York for a couple of years, although I taught the winter quarter. Things seemed a lot rosier and more optimistic in the late sixties.

AUPING:

At Irvine, you're speaking of?

KAUFFMAN:

No, in general. You know, selling things. The art world in general.

AUPING:

Oh, I see. How would you characterize the situation at Irvine then compared to how it is now?

KAUFFMAN:

Not an awful lot different. Different people have come and gone. There's been more demands. People expect a lot more. Whenever you do something and it works out, people always expect it to be like that, only better. They'll expect it all to be like that. The dean always said that he wanted a high professional level at the school, and John Coplans and Tony and John Mason—a little bit later John Mason—put it together. They had a big budget at the beginning to hire people from out of town. The budget since has dropped way down, and still everybody expects you to do the same sorts of things. Well, it never was formulated that there was any particular direction or, you know, any particular philosophy or anything like that. I think a lot of people assume that there was or is still, and it is just not the case. I guess the only assumptions are that you should have a good deal of faculty be visitors and you should keep that kind of thing going. The main concerns should be on other people there and their own work. [Although] we've sort of taken our turn with administration, we've tried to hold that to a minimum: faculty meetings and

all that sort of organizational thing. We've tried to keep [it] down, although everybody keeps demanding, especially students, that we get more organized.

AUPING:

Do you think it's important for art students to have formal education at a university like Irvine, or anywhere for that matter?

KAUFFMAN:

No.

AUPING:

You don't?

KAUFFMAN:

No, not really. I think they should come in contact with artists somehow. I don't even think it's all that much important that they're artists that they agree with, just as long as they're artists that really make art. That's a very hard idea to get over to people. Lots of students want the people in there whom they're sympathetic with, agree with, and it's not always possible. I think that's the important thing. But you can have contact with artists without having to go to school particularly. That just happened to be my background in going to a university, so I understand that a little better. I think other people are much more comfortable teaching in a professional art school. I taught at [School of] Visual Arts in New York for two years, and I didn't quite know my way around in that world. It was a little different. I think some people are more comfortable in that environment, teaching in that direction. It entirely depends on what you're up to and what your background is. I don't think it makes a lot of difference. I think some people think that it does make a lot of difference. I don't know; maybe it does. I mean, I certainly don't know. Some people come to Irvine in graduate school and just sort of say, "The heck with it," after a quarter or something [of our] trying to talk them, in vain, into staying. I always thought, "If you've got it, if you feel that way, great. [laughter] If you don't need it, fine."

AUPING:

What spurred your decision to move to New York for a couple of years?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I don't know. I sort of was friends with people back there, and I was showing back there a lot, and things were going OK for me there. There seemed to be a lot more going on there, I seemed to have at one point sort of gotten closer to some of the New York people than I was to most of the people here. So, I moved to New York for '70 and '71. I really had a good time, although it was a really confused time for my work. So, what can I really say? You know. I mean, I had really good friends there, who still are my really good friends.

AUPING:

Is that when you first met Bob Morris?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I met Bob In San Francisco. He showed at the old Dilexi Gallery as a painter; he moved to New York very early on. I had known him, and then he'd come out here to do several shows. I'd seen him around. He came out to teach at Irvine one quarter, and then we seem to have struck up a really good friendship. And when I went to New York it kept on, I mean, really quite intense. We're still very good friends. And a lot of the other people there. It was in a funny way like living in San Francisco because, although I didn't react against it so strongly, it's just that I finally kind of realized that, even the people I was involved with [in New York], that wasn't my bag; I mean, it was kind of nice to be there and see that. And then last summer I went back and lived there all summer, and I felt very at home and just did my same old work, whereas before, in 1970 and '71, I was really kind of wavering around. I did a lot of different things. That was sort of a real turning point for me.

AUPING:

In what way a turning point?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I had to make a lot of decisions about what I was going to do. In one way I was moving more towards painting, and in another way I was moving more toward light- oriented things. The show in 19 71 at UCLA ["Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists," January 10 - February 14], where I did a

colored-water reflection piece, was that side of it. Then I did these strips of plastic with lots of little dots of paint on them in New York, Then, when I came back, I went back into more complicated kinds of little painterly things formed in plastic. Then right out of that, I just got out of plastic altogether and got really more into wood and canvas. So that was a real turning point, and it really dated from being there. There were other alternatives I could have pursued, such as the water reflections. I actually did a big murallike drawing in Atlantic City at a thing called the "Boardwalk Show," which was really an early conceptual art show. I just had this big kind of drawing, a color aura of mine, on the wall, which looked kind of nice. You know, it was the beginning heyday of conceptual art. Vito Acconci and Sol Lewitt and Ian Burn and all those people were in the show. I felt a little weird, but I kind of liked it.

AUPING:

Why don't we try to go back to the chronology of the works and get on a train going that way if we could? I think we stopped about '67 and '68 with the bubbles, the iridescent bubbles. You went from fairly bright primary colors to iridescent [ones]. How did that decision come about, you know, to get into those kinds of colors?

KAUFFMAN:

I had this stuff called Morano color that Irwin used a little bit. It is the kind of color that you can coat something, and then, depending on the color under it, it changes a little bit according to the direction you're at. I liked this fuzzy, kind of imprecise quality and this idea of lighting with one light, and having the thing sort of de-materialize was a concern.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (May 21, 1976)

AUPING:

Craig, we were talking about the iridescent bubbles of 1968 in Morano color, and you were going into summer. Something happened,

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I taught at University of California at Berkeley that summer. That's actually where I got reacquainted with Bob Morris and another friend of mine from

New York, Frank Roth, because they were teaching that summer too. It was a good break for me. I had my VW van in those days. I just put a bunch of the small bubbles in the back and my spray gun and some paint and drove on up there. I had a really crazy summer. Then I got a location there at the university where I could spray, and I would spend two or three hours a day spraying and trying them out. I didn't get a lot of actual work done, but I made up my mind what I wanted to do with them. I'd try them out and then take the paint off and try them out and take the paint off.

AUPING:

What did you make up your mind on?

KAUFFMAN:

On the paler colors in the Morano and how they were to fade in and fade out and that sort of thing.

AUPING:

Did that have anything to do with wanting to de-materialize the objectness of the piece?

KAUFFMAN:

A bit. There was this idea that I wanted this to look very, wanted to kind of see this halo of color without associating it so much with a form, because the bubble idea really reinforces that. There wasn't any particular kind of lines or anything on the image. The Morano color helps that too, that kind of iridescent quality: it sort of floats. So, during that summer I not only had a good time [but] I made up my mind how to paint the bubbles. So, when I got back, I went to work and did a lot of them.

AUPING:

Then, in 1969 you went to what you call the loop paintings.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. They are the only ones that have really sort of come off the wall a bit. They still have to do with the wall, but they're—I just wanted to treat the plastic in a more relaxed sort of way. Instead of imposing some kind of arbitrary form on the plastic, I wanted to sort of treat it in some sort of easy

way. I guess I was a bit influenced by process art to a certain extent. If you take a piece of plastic and hang it on a wire, it will eventually droop into a shape. I was going to do a piece like that. I mean, you could do a piece like that. I thought about doing it then; I had one in the studio. I was just going to chart how much it drooped, but I really didn't like that sort of intellectual approach all that much. I really didn't feel like showing it all that much: you know, sort of chart day by day how it droops (because it will just form by itself to the weight). So, I just formed those with just a very, very simple metal curved thing. Then, as it cools, it warps by itself. So, it's a very natural thing for the plastic to do, rather than forcing it into a mold with a vacuum. Then, I like the idea of shadows—I've always liked shadows—and I got involved with the shadows on the wall. Irwin was doing shadows on the wall at that time, and we talked about shadows. I liked them. Of course, mine are highly colored because I put all those bright colors on there. They did almost a reverse thing. The loop comes out towards you at the top, and then the shadow is a reverse. When they're really well lit, it's very tricky: what's the shadow and what's the piece. It does a real weird thing with the wall. That's the first time I really got involved with what it was going to do with the wall—de-materializing the wall in some way or using the wall in some way—and those used the wall. It was kind of a thing you have to confront, which has been pretty much a concern of mine ever since then.

AUPING:

The idea of using colors seems to be a very primary part of your work. I mean, if anything holds it together, it seems to me it would be the color. Do you think that's true?

KAUFFMAN:

I guess so. They certainly had a lot of color in them, some kind of color. I always found color difficult, so maybe that's why I worked hard at it.

AUPING:

In what way?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I don't know. I just haven't always thought I've used it very well. I always thought I was better at graphic things than I was at using color. It was always easy for me to draw and not so easy to use color. I think that's the thing I've made the most progress with. It's very easy to make forms for me, but color has always been a real problem.

AUPING:

I've noticed also that very few of your paintings are titled.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, they didn't used to be. It sort of didn't make sense when they were a series, in other words, when there were a number of works of the same form, and they were just different colors. The early paintings have titles, a lot of them, the ones I showed at the old Ferus, and most of the new paintings of the last two years have titles because they're individual images. There's a big difference between making an individual image and making a series of an image that just changes slightly according to the color, in other words, a series painting as opposed to an individual painting where each individual one is a whole new game. It may be the same style, but everything is moved around so it has a real individuality to it. The first series, I guess, that had particular shapes I didn't title because I just wasn't in the habit of titling them. I've been thinking more about that: I don't like, you know, presumptuous titles or that sort of thing. I like pretty straightforward kinds of titles. It helps to identify a painting [whereas] in a series I don't think it's very appropriate. I never took a philosophical stance against titling one way or another, although I think some titles get pretty ridiculous.

AUPING:

In your newer work, then, you've decided to move away from series?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, that was a real definite choice. There was an in-between stage when I'd used a particular form and I'd make two versions of it (but no more than that) and then color them very differently. They were really sort of particular images. There were six or seven, eight of them of that shape. You know, each one is a different thing. I might make a small one and a big one of it, but that's

about the extent of it. Yes, I like the idea of having them individual images, in other words, you move everything around. That's a different kind of art than making a series. I just sort of got tired of the idea of making series work and just sort of rejected that idea.

AUPING:

To get off that subject and onto something totally different again: How important do you think design is in making fine art?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know quite what you mean by design.

AUPING:

How important do you feel the content is in the work versus how important is the image, the form: form versus content basically.

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I see what you mean. Well, I think you have to deal with the form question. After all, that's probably what the outside world deals with the most. I mean, most people talk about art in terms of its form rather than in terms of any kind—very few people talk about content in art because it's difficult to deal with. And the other thing, the form thing, is really what people raise banners about, have movements about; it's really a form change instead of a content change too much, I mean, there is a definite relationship, but people seem to emphasize it when they talk about its formal kind of relation. I think an artist has to face up to those things: that there are developments in terms of form and so forth and so on. It might be more comfortable to be in a tradition like a sumie oriental-style painting thing, where you don't worry about the form at all; you just worry about giving your own expression to a traditional medium and really finding your way in that and trying to make your individual statement in that way. I think in our contemporary situation, I think even a painter somehow seems naive to me if I don't see in his work some sort of confronting outside influences. What I mean by that, in terms of painting, is other art that's going on outside of (which is a pretty broad area these days) painting, (in quotes) "painting." There are some painters that stick to the rectilinear format and ignore any kind of format change but use all sorts of

devices in their paintings. Then there [are] other people that deal with the format change of some kind, finding their own way in that, trying to really define what the limits maybe of painting are. I mean, there are sort of boundaries, in my mind, to what painting is in terms of its form beyond which it's not a painting anymore somehow.

AUPING:

What would those boundaries be?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think they're very difficult to define. We could talk about that, but it's very difficult to define, I think. But there are boundaries. I think it's up to a painter, if he thinks he's a painter, to deal with the idea that there are extensions and some kinds of boundaries to what a painting is and not just assume all these given things, although that's an option too. But I think it is a choice that someone has to make. We don't live in a culture where the boundaries are a given situation, although one of the good things about painting is that you can take even a new kind of boundary, and it doesn't particularly discredit it if you work in that boundary. Something that's off the stretcher these days [has] almost become such an everyday thing [that] you don't even notice it. It's become another kind of convention, like something on a stretcher bar without a frame, which was new for a while. In a painting it doesn't matter so much because the main issues in painting are not, in that sense, formal issues. It' kind of a funny game.. It's kind of like it is and it isn't. I think the content of what's going on in any painting is what it's really all about. I think probably content in any art is, but I think the preoccupation on formal things is less because you can assume certain things if you want to. That's why, in a sense, it's more catholic in the tastes it can have, in the forms it can take.

AUPING:

I'm getting a bit confused now. Talking about form versus content: in a way I look at your paintings as the form being the content. Or am I wrong? Is there content beyond the form in, say, your paintings?

KAUFFMAN:

No. I think what painting does is, it works in with some formal questions about what painting is, and just because I've happened to be interested in painting for so long, I think they've gotten more sophisticated as time goes on. Some of them are just my preoccupation, but some of them deal with formal issues in painting in general, (In quotes) "in general," But I think as I worked with it, at first that seemed to be the central issue: having the stretcher exposed and filling in negative spaces and leaving part of the wall showing and having that ambiguous with what was actually painted. Those kinds of games are fun, and I would still do them. It's like learning the vocabulary of cubism or something:. the vocabulary is interesting, but I don't think that's finally the content. I'm into my making above twenty-five now of those things; after a while that's not as much an interesting game. The vocabulary certainly is still developing. It's like I have a little list of the things that I do in painting. I haven't done them all in one painting. There are certain things I haven't even done in a painting that come right out of making up a kind of vocabulary for yourself. Those keep your interest up certainly. But I don't think that's really what the content is about.

AUPING:

What is the content about, then, say, from your point of view?

KAUFFMAN:

The expression of the kinds of colors, coming out of the kinds of colors you use. I mean, that does carry a heavy burden of what the content is about. I think the content is about other issues: how you kind of want the world to look (in a funny way of putting it). In art it's what you don't do as well as what you do do. If you use shoddy materials as opposed to industrial materials, that's a choice that you don't particularly like all that other stuff; you like the shoddy kind of stuff. Right? If you use bright colors or kind of offbeat colors as opposed to very straight colors, it shows that you like maybe a kind of eccentric approach to color as opposed to a very strict approach to color. And if you use eccentric form to a certain extent or subject matter, which I don't really use, or what kind of scale you use—whether you use superhuman scale or human scale (I'm kind of concerned with human scale, which I didn't used to be)—I think that all adds up. But the idea of how you put it together: whether it's precise or whether it's casual and asymmetrical as opposed to

symmetrical—my work used to be symmetrical, as the bubbles, and now it's very asymmetrical: it's all kind of off and askew and not quite right, although, it's well built; but it doesn't look all that well built. Those are all aesthetic decisions that you make along the line. And so, when you finally look at it, it adds up to a fairly complicated kind of thing. The statement that you made—"The form is the content"—that's fine. The closer those two things can get together, the better. I think when the style of the work isn't so close to the form, you feel a little bit peculiar about it. It's like a social realist painting or something: the style of the painting really doesn't have much to do with what's going on in it. I don't think I have any feelings about the world, that I'm beating any drum for how the whole world should look or something, just my corner of it. I think a lot of contemporary artists like what I might call high-rise art, in the sense that it's got this futuristic look about it. It's made out of industrial materials and has this look about it that's kind of all together and predicts some kind of—that you'd want to see in some sort of high-rise or citified atmosphere, and you really couldn't disassociate it from that. I've had a kind of reaction against all that kind of thing. So many of my newer things look more like shanties than they do glass towers. I've always had that kind of ambiguity about things, dating back to my old days in architecture school. I remember there was a shack across the street, an old, Victorian shack that all the architecture students wanted to tear down. The paint was peeling off, but I thought it looked great. So it was very confusing in my mind. It's a real confusion. All the way through all my plastic things, I always thought of them in some instances, except for maybe a bit in the bubbles, as being not quite right in terms of color. I always thought they were kind of cheaply colored and all that kind of thing, and I kind of liked that. I never liked it looking all kind of straight; otherwise I would have just made them out of aluminum and painted them all gray or something.

AUPING:

Are all your works made for an indoor situation? Could they ever exist outdoors?

KAUFFMAN:

I've been asked that before. I guess the bubble could exist outdoors, I mean, the plastic is going to last forever, but the new paintings are really, you know,

like paintings, to be seen inside. I don't ever rule out the idea that I'm not going to change my mind and make something that could go outside. In fact, I have little drawings for things that are sort of like halfway roomlike things that maybe I can make outside, some sort of nonfunctional architectural things. I would like to do that sometime actually, not on any gigantic scale but, you know, medium scale. I'd. like to do that. [tape recorder turned off]

AUPING:

Talking about outdoor pieces and scale too: you said that you feel that your works are on a human scale basically. How did you come to that decision, to make them on a human scale?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I have sort of a lot of somewhat complicated ideas about scale. It's kind of hard to explain in a few words, and [it's] something that I deal with in my painting classes a lot, something that interests me a lot. In general, I like things that are room-size scale. I go up to ten feet on some of the new ones, which is stretching it, stretching the scale a little bit, making it look a little bit larger than things should be, but I like that in painting. So much of American painting in the fifties and sixties—well, not so much in the fifties—was this idea that American art had this one-for-one scale. The size it was was the size you read it, and it got to be such a cliche after a while that I got tired of that, because I like little things and I like big things too. Not that they're interchangeable in terms of scale, but I think it's OK to make little things and big things. It's very hard to adjust the things, but I don't reject that part of European culture, the idea that you can do big things and little things. I think lately, in the last couple of years, because I've spent a lot of time in Europe, it's been very refreshing. What my final opinion about the whole experience will be, I don't know, but I've questioned a lot of the cliches that I've used for so many years. Sort of like this thing about scale: OK, it should be one-for-one scale. Well, that's a cliche American art has used for twenty-five years, you know. Why do we have to be stuck with that? [laughter] And that kind of thing. You know, one after the other I have run down the list of these—oftentimes there are things which aren't all that conscious. They're kind of like working methods that an artist will use, or a whole bunch of artists will use, that one day you ask yourself, "Why do you want to use that? Why do you want to do that?" Maybe it's

difficult to learn to do something else, or maybe you want to stay with that, but I think it's always good to question those kinds of things. I feel very comfortable now in the area I'm working in because it's easier for me to question them because I can work more quickly, I can get through things, I can put things together and take them apart, I can deal with scale. Also there's graphic things, and there are lines and things like that. And then you can suggest scale ideas, and I can change things: I can rip pieces of canvas in certain areas out.

AUPING:

You refer a lot to art history, and I'm kind of wondering how much information you draw from art history versus how much you draw from your immediate environment.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I draw a lot from my immediate environment. I draw a lot from the kinds of art I'm interested in primarily. I like art a lot. I know a lot of contemporary artists consider the modern-art adventure as parallel to some kind of contemporary science adventure, where you work on the peripheries of (in quotes) "discipline," and you break new ground, and you shouldn't really worry about what Thomas Aquinas did or something like that. I don't find that painting has that kind of parallel to science. I really think that's an erroneous parallel. I feel very strongly about that. I think it1s much more interesting for artists to—for painters, maybe not for all artists; painters break new ground in some ways, I guess—but it's much more interesting to bring a whole bunch of diverse information into one coherent idea than it is to dig up something new particularly, or some new kind of form. That may be a preoccupation too. I think, in terms of how I'm dealing with painting, in terms of form, this is pretty original; there aren't too many people dealing with structuring the thing the way I am. But I think those are not the primary issues. You know, it's just bringing diverse things together into one sort of coherent thing. And I think painting has always really done that. Painting [has] not always been the carrier of the avant-garde, you know. Sometimes it's been very conservative and a kind of thing that sort of gathers things together. Now, there have been terrible flops in the twentieth century, with people trying to deal with things historically and deal with contemporary art at the same time, people like Rico

Lebrun, who tried to mix cubism with some sort of historical view of the crucifixion and, you know, mix Goya with Picasso or something like that. I'm not really talking about that. But I just think there are things that are just always relevant, and I really don't feel cut off from any kind of painting at all. Some paintings I really feel very close to. I think it's easier for a contemporary artist to be perhaps closer to maybe oriental painting or to Gothic painting or pre-Renaissance painting and maybe impressionism. But that's not always the case of those things that I really get all wrapped up in from time to time. I really like art, mainly painting—but not just that—both the oriental and western stuff.

AUPING:

A lot of artists in the last five years that I'm sure you're aware of have said that painting is dead. How do you feel about that?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think they have a feeling that painting should be this carrier of the avant-garde, and in the twentieth century it has by and large carried that load up until the last, say, ten years; and then sculpture sort of took over that role. Maybe that's what they're saying. There's no reason why it should be the carrier of the avant-garde. As a matter of fact, I think you could make a very good case that the avant-garde is just sort of a moot point. Being quite honest, I really haven't seen anything new in terms of real new forms in about six years or so. I mean, what was startlingly new was when I first saw a Donald Judd on the wall or I first saw a Dan Flavin light or maybe when somebody saw a plastic piece of mine. I don't feel that newness about art anymore. In fact, the new, the so-called (in quotes) "new" art seems to be art and language. It's not really art; it's an alternative to art. People that want to believe in historical imperatives believe that there should be progress all the time in a kind of linear way. Really I think, if they really feel that way about it, they really have to reject art altogether now. It's sad in a funny kind of way because art and language really is an alternative to art. It's not art. They say that themselves. I think a lot of young people and students feel that way. There are other attitudes about it. I mean, you can have a lot of different attitudes about it.

AUPING:

Then, let me ask the difficult question: what, in your opinion, is the function of art?

KAUFFMAN:

God! I have no idea. I don't really know. I don't think there's an easy answer for that. It has a function for the artist: some kind of survival thing for the artist, not in terms of monetary things, but kind of, like, finding out who he is, which is pretty important I think, probably the most important thing and really, I think, something that, I think, [for] the West Coast artists (although they lost their way in that off and on) was a very, very strong influence. The one thing that early—I'm not saying that other artists from. other places haven't had that influence—but the oriental influence: what painting was about or what art was about, was really finding out who you were primarily. It was a part of that kind of search. And that goes all the way back to Mark Tobey and [Clyfford] Still and really everyone, 1 don't mean (in some kind of quotes) "mystical experience," which some art from the West Coast has kind of gotten into—and it has been sort of pooh-poohed because of that. X don't mean that. But for the artist it does have that kind of role, I think.. Then also, an artist as a person has to deal with that big world out there, and if he's dealing with a kind of discipline, he has to deal with the questions about that discipline. He should deal with them in the most sophisticated way he can, I think. Arid that takes a lot of his time. In other words, for me a primary idea is to find out who I am and where I fit into this and my attitudes towards things and how I really feel. Then I. 'm going to make my changes on that and have my opinions about these issues, rather than going from a point of view of "Well, what are the issues?" and whether I can discover what the next issue is. As I say, that's another erroneous parallel to science, as if there is really something to discover in terms of art, like there's this world of form out there that you should find out and make the next move in. That's not really what you're finding out about art. You're really finding out about yourself. And forms are going to change because people's attitudes and the world change and because there are not some sort of startling changes for a while. Art has gone through periods of laying back a bit and reconciling itself and maybe making certain kinds of changes. Sometimes that produces the best painting, [inaudible] people weren't satisfied with that. They want art to be in some ways radical politics or something like that, and that doesn't interest me very

much. I think that's a hard thing to give up: the idea that you—because when I was with the plastic things in the sixties, it was pretty exciting because something new would happen every six months or every five months. [It] went on with one thing after the other: minimal sculpture and process art. It was all easy to label, and it seemed to be some real form change, and so forth. I think art now is not that easily pinned down. It's been very outlined with a lot of things it's going to be. So, a lot of people get a kind of malaise out of the idea that that's no longer the case. Instead of recognizing and trying to deal with the situation as it is, they want to reject it. I think that's legitimate: if they don't want to have anything to do with art, that's OK. [laughter] You know, they can go off and deal with language and deal with whatever they want to deal with. If art isn't bearing some sort of standard at the moment, a lot of people—I really don't think that all that many people have always liked art all that much anyway. It's an oddball discipline to be dealing in this culture anyway, because we're such left-brained people in this culture that to deal with all those nerve endings, with our hands and eyeballs and stuff, is a little much for most people. They don't want to really think that people actually go out there and mess things around with their hands, get their hands dirty. I'm putting that on a kind of a base level now, but there are an awful lot of brain endings attached to your hands as well as to the prefrontal part of your head.

