A TEI Project

Interview of Lynton Kistler

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (December 13, 1988)

RATNER

> I'd like to begin our discussion today by talking a little bit about your background. Would you mind telling me a little about your family, where they're from and how they came to California?

KISTLER

The family originally came from northern Switzerland and southern Germany. That is, the Kistler family. My maternal grandmother [Mary Richards] was English. The Kistlers migrated to this country from Germany in about 1723 or around that date. They first settled in New York and finally drifted down to Pennsylvania, where they established themselves. There is a Kistler Valley in Pennsylvania now, which is outside of Allentown. It's quite a beautiful, green valley and farming and dairy country. I've been back there twice, and I'm the only member of this branch of the family that's been back to the old home. The first time I went back, we ran into some Kistlers there. There were quite a few of them living there at that time. That was back in about 1940, in that area. I thought that I had probably run into a group of people that were representative of the whole family. They had a big stone house and a large barn. They were farming people. I was working in New York at the time and I had a New York license on my car, so that they were quite suspicious of me and didn't receive me very well, although I did make it clear that I was a Kistler. I found the valley there a very beautiful place. There's a church up on the hill. There's a cemetery, and most of the stones in the cemetery were Kistler stones. I'm not sure-- Well, the second time we went back was with Lelah [Morris Kistler] here. We came in from Ohio and down into Pennsylvania. We ran into some people at the head of this valley that were quilting, making a quilt. It was quite a beautiful thing. We were quite impressed with it. They said that they still got together every Saturday, I think it was, and did some quilting. When was that date? Do you remember, Lelah? You remember the date thereabout? [inaudible reply] Yeah, it was right in there, '81 or '82. So after visiting with these very nice people for a while, why, we went on down the road, and I found a sign on a garage. It said "William A. Kistler Garage." That was my father's name, and I felt quite at home. [laughter] Then we went on down the valley a little ways, and we came to a sign that said "Aunt Gracie's Gift Shop." I stopped and I said, "Let's go in and see Aunt Gracie and see what she knows." So we went up the driveway a little ways, and there was a stone house to the left of the road. We looked around there, and we found a cornerstone on the house that said, "This house was built in 1812"--was it, Lelah?--"by Samuel Kistler." I have a Bible, an old Bible, and it says in it, "This belongs to Samuel Kistler." Well, there were so many Kistlers there and there were so many Samuels, I don't know whether they're

any of my relatives or not. But I kind of felt at home. I felt as though I'd struck gold [laughter] when we hit there and we ran into this Samuel Kistler and that I had a Bible of his. It was a very beautiful place and quite prosperous, however, because they had another house built up on the hill, and that house had a plaque on it that said it was built in 1825, I think. So the difference between the two dates, they were quite prosperous apparently. They had been able to afford a better house and had built it there. They had a nice duck pond down below, and we chased the ducks around and tried to get them to come and eat, but they wouldn't have anything to do with this . There was a girl there who was-- What was her name? Jenny Griner. She was hesitant about showing us through the house, because the people were away, her mother and father were away. But we talked her into it, and she took us all through the house. Of course, it wasn't prepared for us or anything, and she was afraid her mother was going to be quite upset about it. But they had a beautiful place there. Both houses were built of stone. They were renovating the house through and through and uncovering a lot of the old wallpaper and things like that to get down to the original finish in the house. The rooms in the house were small, because they didn't have very good heating facilities at the time it was built, and it was in a state very much like it was to begin with. My family, my branch of the family, migrated to Marion, Ohio, My grandfather was born there, and his name was John Kistler. I haven't much idea about what he did between the time that he was born and when he ended up on the Ohio River. That's the first that I had any real contact with the family. He had a sawmill on the river, right on the Indiana side, right where the bridge from Louisville comes across the river. It's up on a high bank. It must be forty feet down to the river at a straight drop. Don't you think so, Lelah? But my grandfather was very successful there. He was on the city council and he was acting mayor for quite a while. He disappeared from the political scene when he joined the Prohibition Party. [laughter] That settled him. They didn't vote for him anymore. But the thing that drove them away from Indiana was that they had these horrible floods on the river. It was amazing to me that a river could rise that high, because it was at least a forty- foot drop down to the water, and to have washed out the mill, and to have carried the saw logs away. They just had a grand old time, my father [William A. Kistler] and his brother, who would go down the river to pick up what logs they could. Pick them up where they had stranded along the bank and bring them back. This