AUPING:

Where does the term aesthetics come into this problem then? And how does that relate to, as what you're saying, self-expression? In other words, when someone says one work of art is better than another work of art: if it's a matter of personal development, how do we deal with saying one work is better than another if it's a matter of self-development?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, you know, that's a complicated question. If you deal with history in art as linear—in other words, what's original is what's there—that's a fairly simple problem. You can deal with all that. You can say, well, because somebody dripped paint on a canvas as opposed to putting it on with a brush, you can say, he's more original, therefore he's better. If you're going to deal with contemporary art, I think that follows to a certain extent, because by and large most of the people that are pretty good have been original. But there are

exceptions to that, especially in painting. I think you really have to start dealing with things from the point of view of whether it feels authentic. I mean, you really have to start dealing with some ideas of quality from a different point of view. I think Americans are not used to dealing with things that way. Europeans are much more used to dealing with things in terms of quality. We're much more used to dealing with things [in terms of] quality equals newness, or what's the newest thing on the market. When something doesn't follow that cliche, it's very hard for people to find their way around. I just saw some reproductions of some de Koonings, and they hearken back to these very complicated kinds of forms jamming up the whole canvas. They hearken back to mid-fifties de Koonings, but they look, from reproduction, very, very good to me. He was involved with the figure all during the sixties, and some of them were very loose and nebulous, and I didn't really feel so good about them, but the new ones looked really good. I'd like to see some of them. I mean, what do you have there? You have just this painter working along, and now he's gone back like fifteen years in some ways. But you have, in my opinion, although I haven't seen them, a real quality thing. How do you deal with that? Well, a lot of people think he's just gone soft in the head because you can't deal with it. But give it a bit of perspective from history, it just is not going to make all that much difference, in my opinion. I mean, nobody worries about who came first: Rembrandt or Michelangelo? Especially in the Renaissance, the idea that Masaccio really invented perspective for the first time: you don't really think that Leonardo was less of an artist, or something. I mean, you go to a museum, you see all that stuff, and you never really worry about that stuff very much. From a closer kind of viewpoint, it seems like an incredible burden on your back. Who dripped paint the first? Or who did this the first? And that was their only contribution it seems. It seems like it's asking an awful lot of art, more than art, I think, is really capable of giving. As a matter of fact, I think art is capable of giving a lot of content, a lot of feeling content in attitudes about reality that are much more important than this formal historical kind of judgment about its worth or something. Plus there's a funny kind of thing in painting which you experience when you go and come across works in Europe and you see the work in person. You see a lot of, say, constructivist paintings and de Stijl paintings, you know, besides Mondrian, a lot of the others. You see all this contemporary art, and you see Picassos and Braques and so forth. And you see the Picassos and the Braques

and some of the others: they're just so well crafted that they look fresh, and they're well painted. You know, Matisses: they're well painted. And you see some of this other stuff that was so—because they really didn't know how to deal with plain surface—it's so cornily crafted. It looks corny just because it physically looks naive and dumb. And conceptually, in a way—if you see it in reproduction, of course it looks more like (in quotes) "zappy modern"—but you see it now, I mean, just go in there and really look at them, and you're confronted with this funny idea that maybe craft does have something to do with quality. And it's very shocking in a way. I mean, a lot of people have always said that, but it was in a way shocking for me. Things just don't survive very well, and they look dumb after a while if they're not crafted. [inaudible] just doesn't come through anymore. [tape recorder turned off]

AUPING:

OK, Craig, dealing with art from this quality standpoint: when you deal with it from that approach, don't you feel that in a sense insulates the entire art community from the rest of society? I mean, it denies a broader sense of understanding of art. What is the responsibility of the artist versus what is the responsibility of the viewer towards coming to some understanding about the imagery, do you think?

KAUFFMAN:

To answer the first part, I think everybody's concerned with quality all the time, their whole life, whether they think about it directly or not. They're concerned with quality in the kind of woman they pick out, in the man they pick out, the kind of clothes they pick out, the kind of life they want to live, and on another level, you know, just what they choose to do. How they deal with that, I think, is very important: whether they're content to have a lot of junk or just a few good things, whether they want to have a few things that are original and maybe good and make their life around some objects that they think are good, or do they want to have a kind of carbon-copy interior that they see in Home magazine. I think that people's whole lives are concerned with those questions. They're concerned with morality: "If I should do this, what will it lead to?" Far from thinking that quality is not something that everybody—I think it's absolutely central to their whole existence constantly. I make a decision about everything all the time. Maybe it's

unconscious sometimes, but they do all this stuff constantly. The quality of their life is something that people are worried about. Not worried about, they make the choices anyway, They fall into it unconsciously and unwittingly. We are victims of other people's taste decisions upon them, instead of making up their own. Not that. quality is just a matter of taste, although on one level you call it taste. On another level, it's really very related to more profound things.

AUPING:

Do you feel that quality in art is any different than quality in life? Do you think it's a more complex level of quality?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I think it's very similar. It's just something that's very graspable in a very, very concrete kind of way. Having two things that are very much alike but very different is an interesting experience. I, in a small way, am a collector of oriental antiques, mainly things around the tea ceremony. You have two tea bowls, and they may come from the same area, and they may be from the same period or something, and one's just a lot better than another, and it takes a long time to figure out why. I don't think you ever figure out why.. It's just that it becomes clearer and clearer all the time as time goes on. And other people have come to that decision a long time before I have. In fact, they've been choosing these things for a long time. In the courts in Japan when tea ceremonies just began, the way a tea master really started, the first thing he was called was a connoisseur. What he really did: [he] was hired by the rich people, by the daimyo and lords and so forth, just to choose what was good and bad in terms of imports from China and catalog them and pick out the good things, and so forth and so on. In other words, the tea ceremony, the tea masters, really started with connisseurship, in a good sense of the word, you know, really good sense of the word: cataloging, figuring out quality, these things. In other words, I feel quality is as much of a tangible quality as whether a thing is red or white. There are levels of quality. There's something you don't want to throw away because it's pretty good. You know, it's interesting to compare it. It's interesting in terms of tea bowls, because you've got the same thing, the same function, it's very similar in shape, even maybe it's the same style, and one is A+ to D. After a while you really can begin to class them. It's not all that intangible. In the real world out there, in the world where they

auction off all that stuff, a lot of those people know, and they know a hell of a lot more about it than I do, and it means the difference between the same thing being worth $250, 000 or a couple of hundred.

AUPING:

But is it a true universal quality? [That's] what I'm getting at. In other words, you believe that there is a universal sense of good art or good connoisseurship.

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know whether it's good art or not. I'm not trying to say that really. I'm just trying to say that there's quality difference. I really haven't answered that all in my mind, exactly what the extent of that is. I think there's a lot of contemporary art which may say a lot and which may not. I look at it two ways: I don't think there's a bad tea bowl, and yet there are better tea bowls than other tea bowls. [laughter] It's kind of like I don't think there's any really bad art, but I think some art is a lot better than other art. In other words, I'm not willing to throw any of it away. I'm not saying, "Let's all separate this out, and then we'll junk all the bad art," because I think the bad art exists too. There it is? it's a part of reality too.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (May 21, 1976)

AUPING:

Craig, since we're dealing with the relationship between aesthetics and politics, I thought we might talk now about being, in a sense, a Southern California artist versus being, say, a New York artist. Do you feel anything about being a Southern California artist, any disadvantage or advantage?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think realistically there are certain disadvantages to being a Southern California artist, but I don't think it has anything to do with sophistication or what's going on in the world in terms of (in quotes) "what's new," or something like that. I think it's been seen that new trends come out of here as much as they do out of any-place else. It may not be on the grand scale, it may not be codified as much, but they do. There are other centers in the world

that own the press—I think I said that to you before—and that's just something that's a reality. Moving to New York for someone who feels that they should be here—or in my case I feel that I should be here and in Paris, or southern France, because I feel very at home there, and truly I feel very at home in New York; I like New York—that's something I think an artist just has to face. There was a self-conscious effort in the early sixties to establish Southern California, or really California, identity in the painting, and I think they did a pretty good job of it. That stuff still looks pretty good to me. I was really sort of surprised to see that. It has a nice clarity to it. I think as time goes on, that stuff is going to look better rather than look worse and more dated. People have gone on from there. They've gone their various directions. There have been two solutions. I've shown every other year in New York for the last ten years just about, and Tony [DeLap] has, and other people have, and not to any great avail. But I've spent time there, and a lot of my good friends are there. I'm one of those exceptions. They [inaudible] the people that are considered from somewhere else, and they go down—the sergeants—you know, pecking order. If you're a young artist and you move to New York, it's a very different thing than if you're someone like me that's shown there a lot and you move there; they tolerate you. You're not part of them, but they don't put you on the pecking list. You know, they can talk to you in various ways. It's very chauvinistic there. I imagine it's very chauvinistic here, although I don't see that as much. It's a little more diffused. There are certain things that I like about [New York], just the area and the kind of color it has and so forth and so on. To refer to, I think, any big city in the United States that has an art community as being "provincial" these days is really kind of a dumb use of the word, because there really [were] provincial artists in the past that have been very important, very charming and interesting. There is provincial art in the United States still. It would be very hard to define, I think, and it would take a long time to think about it that way, but there is kind of an Americana art. I sort of think of sharp-focus realism as something that really is an American strain and not a part of the international art movement. I mean, you know, international art. But international art goes on all over the world now. I mean, think of someone like Cezanne living in Provence. When he lived there, that was much further away from Paris than Los Angeles is from New York these days. That was really the sticks. So what do you want to call provincial artists? I mean, it's really kind of, like, a bad use of the word. What you're

really saying today is: Who controls the press and what's published? But a lot of people have hostility toward it. A lot of people have abandoned New York, gone right around it, like Ed Kienholz did.

AUPING:

Do you feel any need to have a sustained contact with New York?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I do because I have lots of friends there. I almost have more friends there than I do here. I kind of like, even though it sometimes annoys me, that hyper-intellectualism that New York sort of sponsors on every street corner. I kind of like that, so I go and spend some time there. My real influence is in direct contact with nature. I think it really is as much a part of your head as it is a part of where you are. Like, I love colors in Mexico and Mexican buildings and all that stuff, and I really haven't seen that much of Mexico. It mostly exists in my mind. I have never been to Mexico City. I have just been to Tijuana and Baja. And yet everybody sees my paintings, and they say, "God, it really reminds me of Mexican colors," and so forth. You know, Matisse went to North Africa, I think, once, or something like that, and always had these things around his house, you know, these drapes and screens. I've never been to Japan; I know more about Japanese art than a lot of people who have been there a hundred times. [laughter] I mean, I'd love to go. A lot of the world can exist in your head in little objects that you have around. It's great to be somewhere, but it's almost like you can be a Parisian artist and never have been to Paris, in a funny kind of way. I think that's maybe a fairly Californian attitude, what I've just said, because it is kind of spacy here. I don't think that's a bad quality. Everything is spread out and sort of diffused, and you can't get a hold of it really. I don't consider that a really bad quality. I lived in Laguna Beach, which is, like, chock-full of art and it just didn't bother me at all. In fact, the way I look at it, it's all kind of charming. I can imagine myself being in Montmartre or something—there's corny art there—or in Greenwich Village and the outdoor fair or something. I kind of like art in general, so it doesn't really bother me. I'd much rather be in a community like that because the people are much more congenial, and I don't feel like an outcast. All that other stuff doesn't bother me. But I feel a necessity to get away from here and go somewhere else quite often. In fact, the ideal thing for me would be to live

half the time somewhere else and half the time here. But a lot of people have not made their peace with New York nor with anywhere else. They've been defensive about it. They've worked very hard at establishing themselves on the West Coast, or in the West, and have done very well at it. They sell very well here and are famous and so forth. In fact, a few of them I know have shown in New York and have been punished severely by the critics and so forth and so on. For a long time, there was always that opening sentence in any review of the West Coast in art magazines about, you know, "It comes from the West Coast, and even though these people are from the West Coast, the art's not so bad," and so forth and so on. That's something that reviewers learn from their teachers at Columbia or something. They're expected to do that by the editors, who may have some hostility. When you learn the reality of the situation, it's not so bad; but to sit home and just read the magazines and not know about that, it seems all out of kilter. If you know the realities of the situation, it's a little bit easier to take, I think. Nobody's going to give you a break [laughter] in art. You kind of have to bowl them over. Paris is just as bad as New York, if not worse, at being chauvinistic. I'm sure the West Coast is, in its own way; we just don't show it quite as much. I think Los Angeles has developed a real chauvinism towards the rest of the United States besides New York. I think that's to our disadvantage to a certain extent. I think that any artist who lives in Los Angeles thinks that San Francisco and Chicago and Texas art is not quite as good as what's going on in Los Angeles. I think they really sort of naturally feel that. I don't know whether you've gotten that kind of feedback or not. So, if you're in New York, it's like joining the crowd. You can sort of yell out, "Look at those guys—" If you join the people on top, you identify with them, and that's what it's all got to do with. The more people are successful out here, the more people identify with them, the more they'll just think this is the greatest place. But anybody who would put that in a critical review now, at this date—refer to provincialism or something like that seems to me to be beating a dead horse at this point.

AUPING:

We talk about provincialism: doesn't that also kind of blend over into ideas about ethnic art and feminist art? Do you think there [is] such [a] thing as ethnic art?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, there is ethnic art. I don't know whether there is feminist art, but they sure seem to be trying to make something out of that. I mean, I've heard the people talk. My girlfriend's an artist, and Joan Snyder was here last quarter, and they're very good friends. There is a conscious effort to make certain signs and certain ways of working in feminist art. There's a conscious effort to doing that, sort of like a stylistic thing that they're trying to do. There is ethnic art. I think it's very apparent. It' not very authentic. It's sort of a very mixed bag. You may want to call certain kinds of graffiti ethnic art; that's the most, I think, [ethnic] art that we have out here. I've noticed the quality of the graffiti of the Chicanos out here is so much better than in New York, so much more schooled and sophisticated. They have time to do it here. In New York they have to break into a train yard at night and write real fast. But, you know, I'm not any expert on that. You might get up in the Bronx and see a lot of really great stuff, but—

AUPING:

Well, what would kind of finish this tape out, just still talking about the sociology of art, and now kind of talk about museums, if you will. Do you feel the museum right now is a relevant institution to contemporary art?

KAUFFMAN:

I really don't know what kind of function it should serve. I really don't know. I think there is the thing that every young artist would like to have a big museum show because it gives him a certain kind of relevance and establishes a certain authenticity for this person, this establishment giving him a sort of tap on the shoulder or something like that. But if it gets to be too much, if all art was shown in museums, or something like that, would all of it be worthwhile? I really don't know. I have this older idea of what a museum is. And then there's a newer idea of what a museum is: a kind of community-service thing which shows a constant influx of not only historically (in quotes) "interesting" art but all kinds of new things. It's sort of like a multimedia center for the visual arts of the community, the newer idea of what a museum is. I guess all museums are purveyors of what contemporary taste is, because after all, most of them own ten times the stuff than they show at that particular moment. The basements of most museums throughout the world are chock-full of stuff that they don't show, and once in a while they get it out

and change their minds about things. People have changed their minds a lot about the Ecole des Beaux-Arts kind of paintings of the last part of the last century: [William Adolphe] Bouguereau and all that sort of thing. They're hauling all that stuff out like crazy now. They had a big show last summer in New York of David and Ingres and all that sort of thing, you know, that sort of classicism, most of which I just can't stand at all, but a lot of people like that stuff. That's been buried away for years. So, I guess in one way a museum is (in quotes) "a museum," which means preserving, I guess—I don't know the origins of the word—kind of preserving things and keeping them out of harm's way while the society tears down and builds up things like it's going out of style. The thing about the United' States, which was [pointed out] years ago by [Sigfried] Giedion, who wrote a lot of books about architecture, is that we're really concerned with turning under our own past. I think a lot of modern cultures are getting onto that. There's been so much lost, unfortunately, in terms of architectural history and art history and so forth and so on; there really are big holes. So, I think a museum's function, to a large extent, would be documenting things and really making sure that some things survived and that kind of thing. Its public-service aspect of it could be anything a community saw it to be. After all, most of the time it's a community museum—I mean, in the United States. I'd like to see actually the thing that they do in Europe more: an artist gives his estate maybe to the government, and there's a small museum put up where his studio was or that kind of thing. That seems much more sophisticated to me. It seems to me we have room for that in our culture a lot more. Those are the times where you really get close to where an artist was, in his environment. There's nothing like seeing, like, the Leger Museum in France, or something like that. It seems silly that we don't have a Jackson Pollock museum or something like that on Long Island. Those things are much more moving than going. to a big museum and seeing eighteen thousand cross-sections of this and that and so on. I like museums that specialize in things; that's what I'm trying to say. I don't think anybody can cover the whole spectrum. I think that that's the mistake that the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] tries to do: to do everything. Everything. I mean, they try to show everything. Right? I just don't think that's possible to do.

AUPING:

In terms of contemporary art, how well do you feel they have documented what has gone on in Los Angeles?

KAUFFMAN:

Local museums?

AUPING:

Our Los Angeles County art museum.

KAUFFMAN:

I think they've done a very poor job. They used to do a very good job in an old-fashioned format. They used the old salon format. In the fifties there was the big "[Artists of] Los Angeles and Vicinity" annual. Everyone submitted; it was juried. Those were some terrific shows. Ninety-nine percent of it was junk, but that's where they got their Jackson Pollock. That's where they got their [Josef] Albers. That's where they got all those paintings. Think of all the paintings they could have bought out of that. I mean, they were really big, big bashes. Now, whether that's called for now, I don't know. They just had the Los Angeles Eight show ["L.A. 8: Painting and Sculpture '76," April 6 - May 30, 1976]. Now, each individual artist taken out of there may be of some interest, and some of them more than others, but they shouldn't have done that. They should have just emptied that whole building out and selected—you know, there's just a lot more going on—maybe had one floor multimedia junk and other floors painting and sculpture, and just shown, like, eighty artists and had one or two or three works by each artist. That would have been a much more realistic picture of what's going on. I think a museum in the United States should do things like that. The Whitney has its Whitney annuals—and they've become less and less catholic as time has gone on too, unfortunately. They've become more sided towards a particular thing. I think the old sort of bash in the United States was almost better in some ways: you know, that tradition of the salon, the open salon, which is really sort of a French tradition. It's not such a bad idea, even if it's selected by somebody who tries to cover a broad—I think Illinois' biennial is still creditable, the Chicago one. I've seen the catalogs, and I've been in a couple of them. They cover a whole ground. They cover a whole broad spectrum of what's going on. Somebody could arrive in Los Angeles and

go to the Los Angeles Eight and say, "This is what's going on in Los Angeles"; that's a very unrealistic view.

AUPING:

How close were you to the Pasadena [Art] Museum, and what are your thoughts on Its collapse?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I wasn't all that close. I knew the people involved. I had a show there at one time [January 27 - March March 1, 1970]. I was competing with the big logs. Richard Serra had the logs at the same time I had my show.

AUPING:

That was in what year?

KAUFFMAN:

In 1970. But they gave me good space, and it was a nice show. It was like anything else. You kind of get the feeling that everything is going to go on that way forever. Right? I kind of liked the old museum where I'd shown before [November 28 - December 31, 1967]. I liked that old, sort of Chinese building. It's like industry: oftentimes a company will over expand, and what happens is, they go under instead of going over the top. I think that's often the case with museums. They really over expand, and that's what they did. They got out of hand. It was under control they had the budget, and they did a lot of good things when [James] Demetrion was there and, before that, Walter Hopps. Then they moved to the new building and tried to get big-time, and John Coplans was there, and they did the opening show. Alan Soloman did a fantastic job with a beautiful show of a selection of sixties work from New York and then John just did what I thought was a very average job of presenting California art. So, the two came out looking just terrible in comparison. So, California artists, really a lot of them—I didn't do this; there was even a radio program on KPFK, I think, which we heard down at school—you know, really coming out in protest. Then, I think at that point, it lost a lot of support of the community, the artists' community, although they continued to have exhibitions there and so forth and so on. (They did good things after that with Barbara Haskell.) It was a big space. It's an uncomfortable, kind of

funny space. The architecture isn't all that great, but I don't think there's ever going to be a meeting of the minds between what art needs and what kind of building it goes in. Art is often way ahead of what's going on in terms of architecture, and maybe sometimes the reverse. You sort of take the space you can. You can't get all that upset. Everybody got so upset about the structure of the building. They worried about that so much that Norton Simon came and took it over. [laughter] That was an interesting power play. They cleaned it up, and they've got some nice things hanging, and it's turned into an historical museum. I just hope he doesn't in the future just generally edge out all the contemporary stuff and put all that older stuff up, which is—for the most part, if it was very, very good, I would not object to it. If there were beautiful Rembrandts and terrific thises and thats, I wouldn't object to it so much. But they're not very good. The Galka Scheyer collection, the Picassos, Matisses, and this and that, plus their strong representation of sixties painting is very, very good, and they should leave all that stuff up. So, I don't think it's so bad that a museum is around like that, as long as it just doesn't hang up gradually all those—probably most of which are fakes—that's the tragedy of the whole thing. It's like most of that stuff at the L.A. County Museum: if it's not a fake, it's "school of," and it's just not worth looking at.

AUPING:

How about commercial galleries? What kind of relationships have you had with commercial galleries?

KAUFFMAN:

Rocky. You know, kind of rocky. But I've always liked the people that run them. I was charmed by Irving Blum and, before that, Walter [Hopps] and Ed Kienholz and by Rico [Mizuno] and the boys at the Pace Gallery and my gallery dealer in Paris. Some are honest, and some are not and not always that intentionally: sometimes they just don't have the money to pay you. Sometimes they're just ornery. I think it's just something you have to give a little and take a little. Otherwise, if you go down the line over principle or absolutely over a monetary situation: I just have not been able to do that. I know some artists who are very successful about getting lots of money out of the gallery, you know, taking the gallery for a ride really. Maybe I've been a little too dependent on them being a little bit of an authority figure or

something like that. I've usually had very comfortable relationships with galleries, but as I've gotten a little older, I won't tolerate certain things. I had a big sort of quarrel in my last show in New York with the gallery dealer because he wanted to make certain choices about how the paintings were to be hung and that sort of thing. I didn't think I was even capable of it, but I just blew up because I was—I was never even a part of the ball park before. I guess in that respect I've been pretty lucky, because a lot of galleries, you know, they ship your work off to it, and they hang it up on the wall any way they want to hang it up. The ground rules out here have been somewhat established: you hang your work and light it the way you want to. A lot of times that's true in New York and to some extent in Europe, but it's not, by and large, the case. I mean, that's expecting a bit. [With] most galleries in the world, you ship your work off, and they have the final say on this and that and so forth: how it's hung.

AUPING:

How would you characterize the differences, say, between [the] Los Angeles gallery scene and the New York gallery scene?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, there's just a lot more money at stake there. Whereas a gallery here, even though it's a fairly well-known gallery, may take a chance on unknowns and do things like that and not expect to sell a lot of stuff, if you're in a big gallery in New York, they've got to pay the overhead and the rent and so forth. They don't have time for it. If it doesn't work out—they're liable to take a chance once in a while, but after a certain point they just don't anymore. Showing in the gallery will either do one of two things for them; it will either make them a lot of money or get them a lot of press because it's something new, which is useful to them. But if it's neither, if it's just sort of good art that doesn't sell that well, it's tough. I think a lot of art falls into that category. Usually you can find somebody who will show your work. It's surprising: there are not a lot of galleries in New York, but there are a lot more than here that people review and so forth, and so on. Most of the galleries are connected in different ways to the art world, and to be naive about that is to your disadvantage. I think it's very hard to deal with New York from here. I did much better when I was there. You lose the sense of it even if you're gone a couple of years. You lose the sense of how to deal with them and what's going

on and where you should be for your best advantage, where you fit the best. You can make mistakes. But by and large I've been very, very lucky. I've made a few errors along the way, but I can see if I was a young artist, and I had two or three bad experiences right in a row, it might really turn me off the whole situation. I think a lot of young artists today expect an awful lot. They expect their first show to go very well. Even if it does go very well, they expect the second one to build on that one and go that way. That's asking an awful lot, really an awful lot.

AUPING:

Where do art critics fit into this whole scheme? What has your relationship been with art critics, or what are your thoughts on the role of the art critic within the system?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think it's a good idea if you are your own art critic. Unfortunately I don't write. I know a few artists that do write, and they do pretty well at it. Or you have to get in with some that want to make their mark the same way you want to make your mark. So, they sort of sponsor a movement or get behind something. If you're lucky, you get someone to review your work or to write about your work who's sympathetic at that particular time [inaudible] or is enthusiastic about it. Also, it's good to get an art critic who's going somewhere themselves in their own profession. In other words, you can get a dodo who's just enthusiastic about your work and happens to get an article in [a magazine]. It is not as interesting, and the relationship doesn't last very long. You hope to get somebody who is critically interested in your work over a period of time—I think that's the thing that would be good—who's really sincerely enthusiastic and lives through several turns of the clock and is still interested. I've had good reviews and bad reviews and terrible reviews and over inflated reviews.

AUPING:

If a critic reviews your work negatively, do you respond to that and change your work?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I've never done that. Usually the kind of negative criticism I've got is something that was pretty easily dismissed. I don't think I've ever been nailed so to the wall that I've really felt it burn philosophically. You know, I always thought it was a naive kind—maybe that's just my own rationalization—but I always thought it was a pretty naive criticism, something that wasn't really relevant to [the work]. I think they've said some fairly sensible things off and on, just stating what it was, and sort of made me conscious of what it was. Maybe it was something that I wanted to move out of, an area I wanted to move out of. When somebody can describe something very, very accurately, and suddenly you realize, "Oh, Jesus! Is that what I'm doing? I'm not really sure that's exactly what I want to do—"

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (MAY 25, 1976)

AUPING:

Craig, getting back to the development of your work, you know, in 1971: how did the works of 1971, the sort of stained plastic pieces, develop out of the loop pieces of 1969? Do you remember what you were thinking at that time?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I was in New York in '70 and '71, and I'd made some other pieces that were sort of like the loop pieces, with narrow pieces of plastic that had sort of unevenness in the plastic itself, and they hung out vertically from the wall. You couldn't see them hardly at all if you stood right in front of them, because there's the little, tiny loop at the top that hung on a nail and these big, long, sort of droopy things, a few of which I still have. They had lots of little indentations and impurities in the plastic. Actually, what they were is scraps off of sides of large pieces that had been molded, and I saved these scraps and cut them. And what they did is, you lit them from the side, and it made this real bright, kind of wavy pattern on the wall. So, what you were seeing was really just the light on the wall. Then I did some other pieces in New York that were just strips of plastic glued to other pieces that stuck out from the wall so it made this sort of band that was sticking out from the wall about two inches. It was parallel to the wall. In other words, you could see through it, but I put little spots of color. So, I was interested in breaking up the light more than on the big loops, which were pretty much evenly painted. In other words, there

were big broad areas of the same color. Then, one day I was fiddling around with that. (I'd used these framerlike spotlights before that to frame off a particular area. In other words> they light any shape you want to put the shutters in. I had played with that before.) So I had a little plate of water with a mirror under it and sort of agitated it with a fan and stuck a framer spotlight on it. I liked that, so I made a plan for doing that. I was asked to be in a show at UCLA in 19 71 ["Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists," January 10 - February 14], and I chose to do that, one of those pieces, there. I did it in plastic: troughs. Well, the troughs were actually formed things which were about eight inches wide and about three or four inches deep and I think they were six-foot lengths. The piece at UCLA, I think, was three of those. So, it was eighteen feet or more long. I had a mirror under that, and because the plastic was formed at an angle—like that [gestures]—coming down to the mirrors, in other words, with the water in it, it made like a prism, so that the band of water reflection on the wall was color. I had little fans on it. It was, like, this moving, colored thing. I'm sorry I don't have any colored shots of it. I have black-and-whites of it. I should have just taken some nice color photographs. I keep forgetting sometimes that the color was there, that there was color in it. I had plans for a whole bunch of that type of thing, lit with different kinds of colored lights, which would complicate it even more in different directions. I had plans and drawings for quite a few of those pieces. People really responded very, very strongly. There were problems—dirt getting in the water and things like that—but problems that could have been solved, you know. They were sort of just minor technical flaws. People were throwing paper in. [laughter] It was sort of spacy-looking, and the room didn't have to be all that dark. It could be just sort of on the dim side, which I kind of preferred. It was a refreshing kind of thing because it was airy: you know, the fans were going and there was water. I've always liked water reflections. But I had to work in the particular environment and work with people, get them to change the place a little bit and set it up and worry a bit about the maintenance of the thing during the exhibition. The maintenance problems could have been solved,, but X really just didn't think that I really wanted to get into that Kind of thing: going somewhere and adapting my work to fit the space, working with the people, and all that sort of thing. Now, some people really thrive on that sort of behavior. I think I could have taken my show on the road, as they say, because it seemed to have quite a positive response, I

think I could have shown them quite a bit, and they would probably have developed. But I really just kind of felt at a certain point that I didn't want to do that, X wanted to work in my studio and really have less problems with installation and so forth than I'd even had before. Like, hanging the loops was a bit of a problem and lighting them correctly. Since then, I've heard people have hung up loops here and there, and they haven't been lit right, hung on the wrong kind of wire, all those things. I just sort of didn't feel that I wanted to cope with that,

AUPING:

Right before that, in 1970, you and Robert Morris set up a thing called the Peripatetic Artists Guild?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, Bob and I in New York became very good friends, and we had this idea that we would have this kind of relationship where we would have this thing and maybe go somewhere and do anything if people would hire us to do it and so forth. Not much came of it, I think Bob got asked to do a few things, and I did too, but it was just sort of the idea of doing it, the artist was sort of a traveling—it was like a statement that he was a traveling sort of entrepreneur, that he could do all these various activities. I think I reprinted that in the UCLA catalog. We ran that ad in several magazines. It was sort of like a statement of how artists should behave.

AUPING:

What kind of activities did you have in mind? Was that spelled out?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, there was a whole list of things: wine-tasting parties, [laughter] all kinds of things that we were willing to go and conduct. Other people could send in proposals, and we would act as sort of a clearinghouse for those sorts of things. Other people did send in proposals. We were sort of thinking of setting up a thing like that. It was an idea. It was an idea that came out of another idea that I had discussed with Bob; he had [a] similar idea—which I thought was a terrific idea and would have been fun at a particular time—that you would exchange lives with somebody else. You would go into their studio, and

they would go into yours. Depending on how much of the life you wanted to exchange, it could even include family, [laughter] You just take on somebody else's identity for a while and make your own versions of their style. That was a very interesting idea, and it might have been fun to try. Bob and I did do a piece in common. We did a piece at the Jewish Museum, a wall piece.

AUPING:

When was that?

KAUFFMAN:

In '70, about the time of the Cambodian thing, because as soon as it went up, right after the opening, the next day [May 14, 1970], we closed it. [The exhibition was entitled "Using Walls (Indoors)."—Ed.] We kind of voted, all the artists. It was called "Working on Walls." It was a combination of his very didactic theory about three strips and how [they] should be poured; and there were these rounded plastic pieces that were on the wall. And then we sprayed red, yellow, and blue, and we poured red, yellow, and blue. So, it was sort of a process, plastic, transparent thing. So, it was a combination of both of our ideas, and it was really quite a spectacular thing. We got lots of lights on it. That was sort of a very nice show. People were by that time working on walls. Sol Lewitt. It was a very nice show. Unfortunately, the Cambodian situation occurred that very, very night after the opening. So, all the members of the exhibition got together and got the word out. We took a vote, and out of that came sitting in front of the Metropolitan and closing down the Metropolitan and the Modern. The Modern never really closed down, but the Metropolitan just about had to because nobody broke our picket line for a couple of days. We sat on the steps. That was when all that artist political activity really got going. Bob really got into that a lot more than I did.

AUPING:

So, after the UCLA piece you decided to go back to static works?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I moved back out here, and then I went into forming those pieces that were only seen in Paris: some bars, and there are some that are like boards.

AUPING:

Do they have a name? Does the series have a name?

KAUFFMAN:

No. I just called them bars. They're sort of like boards. They're actually done over boards, put on sort of like the boards on a house around here. They had a more kind of local building-material quality to them. It came out of that quality. Some of them were sprayed in sort of this uneven way. Then others were poured into this channel from the back, this channel that some of these bars make, and actually poured. Also the idea that I wanted to get [into] the work more different kinds of color in the work. I didn't want to be confined to having the thing a single color. It was an attempt to really sort of get back into painting after the water reflection thing. I really just didn't want to get off into doing environments and that sort of thing. I could sort of see it going that way. It was a painful kind of thing. It was a difficult period there from about '71 through about '73. It was two or three years there of trying a whole bunch of stuff, all of which I haven't saved. I actually made a few paintings on canvas. I made other projects in plastic. I made things that were sort of a combination. I used some Styrofoam. I made some drawings in Styrofoam, which I still have, a lot of different things. Then, the next form series I did were these sort of eccentric shapes formed in the plastic.

AUPING:

Where the bars stand out from the plastic?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, yes, there were these; and what I mean by that is, the ones that were in my '73 paint show.

AUPING:

I see. They were more, like you say, eccentric and rounded.

KAUFFMAN:

Right, right. Very complicated individual images.

AUPING:

What was your main concern in those pieces?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I like this kind of imagery. I made some drawings and so forth. It was an attempt to really make an individual image instead of a series-style image. I liked them fairly well. I didn't think they worked out in plastic as well as the later pieces did in wood because certain areas I really just didn't want in there, and in plastic you can't physically cut an area out and have it be stable. It has to remain sort of one big sheet with this formed image in it. If you start cutting holes in it, it becomes very weakened, and it breaks. So, some of those areas I didn't really want, and so it really didn't work out all that well. But to get from there into the wood with the separate sticks put together was quite another step too. I mean, I almost tried everything before I wanted to do that. At first I thought of just cutting it out of plywood, and I did that, and then cutting it out of Styrofoam. Cutting an image out so that you have an image after you've cut it out, physically cut it out of one sheet of something, is a very different image than if you take separate pieces and join them together. It took me a year to sort of get that through my skull. I made little models and so forth and so on. In fact, I made one little model that I have exhibited, a little model made out of pieces of balsa wood; it was covered with sort of silklike things. I made one of those way back in '71 or something like that. It just took a long time in my head for it to really jell that that was the way to do it rather than try to cut it out of one big sheet, which is easier. That's also the way that I had made the forms for the plastic pieces: [I'd] take a piece of plywood and cut it out and make sort of a wafflelike thing for these later low-relief pieces, where it's a wafflelike form [that comes] together [like a] waffle iron. So it pressed it together. It had some texture on it too. It had some wire that formed into the Plexiglas. It was hard to leave plastic. It was also hard to leave going into the direction which really was moving in the direction of almost like an environmental situation with the water reflections. These were all very difficult decisions for me. It made me really think about what exactly I wanted to do. At first, I had no real intellectual answer for it. It was an instinctual kind of thing. Although I spent a lot of time doing my homework'—I certainly read a lot during that period of time about all that was going on—finally I just had to say it really wasn't for me. I would leave those kinds of activities up to other people because I really wasn't at home, really at home doing those sorts of things.

AUPING:

Were there ever a series of works that you exhibited between the plastic pieces and the wood pieces?

KAUFFMAN:

At one time I showed one of the drawings that was a Styrofoam drawing at Irvine ["Faculty Exhibition," 1972]. I'd paint a line on it, on a piece of very dense Styrofoam that I had made, and then I'd carve in between the line. It made sort of a nifty-looking line. It was all right—nothing terribly exciting. I still have a few of those. There's a lot of in-between, transitional works, some of which I've thrown away, and I really shouldn't have. I sort of regret that. There's a few pieces, like, just after the bubbles, the next series, somewhere in there, around the loops, there were these things I called awnings. They were sort of like half a bubble. Only it wasn't really a bubble, because I had one spotlight in the ceiling on this thing, sort of a rounded-off awning. It would make its exact image, the shadow would. In other words, you would think it would just be a half-round, bubblelike shape, but it isn't. It has to be an odd shape in order to form itself with one spotlight in the ceiling that's approximately the right kind, you know, what you'd come across. I sort of painted them speckly kind of colors because that blended in better to the bottom. And it made an incredible illusion if you looked at it from [a distance]. It looked like a full thing sitting on the wall. I guess some of those kinds of concerns are still in my work, where some of the paintings you're not sure whether it's the actual wall showing through in a hole there or it's part of the painting. I still play a bit of those optical games in the work. But the awnings: I didn't save any of those. I guess I should have—some of those things.

AUPING:

How did you decide to use the material wood?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, first I decided that what really worked was joining separate pieces together rather than using one big thing. Then I thought Styrofoam would be a really good thing to use because it was easy to cut out, and I had this dense Styrofoam made at a surfboard manufacturing company. The first pieces were made out of Styrofoam, one of which still exists. But it warped after a while, as

plastic will, leaning up against the wall. It was very light and nice, but it didn't hold its shape, and several people just suggested, "Why don't you just use wood?" There's a certain kind of wood called jelutong, which is nice and light and very stable, and almost like balsa wood. It was like pulling teeth to go back to wood, but once I did it and learned how to make a nice lap joint, which was really the only way they would hold together—at first I tried doweling it, and that didn't work very well—a nice lap joint, clamp it together and let the glue dry, and then I saw, you know, after I made the first one, that it was really solid and still very light and flexible, you know, a very sound way to do it, so I just said "All right, I'll do that." I tried using regular-style canvas to fill in the areas and other materials, and then I finally wound up using a very smooth-textured canvas. So, I really don't get much texture in the canvas. Canvas can be stomped, kind of printed on cardboard where you get some texture, but I don't—the heavy canvas was too much of a contrast to the holes on the wall, and that didn't work out. I thought of using other materials—and at some time I may—in those spaces.

AUPING:

In the wood pieces what do you consider to be the major concern formally?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I'm sort of developing a vocabulary that I keep track of, problems I want to work out of ideas that suggest themselves. I'm really kind of working with a painting format. I think some of them get quite shaped-looking in themselves, some of the earlier ones, but most of the later ones refer to a rectilinear format pretty much. There's this idea of flexibility: I can fill an area with color, and I can take it out if it doesn't work out, and this sort of thing. Then there's the idea of how much literalness, in other words, the literal nature of the support: how much can I get away with using that, and whether I can make that illusion. Some of the newer ones, some of the canvas is on the front of the stretcher bar, but I still let the bar show. I paint right up to the bar, and the canvas just goes around the bar. Then another area will be on the back. So, it's playing with an actual space and making it kind of an illusion and turning it back into a real painting space. But for me it just seems, the only way I can work my way back into painting is to really reconstruct painting for myself. And the problem of boundaries: what kind of reference you have to have to a

rectangle or how big that can be or to what kinds of shapes and how much you can leave out of the painting, in other words, actual physical space that's out of the painting, and still have it read as a painting is something I'm sort of working out. There's drawing in some of them, like, a line will start and then it will skip over an area that's actually the wall. It will skip over that and continue in another space, and things like that.

AUPING:

What about scale: has that changed much since the early wood pieces until your most recent things?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's gone up a bit. The problem for me with scale: it's a very interesting problem for me. I want the big pieces to look as if they hold together and you can read them as almost being smaller than they are or larger. It's kind of interesting. The new piece I've recently finished, which is about a little over ten feet tall, when you get back and look at it and then someone walks up next to it, it's very funny because they look much smaller than you'd think they would. So the piece, I think in that sense, has a good scale to it. It sort of hangs together. I'm not really concerned, as I was at one time, with this one-for-one scale. American artists have been very, very concerned about this. I've sort of questioned that in my own work. In other words, the scale it is, is the scale it is, and it has to be read just like that. I think that's something that I really don't—

AUPING:

In other words, an idea can exist in any scale if it's worked out properly.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, in a sense it's a much more traditional idea in terms of scale. I've sort of re-questioned for myself the idea that it had to be the same scale. In other words, if you have an image, I think it's been sort of a working rule of thumb in American painting [that] there's an optimum—there's the right scale that that should exist in. It's not been a hard-and-fast rule, but I think it's sort of been a working rule of thumb from abstract expressionism on, and not just that but just the idea of largeness itself. I think scale in painting is much more

complicated. To make something large and have it read properly, there's other clues that almost have to be in there. You have to do certain things and not do others.

AUPING:

What do you mean?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, like a Leger reads very large, and the reason he can get away with that is because you have a suppression of certain kinds of details; you don't have any drips in there. A drip or something like that has a physical scale that you can recognize, and so you're sort of stuck with that scale. I mean, you can drip over a large area, like a Jackson Pollock, but you can't expand things. Also Leger has the advantage of you have a figurative thing, most of them, so you can just make a big foot or something. You get to see this expansion. A lot of the big pop art paintings have that advantage too because they could just blow things up. When you're dealing with abstract painting, it's a little more difficult. You have to blow it up in the right sort of way and suppress certain details: certain brush marks and this sort of thing. Still I want certain kinds of activity in the painting. So, it's a problem. It's a problem for me, and I find it interesting. I don't think there's an easy solution to it, and I don't have a definite opinion about it at this point. It's just that I'm very questioning of that area, and ten feet right now seems to be a very good size for me. [tape recorder turned off]

AUPING:

Craig, getting back to your recent paintings, the wood paintings: do you feel there's a sense of foreground and background in these pieces? Do you feel you're dealing with that kind of idea?

KAUFFMAN:

I'm not sure exactly what you mean.

AUPING:

A sense of illusionistic space from a surface that comes out at you to one that recedes or a color that comes out at you to one that recedes back in space.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I think there are illusions. There are big diagonals. There are diagonals in nearly all of them, and some of them are like isometric kinds of planes that go back into space. There are illusions of things coming in behind other things, drawn in or otherwise. There are those things in them, but I think they're also fairly flat at the same time. They're sort of ambiguous; [there is] that kind of ambiguous space in them. But I seem to be able to get away with a lot of illusion in terms of drawing things in, coming in at funny angles and that sort of thing, because the bars read so strongly. I seem to be able to get away with a lot of it. What I mean is, it doesn't seem to break down the idea that you're reading it as a fairly flat thing.

AUPING:

Do you consider there to be a picture plane there, and is that picture plane the wall, or is it somewhere else?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, let's say, it's sort of approximately like the wall. It's hard to explain because I don't think I see it as a continuous surface. In other words, one of the reasons I'm breaking it up in these—leaving, in other words, holes in the middle here and there—is the fact that your eye has to travel from one spot—even though it's connected by bars, and there is an overall kind of gesture to the painting (if you want to call it a gesture; I mean, it's like a pretty clear form in the bars you can read)—your eye has to kind of go up and get to a bar and travel over a bar to get to this other spot. It doesn't skip over the whole thing. I was looking at one of the bigger paintings the other day, and they're hard to look at as one kind of continuous image, and I really like that. It's the idea that you have to get from one place to the other. It really almost takes you time to get there; you don't get a real quick overall reading. You can read them that way, but if you start looking at them, it doesn't work out so well. I like to reinforce that. I want to make them in that way kind of visually difficult. And now that in some of them the canvas is on the front as well as on the back and you're not quite sure about that, as an illusion [that's] working very well. Sometimes a line will run across the front, if the canvas is on the front of the bars, the line will run, and then it will continue on the canvas that's on the back. That tends to flatten it out, and you get this double reading. I want to

make them sort of difficult and, at the same time, complicated. I'm not working consciously towards any reductivist idea. In fact, I think these days I have a tendency to be going in the opposite direction: to want a more complicated kind of image. Different areas have different sort of textural treatments, and they're painted differently, and that doesn't build up for unity either. I'm sort of separating these areas. So, your eye has to travel from one part of the thing to the other because it's not a unified kind of image.

AUPING:

Do you feel that's a strong break from your earlier plastic works?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. The bubbles, for instance, were really one big unit that you read. Really my earlier paintings, way back in the fifties, had some of that quality: there were different areas here and there that were separate from one another, although they were all on the same surface. I like that these days.

AUPING:

I'm trying to think where these ideas are coming from, sort of what you were thinking about.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think this idea of having a nonuniform reading of a painting is kind of a reaction against the idea [held] for a long time that you should be able to read the image [in painting] very easily. You know, you have this image that's given; and then what's going on is either the color or some other activity—texture, or something like that—and the image doesn't count very much.