was in 1866. His credit was so good that they gave him a million dollars' worth of saw logs at the bank to start him up in business again. It had practically wiped him out. Two years later, in 1868, why, they had another flood that came down and washed the mill away, the business away, most of it. My grandfather decided to sell out and come to California. At that time he came to California and liked it at Escondido. He settled down there and bought the hotel and ran that for a few years. It was there that my mother [Mamie Chambers Kistler] and my father met. My mother's grandfather was a riverboat captain. He ran from Ohio down to New Orleans. The last trip that he left on, he had quite a bit of money on him. He got into New Orleans and disappeared. They never found any trace of him at all. He just disappeared altogether. Left my maternal great-grandmother [Mary Richards Chambers] with a boy and a girl. The boy is my maternal grandfather, my mother's father. She was quite a practical woman. She figured she could take care of one child, but she couldn't take care of two children. So she sent her-- She took her boy up to the Shakers and turned him over to the Shakers, and they brought him up. They taught him a trade. He became a mechanical engineer. He traveled in the West, clear out to Wyoming and Montana. My mother had quite a few songs that she picked up from my grandfather, and she used to sing them to me when I was a kid, these old songs that they sang on the range, you know? She was very good at it. My mother and my father met in Escondido. They came up to Los Angeles, and they were married in about 1894, I guess. My father worked in Escondido. He took up a printing apprenticeship. He became a typesetter at the *Escondido Blade*. Then he moved from there over to Oceanside to the *Oceanside Wave* for a while and finally migrated to Los Angeles. My mother came to Los Angeles, too, and they looked each other up and they got married. I think it was in 1894 that they were married. He worked for a man by the name of McIlheny here, and he was quite a valued employee. My father was a man of all parts. He was interested in everything. He played several musical instruments, and he was in a band down in Escondido. When he came to Los Angeles, why, he joined a band here. Porter's Band. They used to play in the rotunda of the leading hotel in Los Angeles and at Westlake Park on Sundays. I used to go out to hear the band. He could play almost any instrument. He played the clarinet, the piano, and a couple of horns. He made a xylophone out of an old bedstead that we had. It was an old bedstead, and he made a xylophone and learned to play it. But

somehow the musical didn't come down through the family. However, I was much taken with printing at an early age. I think that I was about ten or twelve years old when he set me up on a stool in front of a type case and put me to setting type. So I learned the printing business that way. And I'm a self-educated man. That is, I never went to college or anything like that. But I was intensely interested in printing. My father was one of the leading printers in Los Angeles. He had a penchant for moving around, though. His first office was at First [Street] and South Broadway. Across Broadway- -where the [*Los Angeles*] *Times* building is now--was the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. It was there that I saw the only president I ever saw of the United States. It was Theodore Roosevelt. He rode past there, and we were up in the building in the printing shop looking down on the street. He's the only one I've ever seen in person.

RATNER

Let me just back up a minute. I don't want to interrupt your train of thought, but what year were you born?

KISTLER

I was born in 1897. My father moved around an awful lot . He moved from there down to-- He was progressive, and one of his friends that was in the printing business got into financial troubles and sold out his plant to him. So he enlarged quite early. That was at 123 East Second Street, I remember quite well. Then he moved from there up onto New High Street and moved across the street at New High Street to the old People's Store building. He moved in one of their buildings. The People's Store became the May Company eventually. Then, at that time, while he was there, he acquired the *Out West* magazine, and for several years he published it. George Horton James was an editor at one time. Another editor was George Vail Steep. At that time, he had a bindery- -

RATNER

What year is this that you're talking about that he was at that location?

KISTLER

Well, that is around 1910.

RATNER

Nineteen ten. So you're still a youngster at that point.

KISTLER

Yes, I was. Then he moved from there to Los Angeles Street, Sixth [Street] and Los Angeles Street, in the Chapman Building. Then he moved from the Chapman Building down to East Fourth Street. Then he moved across the street at East Fourth Street. And then he moved from there to West Eleventh Street. By that time, the family was pretty well established. I had two brothers and a sister, and our time was spent in having all the fun that we could and going to school, which was kind of a hard task, with all kids. I went to Twenty-fourth Street [Elementary] School to M. Amelia Foshay, who taught-- Her favorite subjects were arm-movement writing and "Walk on the balls of your feet, children." [laughter] She would go prancing down, tiptoeing down, the halls. I can see her yet. My father built a home at 1629 Van Ness Avenue. In about 1905, he started it. That was kind of an idyllic time, because in order to save money, why, they put up what they called a "shed" first. It was just a room, one room, with a slant roof. My father and my mother and my sister and I lived in that shed for almost a year's time while they were building a house. It was a big eight-room house, a rather large place for that time. But the neighborhood was completely isolated. It was clear out at the edge of town. Between what is now Arlington [Street] and the ocean, which was about ten or twelve miles away, there wasn't a house anyplace.