AUPING:

For instance, field painting.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, things like that. Also the unity of minimal art, that sort of thing. I think it's just a reaction against having that kind of reading of a work, which I'm not very concerned with.

AUPING:

You're more on a narrative level in a sense?

KAUFFMAN:

No, I just want a painting that's more difficult to look at I think. It takes you time to go through a trip that you don't get an immediate reading of something. It puts your mind through a different kind of process of looking at a painting, and in some ways maybe that's more traditional where you have to follow things through. I think to a certain extent I was influenced by oriental painting.

AUPING:

Oh, really. In what ways?

KAUFFMAN:

When you say "narrative," it reminds me of narrative Japanese scrolls, where they're long scrolls and they're all sort of divided up in an isometric or reverse perspective that's mostly screen walls, you know, walls and screens in the houses. You're looking through the roof, and maybe clouds [are] in the way in some passages that separate certain places from another. And you read it. You read along, and there's something going on in this little area, and then you sort of skip over some clouds or some rooftops, and you then look down into another room where something else is going on. I like that idea that a painting can really contain a multiple kind of image kind of thing, rather than just [inaudible]: the target or the lines or something.

AUPING:

How much of your paintings deal with your personal calligraphy in a sense versus not showing your personal brushstroke or mark?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I've been fishing around with that kind of thing. In other words, some of the paintings have been sort of dark brownish, and I would say almost a broken-color kind of thing on bars, although in browns, going for a kind of richness. Some of the ones I showed in New York were like this. They're almost like Vuillards or something like that when they were done and very, very active in some of the areas in terms of paint quality and the color being all that kind, of rich browns. I'm working towards a happy medium there

somewhere, where there is paint activity, and yet to get a certain kind of scale you have to almost repress some of that. Some of the bars look very splashy and have lots of activity, and others are plainer colors and just come together, they kind of run together a little bit. It's not like a hard edge or anything. But those are problems that I'm kind of working through—and to find just the kinds of colors I want. I think there's a variety of things I can do. In other words, I don't have to paint the same kind of paintings all the time. Sometimes I can paint kind of bright paintings, and other times I can paint sort of darker paintings.. But I think the style will probably, in terms of paint application, even out more. I've been mashing the paint on corrugated cardboard lately, which really confronts you with some material, not going for an actual material being there but just sort of an illusion of a cardboard piece. [It] also gives it a kind of a casual quality too, which I like. The areas have to be done all at, like, one go. In other words, I don't go back and repaint an area. I mix the color and get the color right,. The paintings usually have a color idea about them that kind of comes out. In other words, it might be a red, yellow, and blue and green painting, or it might be—it usually has all the colors in there, I mean, all the primaries in there in an offbeat kind of way. Sometimes it misses one of them.

AUPING:

In getting back into being a little looser and letting paint fly, so to speak, was it difficult to get into that after making all of those machine-made, sort of technological kind of works?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, some of the later plastic ones had these sort of formed areas in them, and I poured the paint in there so that it just kind of ran into these spaces. That sort of got me off on getting back into them. I'd done a lot of expressionistic work in the fifties. I had done my drip painting, and I had done my paintbrush-splot painting, [laughter] textural painting. That was another question of whether I wanted to get back into that kind of scale of making a mark on painting or, as you say, your own personal calligraphy. Quite a few of the paintings have some kind of drawing in them, and what the scale of that line should be has been something that's been a problem for me, something that interests me. That seems to be a giant step backwards [laughter] from a

lot of people's point of view too, whether you're going to [inaudible] your own lines and everything, drawn shapes and stuff like that. But that doesn't seem to bother me. In fact, I'd like to get more information in the work all the time and try to not have it a flop. 0 Like a lot of painters I think I mentioned before: some people [who] try to deal with a lot of crosscurrents in contemporary art have been, well, flops at it. Contemporary art seems to have been—A lot of it is concerned with purity and refinement, but going towards a minimal kind of statement, or purity or reductiveness, is not really something I'm concerned with now. In fact, I'm almost reacting against that kind of idea.

AUPING:

I'm really interested in the character of your drawn lines and what you call drawing on your paintings. It has a very, almost primitive quality to it. It's interesting in that you said that as a young boy you were a very good draftsman: you could render things very realistically. How did you come to that style of drawing?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, there's a bit of that, I guess, in the earlier paintings, in the 1958 paintings. I just kind of liked that line. It was an uneven kind of line. At first, I put it on with actually oil paint with kind of a broken crow quill pen. That kind of line: I don't know exactly where it comes from. It's not an even, like, precise line. Over the years, and except in a few works, my work seems to have lines in it. A lot of it has lines in it. A lot of the plastic pieces have lines in them. It's a broader vocabulary than just dealing with large areas of color or something» A line's another piece of the vocabulary that painting has. At the present time, it's a real open question for me whether to have these lines or not. Even if I'm drawing a big rectangle in there, I kind of like it somewhere. I like to make it look like it was just made or drawn.

AUPING:

Some of them look like they're almost scratched on.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. I like the idea that it reminds you of the surface too. It's part of the surface really.

AUPING:

Could you give me a brief synopsis of how these paintings are produced? In other words, how do you begin? What would be the beginning step in one of these paintings?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I make a lot of drawings. Then I kind of get an idea. In other words, lately there's been this kind of parallelogram that comes down at an angle. It's been in two paintings, and now it's gotten bigger, larger, and I'm going to be making some more paintings with these parallelograms. I sort of get an idea like that, and then I make a lot of drawings. I sit around and sort of do them when I'm in someone's house or somewhere. [laughter] I sort of do it over and over again. One or two kind of lock into my mind. Then I kind of do a watercolor of them to get a color idea. I may do several of those. Then it kind of jells: "Yes, that's kind of what I want to do." Then I proceed to decide upon what scale I want this thing; usually I work on a small one, a smaller one, and then maybe go to a larger one, but sometimes I just go to a larger one right away. I've been piddling around—"piddling"?—alternating the thickness of the wood and the scale. They're not just cut out parallel from the wall. They're slightly cambered like that. They have to be. They don't read right otherwise. Then I just start cutting the wood and leaning it up against the wall to see about the right sort of scale. Then I clamp pieces together and get kind of a general outline of maybe the four or five most important members of the thing. I look at the drawing and look at the wall; I'm able to transfer the scale, in other words, the proportions, pretty easily. I don't use a graph or anything like that to make it the exact scale. Sometimes the scale, the proportions, change a little bit, but I get it to look sort of right. Then I put those main members together. In other words, I make lap joints and glue them together, and then they're there. Then I gradually fill in the other members. It usually comes out OK. Usually they change a little bit. I'll leave out something or put something else in, or something may be slightly a different shape. Sometimes I change it from the drawing, and I don't like it. Then I have to go back and put a little extension on some of the members that go through and come out the other side. (They have the appearance that they're going through.) The joints: I like to be able to see the joints. That seems very important to me, so I leave a little space in there, physical space, because I like it to look like it's sort of stuck together

rather than out of one big continuous bar. Then I usually prime the wood with gesso, and I sand it so it's smooth. Then, at that point I've done one of two things. I've just painted the bars and then proceeded to fill in the spaces with colors, with canvas. First, you staple it on the back and then get the color right. Sometimes I have to take the canvas off two or three times before the color is right. Then sometimes I've done both at the same time. In other words, I've put the canvas on, colored in some of the areas, and then done the bars. I seem to be doing more of the whole thing all at once now, instead of just doing the bars.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (May 25, 1976)

AUPING:

Craig, you were talking about building the paintings. So the wood structure is built first, and then the canvas and paint is applied later like a traditional painting.

KAUFFMAN:

Right.

AUPING:

Have you thought about how little canvas you use compared to how much wood you use? Isn't the proportion quite a bit more towards the wood?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, in the earlier ones the bars seemed to have dominated, but gradually the canvas has become more important, I think. Where that will finally end up, I'm not quite sure. A few of them are practically all filled in. There's a few that exist that [have] only very, very small, a couple of small areas that are vacant. It just sort of seems to be the individual paintings. Some seem to go towards being very, very open and a lot of empty space, and others seem to get filled in more and more. In fact, in the last painting there's only one empty area in the middle, kind of like a long, empty area in the middle, and then one other little, teeny empty area, and the rest is all filled in.

AUPING:

Why do you think you're beginning to use more canvas?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know. I think I'm seeing them more and more as paintings. I think I've always seen them as paintings, but I think I'm able to get more in there, more different colored areas in there, and have it work. I'm thinking about the areas more instead of the bars with just pieces filled in here and there. I don't know how it will go, you know.

AUPING:

Do you think it might end up in being a traditional stretched-canvas painting in a year or two?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know. I kind of have a tendency to doubt that because there seems to be a lot of room for development,, I have a whole list of ideas that I haven't even done in the paintings yet. I wouldn't object to that, but I kind of have a tendency to think that it wouldn't really work out all that much. I've always had this idea that I wanted the structure to show somehow—I don't know whether it's a puritanical idea or what it is—for the painting to be self-supporting. All the plastic paintings, even though the early ones had frames on them, all plastic things are self-supporting. In other words, they're a shape that supports itself. I've always liked that in art. I don't think it necessarily has to be a sculptural idea. I kind of like the guts of the thing being exposed. In a regular painting, as long as you're painting a kind of traditional painting on it, I think the idea that you're using these stage props, in other words the stretcher bar and these things, seems to be all right. But when you start dealing with abstract painting, exposing the underpinnings seems to me a problem that I'm interested in. I'm interested in dealing with the format in some direct kind of way. A lot of people have opted for using an off-the-stretcher kind of a format and working in this way. It's a very different way of working, to have something, sort of a given area to work on, and to build it up out of separate little parts. Right? It kind of comes out of constructivism to a certain extent. They are constructed paintings. In other words, they are an additive process rather than something you put into a given area. And it's not bordered in the same kind of way. What the border of a painting should be or shouldn't be is an interesting thing for me: how it's bordered and how it reads on the wall. The depth of the stretcher bars and that exact relationship is

something that still interests me. Whether it always will, I don't know. Do you understand what I mean?

AUPING:

Yes, I do.

KAUFFMAN:

In other words, the physical borders and this kind of philosophical border of what a painting is are very closely related for me. In other words whether you can see areas in them, what the shape of the thing should be, whether it should be a rectangle, what it should be, whether it should break that down, how it should read on a wall, not being separated off from the wall or the environment that much: just what are those things? How big can it be? How vague can it be before it loses its boundary and really doesn't read as a painting anymore?

AUPING:

Have you made any works that you feel don't read as paintings anymore?

KAUFFMAN:

No. I have really consciously tried to figure out what for me those boundaries were. I'm sure a lot of people would look at my paintings and not call them paintings; they'd call them painted reliefs or something. I really don't think about them that way because I don't think the space is a relief kind of space. I think it's like a painting. A lot of people would object to that, I guess. They just think you ought to have a rectangle and really make a painting, as they say. But I think this kind of what you might refer to as hybrid area of painting, you know, off the stretcher and dealing with different kinds of format in painting, is interesting because it's responding to the pressures of other kinds of art to a certain extent, the influences of those kinds of art. I think that's healthy. I don't think painting necessarily has to lose its identity as painting because it responds to these things. I'm sure a lot of people would disagree with me on that. I think painting can retain its identity. Not that I'm beating that drum as a cause, but a lot of people see painting just sort of blurring in, its edges becoming so blurred that it just becomes another one of a series of possible art activities and doesn't really lose its identity. You may make a painting, a

thing like a painting, because it works for that idea, and then you make a thing on the floor, and then you do this—that kind of activity. I really think painting has an identity, and I think there's positive things about that identity. [When] I was working really with the plastic things, I was kind of like letting it take me where it wanted to go. And when it took me to the point of the water reflections, I said, "I don't want to go that way." [laughter] Then I started rethinking about what painting was for me, what it could be, and what were the good things about it from a philosophical point of view and from how I wanted to deal with things, from a practical point of view in my own way. I didn't want to go out and deal with these people directly and work on a spot, go out and change the environment in some way. I really didn't want to do that. I wanted to really reflect my own personal vision to a large extent, my own attitude towards (in quotes) "a general kind of tradition of painting." Not that I think that painting has to be in any way "traditional" (in quotes); it doesn't seem to me that way. So, that's about where I am now. A lot of these ideas are open to revision at any time, [laughter]

AUPING:

With your painting, do you feel that in some ways you are trying to find, or are searching for, an archetypal imagery that would be almost Universally understood?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I don't know. I think one of the advantages of any graphic kind of presentation is the idea that it sort of breaks down boundaries between—it doesn't have a language barrier, you know. A graphic presentation can be understood without, hopefully, a lot of explanation. I know that a certain amount of sophisticated education seems to have to go into how you see certain things, but I think that's one of the advantages of it. I'm not particularly beating the drum on that. But as an archetypal kind of image: I really don't know. Somehow the strangest, most personal things, images, seem to be somehow understood universally very quickly. You know, the most personal kinds of things seem to become that somehow. I don't feel like I have to make any sort of internnational style sort of statement however. I think you can be much more personal and eccentric. But I think you have to walk kind of

a delicate line about that. I don't want my paintings to appear eccentric and unsophisticated at all. I'm not interested in that at all either.

AUPING:

Do you find that when you do have something personal you might want to put in a painting, or the idea comes to you, do you find it difficult to put it on that painting and put it out in public view? How does that happen? How are those decisions made?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, in some of the earlier paintings that had a lot of almost sexual imagery in them, even though they were very abstract, I didn't seem to worry about it very much, but some people saw in [them] very sexual things and sort of objected to it, even though it was fairly abstract. It seems hard to believe that, but they did. You know, a big tubelike shape looping down on the canvas: it was really kind of threatening to them. The newer paintings have very little of that in them. It's mostly, like, architectural kind of space. Somebody said that it looked like pieces of furniture inside of a room or windows or something like that; so I think that's a pretty neutral kind of ground. The color carries more of a role in any kind of overtones of subject matter. Some seem somewhat violent, and some of them seem very calm. But I can't see anybody seeing them in any kind of disturbing way, the newer pieces.

AUPING:

In talking about color: When you're putting the color on wood structures, how are you dealing with color? What are you thinking about? What do you want the color to do?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I get kind of a color idea about the painting somewhere along the line. It starts becoming clear to me in the sense that, oh, this is maybe a very strong orange painting with several colors that heighten this, and maybe in another part it's got two color sets, like two other colors. I sort of think about it that way. Then it becomes sort of clear. The bars seem to work best this broken up way, where the color will continue over from one bar onto another bar. In other words, the color doesn't follow just the structure; it skips over areas. It

runs down one bar and skips onto another bar. That seems to hold the painting together better. In other words, it's another double reading: You've got the color going onto several bars. Sometimes the color on the bar will be the same color, just about, that's in the inside of the panel. So it sort of runs off the bar into a filled-in area. So, they're all sort of part of the games I play with myself. I've tried using a very simple color scheme on the bars, like just black and white or something like that. That doesn't seem to work for me.

AUPING:

Why do you think that is?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know. Maybe it breaks up the thing in too much of a one-for-one thing. In other words, you've got the bars, and they're all kind of coming together, and you can read the joints very clearly and so forth. Then, if you've got just one set of colors, you've just got to, you know, play off just, like, one set of notes working against another set of notes. Maybe it has to be more complicated than that, but visually so far it hasn't really worked. It might at some time. So, it's usually three or four colors or more on the bars.

AUPING:

In using more colors, do you think that adds to that sense of making the piece more difficult to read?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I think so. I'm really not all that sure about exactly why I use all the colors I use. It's kind of an emotional response. Some of the paintings have had a very definite color idea. A couple of them have been sort of jokes on the primary colors. One of them is called the The Primaries Are Nearly, and then I've got one here that's called The Primaries According to Young. What they are is mostly a kind of funny off-middle gray, a lot of gray in them, and the bars are pretty much grays and black, not really black. None of the colors are really very pure. Then the primaries—red, yellow, and blue—are very let-down colors. In other words, they're real pale, but in the painting they look pretty bright because it's dominated by this big, big broad expanse of this funny gray. It's kind of like a middle gray, but it's got a lot of red in it in one of

them. Actually, in one of them I had to paint the blue purple in order to get it to look blue. And those things I like, where the color that's there is not what you're really reading. In other words, if you would take the canvas off, like this one blue patch in this one painting, and stick it on a white wall, you'd say, "Oh, it's purple." Then you stick it in the painting and it's blue, a nice pale blue. You take the red and yellow off, and the red looks like a brown, like a dull, reddish brown, and the yellow is just so pale that it's like cream color. But when you get it in the painting, it's a nice bright yellow, and you read them as red, yellow, and blue. I like that kind of thing in color. I like it where it really reads as a different color. It really interacts with the other colors. And just seeing how much I can get away with in that sense. I don't seem to really go for bright, really bright colors. I like colors to read brightly, but I don't like them to be bright colors. It looks too much for me. It just gets all kind of crazy. My real interest in Matisse's work has been that he worked at color, looked at color in that way to a certain extent. You see these paintings that zing. You know, they have this incredible kind of color and you say, "God, it's a bright painting." If you really look at the colors isolated, they really aren't bright colors at all; they're very dull colors. They're just doing a lot to each other. I like that.

AUPING:

Do you mix the colors on the canvas or in the can before it goes on the canvas, or do you buy a specific color for a specific painting?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I have somewhat of a palette, but it changes from painting to painting. Sometimes I let down the color by thinning it out with gel medium. In other words, it becomes almost like a transparent color. It really is a transparent color. Instead of adding white, I thin it out that way. Sometimes I do work a bit on part of the canvas. I really have to test it out. Sometimes, as I say, I have to redo an area. I do an area and it will dry, and then I look at it, and I'll say "No, that's not the right color." Very rarely I've been able to paint over, maybe some of the small areas I've been able to paint over with enough paint to cover it so it looks right, but most of the time I have to take the area out and redo it. When you're working with water-based paints, a lot of times they dry different colors than you see them, especially if they're let down with gel. There's sort of a silvery gray in one of my recent paintings, and I repainted—I

had this one area of this color that I liked a lot; it's supposed to be the same color as these other two areas. I mixed up this paint color, and I thought it was going to work out. I stuck it on there, and I really liked the way it painted the areas, but they were too light. I looked at it, put it up against the wall, and said, "Oh, I just think I'll look at it for a while." They were really so much, in terms of value, lighter, and as they dried they just turned that other color on me like magic, [laughter] and I really felt lucky. So, when you thin colors down, you're working with a lot of unpredictable kinds of things. I seem to be able to work back on the bars quite a bit more than on the canvas. The canvas seems to have to retain a kind of freshness, whereas the bars can build up a bit of cruddy paint on them and it doesn't seem to bother me so much. Sometimes I'll have to go back and sand them down a little bit to get some of the texture out of it so it doesn't get too much, but they seem to be able to be repainted more, whereas the canvas seems to get very tired and just doesn't look right. It just gets fatigued.

AUPING:

Why do you use water-base paints as opposed to oil-base?

KAUFFMAN:

I, actually, lately have thought about going back and painting some of the newer paintings, the bars in shiny, maybe lacquers or something like that. I really went to a water-based paint to get a kind of nice matte surface because I got so sick of years and years and years of working with—I mean, not sick of working with plastic, but after a while the surface couldn't be anything else but that plastic. And some of the [plastic] pieces I had, I had the front sand-blasted so it would dull it out to a sheen or sand it off. That seemed to work all right, but it wasn't really the nature of the material, you know. After a while, I just got constantly tired of this shiny surface all the time that I was stuck with. I admired some paintings that had flat surfaces, and so I wanted to work with that for a while. Now I think I could do maybe a combination of both: have the bars very shiny and maybe the paint on the canvas dull or something like that. That's another possibility, because I really like lacquer a lot: the way it dries quickly and the kind of color ranges in lacquer. I worked with lacquer for so many years. I mean, all the plastic pieces are painted with lacquer, and lacquer works very well on wood. It's very permanent and hard and stands up very

well. Acrylic is very tough too. But oil paint? I don't know. There might be a time a certain color that I might want in a certain area of canvas that I might want to paint in an oil color. But oil color you have to separate from canvas with a ground. That's one advantage as you probably know, of working with acrylic: you can work right on the canvas. Also I paint from the back a lot* In other words, I'll paint a coat of paint on the front of the canvas, and I'll flip it over on the floor and paint on the back. So a lot of paint seeps through the canvas onto the front. That method of working just comes out of working on plastic because you're always painting on the back, just about, in plastic. It's the natural thing to do. You can paint on the front and the back. So I seem to have carried that over in working on the canvas. In fact, nearly every area is worked from both sides.

AUPING:

How does that affect the canvas? Does that make it a brighter color or more intense?

KAUFFMAN:

No. It just changes the color a different kind of way. You get this kind of seeping through from the back, spots of color kind of bleeding through, and I sort of like that. Sometimes I'll just put clear on the back, coat it with clear, just to kind of give it a strength. After I'm finished, and the canvas is all stapled down in the back, I go back and glue all the edges of the canvas down, and that makes it even that much stronger; that total continuous pressure, I mean, firmness onto the bar makes it very, very solid, which just appeals to me. Also it hangs flatter to the wall; you don't have all this ruffly canvas back there. I mean, it's just sort of an aesthetic thing that I like to do, finish it off that way.

AUPING:

How much do you think about how you want to apply the paint on the surface? How intent are you when you do that: "I want to do it this way"? Or do you just kind of get in there and start doing it?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, sometimes I just get in there and start doing it. Then sometimes I really kind of have a plan, because I've done it maybe a couple of times in that area.

So, I've had to change it. Sometimes the marks have to be a different scale, and you have to kind of blow the scale up. Like on a large painting, if you use little, tiny marks, it just doesn't look right; you might want to blow the mark up. I put it on with brushes sometimes. I scrape it on with sticks sometimes. Some areas can carry themselves being fairly plain, not very activated in terms of brushing, and some areas sort of seem to want to be thicker paint than others. Some areas can be thin with the color. Those things are: very relative. You might try red, and it might be the right color, but it should just be a little bit thicker. I just get the feeling that it doesn't really hold, even though it's the right color. So, I just put a little thicker paint on there. I try to get away with doing as little as I can. In other words, if I can get away with the paint being thin there and the right color, I'll do that, you know, instead of going for the other thing. If the color is right in the painting, if the colors are right and somehow it fits the form, there doesn't seem to have to be a lot else going on, you know. But just flat color areas don't work for me. I think it's got to do with the color more than just paint activity. I'm not very interested in just that. The identity of the color seems important: if it's transparent or opaque or how thick it is; if it seems suited to the scale of the area, its particular area, and to the kind of color it wants to be,

AUPING:

In terms of scale and form, we were talking about this morning how your paintings, recent paintings, have hung so low to the ground. What is the purpose behind that?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think I just want to sort of identify it a bit with the architecture of the space. By sort of getting it onto the floor like that, they seem to relate to the wall in a very nice kind of way, almost like a real window in a wall or something, I rather like that, although some of the smaller pieces seem to be OK sitting up off the floor. This kind of [relates to] a thing about the boundaries of painting, you know: whether you can have a thing that almost reads like an actual part of the wall, like it was almost nailed onto the wall, you know, like a window detail or something, and still have it retain the identity of a painting too. Being close to the floor sort of reinforces that idea, that [it's an] architectural part of the wall. That's the peripheral concern. But a

lot of them seem to have legs on them, as someone pointed out. They're almost like screens or something. People have said to me, "Well, why don't you just set them out in the middle of the room or something? but I don't see them as sitting out in the middle of the room, those particular ones. I may at some time do some that sit out in the middle of the room, but my primary concern wouldn't be with having them read three-dimensionally. I'm not interested in them being like sculpture. I'm just sort of fishing around with these boundaries in terms of painting and their relationships, the internal imagery that the painting has, I think it would be very interesting to make a painting like a screen painting. I mean, after all, the Japanese made screen paintings that were actually physically, three-dimensionally folded, and yet you read them as one continuous painting because you were sitting on the floor at the right height. I think it would be interesting to make a three-dimensional painting that's set out in the room but really read as a painting. That might be kind of an interesting idea. I have some drawings for things like that which I very well might make, but I would really want them to read as paintings, like a screen painting reads as a painting, rather than anything else. You don't think of its identity. It's hard to do with abstract images, you know, to retain the identity of a painting if you have three-dimensional elements. After all, on a screen painting you've got the illusion of landscape or something like that, which really reinforces the illusionary quality of the thing. You know, if a bridge continues through one fold in the screen, you really want to read it as a continuous bridge. Your eye wants to do that. With an abstract element, just a line or something like that, I don't think your eye wants to do it quite as much. So, it's a little harder to do that kind of thing.

AUPING:

The form of your paintings, the actual wood structure: do you think that makes reference to anything? I mean, the actual shapes. You said a lot of times you'll sit at someone's house and just make continuous drawings until you find one you like.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, the things that really appeal to me around, I love lattice work and architectural details, especially before they put all the guck over things. I love shacks and temporary kinds of architectural things. So, if the subject matter

comes from anything, it comes from that. I like that kind of human scale that that kind of architecture has. You really know how big a door is and how big these things are. Although I may play with the scale a little bit, I want it to remain sort of like human scale, maybe slightly larger. I'm interested in human scale, and that kind of architecture has a very human scale for me. In [a] Frank Lloyd Wright house, if you've ever been in one, everything's a little small. It has unusual scale to things. You have to duck into doors, do funny things like that, that really relate to what you're dealing with. Well, in oriental architecture, in teahouses and things like that, you had to crawl in; you had to deal with the space in a very, very direct kind of way. I really like that, as well as a sort of almost casual—the funny thing about some primitive structures: they're very bare and Spartan, almost more so than a steel-and-glass structure. That's kind of hard to explain; but if it's really bare, it looks barer for some reason, more sparse, to me than something that's pure—I think that's kind of hard to explain—because it denotes maybe a kind of poverty or something like that. It seems more barren and more sparse to me than something that [has] slick surfaces and [is] perfectly made. There's an elegant rusticity that I kind of like. I guess that comes from a bit of oriental influence. But even in Mexico you find that: you walk into a room, and it's very barren. The walls may be painted all violet, but there's just a hard-packed dirt floor, You sit down and have a beer, and there's really nothing around, maybe one little painting on the wall, maybe one little crucifix or something. Everything is really stripped for action, [laughter] It almost seems purer to me than a Mies van der Rohe room with a couple of elegant chairs in it. That seems really filled up. He said less was more; and he's right. He wound up with a lot of stuff really. [laughter]

AUPING:

Do you think that the generation of California painters before you has influenced your direction in art at all?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, about the only direct influence of any painter was probably Clyfford Still at one particular, point in my life, in the late fifties, and kind of a j detrimental influence to a certain extent, I looked hard j at his work, and then I started doing some painting with thick paint in it and clawing the paint. The influence

of his scale on me perhaps was good; that's a less obvious kind of thing than [the way] one applies the paint or something like that.

AUPING:

I've heard a number of people mention Richard Diebenkorn in relation to your work.

KAUFFMAN:

I admire his work very much, but I was never really a student of his. I really felt very close to his work until maybe recently. Maybe he has some similar concerns, but it's not like I feel very influenced by his work. He has personally said that he admires my work, and I admire his work. I think his work is very, very good these days. But I don't know what that's in relationship to, maybe some of the lines in his—I don't know. Drawing a line or two?

AUPING:

What exhibition that you've seen in California do you remember that impressed you the most?

KAUFFMAN:

You mean in the early days?

AUPING:

Or anytime. Just since you've been in California.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, that first show was called the "American Vanguard for Paris, 11 which had all the abstract expressionists; it was kind of like the one that really bowled me over. Then later on at UCLA, in the fifties—well, it wasn't actually at UCLA; it was on Wilshire Boulevard in a rented space—there was a large Matisse retrospective, one of the first in the world. It was a beautiful show. I remember that stood out very strongly. I don't know how much influence it had one me, but I certainly remembered it. The first big [Marcel] Duchamp retrospective in Pasadena, which was beautifully done and very memorable. Then there are a lot of exhibitions at private galleries since then, you know. They were in the old Dwan Gallery and Irving [Blum's] gallery. They stand out in my memory. You know, Andy Warhol's first show: I can remember that.

Those sorts of things, people's first shows, you know, the first time I saw some of that work. Those all stand out in my memory, as well as some of the shows by some of the people here. I could probably make a list of fifty or a hundred shows that really stand out in my mind.

AUPING:

What show would you say has impressed you the most, period, whether it be in California, New York, Paris, or wherever?

KAUFFMAN:

That's a hard one. I really don't know. I recently saw in Paris the big [Francis] Picabia show. That was an incredible show. I was really surprised. I mean, I had known his work, but I didn't know quite the range and the quality and the scale of it and just how incredibly important he was as a pioneer of so many ideas. It was a really incredible exhibition. Their way of mounting those things and doing such a thorough job, you really get immersed in the person. They have video tapes of his home, and they have a very elaborate catalog—I'm talking about the French—very elaborate catalog, interviews, and lectures. You get pretty thoroughly immersed in someone's work. They do a good job of that. I don't think we really do that good a job of that. We mount the shows pretty well, but we don't do all the peripheral things, Also we have this terrible way of mounting a beautiful show and just leaving it for six weeks, or something like that. They leave them up all fall or all spring. It seems an incredible waste to me for a museum to have to go to the trouble to mount an incredible show and only have it up six weeks, seven weeks, or something like that. I guess that's because out here particularly [inaudible] they feel that they have to present more. Consequently I've missed some shows because of that kind of thing. [tape recorder turned off.]

AUPING:

Since you're leaving for Paris in a day or two, I thought I might ask you how you [feel] about Paris as a place to live and why you [choose] to spend six months of your year there.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I've done that for the last—well, actually I didn't spend six months there. I spent the summer in New York, and then I spent the rest of the year in Paris. This year I'm going to be spending six or seven months there. I don't know. There are certain things about it, I like being there, I like Paris. There is an awful lot to see there while you're there, not only in terms of contemporary work but in terms of traditional, you know, older work, I like that. Plus, when I'm there, I'm not bothered by—I seem to get caught up here a lot of the time in just running errands. I have my house in Laguna; even though the people that rent it are supposed to take care of it, there's always something to do. Then there's the teaching thing, and I get involved in that a couple of days a week. Then there's a lot of driving you do here. When I get to Paris, it's like there's very little to do besides just eat and work. Or if you want to go out and look at something, it's fine. Where I am, you can do all your errands in about fifteen, twenty minutes. You can run up to the corner and mail a letter, and you go over to buy a little food or something. There just doesn't seem to be those kinds of problems, and I like that. I don't know what I'm going to do about it in the future, but I'd certainly like to simplify certain parts of my life. People here seem to have to get other people to do a lot of these things for them, I don't know whether I can do that. I can't afford that at this point. It might be nice to have somebody run all your errands for you. It sure seems to take up a lot of time,

AUPING:

Do you think living in Paris has affected your work, besides just how much more you produce?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's curious. Before when I lived in other places—I lived in Europe for a while, I lived in New York for a while—I didn't seem to be able to work very well. But now, when I worked last summer in New York and I worked last fall in Paris, perhaps a little bit in terms of the color, but outside of that the work seemed to go right along. There didn't seem to be any problems along those lines. In fact, when I went to New York last summer, I just got to work in a couple of days and turned out a bunch of stuff.

AUPING:

You mentioned the color. Did you notice a change of color both in New York and Paris?

KAUFFMAN:

A little bit. The paintings were a little darker in New York, a lot of browns and stuff. There was a bright color here or there. The ones in Paris were a little darker, but I'm not so sure that wouldn't have happened anyway, because some of the paintings here were a little bit darker for a. while. Now they seem to have gotten brighter in color again, I don't even know whether that has all that much to do with the environment I was in there as it was—maybe part of it was going on in my head and what I was thinking about in terms of painting. Paris is a very light and airy kind of place. It's got those neat colors in the sky. There are lots of grays in the buildings and kind of rich colors and things, It's certainly not dismal, and neither is New York really: beautiful blue sky on certain days, buildings are painted all these neat kind of decaying reds and colors like that. I think you really see a lot of times in environments really what you're looking for. Being from here, I really look for those things in other places. [laughter] You carry your environment along in your head a lot. Maybe if I was there for a long, long time, it might slowly seep—you know, certain kinds of things I wouldn't do, but I don't know,

AUPING:

Do you feel the fact that Paris has really been a painters' town and New York has been a painters' town, more than Southern California has, has had any effect on your going there?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, perhaps. Maybe I just kind of like the feeling of discovering those kinds of roots in a very intimate way. After all, you can go out and really look at a lot of work at a given time. In Paris there are usually several big, major retrospectives and also a lot of contemporary work all at the same time. It's nice to have that around. If you want to go out and look at a big Leger, you can, or Matisse or something like that. There's that available as well as older things, I like the life there. I like New York too, but New York, I think, over a period of time kind of wears you down, whereas I really don't feel that about Paris.

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (January 24, 1977)

AUPING:

So, how was Paris? Why don't we talk about Paris first?

KAUFFMAN:

All right. I enjoyed being there. There were certain times when I got into a weird state of mind, but all in all I'd say it was very good. I got a lot of work done,

AUPING:

You did?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, up until October I worked very hard as soon as I got there. And I think that the work I did there was all along the same lines. But it changed. There were some changes, and now the changes are continuing. And then I had the show in October, at Galerie Darthea Speyer [October 5 - 30, 1976].

AUPING:

Was that of all the new work that you produced there?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, 'cause I was there a year ago this fall, and then I was there for a month last year in March. I was there almost all last year. I worked very well there. Of course, I mean, I just had a studio; there wasn't lots of things to do. For a while there I thought of lots of errands to do when I first got there, all little things' to get sort of cozied in. Then I ran out of errands to do. Then there wasn't anything else to do but to work. Here you can always think of an errand to do or something to do besides just work. Some people are able to discipline themselves so they don't have to deal with those sorts of everyday kind of things. And then it was strange: being there for a total of seven months, a lot of things, ideas I think I had about things that I really wasn't all that conscious of, started coming to the surface in a way, and then they would sort of drift off. A lot of my ideas that I had about certain things just sort of—I wouldn't say they crystallized—there are just sort of certain prejudices maybe I had or

something just sort of dropped away, because I just wasn't around the art scene, even in a peripheral sort of way. I was around a different art scene, and I took that in a very different kind of way.

AUPING:

What were some of those ideas that you thought about, for instance?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's hard to really put them into words.

AUPING:

Did they deal with your painting specifically or other people's art or your attitude about art in general or those kinds of ideas?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, that's right. I think when you're living just here, you tend to have a more immediate view of what's going on. You tend to think that everything that's happened in art that's really important is going on in the last few years. And it's not tradition that you confront there so much as—I guess it's tradition in a way, but it's just the idea that all this art's been around for so long,

AUPING:

Kind of an historical recharge in a way.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it wasn't that. I mean, certainly there were a lot of paintings to enjoy, their older work, that I've known about, that I've seen for a lot of years, going back to the Louvre and to the impressionist museum and to all that sort of thing. A lot of artists go there [to Paris], and they never go to any museums. They never really think about that stuff very much. So, I don't know whether I have a more traditional attitude or not, I don't know what it is. [laughter] But a lot of concerns and maybe prejudices about contemporary art that I had I just don't think I have anymore. Not that I went to any effort to have any other kind of an attitude, it's just that the urgency of it just doesn't seem all that interesting to me. And I don't know what that means really. And also the idea that for so long the United States—when I was growing up—was really the leader in painting in the world—perhaps in a lot of the other visual arts,

not so much in films and music I suppose—but really pretty clearly the leader in that sort of thing. And everybody's caught up in that, and that's pretty obvious.

AUPING:

And when you go to Europe—

KAUFFMAN:

And you see that many shows. Maybe they have not caught up completely or in terms of numbers of people doing things, but there are people in a lot of different countries doing stuff that's contemporaneous with—there is not as much of a lag time as there used to be; they're pretty much doing similar things. I saw a show of young painters from Portugal—of course, that was odd, you know—but most of the influences were from England, sort of pop art and so forth, and then there were other things, and then there were a few conceptual things. But there was this exhibition of—there's a school outside of Marseilles (I can't remember the name); it's an art school, very large—of the student work and so forth, and they're about the same kinds of things that they'd be up to at Irvine. At the Musee d'Art de Ville de Paris, which is the mirror image of the Musee d'Art Moderne, which has just sort of closed up, because they're moving everything over to Beaubourg, the new big museum there: the Museum of the City of Paris is a huge, kind of odd building with kind of clumsy space and stuff; they have a small, but interesting permanent collection, the most interesting things being the big mural works done by [Robert] Delaunay and stuff, the real big stuff. And then they have a small collection of cubists and post-cubism. But they have all these contemporary exhibitions running all the time, like five or six running all the time, big exhibitions: Germans and Italians and groups and stuff. And I didn't go there all the time and see everything; they would change it every three weeks or four weeks. And now Beaubourg is just going to be an incredible sort of—you know, it's a big cultural center. It's going to be a big mishmash. The idea of putting music and cinema and all these different kinds of stuff under one roof is kind of a crazy idea. Plus the building is really—I walked by there every few days—because I lived right near there, about five blocks away—and watched it go up. It looks like a big boat coming at you a long way away.

AUPING:

When you go out and, say, visit galleries and just hang out in Paris, do you tend to get, in terms of your work and trying to feed your sensibilities, do you tend to get more turned on by the contemporary paintings, or do you tend to draw more information from the historical paintings, say, in the Louvre?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I would say mostly just from the environment to a certain extent. I sort of like the way Paris looks. Of course, I like the way Mexico looks. I like old walls and funny, different kinds of faded colors and so forth. I like the light in Paris a lot; the light's really terrific. It's a dull light. I mean, it's sort of filtered very evenly. I relate to that. I don't know, it's not similar to Southern California, it's very different, but there's something about it that reminds me. There's a glare here, but there isn't a glare there. But I don't know, there's something about the light I really like a lot. Then, by historical things, because you do see a lot of historical shows—and there were an awful lot when I was there—plus there are the museums. You go look at the stuff, and after about the fifteenth time you see it, the really good things start standing out. The confusion sort of settles, and you just really start getting interested in maybe one or two people's work and you change your mind about that, and so forth. I constantly reevaluate what I think about this or that painter. Also there were a few contemporary shows that were very interesting in private galleries. Probably the best painting show was paintings on paper, on-the-wall paintings, was by an Italian, Antonio Dias? he's fairly well known, I thought that was a terrific show in a little gallery off the Rue de Seine. But most of the contemporary shows, you know, you had either heard of the people or they were in New York or were something I was really already informed about and wasn't all that excited about seeing there.

AUPING:

You mentioned that your work had changed a little bit but [was] still following the same lines. What were some of the things that changed or maybe were refined or whatever?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think because I had just time, and I stopped thinking about kind of—well, I was doing that before with the paintings—kind of just making up a

painting and sort of pushing it to its finish as a kind of a process. I would just sort of sit here and put a spot of color here and there on the painting instead of having it sort of, like, paint the bars and then—You know, more of a systematic way of going about. Although I could make changes on the other, on the pieces with the wooden bars: take the canvas off and so forth. But by and large I kind of pushed them in a systematic way to their conclusion. The bar paintings I made in Paris: they gradually got away from that. They were more loosely painted. I would just sit there and adjust the color and that sort of thing. I can show you pictures, black-and-whites. Unfortunately I haven't gotten the slides back. Then the last painting I did, I started painting some of the bars on the painting instead of having actual bars. I had both: I had real bars and then bars that were just painted on.

AUPING:

You mean painted on the canvas that looked like the bars?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. So when you stood back about eight—you can get back about eight feet—it's pretty tough to tell the real bar from the painted bar.

AUPING:

I see.

KAUFFMAN:

I painted the other bars as if they could kind of cancel themselves out, too, to look more like part of the painting.

AUPING:

Did the relationship between canvas and wood support change when you were in Paris at all?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I think to a certain extent. I mean, my priorities are almost like becoming more what the image is than an idea about a physical structural thing, The images haven't changed all that much. It's just that I'm feeling more urgency about getting the images out. Maybe I just don't want to go through making all those bars. Now, I don't know what's going to really happen, I'm going to

try just painting on flat canvases, and then I'm going to try some more like I did there where there are just some bars and then some things that are painted on.

AUPING:

But definitely you seem to be leaning towards more canvas at this point.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, they're not as obviously shaped; they're mostly just a big rectangle. All the stuff's kind of going on inside the thing, as the watercolor is kind of empty—you know, these shapes inside of it. Also there's kind of a bit more divided-up environment, like the right sides, I mean, there's almost like a shadow on the sort of thing, like a shelf on the top. But, then, it's a different space in the area on the left, right? I don't know, I mean, I like those things very much. And as I did the watercolors, I finally got some watercolors that came almost out to the edge; so that seemed to solve—most of them were always isolated as a little piece on a big piece of paper, but those take up the whole thing pretty much. I don't know. So, it will sort of be interesting to see what happens. Also I think, looking at the things that interest me most, the things that interest me most are really oriental art; and I like a lot of Western painting, but I really prefer oriental paintings to almost anything—plus some early painting, you know, medieval painting. So, I went to Barcelona and resaw a lot of Catalan paintings that—

AUPING:

The Catalan—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, yes, in northern Spain in the Pyrenees it's called Catalan. I mean, that's the area. And during the eighth and ninth century, tenth century, there were Romanesque churches built all up in the mountains. They're really up there. A few painters came from Italy, plus there were some Spanish painters. The most outstanding work was done by—I have a postcard in the other room—by an Italian. It's incredible stuff.

AUPING:

What did it look like in terms of imagery and things

KAUFFMAN:

Well, you know, religious paintings, frescoes on walls. [tape recorder turned off] I went to a lot of churches and saw lots of stained-glass windows. I traveled around France a bit. One trip, when Tony [DeLap] came over, we went down along the west coast and then inland. Kathy and I came back on the train, and then he and Kathy DeLap went on and saw one of the cave paintings. I wish I could go see Lascaux, but I guess it's pretty much impossible to get in. But he was very impressed by the cave paintings, and I would like to see them. Then, we took another trip to Barcelona and to Ibiza. But most of the time I was in Paris. Ninety-five percent of the time.

AUPING:

The move towards the pictorial: it seems like these paintings are moving more pictorial than—like we were talking last time, your paintings, you were very interested in the literalness of the painting, you know, sort of trying to push those boundaries a bit in terms of how far you can take a painting in terms of the literal. Is there anything that kind of keyed you back to the pictorial, do you think? Or were you moving that way all the time?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I almost get a feeling from the kinds of painting work I like that it's not exactly pictorial. It's a hard distinction to make between something that's pictorial like a photograph and pictorial like a very structured painting. I think it's very different—even if I got back to just painting on something flat—for me to paint a big painting concerned with those kinds of concerns that I've always had and for someone who's not concerned with those things to make a painting. I always think there have been painters around who have been really preoccupied by all that stuff, literalness of their painting. There are literal elements in a lot of medieval paintings, especially on the panels and things. You know, they have real panels stuck in there; I mean, real things that divide things up. And on stained glass, they had to deal with sort of literalness because they just had to practically support the glass in a practical sort of way. I find all those kinds of disciplines really interesting. And I don't think that's going to go away. Even though the things become completely, so-called, pictorial, I'll probably always have this preoccupation with structure and just what that is about.

AUPING:

That's real interesting that you talk about stained-glass windows. I mean, that seems like an obvious correlation, even before you went to France and you were making these, that I never had thought of.

KAUFFMAN:

I've always really enjoyed that. The windows, particularly at Chartres. Of course, I haven't seen all the cathedrals. I particularly like them at Chartres. I haven't been to some of the places where they have the earlier work, the earlier windows. Then at Bourges, which is in the south of the Loire Valley—and I even got to sort of like some of the later ones—at Bourges the later ones are just a whole new revelation. Most of the time you see later, Renaissance windows, and they're not very interesting. But the ones at Bourges are really beautifully done. Then I got to like a whole other range of windows too: quiet ones and stuff that just don't have much of anything in them. At Notre Dame, on the north aisle and south aisle, there's lots of them. The rose windows at Notre Dame: there's almost too much purple in them for me; they're too elegant. Then, the modern windows where they filled in, that were damaged, or destroyed, I guess, in the war: they just don't work at all, It's interesting to see an attempt in a contemporary stained-glass window, and they don't really know very much about it. It just doesn't work. It doesn't read in the space. I imagine there's a few that I haven't really seen that might read well, but they don't read well in the cathedral at all. Of course, if Matisse did one or something, that might be a whole—in a big cathedral instead of a small chapel—that might be a whole different thing. But it's very hard for those big, funny shapes to read right,

AUPING:

Do you consider those windows, in a sense, paintings or—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, they're pictorial. They're like, I guess, sort of like painting, I don't think of them in quite the same terms. Of course, my idea of what painting is, is sort of complicated. [laughter] I worry about it a lot, let's put it that way. I think a lot of painters don't have any trouble with that; it's what they're going to paint,

and they assume certain pictorial ideas. But I worry about it. Maybe I'll stop worrying about it someday, [laughter]

AUPING:

How does that dialectic take shape?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I worry about the literalness as compared to what a pictorial thing is, and all that sort of thing.

AUPING:

Do you think much about patterning? The reason I ask is that there seems to be a renewed interest over the last five years in decorative painting and in patterning. You know, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Kushner, a renewed interest in Matisse also it seems, a reevaluation of Matisse.

KAUFFMAN:

I've always been interested in Matisse. He's always been my favorite twentieth-century painter. I certainly have other painters that I like a lot and I have learned more about, but he has always been my favorite painter. But I could never—it's funny—I could never really steal anything directly from Matisse as much as I could other painters. It just doesn't seem to be very usable to me, although, you know, he's very much of a favorite of mine. As far as decorative paintings go, I don't know, I really don't know. That's really hard in my mind to know what's happening. [laughter] You mean, much like an even pattern?

AUPING:

A pattern, a repetition of patterns, but then there seems to be, even in your paintings, it's almost as if a pattern begins to develop but then breaks down, a kind of complexity of pattern. How complex can you make a pattern and still have it read as a total unit?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think of them really as sort of an architectural kind of thing. I'm starting to include other things in there, things that have other associations to me.

AUPING:

For instance?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, like the thing down in the lower left-hand corner in this watercolor. It's a palette, and that's studio painting, but there's not much in there. There's a palette and a sort of a shelf up in there, and the other stuff, I don't know quite what it is. But it's all made out of the same stuff, right? It's all made out of these sticklike things. So, I don't know. I mean, I don't know how much I can get in there and still tolerate it. That's another problem that I'm facing right now. What can I paint in the painting and make it out of these basic units, these basic, architectural kind of units. What could I tolerate in the painting? I mean, could I paint a dog in there? I mean, those things are pretty abstract. The palette, unless I told you it was a palette, you probably wouldn't know it was a palette.

AUPING:

Right.

KAUFFMAN:

If I call it a studio, even then I don't think—it might remind somebody of a broken-up interior of some kind, but that's about it. But I just wonder if I can get away with. that, or what. I don't know. Plus shadows interest me a lot right now. You see, in that watercolor there's one shadow that goes across—I mean, it's not painted in the color of a shadow—but it sort of goes across, up there on the shelf? Now, in some of the other watercolors there's even more shadows. They're all cast from different light sources. There's no one light source. They're not really logical. Shadows interest me a lot. I don't know whether I can use those. I don't know. Shadows in paintings are real Western. There are hardly any shadows in Eastern painting. It's the one division, if there's one incredible division between Eastern and Western paintings, the idea that—I don't know how to say it real well—chiaroscuro exists in Western painting where it doesn't much exist in oriental art. There are exceptions, but there's not really an emphasis on it. And there aren't many shadows in contemporary art, a few. Cubism never gave up shading, you know, shading in a non-traditional sense. But they sort of interest me, Now, they've always

interested me in terms of color shadows; my plastic pieces either made literal shadows or colored shadows, and I always dealt with that. And I sort of think of playing with the idea of just painting them in there, but I don't know whether I can get away with it. If there's anything I'm sort of thinking about now in terms of painting it's what I can just sort of add. But I've been thinking that way for a while, whether I could put texture in paintings, I've tried various things out. You know, "get away with" just as far as my own sensibility goes, that's all, what I can sort of tolerate. [laughter] It's sort of a game with me, a game or something, but it's sort of a serious game.

AUPING:

Do you find yourself wanting to put more imagery into your paintings?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's a curious idea, see, for me. I may wind up just emptying it all out, but it's an idea for me and something to try. My work keeps changing a lot, and I don't know whether that's the most desirable thing, but it sure seems to do that. Lately I've said to myself, I'm just going to stick with making those things on bars and so forth and so on, and then all of a sudden all the bars take on another line only in a couple of years. So, I kind of let the work take me where it wants to go to a certain extent, after I've made certain decisions. Once you decide that maybe painting's OK, then you can ask yourself a whole bunch of questions, if you really try to think of it without a lot of assumed prejudices. Now, maybe the reason I would reject any subject matter in a painting is because the scale was wrong or it just didn't work in the kind of world I wanted to evoke, or something like that. I think there are very few people in contemporary art that are able to—they either seem to paint so-called (in quotes) "figurative" art or "nonobjective" art. There doesn't seem to be a happy melding ground between them. I don't know whether it's possible anymore. I mean, Leger never had any trouble with it, or Picasso, but maybe that's just a different cultural thing. I can't think of any American paintings. When Diebenkorn was painting figurative paintings, they were figurative, obviously figurative, and when he painted the abstract things, he seemed to think about it as two different things, whereas I don't really think somebody like Leger really thought about them as two different things. And one wonders if it's necessary. De Kooning, I guess, is a strange mixture of abstract and

figurative art, one thing kind of flips, and it becomes another thing. Most of them are based on, I guess, except for a very brief period there in the big gestural paintings in the late fifties and early sixties, all of them really had subject in them. But he's in that kind of world where there's a flip over between what's abstract—a big funny shape always flips into being a big thigh or something. But that intrigues me a bit. I don't know how serious I am about that. There are other priorities before that.

AUPING:

In terms of the newest paintings, have you done much thinking about the color?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, yes. Those are pretty much on the white with the color around the edge of the bars. I like to paint in the cracks.

AUPING:

Oh, I was wondering about that.

KAUFFMAN:

Those are collaged. You can't see it's collaged with paper., Then I sort of paint on the edges and the cracks. That's where I found a lot of the paint going on the ones I did in Europe, would go between the bar and where the canvas was. There's this crack in there, and I seemed to be preoccupied with painting in there, rather than on the surface, out in the middle or somewhere. I just seemed to be obsessed with painting on the cracks there and bringing out the form. Now, you know, I have a few planned where I'll make the thing, maybe for starters, one overall color? instead of white it will be some color, and then I'll start painting in the cracks again. [laughter] There are lots of buildings and old store fronts and stuff in France where they spackle up the cracks and stuff, and it's on an irregular surface, and they just sort of spackle where the cracks are over one color and then they prime it, you know, and they're mostly in cracks along—what I mean by cracks, where the moldings are, you know, moldings, they paint the edges of the moldings and stuff. I really liked the way all that looked. I went around and looked at a lot of those buildings really hard. Something about painting somewhere that's physically just sort of a

place to put it. Like, I'm trying a small canvas out there; [it] is an experiment. The bars and stuff are collaged canvas on there so there's a physical edge there. It's not much of a visible thing, but it's a physical edge where the paint just kind of runs up and stops, like a crack. So that's the literalness. I like the idea of just painting in some physical area that just sort of stops the paint.

AUPING:

Do you apply that paint then with the brush or with a palette [knife]?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, it's all put on with a brush.

AUPING:

The colors in these watercolors that I'm looking at now on your wall here: they look much brighter, pastel—almost happier looking. That sounds like a dumb thing to say.

KAUFFMAN:

These are the last ones. Most of the paintings I did in Paris were sort of on the dull side, but lighter in value. I gave up blacks, a lot of black. I think it's just the way I want it to look rather than some sort of mood. Maybe there's some sort of mood change, I don't know. I still seem to worry about things as much as ever. Maybe I'm happier these days, [laughter] [tape recorder turned off] I like doing the watercolors too; so I'm just going to keep doing those. The first time I've ever been able to make a watercolor that covers the whole piece of paper [laughter] that looks OK. They're watercolors too, which means that they're all transparent colors pretty much, which I've always wanted to do too.

AUPING:

Yes, the paintings seem to be getting much more complex in their reading, in terms of—illusionism seems to be becoming a more central part of it,

KAUFFMAN:

Most of the other paintings are sort of what I might—there's kind of a hangover from one big gestural statement. Even in a complex one like this one, it's still got all one big slope to the whole thing and reads kind of like a one-gesture sort of thing. Whereas, like, that's this divided-up space (where

there's one reading in one space and one reading in another) and that, because there's an image in the space, you're forced to read the space in a different kind of way: that's what I hoped to do in here, where it was hard for your eye to get because of the bars and stuff, go from one area to another. In other words, I wanted to make it a sort of difficult passage. You still get an overall reading of it very easily, and I don't think in these you do very much. In other words, I like that breaking up of space; you know, there's no really unified space to the thing. I mean, I don't know how you see it, but—

AUPING:

No, I do see that, yes.

KAUFFMAN:

I sort of like that. And I think that's directly influenced by oriental art.

AUPING:

In what ways? How do you—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, from those things: where you move from room to room in the genre screens. Of course, the space is much different. In like the scroll paintings, it's more complex, the idea of how the things are seen from different viewpoints in all the same painting. It all looks like it's the same space, but it's really not; it's more complex.

AUPING:

We were talking about how the newer ones are getting closer to being more compartmentalized, harder to read as a whole unit. And yet it's funny, because they're painted more as a whole unit than they were before.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, maybe you've got a point there. That's the reason I feel I have to do a simpler thing as far as constructing it and painting it, because the other stuff is getting more complex. I don't know.

AUPING:

What do you think caused the more loose paint handling. I mean, now you're painting all over.

KAUFFMAN:

I just wanted to get the color right. I mean, I adjusted the color before in fairly large areas by just, if it didn't work out, I took the area off and put it back on. It became so complex that I just didn't do that anymore. I was painting on the bars and on the canvas all at the same time, and I just really couldn't deal with it in that sort of concrete kind of way. With the plastic pieces and with a lot of—I mean, with the work of that period, I really got into this idea of making art as if you kind of make it in this kind of direct way, where you sort of just make it, and then maybe you pick out the good ones later, or something like that, this sort of process. That was fairly ingrained in me. I mean, after all, when you do a piece and you form it and you form a number of the same image and then you paint it different ways, you look at it afterwards, the execution, or along the way to a certain extent, but you can't do a lot of changing. I think [for] a lot of people that's become a cliche of contemporary painting, where you get set up in a way, and then you kind of make something, and then you make all these things, and then maybe you pick out the good ones and the bad ones. But it's a process of making the thing that's really—It produces a product really* You've got a product at the end. I've just gotten so involved with changing the thing along the way, or something like that. The process is not that clearly—I mean, there's not much to the process; it's just painting. Right? I mean, there's making a few bars and so forth and so on. But I'm not making the bars, then painting the bars, and then putting a canvas on, then changing the color, then taking the canvas off as much as I did. I mean, I do it a little bit. The last painting I didn't take the canvas off at all; I just painted it.

AUPING:

And reworked it a lot? In other words, if you didn't like the color then, instead of taking the whole thing apart, you would just put in more paint.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I didn't put the color all on in such a way that I just couldn't paint over it or something. I just didn't paint a big area. I just sort of went at it in a more

tentative sort of way. I put a spot here and put a spot there. More like, I guess, how some people paint, but it's not that sort of logical buildup. Really the logical process, buildup, is a more traditional way of working in terms of painting. It's more like, like a correct traditional—it's like Ingres or something. See, the draftsmanship came first, and the shading came second, and then color came third. And that's really a process. You get set up, and you don't make any mistakes along the way, and the final thing sort of adds up. That's OK. I mean, that's fine. Then, there's the other kind of painting, which is just more—I don't know whether it's more spontaneous—it's just open to change further along the way. I guess I'm still involved in setting it up to a certain extent. I mean, my goodness, after all,. I glue those bars on, and the composition is set. I mean, I can't make changes, but it's sort of set. But the way I paint it certainly isn't predestined, where the color's going to go and all that. I'm not doing it quite as indirect. This is all pretty direct: I'm looking at it while I'm doing it. I'm not working from the back as much. I don't know which is accident and which isn't, though. And when you say, "Oh, I want a little green here," and you put some green here, is that any less of an accident than when you turn it on the back, and you smear some paint on it, and it comes through, and you say, "Oh, I like it there"? I don't know. I mean, that's sort of. a funny question.

AUPING:

You were saying at one time you would like to get into doing a large painting again.

KAUFFMAN:

That's the next thing I want to do: I'm going to try painting like this, large.

AUPING:

What is large, then, are we talking about?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, eight feet or something like that, so I could see what it looks like. I think of these, all these watercolors and small things as sort of sketches for big—it's not that big. That last one I made of the bar paintings, that's over ten feet. That's a little big to me for some reason. So I'd like to find a good size. I think

most artists that work large, unless they make a big, mural-sized painting once in a while, find a sort of nice size for them to work in, or several sizes, that seems to be sort of maximum. Although, two of the bar series I did were long paintings, I would like to do horizontal paintings too. I think if I did a really large painting, it would have a tendency to be horizontal. But I don't know. I just don't have any idea about that. But I'd like to find sort of medium-sized—Does it have to be 90 inches or 110? Somewhere around in there, I would like to find a sort of convenient size.

AUPING:

I was reading over some of our transcripts from other tapes, and we were talking about the bubbles, and you said it was funny how the bubbles weren't that large but they filled the room, and they filled the space a lot, and you really liked that quality a lot.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, that's always been a preoccupation of mine. I've always wondered why painting, even a small painting or a medium-sized painting, even though it didn't have color in it, very much color in it, why it really read so incredibly, why one painting really was dominating. And I have never come up with a real good answer. Just because it was very good? Or why? I mean, but why certain paintings just sort of seem to just dominate things. It's not because they're bright or any of those kinds of things. Of course, seeing something that's three-dimensional has a tendency to just stick out, and that's true, but other kinds of things really read very strongly. Egyptian art tends to read, structurally, incredibly strong, even small things. Maybe it's flatness to a certain extent, but then you get other things, like some Dutch paintings that are very small, and, God, you can read them from a mile away. I think it's clarity or something, I'm not sure.

AUPING:

When you hang these, do you like a lot of white space around the paintings, or is that of any importance anymore, like it was say in the '60s with the bubble pieces, which floated?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, a lot of the bar pieces have pretty much had to be hung on a white wall because there were holes in them. Now, the holes are getting all filled up. On that last painting you saw, there [aren't] any more holes. So, it's not as critical. It's nice to see a painting on a white wall, but in Paris there was a wall that wasn't white, it was sort of a dark brown. We had to hang one of the paintings with the holes in it, and it didn't seem to bother me all that much. I think you can do two things. You can get so involved with the environment that that's what you have to do, is sort of deal with the environment. That's one extreme. And then there's the other extreme, and that's put a big, heavy frame on a painting, so you don't have to have the environment interfere with the painting at all, and it becomes a world unto itself. Now, just where I want to draw the line there I'm not quite sure, but I certainly, as I think I said before, found it an inconvenience to—[There] was one time the environment was very much of an interest, and special lighting. I found that as time went on that was an intrusion onto what I wanted to do. Rather than the thing I wanted to deal with, it was something I didn't want to deal with. And, so the less I can deal with that, maybe the better. Although it's still a concern to a certain extent.

AUPING:

The newer paintings: I noticed there doesn't seem to be as much scratching on the surface.

KAUFFMAN:

You mean the graffiti type of thing?

AUPING:

Yes, the graffiti and—what?—the nail marks and the quill pen marks and things like that.

KAUFFMAN:

You mean sort of textural things?

AUPING:

Textural things.

KAUFFMAN:

I don't think I'm concerned with the immediacy of all the paint. I think the paint had to be that kind of immediate when it had to deal with the bars. I'm painting in a different way now and application just sort of put on in the cracks. But I don't know what will happen, I don't seem to be as concerned with paint as the thick stuff as much as I was in some of them. Although most of them are pretty thin. But I think some of the areas just had to have some body to them to equal out the bars, I mean, the feel for the bars. But it hasn't been an also conscious effort of mine to sort of weed out traces of abstract expressionism in my paintings, because when I went back to painting, that was my real tradition, was abstract expressionism in painting. I mean, it was a reaction against making something real slick, you know, because of the plastic things. But when I sort of took up painting on the bars again, that was my hangover, was abstract expression. And there are certain reminiscences in the bar paintings of a bit of that; I don't think it's all that much, sort of a common language. I kind of want to weed that out. I don't want those kind of emotional overtones in the paintings. I mean, I'm always probably going to have those influences, but I just kind of want to get rid of that stuff. I don't know how successful I've been or not though., I mean, I keep asking, people, or I ask Kathy, "Does that remind you of an abstract expressionist painting?" [laughter] Most of the time it isn't, but I worry about that, especially as I go back more into painting, 'cause I don't really want that kind of hangover. Not that a little bit here and there—I mean, something's always going to remind me a little bit of something. But I mean, a heavy dose of that I don't really want very much. Is that sort of what you meant?

AUPING:

Yes, it is. It is.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, like within this painting, there's a little bit—one could say these kinds of marks, and this kind of paint application and so on and so forth—whereas in these it's hard, isn't it?

AUPING:

Right.

KAUFFMAN:

It's harder. Yes.

AUPING:

Lines and forms are becoming more geometric, I think. Don't you?

KAUFFMAN:

I don't know.

AUPING:

The human element is there, but it is underplayed or, at least, balanced with geometic, abstract forms, whereas in the earlier things, the human element, the scratching, was very evident.

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I see what you mean.

AUPING:

Well, I thought we'd also talk today a little bit about—since I'm kind of at an impasse on these right now until I can think of something else—talk about some old acquaintances in the art world and things, sort of to round the tape off—

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. OK.

AUPING:

—basically the Ferus crew and all of those people, which we really didn't get into too much; we just sort of skimmed over it. I thought we'd talk maybe a little bit, first, about Felix Landau and your relationship with him: how you felt about him, and what you knew about him.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, he was in partners with Orrel P. Reed at the time, was still a print dealer in Los Angeles, very good print dealer. They were partners at the time. And they saw a painting of mine at the county fair, when I was still in architecture school. The county fair show, the L.A. county fair show used to be an important show, big, invitational, and juried show. Everybody submitted. I

mean, you know, Rico Lebrun—It was one of the major shows. That and the L.A. County show, the big annual they used to have at the L.A. County Museum when it was down at Exposition Park, were the big exhibitions. Maybe it wasn't quite as important as that; but it was, it was a big, important exhibition. They had a lot of space. So, I did these paintings during the summer when I wasn't in architecture school. I submitted it, and it got in. The early work was sort of Paul Kleeish like, only a little larger. I don't know whether you've ever seen them or not.

AUPING:

Yes, I have, I think.

KAUFFMAN:

This is a big, red one with sort of three oval things in it, with sort of a sunlike thing over it. It was OK. They [Landau and Reed]; phoned me up and asked me if I wanted to show some paintings there. I said OK, and I showed a few, and they sold one, and we had a relationship for a while. It was strange because they put expensive frames on them and charged me for the frames.

AUPING:

They charged you for the frames?

KAUFFMAN:

They'd include that in [inaudible]. I'd sell these paintings, and I'd wind up getting hardly anything out of the painting. [laughter] Not that they went for all that much, but there was this expensive frame, and Felix would say, "Well, that's the reason it sold, because it had this great frame on it." Maybe they were right, I don't know. But some of the better ones—I still have a few—have big mattes on them, you know. Some of them were done on cardboard and lots of chalk. They framed them in glass. Then I sort of switched from there to UCLA, and our relationship was off and on. Then, of course, my style changed a lot. I started experimenting around with a lot of different kinds of things. I was using white and black enamel; there was a bunch of paintings with white and black enamel of these big stick figures. I don't think I have any paintings left, but I have some photographs, and I have some prints. They remind me a lot of my new work. [laughter]

AUPING:

Oh, really?

KAUFFMAN:

In a funny kind of way. They're just stick figures. Everything's made out of sticks, and they're stick figures—

AUPING:

When were those done about?

KAUFFMAN:

—but they're symbolic kind of things. 1952. Like, the man's like that, and the woman's like that, kind of, you know, with legs, you know, like biological symbols for this and that, and it was sort of a sign. But they were all painted like Gottlieb, or something, with these kind of big, enamel brush marks, and they were fairly large, I don't know what Reed thought, but Felix didn't like those at all.. I had a one-man show—and I'm trying to remember when it was: '52 (I could look in my biography), it was in '52, '51 or '52—half the show was those things and half the show was the older things. It was made very clear to me that the old things were fine, but the new things just weren't—Felix wasn't interested in handling those things. So, after that I didn't really have any relationship with a gallery again until the old Ferus.

AUPING:

Was Felix Landau a very respected dealer in the community at that time? Or what was his status?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, he was, but my relationship with—I always thought he was really just a hustler. But he was OK. He showed good things there. That's where I saw, you know, some decent art, there and Prank Perls. But there was always that sort of hustler edge, you know? it reminded me of an Armenian carpet salesman. You know, Felix lives in Italy now, and he still reminds me of that kind of a guy. He's a real aggressive kind of guy. Apparently, according to Tony, there's not a young girl safe in his city, you know, or his town. He's quite a character, I was just a naive, young, idealistic kid about all that stuff. It was probably a good

first lesson for me. So the way I came into the gallery situation after that was with friends and in much less of a threatening kind of professional situation. But a lot of people I know had dealings with him over the years. It's always been strange.

AUPING:

Any interesting stories you could tell me? Mythical?

KAUFFMAN:

Just those things. You know, I've always remained friendly with him. I don't know what Bob Irwin could tell you about him? he handled Irwin's work for a while. He used to handle Tony DeLap's work, and, of course, he was John McLaughlin's dealer for a long time and steadily showed his work right along. He took risks up to a certain point, and then after that, like anybody else, he just didn't want to deal with it. I guess he just thought my stuff was cuckoo. I showed Paul Kan tor some work one time. I thought that was going to be in— because Diebenkorn had his first one-man show there, I don't know whether it was his first one-man show, but I think in a commercial gallery it was. He used to be on Beverly Boulevard, had a neat space. I showed him some of my work,

AUPING:

What was that like, when you showed him your work?

KAUFFMAN:

I think I showed him a bunch of different kinds of things; it was probably a mistake. He probably didn't think I had a clear idea of where I was going. He just sort of treated me like some young kid. So, I called it quits at all that stuff, [laughter]

AUPING:

You shared a studio with Ed Moses and Robert Irwin, right? On Sawtelle Boulevard?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, it's a little more complicated than just that. Oh, let's see, there was one building there on Sawtelle it's an. old building. There were several old, frame buildings, neat, old buildings. We rented one studio. My mind is a little foggy

at the moment as to just who rented if first, but I—I'm not sure whether I rented it first, or Ed rented it and then I shared it, but a lot of people were in and out of that place over a number of years—and in that neighborhood. Then, there was a building down at the corner of Santa Monica and Sawtelle, the second floor, which had sort of apartments, smaller places in it, and it had a market under it. I think that building's still there. We got friendly with that owner, and I don't remember whether it was the same guy that owned the two buildings or not. I'm trying to think of his name. I just can't remember his name. But a friend of mine, Les Carr, lived in the building up there. Ed Moses had a studio up there. I had a studio for a while in this other building, in another room, and then, when I came back from Europe in '61, I shared a studio with Ed, and then Ed moved out to a larger studio. That was in that building on Santa Monica. Now, in the other building, let's see, I was in there, and Ed was in there and lived in the back for a while, Then we gave it up for a period of time, and Wally Berman had his press in there with Bob Alexander. I can't remember if it was in-between or not. Then a friend of mine, Allen Lynch, shared it with Bob Irwin, and I shared it with Bob Irwin. And then Walter was involved, Walter Hopps was involved in keeping—He always wanted to keep spaces, [laughter] keep these places and so forth. I think he helped with the rent while Semina was published there, Wally Berman's poetry. It was a press. I don't remember the name of the press. We did some of the printing for my first announcement for my first show at the old Ferus. We did it on the press there in that old building. And we had some terrific parties. Ed has this damned dog, this pit bull terrier—I don't think that was Rafe, I don't know whether that was Rafe or not—but I remember it had a case of fleas, and fleas were all over the place. Wally was living in the back and everything, and the health department came around and made him drag everything out into the backyard. It was really a grim scene. We were booing. So, there was a strange thing, and it went on for quite a while.

AUPING:

Who came to all the parties, like, art community?

KAUFFMAN:

Friends, yes. [tape recorder turned off]

AUPING:

So, the parties: who came to all the parties?

KAUFFMAN:

People we knew at that time.

AUPING:

Just artists mostly?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, all the artists that we knew at the time. We didn't have that many. I think one particular one: I remember it was an incredible blast. Irwin and I gave it, and it was really a good party. I'll always remember that one party.

AUPING:

Why?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, I don't know. It was just such a good party. We just cleared the whole studio out, and I remember painting these light globes red or orange or something, so the lighting was real kind of even and nice. We cleaned the place up. Then I thought, you know, there's no chairs or anything, so I built these low benches along the wall, [tape recorder turned off]

AUPING:

So tell me more about this party. This is a fun story.

KAUFFMAN:

I built these long benches along the walls, I don't remember where I put them—on boxes or something. Then we had a record player and lots of cheap wine, and we invited tons of people, and everybody came. It was a nice night, so we had the back door open and the front door open. We had these two friends of ours, Dane and Keith, Dane Dixon and Keith (I can't remember his last name), Anyway, they were ex-Marine raiders from the Second World War. So we said, "Just have everybody cool it. If anybody's smoking dope in here—" You know, dope was really serious in those days. [laughter] So we said, you know, "Kind of have them go out in the backyard or cool it or something."

Everybody got drunk and danced. I think the police came a couple of times, but we didn't have much trouble. It was really a good party.

AUPING:

No flare-ups or fights?

KAUFFMAN:

No, there were all sorts of people [who] met one another and things, young ladies and stuff. It was fun. It was a memorable party,

AUPING:

Was the whole Ferus crew there?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, you know, lots of friends of Bob Irwin's and lots of friends of mine. It was a great party. I remember few parties through the years; that one stands out. I think it was also about the first successful party I ever gave. [laughter] So I have never given that many parties.

AUPING:

How did you get along with Ed Moses?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, love and hate. Always have. It's always been love and hate with Ed and I. Off and on, off and on. But we really aren't that, I guess, that close. We don't correspond on anything. Any time we see each other, we always have a funny conversation. But we used to be really, you know, very, very close.

AUPING:

It seems like it because you shared so many studios.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, and also we went to UCLA together. My other close friend from UCLA, Les Carr, really gave up, I guess, painting. He moved to New York and gave up painting and became sort of an apostle of character, so I really lost contact with him. My other friend from UCLA, Allen Lynch, he was really in art history and went on. I'm still very close to him. He lives in New York, and we're still

very good friends® He still makes small works on paper, but his main interest is in collecting oriental art and really has been for a long, long time.

AUPING:

When you had the studios, say, on Sawtelle with Moses, and Robert Irwin was there, was there a kind of daily pattern? I mean, you guys must have gotten together a lot and talked. Do you know what I mean? It's sort of like having a roommate, I guess.

KAUFFMAN:

I was out of school, and I had an apartment away from there—it was actually kind of a nice apartment; it was very cheap—and had an old car. Ed sort of shifted around between girlfriends and apartments. He had a cheap place at the beach for a long time, off and on; it was a great place, right off the Santa Monica beach. Then he got other apartments around—he moved around a lot—and had an old car. But we didn't have any money hardly, I mean, any money in the sense that we lived on—I lived on—I had a little bit of money from my mother and father, but it was, like, $200 a month or something. [Then] they'd throw in something else once in a while, when I needed some new Levis or got dressed up to go somewhere; they'd buy me a sport coat. You know, they'd throw in other things. My car would break down, they'd always bail me out. Daily living was—you had those two-fifty, three dollars a day for the day. Even then it was not a lot of money. We had to buy supplies, but we always managed. We always seemed to manage to get along. Ed didn't have any money; he'd have to have odd jobs and so forth. There were a few odd jobs I shared in. One was taking care of a schizophrenic girl at UCLA; and so did Walter get in on that act. But there always was a little bit of a scramble for money and stuff. So, we were always sort of scrambling around for that and for girls and stuff. And if you didn't have any money, the scramble after. girls was even more complicated.

AUPING:

Did you guys go out drinking together and carousing and searching for girls?

KAUFFMAN:

We used to go to Barney's Beanery and all the openings because [they] had free booze. Of course, there [weren't] that many openings and all that sort of thing. Oh, yes, it was a constant kind of thing like that. Or we'd have to fix dinner, like, at somebody's house or make spaghetti or something.

AUPING:

What would, say, like a typical Friday or Saturday night be? You and Moses, Robert Irwin?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, we might meet at Barney's Beanery, or we might go to a party, but we managed to try to keep other friends that were more well off. Somebody always knew somebody that actually had a job, [laughter] and they would give parties too, and that kind of thing. I guess Billy Bengston's hardly ever done any work. John Altoon would do commercial things off and on. Irwin, I don't remember what Irwin did. Oh, he taught off and on. Yes, he did some teaching at Chouinard's. I think Ed Moses did some private teaching at one time. I did a little bit. I never got a job teaching. We all had all these plans getting jobs teaching when we finished UCLA; none of us ever got a job. So it was sort of a scramble. Ed was really poor off and on until he got married. That bailed him out for a while, [laughter] But it was a long time there, and you just got to think that way about being very frugal, and I think I probably still am, overly. It's a different style than people have now, although there's not a lot of money around now, but [inaudible] in the late sixties when there were younger artists coming—like Larry had a very different kind of attitude about money.

AUPING:

Larry Bell?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, very different thing,

AUPING:

In what way?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, you know it was, "spend it, because you can get some from the gallery, or you can get some from a collector. You can raise it or something." There was just no hope of doing any of that sort of thing. Once in a while you might sell a little thing. I remember I sold a painting at the old Ferus, the only painting I sold there; I got three hundred dollars. Everybody just immediately forced me to take them out to dinner. There was just one kind of hairy scene after another. But we managed to have a pretty good time and get by.

AUPING:

Was there ever any conflict in any of the members of, like, the Ferus?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, yes, there are always weird, weird—

AUPING:

What seemed to be some of the major polarities: individuals who didn't seem to get along?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, they're so hard to keep track of. It's so hard to keep track of over the years. And having lived in New York for two years, and now I live down here in Laguna, I'm not all that involved in the daily things. But in those days we were all much closer in those days, of course, than we are now. I mean, we see each other once in a while now. I think that's true of any group of artists when they're younger and finding their way: they tend to be really personally closer. Then when we get older, they make their own places and families and things. That separates people. If I lived up in Los Angeles, I don't know. But I used to see people. I mean, you'd see people every day. I'd see two or three people every day. It just wasn't hardly a day that went by that you didn't see a bunch of people. And then Billy and Irwin: they all moved down to Venice, and then out of that you saw a lot of everybody. That was a little tight group down in Venice. I was kind of a member away from that, of that group for a while. That was in the early sixties. Nevertheless, I knew everybody, and that was the people I went around with, but I wasn't the basic two or three,

AUPING:

I've heard a number of times about conflict between Robert Irwin and Bengston.

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, yes, Jesus, they had a real falling out.

AUPING:

Oh, yes? What was that all about? Do you remember?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it was about a lot of things, Bengston's very much of a perfectionist, and he's the kind of guy that there's just one way to do something. You know, you've got to do it this way. And he's really kind of a buddy-type guy. I think he still has buddies with some younger artists and so forth and so on. I think everybody tends to be that way. I have a few buddies once in a while off and on, but he tends to really work at that kind of thing, and he always did; so we were really tight, especially Billy and I for a while. God, we saw each other all the time. Well, he was off and on with each one of his friends: Ken Price and Larry. Then, at a certain point he'd start to want to run how you did everything. If you weren't screwing a screw in the right way, he'd grab your screwdriver. [laughter] Irwin just wouldn't tolerate that kind of thing, so they had some fallings out about things like that. And there was a young lady involved, but I'm not going to talk about that. That finally was the straw that broke the camel's back, I just don't know whether to this day they even speak. Billy will hardly talk to me. He'll just say hello and sort of one or two words; then Penny [Little] might say, "Why don't you come over some time?" or something like that. Then that's about as far as it's gone in eight years or something.

AUPING:

Well, did you and Billy have a falling out or something?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, when I got divorced from Vivian in '67 or something like that, we were really tight, and he sort of took Vivian's side, which was OK. He was a witness for her in our divorce case. I was mad about that. But then Vivian and I became good friends again, and he just—we never did again. That's like,

almost ten years ago. We'll speak and say hello and maybe say a sentence or two, and he has some wise-aleck remark to make or something. He's always got a quick, sarcastic remark about how you're dressed or something. And that's it. I've always liked Billy. Well, I don't really know him anymore. He was an ass in some ways, but, God, we used to have some really great times. He can really be incredibly charming and very vain about what to do. You know, there were always sort of "things" to do. Billy was the only guy, one of the few people then that was concerned with clothing; so he was always very concerned about getting us to upgrade our images a little bit. [laughter] So, I don't know. We kind of developed our interests in other things to a certain extent. It used to be fun going to the motorcycle races, where he raced for a while, and all that sort of thing. That was fun.

AUPING:

In the midst of all these personalities sort of clashing and coming together off and on, was Walter Hopps right in the middle, kind of like the arbitrator of everything?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it was earlier. We're talking about a period of ten years now, from maybe '56, '57, and before that was some of the people for me, to in the late sixties, when everybody sort of went their own way more. So Walter, really, while he was at Pasadena, he had various relationships with various people. I still think he keeps up various relationships with artists in Los Angeles. Walter's always around somewhere on the scene. I mean, I don't know what he's up to now, but I know he's always lurking somewhere. Somebody's always telling me Walter's in town, and I just sort of smile and say, "That's great, great." You know, he's like the man in the background.

AUPING:

Well, when the Ferus Gallery was going and it was sort of a tight-knit group and he was a part of it, as director did he, like, have certain favorite artists whom he seemed to show more? Or how did that work? What was the decision-making process on that? Do you remember?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, he was kind of off in the woodwork all the time. I mean, actually as a person you'd see Ed Kienholz a lot more at that time. But Walter was around. He was doing things. He was more involved with, I guess, some people than with others, but he managed to divide it all up in some way. Walter's more of a one-on-one person, kind of visits you and that kind of thing than come around to social things so much. And he wasn't hanging around at Barney's Beanery. Like, Ed Kienholz kind of held court there every night. Walter would come once in a while, but he wasn't that kind of a person so much, whereas Ed just practically lived there.

AUPING:

How did you get along with Ed? What was your relationship with him? Did you know him very well?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, pretty friendly. He'd always manage to take you to the cleaners in some way, whether it was in a pool game or selling you a rotten car; or if you needed ten bucks, he said, "Well, how about that drawing?" [laughter] Apparently he has an incredible collection of art from that era up in Idaho in this big bunker that he's built up there, this giant bunker—huge, you know, huge. I don't know whether it's a farm or what it is, but it's hundreds of acres in Idaho where he hunts. I guess he flies glamorous Europeans over there now; they fly over there and go hunting. He has a studio there. But I guess he just pretty much fluctuates between there and Berlin. I know his address in Europe is in Berlin. He never comes to Los Angeles anymore. Moving on; he just moved on.

AUPING:

What about John Mason? Did you know John Mason very well?

KAUFFMAN:

Not as well. I mean, I knew him, but, of course, in the recent years I've become much more acquainted with him, but I knew him and he was around. He was friendly with, you know, Billy and those people because there was an interest in ceramics. I really didn't know him all that well. It wasn't a chum thing. I've learned to appreciate John more recently. He's coming back to Irvine; he's

spent two years in New York. Or is it three? I don't know. Yes, he's been there a long time. He's going to come back next fall. I think just about everybody of the group, of that group that hasn't died, [laughter] is for the most part either in Los Angeles or New Mexico. And that's about it. Nobody else has seemed to, except for Ed Kienholz, [have] moved anywhere except for periods of time, like my going to Paris or in New York for a while. But they still seem to all be in this area. Some people haven't left for more than a week, I don't think, in all this time. Of course, Irwin gets all over the place, travels all over the place, but Los Angeles is really his home base, and Ed [Moses] still lives here, and Billy still lives here. Ken Price, where does he live? Santa Barbara now? New Mexico? I'm trying to think, but I can't think of anyone that's moved. My friend Les Carr went to New York, and now he lives in San Francisco. We used to all think about living in other places, but we just didn't do it.

AUPING:

What about Irving Blum when he came in? What was his situation there?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, when he first made his entry, I literally wasn't on the scene. I was in Europe. I lived in Europe for two years. Then when I came back, they had moved. The old Ferus was no more. It had moved across the street to the building with the porthole above the door, and it was a whole new scene. I really wasn't part of the gallery anymore; they had sort of moved on. But then I got back to work, and my work came along pretty well, and Irving was interested.

AUPING:

What was he like?

KAUFFMAN:

I showed in a few group shows there. See, very quickly Irving just took over. Walter wasn't in the new space across the way for an awful long time; you know, it wasn't very long. He was around less and less.

AUPING:

Walter was.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, and he got involved more and more with Pasadena, and finally he was just—I mean, I could never figure it all out, but he wasn't really too—It wasn't his decision to take me on again—I had a one-man show of plastic things—it was really Irving who made that decision. But Irving and I have always gotten along very well. We've remained really good friends,, I think Ed Ruscha and I were the last two of the original bunch in the new Ferus to wind up at the Irving Blum Gallery here in Los Angeles before he moved to New York. We were the only ones that sort of stuck by through all the years. Everybody dropped out along the way; they had one difficulty and another with Irving, but I never did. I mean, there [were] always problems, but I never abandoned the whole thing, and everybody else moved on.

AUPING:

What kinds of problems were there?

KAUFFMAN:

Mostly financial problems. When the whole situation kind of went professional in '63 or—well, it was later—'65, something like that, and people started showing in New York, everybody just sort of—Larry asked them for a lot of money, from Irving as well as from Pace, and Billy had this sort of—you know, to try to keep up with that, and he wasn't connected with Pace. Everybody just had to make all those money demands, and Irving just didn't want to deal with that.

AUPING:

I had heard there was a big fight over that, a physical—some people came to blows over that Larry Bell-Pace-Irving Blum situation. I think I heard it was between Bengston and Irwin. It's just what I'd heard at some openings or something. What was the specifics of that?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it was very difficult for Billy—I don't know what happened. It was very difficult for Billy to handle that, because here Pace picked up Larry and I and Bob Irwin, kind of one little group, and Bengston was still dealing with Martha Jackson—and not very directly. It was mostly his choice not to do any of that

stuff. He was just so ornery about the whole thing. Of course, Larry had been his kind of like slave practically for so many years.

AUPING:

Whose slave?

KAUFFMAN:

Bengston's. He taught him to fart or something, and Larry learned; he learned an awful lot. But then at a certain point, all that stuff, a lot of blowhard kind of stuff that Bengston said, Larry took seriously and just applied it, about business and all these kind of things, and Bengston's never been able to do it, but Larry can. It must have been an incredible revelation for somebody, after you've given all this advice on how to deal with people and deal with the art world for somebody—it wasn't his student, but his underling—to suddenly just do it all. But they managed to remain very good friends for a long time, but then I don't know how good friends they are now. I know when Bengston made certain demands on Irving, Irving just couldn't come up with it. And he had to equal—you know, "Can you top this?" There's a lot of childishness in a lot of that stuff. But I don't know. I can't remember exactly what happened. That was mostly the difficulties: one person making a demand, "Well, if you get that much, I'm going to ask for twice that much" [laughter] or something like that. And Irving couldn't afford any of that kind of thing, Irving's interest was really—he made some smart buys in pop art kinds of things, I think a lot of the difficulty came from his real interest in that, and a lot of the old people, I mean, the old Ferus group, really weren't interested in that. They weren't being as successful, and so they sort of dropped out along the way. So that's all. He just wound up with—we were the only two West Coast artists he had in the final Irving Blum Gallery—I guess he showed some other things—as sort of the regular people there. He showed some of the younger people. He showed Guy Dill or Laddie Dill. I don't remember,

AUPING:

Tom Holste show.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. But of the original people, it was Ed Ruscha and I.

AUPING:

What were his reasons for moving to New York, do you know?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, well, I don't know. He went on; he always talked about moving to New York and so forth and so on. It's really worth the money when one's a collector. He was real interested in art. He was really disappointed that none of the people he handled out here really ever made it all that big, I guess. And as they did start to make it big, he didn't handle them anymore. Right? His real interests were really pop art in New York, his main interests; so he just wanted to be close with that. He just always wanted to be back there, and now that he's moved there, I don't thing he's all that happy. I think he's being very successful. He and [Joseph] Helman are pretty successful. But every time I see him he moans and groans about New York, I also think New York has changed. New York is not the place it was ten years ago. It's a different kind of thing than ten years ago or even seven years ago. I mean, if you live there, you don't notice it as much. God, the times I can remember. It was really desirable to live there. I mean, in some ways it still is, but it's just so impossible in other ways. I would never think of moving there now.

AUPING:

You'd rather spend your time in Paris or your money in Paris?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, in Europe or some other place. I mean, I might go there for a month or two, something like that. I wouldn't have any problem. I did. I went for the summer, two summers ago, which was kind of crazy. I would not mind going for like the fall, trading somebody else for a studio, something simple like that, but I would never think of going there and setting up shop and moving. I have a spirit of adventure, but it's just gotten incredible. It's so expensive. When I came back through there, it seemed much more expensive than Paris. I was talking to friends whose lofts were $350, Their landlords were jumping it to $450. When I was making lots of money, I might even consider it. Everything is gradually deteriorating. I don't know what's going to happen. For the people who live there, they think it's great, it's fine. [They] don't notice those things, and the social things are much more—are so important. You know, if you're

living on one thousand dollars a month or fifteen hundred dollars, to pay five hundred dollars out for rent or something—

AUPING:

That's a lot.

KAUFFMAN:

Maybe I'm just getting too old to make that many sacrifices for something like that.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One [Video Session] (February 7, 1977)

AUPING:

Craig, why don't we blast this thing off by talking about the newer work first, the things you've been working on for the last two years, the painting we're looking at now, which' is—what?—1976.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, last spring. I did it last spring.

AUPING:

Maybe we could talk a little bit about the structure of the painting, the relationship of the canvas to the bare areas, where it's open. Let's walk up to it. The relationship of these canvas forms, which these are all filled-in canvas, and the bare sort of areas, and what you're thinking about in terms of the structure.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, the structure is the image, the beginnings of the image. It's self-supporting. Right? I mean, these are all put together by these lap joints, and so it's independently strong. That has been a preoccupation of mine for a long time, even with the plastic pieces, the earlier plastic pieces; they were all sort of self-supporting.

AUPING:

This would generally be hung off the floor a bit though?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, it'd be off the floor a little ways. And with some of them, instead of just painting this white in here, I wanted a sort of neutral area. I have the opportunity with the structure like this to just leave it out entirely. Some of the earlier ones weren't filled in in very many areas at all. I've been filling more and more in as time has gone on and painting on—this one was pretty much the last one where I sort of painted the bars in one go and thought about what color I would put in here; well, I thought about it, but I didn't like—the paint doesn't splash over on the bars very much. Ones I did in the last eight months in Europe: they were considered more as if I painted them. all at the same time, though much looser in terms of some of this paint going over onto the bar. But this one and another one I did in Paris last March, March of '76, I put—see, this piece of canvas here is on the front, whereas this is on the back. And there, in Paris, I went on with that more and more, where a lot of the canvas is on the front, although the bar is very definitely outlined: it actually follows the line of the bar, in other words, the border there.

AUPING:

So it's real space you're dealing with, not just illusionistic space.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I'm really trying to sort of confuse the issue. One of the pieces I made in Paris, for the first time instead of having all really physical bars, like all these, I started painting in some, trying to confuse the reading between what a real bar was and what a painted bar was. Now I'm in the midst of trying to decide whether this is something that I want to do for a while or whether I am interested more in painting more of the bars in, whether this issue, which I've been involved with, whether it's—I don't know whether you'd want to call it honesty or something—but this presentation of what the structure of a painting was about and its being self-supporting in this way and not being hidden, whether it's something that I have to always continue for a long time to cover or not. I'm sort of debating that at this point, because the images are becoming more important all the time, and they're becoming more complicated. Although I don't have one right here to show you, in some of the watercolors you can see that the images are becoming more complicated. That's beginning to take the necessity over the structure to a certain extent,

although in a painting I seem to feel that I have to have some sort of structure. I'm sort of in a questioning mood about that now, because I've been working on these for two and a half years, or about three years. Actually, there was a plastic series before these where the structure was formed into the plastic and the image was very much similar to these kinds of images.

AUPING:

To me they have almost a sculptural feel to them as opposed to being strictly painting. Do you get many reactions on that level of people saying, "Is that painting, or is that sculpture?"

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, people that define painting strictly in terms of painting on a two-dimensional surface call them constructions or something like that. But I really have always sort of considered myself a painter, although I've been called a sculptor, especially with the earlier pieces, which got quite a large relief situation. For me it's a difficult thing. The presence of the bars is very important to me, and this kind of three-dimensional presence, which a lot of work in the sixties had and which my work in the sixties had, is something which I'm working back into. It's my way of kind of working my way back into painting, and I seem to be doing it step by step. I think a critic remarked at my show last year in New York, he said, I've "returned to painting but with reservations." I don't know whether it's my reservations—it's not my reservations about painting; it's just my way of thinking about, it and doing it. They may wind up someday being entirely flat, and then, again, they may stick very much with this kind of double, this double kind of world, leaving the areas blank and the structure being a very obvious thing.

AUPING:

What about the colors? One is called The Primaries Are Nearly, and one is called The Primaries According to Young. How does that relate to the painting and the color of the painting?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's always amused me that you could put a color somewhere on a painting and compare it to other colors and have it read much stronger than it

really was or read as some other color. On the two Primaries, one's sort of—It's sort of a funful play with Mondrian, because the gray on one of the paintings has an incredible amount of green in it, and on The Primaries According to Young, there's a little, teeny bit of green down in the corner. Young changed his mind during his lifetime about which were the primaries. But in both of those paintings, a color like this, for instance, which is sort of an orangeish yellow here. But they're pretty much black and white and gray, red, yellow, and blue. But the red and the yellow and the blue are very, very dull colors, and almost if you'd see a separate swatch in them by themselves, you might call it yellow, but it's such a peculiar, pale color. But in the context of the painting, it's very bright. What your head does is sort of read it as primaries, primary colors. So that was what was about those two paintings. But most of the colors of the painting come from my liking, I guess, an odd set of primaries, an odd set of colors which have been very influenced by Southern California, by kinds of crazy colors that people paint buildings here, and also by my little knowledge of Mexico. Every time I go down there, I just love to go down there and look at all the crazy colors that people paint things. They paint them these bright colors, and then they fade slightly. So, all my colors are bright—I would call them bright colors—but they're a little off; they're all let down quite a bit. This has a lot of gray, I mean, it's not just pure color. Even this red is thinned down quite a bit, although it looks pretty bright on' here. So, I like these kinds of colors that are a little off the—you know, instead of a whole note, sort of a minor, sort of sharp. Even in this older, really pretty old painting of mine here, from my first sort of mature series of paintings, the color—I think it's developed—but there are overtones of what would come later, sort of the pinkish color and the green and the ochres and things.

AUPING:

Why don't we move that in and look at that with this other one you're working on now, maybe? You want to move this over to the side here and take a look. I'm real interested in the way you apply paint to these new pieces. It doesn't look like it's applied with a brush at all. It looks like it's poured on or slapped on with your hands—

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, sometimes I paint from the front and sometimes I work from the back, and I guess that comes from the plastic paintings, where I always painted from the back. So when I think about painting a painting, I don't necessarily think about just painting a painting on the front. I paint from the back and the front and go back and forth. So that area that's sort of scraped in looking was painted on the front, then I went over and scraped on the back, and so a lot of the paint just came off.

AUPING:

These early paintings; this one [Studio] is—what? 1958?

KAUFFMAN:

I think it's '57.

AUPING:

Fifty-seven. It looks like it—

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, '58.

AUPING:

—isn't applied with a brush necessarily either. I mean, there's so much—

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, this is mostly palette knife—

AUPING:

—scratching.

KAUFFMAN:

—palette knife, and then the lines are—I don't remember how I did this kind of line; it almost looks like other canvas glued on over it. In some new watercolors, I've actually glued other pieces of paper on with the edge that was drawn with India ink and then applied it; it almost looks like a collage. An artist at the time he did figurative work in monochrome, just canvas glued over canvas with just little edges that he glued it on with—he glued the canvas on with some kind of glue. Where there was black, black squished out.

[Conrad] Marca-Relli. I kind of like that line. I like that line that has a real sharp but uneven quality.

AUPING:

I see.

KAUFFMAN:

Another thing that's sort of curious in this painting are these sort of sticklike shapes. They seem to have, the last four or five years certainly, come back into my work, as well as some of the other—in the watercolors and things, there's these sort of rounded shapes. I don't seem to go in for very bizarre shapes. They're either bars, or they're fairly shallow arcs and that sort of thing. I don't do sort of free-formed shapes. I never have really.

AUPING:

Where do you think those shapes come from?

KAUFFMAN:

Oh, all this stuff? Well, they were parts that were influenced by Duchamp, The Big Glass, and part were just some of the things I had around my studio. And this sort of clean—although it's certainly expressionistic in a lot of the way it's applied—this sort of clean look was a reaction, a personal reaction, against a lot of thick painting that was going on in the fifties. I felt I just had to "sparsen" everything up. Some of them were much more sparse and sort of clean-cut than these are. And, of course, later in the sixties I was going to go into really masked edging and. all that sort of thing, where the paint was sprayed on the plastic from the rear.

AUPING:

Yes, because that, in comparison to your plastic piece that we'll look at in a minute, that doesn't look clean and minimal at all.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, at the time it really did. See, for a lot of people in Los Angeles, it looked very sparse and clean—especially some of the others.

AUPING:

Well, we were talking about this one that's in progress. Let's move this out of the way and get that other one in here. Can we put this right over here? Is that OK?

KAUFFMAN:

Sure. This is just the structure of a painting. This piece of canvas on here is just to test the color.

AUPING:

You were saying that you were having trouble with it or that you were having—

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I did some watercolors where the bars are the same color as—if you want to call this the background. And the only way the bars were defined were some painting around this area. There's another shape that goes in this painting here, and there's another shape that goes up here. And at this point I'm not quite sure whether I want to build them out of wood or paint them on the canvas. I had another canvas on here first where I painted it, and it didn't seem to look right to me. My feeling at this point is, I may just wind up painting on the edge of the bars, on the sides, adding these other shapes in wood and then doing the background entirely separately, on another stretcher, and just having the color come in really freshly and almost look like the wall sitting behind it, only the wall is another color. In other words, it would be all blue, this one. And where I'd do a lot more painting on the edge with this bright yellow and red—so, pretty much all the paint would be around the edge on the bars. But the color, this color, the color of the bars in the background would be the same color.

AUPING:

How do you arrive at these configurations, this structure? How does that come about?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it's just grown. It's sort of a combination of personal images from things that I like, from architecture and from that sort of thing. Also, fortunately, there're pieces like this, which I like a lot, but they also add to the strength of

the thing; so this already, before I've put anything else in, it wobbles it a little, teeny bit, but when the canvas is on there it won't at all, and. they're very stable and strong. But then when these other shapes come in here that sort of float in this space, they're more personal things; they almost have a figurative overtone. The piece that's supposed to fit in here, I think of almost like a shelf in sort of an isometric—and the thing that goes in down here is like a palette. And so, I'm making the world, or these images I want, and turning them all into this kind of structure. There may be a few other things added as time goes on. I don't know. I'm trying to get more different kinds of things into the painting. In the big, large painting, and most of those paintings before I did some in Paris, they all had this one big sort of gesture to them, like a big diagonal or a circle form come in. They read as an overall gestural kind of painting, which I guess is a bit of a hangover from old expressionist paintings. But I think the new ones don't have that anymore. They're more stable. I'm not concerned with them making anything much but a rectangle, although they have maybe a little eccentric edge on them or something like that. But I'm interested in creating a sort of space where these other things can kind of go on. I'm not interested in this overall gesture so much anymore. This being almost a physical thing, I like to think of this as almost—it's one big painting, but I almost think of it as two paintings: you really see a different space. here than you do here. That was a concern on, like, the larger ones. I really want you to see this space as a separate—have your eye—have it difficult, have it a difficult reading. It was difficult in the other ones because there were different colors. Even with an overall gesture, I think that they were difficult to look at in the sense that [it was] difficult to get an overall reading. I think that hopefully I'm going to do. that more and more as time goes on, because I want these spaces to be, you know, spaces, but I want things to exist inside them; and then your eye has to travel from here to there, and it's really almost physically stopped by the bars. So, right now, at the present time I'm in the process of sort of pursuing a couple of different possibilities. I had no idea that I would think about making almost a monochromatic painting with (it will have other color on the side)—I usually have never liked that kind of painting, and suddenly I find myself involved in doing something—I think this might be an all-blue painting; I'm not sure at this point. But I'm going to have to put the other pieces in here.

AUPING:

Why don't we get this bubble? I think I'll let you do that because it's so delicate. I'll move this out of the way. I hope this isn't too confusing looking at the bubble in between one done in 1957 and one done in 1977.

KAUFFMAN:

This is a small version of these things which we call bubbles; a lot of people call them bubbles. They're a very strong shape. It was vacuum-formed. I remember I got mad at painting one of them one time, and I jumped on one of them. I had a lot of trouble working with plastic, which I did for almost a decade, in terms of breakage and so forth. This one was almost the last series that I did (I did the loops after this, which are also strong), but I was very pleased with these because they're very strong physically; they were the deepest ones I did. The loops, which were plastic, hung out from the wall, from the ceiling on a wire, and cast a shadow on the wall. I was very concerned with the specific lighting. It was very difficult to light these pieces because they show up lots of reflections. The ideal lighting was a single spot on the thing. They sort of contain this kind of foggy color inside of them.

AUPING:

It's quite different than what you're working on now, because, in fact, these seem to de-materialize.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I was interested in shadows and fading out the edges—I had a lot of the concerns that others in Los Angeles had at the time—as well as the precision and the more obvious things about them.

AUPING:

How did you get into using plastic from traditional paint on canvas?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, you saw in those other paintings, I went into painting in the thicker way again. I didn't really believe my first series, and then I went to Europe for a while and then came back and resaw them; and my scale had changed: I did them larger. I didn't want to mess that line up. I got really involved in that line. When you paint on glass, you can put a line on, and then can fill it in without messing up the line. Then I said, "Why not paint on plastic?" because paint

sticks much better to plastic. So I got some Plexiglas. Then they were flat at first, and then I saw things around commercially that had been formed, and so I thought that would be great, because the shapes were these bulgy kinds of shapes. People said, "Wouldn't they be neat if they were relief?" and so I formed them very quickly. Then I got into transparent colors very quickly, and it all happened in a short period of time. I really stuck to working with plastic for ten years or a little bit longer, more than ten years.

AUPING:

Did you know much about plastic before you started working in it?

KAUFFMAN:

No. I didn't know anything. I had to learn it all, sort of go down and hound people at factories and so forth and find out how to make the molds to form them over and all this sort of thing, very much by rote. But I learned it pretty quickly. Then I did a lot of different series with plastic, until I finally formed, as I said, a series that were very much the same kinds of images that are in the wooden structures now. At that point it just sort of exhausted itself. Now, I haven't ruled out the fact at all that I might use plastic again to paint on. I could easily fill in the background in one of these structural [pieces] with plastic. It might be very appropriate at a certain point to work on plastic but it would be these same kinds of images. If there is anything I'm convinced about now, it's the images and the kind of world I'm making more than an attachment to materials or something like that. I think the plastic pieces were very successful, but material has a way of sort of turning against itself after a while, the obviousness of the qualities of the materials and so forth. I got tired of that, being sort of labeled: "working with plastic," and all that sort of thing. If I ever do anything with it again, it will have a minor role in the work.

AUPING:

About the color in these, Craig: now, that's applied from the inside.

KAUFFMAN:

Yes. There were a few pieces, plastic pieces, that were sprayed on both sides or on one side, on the outside, but by and large it was much more efficient to put color on the inside in thin coats. It's what any sign painter does. You know,

the lit-up Shell signs or something: they're all on the inside, because the plastic protects the color, and there's no problem with wrecking the surface or anything by putting the paint on because the paint's all in the back and you have a uniform surface to work with.

AUPING:

Is it one color over another color?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, this has got what's called Morano color, which gives it these highlights, these violet highlights. Morano color is a strange kind of color. It's almost like a vacuum coating in the sense that this goes from a gold highlight, goldish-red highlight, to sort of this violety highlight, depending on the angle of incidence; it's a kind of strange kind of paint. Then I coated it all with Morano and came in with a grayish color. Then I fogged it in with white, just so it wouldn't be transparent. There's a lot of coats of paint on most of my pieces, maybe thirty or forty, you know, just fogging and fogging and fogging, and then finally with clear acrylic lacquer to sort of adhere it entirely into the surface. Acrylic lacquer almost attacks Plexiglas, so it sort of eats into the surface. On some there were so many coats, and I got so much clear on there, that it would craze the plastic, and, really, the molecules get all kind of messed up, and they don't lock together anymore, and it's very easy to break. It's very peculiar stuff, plastic is. It's not an inert thing, like glass is, at all. It's a complicated kind of thing, as well as having a memory, which I always liked.

AUPING:

Why don't we take a break and go into the other room and talk about some of the things in there? [tape recorder turned off]

KAUFFMAN:

You mean the stuff you make with a whisk?

AUPING:

Right. It's real greenish and pale looking.

KAUFFMAN:

Right, right.

AUPING:

Quite bitter too, isn't it? Or it has a real odd taste.

KAUFFMAN:

It has an odd taste. There's the kind of tea that I make that you get at a sushi bar. It's a combination of leaf tea and powdered tea, and then you pour the hot water through it. That little bamboo thing there—see that bamboo basket—you've probably seen it, might have seen it at the sushi bars. They do that. But the kind of tea that's in the tea ceremony is strictly powdered tea, and they use just a little, small amount of it, and then they have a bamboo—it's like a whisk. It is a whisk made out of bamboo—I don't have one around here—and they whisk it around like that and—yes, that's better than the first time around. I didn't get it as strong.

AUPING:

Yes, that's good. I wanted to ask you, Craig—I don't know if we got to this in the other tapes we did, the audio tapes—but I wanted to ask, first of all, how long have you been making art? Do you keep track of that at all, how long you've been painting?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, my father has a painting I did when I was nine years old, an oil painting. I can always remember drawing in classes in school. In grammar school I remember for the Christmas thing I did a big stained-glass window. There was a whole bunch of us working on it, and I just finally got out of a whole bunch of classes and spent a month painting this thing; it was gigantic, [laughter] I always was interested in that. In high school my interests were divided between sciences and art classes and architecture. So, I was always involved in that. I really started making paintings that were actually shown when, one summer school session after my first year at USC architecture school, I went to a summer school class at Pasadena City College and did some paintings there. It was the first time I really did a lot of modern things. I did one small, sort of cubist painting in high school before that.. I did programs, the announcements for the commencement, and all that sort of thing. And I went to architecture school for a year and a half, that's all, and then I switched to UCLA and went into painting. But by that time I'd. already shown in a gallery and all that sort

of thing. So I've been really just painting steadily since, pretty much steadily. There are periods when I go for three or four months or even longer when I don't produce much of anything. I get bogged down in solving problems and thises and thats. But, since I was about nineteen, I guess.

AUPING:

Two questions. One, what do you think it is that keeps you painting? I mean, why do you keep making art? And two, how would you define a successful artist? What makes a successful artist, so to speak?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I guess there would be a lot of different answers to that now. For a while I didn't really think much about that. I don't know if I've thought it out thoroughly myself right now. Everybody enjoys some sort of limelight to a certain extent and having action in their lives, things happening: exposing their work and the excitement that comes with having a little bit of notoriety; and enjoyment of colleagues; and people knowing who you are and recognizing you as a status, that they're willing to deal with you; and all that stuff. So, that's been a pleasant result of my generation, then a little bit younger. You know most of the artists in the United States. You know, I just know most of them, if not really personally, then fairly—and talk to them. And that's a reward. So, there are rewards like that. For me it's the monetary reward [that] has been very off and on. Sometimes I've done real well, and then other times I haven't done well at all. Then, I think showing is good for you, to get the work out: it kind of gets over with that part and get on to something else. With the bubbles and some of the water-reflection pieces I did after that, I started doing this more kind of public art, where I worked with the environment more and worked with other people directly? and it wasn't my cup of tea at all—pun, bad pun. But it just wasn't. And having spent a good deal of time in Europe in the last few years and before and so forth, I'm very interested in painting from all periods: medieval painting and Roman painting and, naturally, Western painting and then oriental painting. I really think that it's an interest that, I guess, I've always had. To really get more and more acquainted with that and just how good one of the masters [was], or even unknown masters' paintings, and just what that was about is very interesting to me. Now, given the situation of the art world today, I just don't know what

it's about in a sense. I mean, painting goes back ten thousand years or eleven thousand years, at least that we know, to caves in Lascaux and Altamira. It's a pretty old thing, and it keeps going on. It seems to be more of a deep involvement for me, both historically and in my own head, than doing something that's more of a public kind of thing. Although those people that do environments and performances and so forth, dealing with the moment, almost without much of a history of that kind of thing, although there's a bit of a history developing now, may in some ways be more apropos of what the world is about. I get very depressed every once in a while when I think that I'm doing all these paintings and maybe they won't be understood right away or for a while; and you see yourself to a certain extent a part of the history of painting, because painting does have a long history, not that other art forms don't either. Then you have to deal with the news of what the reality of the world is, not the art world, but the world out there with this and that, and you just—I guess I seem somewhat naive to myself sometimes about being so involved in something like that. After having been in another area, I almost feel like an old stick-in-the-mud or something—and maybe unrealistic because in my heart of hearts I almost know that, from all the information that I hear, it's just going to all be over in sixty or seventy years. You know, I worry about the permanency of these paintings and the quality of the painting, and it all seems incredibly naive sometimes to me.

AUPING:

To not be on the treadmill of the avant-garde, so to speak.

KAUFFMAN:

Well, the avant-garde is dealing with the moment more. Maybe to directly deal with your own fame and fortune in a really much more direct way, which painting really doesn't, maybe they're having more fun, I don't know. But I really don't know whether painting is supposed to be, whether art's supposed to be all that much fun or not. Sometimes it's fun, and sometimes it's pretty much just sort of sweat and labor.

AUPING:

What is your criterion for a good work of art or for a successful work of art, whether it be a painting, an environment, or—how do you come to those decisions?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, on a first reading, the thing that strikes me most is a kind of a freshness, a real kind of—I don't know whether they call it originality—a kind of freshness. Something strikes my eye as being something that I just wouldn't have imagined would suddenly be there. Then, I guess, authenticity, which is kind of like that, a kind of authentic ring to it as something that doesn't look—that's sort of easy, easy in the way that it's naturally made and a kind of natural outcome of kind of sound thinking, but that there's not a lot of strain involved in the whole production of the thing. Those two things, as well as a certain amount of expertise in the craft. But a lot of those kinds of things can be very, very difficult to really read. Because some things are very, very sloppily done, so-called, and others are very precision; and so the idea of craft is complicated for me.

AUPING:

But you're interested in making well-crafted objects. Are you not?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, but the paintings that I'm doing now are pretty loosely—the paint's pretty loosely applied and so forth. But lately I've been trying to get a different quality to the work. I want it to have a different kind of quality, a kind of fresher quality to the way the paint looks and the color looks. Those kinds of things are very hard to talk about. That means a certain kind of truth to me, and it can be a very personal kind of reaction. One thing that I'm suspicious of in a lot of work today with there being so much press—the art world has to be involved with the press; there are a lot of people involved in art for all kinds of different kinds of reasons, which is, I guess, okay—but I worry a little bit about it. Kierkegaard had one great thing to say—I mean a lot of great things to say—he said that even though there's a truth, if a whole bunch of people vote for it even, somehow it makes it less true. He was very much against unanimity of decision. There seems to be so much of that today, that a whole bunch of people seem to have to agree that something's good in order for it to

be recognized as being good, and that almost makes it not relevant any more. (I don't know whether that made an awful lot of sense.)

AUPING:

It did. Basically we're talking about art being a very personal activity as opposed to a public one. Right?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, some artists think that they have a greater truth than is contained in their work to put forward. And I think the truth is in the work in my work. They feel that their activities have to be relevant to the age, and they have to make some sort of comment about what's going on, and so forth and so on. There certainly seems to be a good deal of excellent analysis of what's going on in the world but very few cures. So, maybe some artists feel that they have to contribute to the curing of various things. Nobody seems to be able to do anything about it though.

AUPING:

Do you think that abstract painting is more difficult for a large body of people to relate to than, say, other forms of making art?

KAUFFMAN:

Yes, I think it is. I think it always has been. I don't really consider my paintings, in the fine sense of the word, abstract, like nonobjective painting. I'm consciously trying to put kinds of content, which is this fishy kind of content, somewhere between figurative art and nonobjective art and make a kind of complete, personal world within the paintings. But they still to most people read as abstract painting. I really do think people do have a difficulty with that. Once [Kasimir] Malevich did a white on white square and confronted the desert of painting. I think you have one of two choices: you can give up painting really and keep repeating this sort of desert, or you can try to refill painting with things. I think I'm involved with filling it up again, but, you know, step by step;. I'm proceeding sort of cautiously I think. In other words, I think I said to you before, I'm willing to put anything in there if I feel in my sensibility that I can get away with it, which means that I'd put a dog in there if I thought it would look all right. So far it's pretty much just little architectural details. In

one of the watercolors, one of the square things with some lines coming out of it: I got the idea when I was sitting at a bar, and they had these kinds of German sausages that were stuck in a thing. And shelves and stuff that I like about Japanese architecture and all these kinds of things. I do drawings, that are fairly realistic, of things that I like. I don't really show them very much, but I make drawings of my collection, small collection of objects, as well as some photographs of objects.

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KAUFFMAN:

[I] also make drawings from other people's paintings, steal little things out of paintings and try to convert them into my own thinking.

AUPING:

How long do you feel it takes a painter to develop a vocabulary for abstraction? Is that something you come by right off the bat?

KAUFFMAN:

Some people seem to be able to come in at a time where they can do interesting paintings pretty quickly. It's hard to sustain; that's the difficult thing. To watch the track record of some abstract artists of the sixties has really been kind of interesting: they've gone back and forth, around and about. Some of them have constantly remained interesting, and others have not remained interesting, I think in the United States we're under a lot of pressure. It's the old cliche, but we're under a lot of pressure here to change all the time, to really do something new all the time. Unfortunately in some ways, or fortunately, people have run out of, not new things to do, but really new whole directions. I wouldn't say there's been a really whole new direction in contemporary painting, or in contemporary art, since 169 or '70. It was all outlined at that point. Even art and language had begun, and all these various directions had pretty much begun by that time

AUPING:

Right. Do you feel the environment has a lot to do with or has a great deal of effect on your painting, on your creativity?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, I think it's more life-style. I seem to have worked best here in Laguna and in Paris. I spent a summer, not last year, but the year before that, all summer in New York, and I worked pretty well. But the paintings that came out of that series, that I showed at [Robert] Elkon [Gallery, New York City] last spring, I don't think are as good as the ones that I did in Paris or the ones that I did here, all this new series. So, what that all means I'm not quite sure. I think I have to have a certain kind of tranquillity. Also I want to be able to go out and do certain things I didn't have a lot of troubles in Paris. I mean, there weren't very many things to do except really think about painting and art. Here I'm down away from the city, and I don't have to deal with a lot of the stuff up there, although there are things to do around because I have a house. I'm trying to organize my house so that there's very little upkeep. It's a constant, constant sort of attitude in my life to kind of pare things down to where there's—I don't have to pay a lot of bills, I don't have to do a lot of errands, I don't have to do all that stuff, because I really seem to work best when there's just not much to do in that way, except maybe go out to dinner, which I enjoy a lot. I love to go out to dinner and eat. That's what I liked to do in Paris, because there wasn't a lot to do except just straighten up the studio and do a few errands and go out to eat and do a little cooking myself. So that's sort of the direction I like to go in. I'm constantly reflecting about whether I want to own a house—I own this house—how little I can get away with. I rent all the front part out, so the house pretty much takes care of itself except for some of the upkeep on it. But I constantly try to think that way: the simplest way I can get all that pared down so I don't have to worry about it a lot.

AUPING:

Does your teaching bite into your art time very much?

KAUFFMAN:

Well, it takes that two days, but when I figure it's only two days—really when you figure it all out with quarter breaks and everything, it's really only six months out of the year. I do a little preparation for the classes. When I'm really interested in something, I kind of prepare a thing. I'm preparing a lecture on the history of the studio in Western painting, I have some catalogs, and I'm picking out slides, and maybe I'll do that more than for just ray own

class. For drawing classes you have to come up with something that's interesting to draw, as well as an idea. Painting classes seem the most interesting to me because I just have them paint there, and they paint, and I go around and look at the paintings, and we talk about paintings. I find that much easier than dealing with lots of abstract ideas in my class. I used to talk a lot more in my classes about problems in contemporary art, and about this and that, and so forth. I find myself talking to the whole class or to a group less and less unless I really have something to say. I used to do a lot of talking: classes were mostly talking. Now I seem to like to have the classes work a lot more. It seems more traditional in some ways, but I prefer running it that way. I find it more rewarding than doing a lot of talking. Once in a while I do show slides, especially of things that I like to see too. [laughter]

AUPING:

I think that about wraps it up. I really want to thank you for taking this hour out and answering some questions.

KAUFFMAN:

All right. My pleasure.