RATNER

Really?

KISTLER

Venice was developed along in the early part of the century. They dug canals there and they had gondolas and made it as much like Venice [Italy] as they possibly could. They really did a remarkable job on it, because I went to Venice in Italy later, and I found that they had been quite faithful in reproducing the architecture and everything. It was the same feeling. My schooling after Twenty-fourth Street School was at the Arlington Heights [Elementary] School. They had no eighth grade there. It just went up to the seventh grade in grammar school. It was along about the time that they were instituting the

intermediate schools. We had to go way down to Berendo [Street] to school, to the [Berendo] Intermediate School. It was horribly organized. They say that they have trouble in school today, and, gee, you should have seen the difficulties that we got into. The kids were throwing spitballs at the board. I remember particularly I had a friend by the name of Carl Haverlin, who's a life friend. He was very German. His name was Karl Bismarck Heberlein. [laughter] So you know how German he was. He wanted to learn German, and so I kind of followed along with it, too. There was a poor German immigrant who had come over here, and he undertook to teach German. Really, what happened to that poor guy was really horrible. His name was Sabesti, I remember. The place was just a riot. I mean, from the time that we went into the classroom until the time that we got out. The whole school was that way, just very much upset. The kids were all in rebellion and everything. So I went over to Hollywood High School. I had to register as being in Hollywood, so I stayed at my grandparents' house. On weekends, I'd go around and go home and see my folks again. I stayed there for one term. By that time, I was footloose and fancy-free, and I could get into high school. I thought I'd completed enough work in Hollywood High School that I was an accredited high school student. I never did graduate [laughter] from grammar school! I went to Manual Arts High School . And there were all the Downs boys [relatives of World War I pilot Downs] there and Jimmy [James] Doolittle, the aviator, and Lawrence Tibbets and Marian Morgan, the dancer. At one time, I think that half of the judges in Los Angeles were from Manual Arts High School. It was about the time that they were changing over from rugby to football. When I went there at first, the first term or two, why, they were all playing rugby. What should I tell you next? [laughter]

RATNER

What happened after you graduated from high school? What year did you graduate from high school?

KISTLER

Nineteen sixteen. I went over to Kingman, Arizona. My father dabbled in everything. He went up to Idaho and panned for gold, and he invested in a mine in Kingman, Arizona, or outside of Kingman, Arizona. So he got me a job on the mine there, and I did a little mining. The First World War broke out

there. I came back to Los Angeles and got a job at the Hammond Lumber Company. I was only there for a month or two, and I joined the 143d Field Artillery, They trained out in Arcadia, out at the racetrack there. Then they sent us down to Camp Kearny. We became the first-- Wait a minute. We became the 143d Field Artillery, and we went down to Camp Battery F. We trained there for a year on three-inch guns, the old Spanish-American three-inch guns. They wanted replacements in Europe, and I went overseas, the First Division headquarters. No, it was Seventh Field Artillery, First Division headquarters. I was at the Battle of Soissons and Saint-Mihiel and the Argonne drive. I got severely scratched, and they put me back in the hospital just before the war ended. So by the time the war ended, I was down in Bordeaux. They evacuated everybody there, no matter how small the wound was. I wasn't wounded seriously, but I was in the hospital for over a month, I guess. So I got a chance to come home, and I came home on a cruiser, which was quite an experience. It was the old *Seattle*. We had an eighty-mile gale on the way back. It was really, really rough. The water was just coming over the fo'c'sle there just like nothing at all. Most of the boys were sick, but I didn't get sick. I had a good time. I enjoyed that. But it was a nice sensation to get back to the good old United States after-- [laughter]

RATNER

I bet.

KISTLER

Yes, after France.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (December 13, 1988)

RATNER

Before we flipped the tape, you were talking about your trip home, and you were glad to be back in the United States.

KISTLER

Yes. So I came back into the United States and went to work with my father. Business was pretty good right at the start. We worked together for about, oh, I can't tell you exactly how many years. We moved up onto West Eleventh

Street and bought a lot of new equipment and everything, and we were doing very well. I did well with the advertising people and brought in quite a nice lot of business.

RATNER

What do you mean by that? You went out and solicited business from--?

KISTLER

Yes. I learned to run our typesetting machine, which was a Monotype. Then I finally got to calling on the customers. We called on advertising agencies and people like that. My father, who always had his eye out for something new--He got into all kinds of things. At that time, we had a letterpress plant.

RATNER

So what years are you talking? Right after the war, right now, you're talking about?

KISTLER

Yes, yes. We had five presses, and he decided to go into the lithography business, because at that time, photography was commencing to be applied to the lithographic process. It had been done almost all by hand up to this time, and they had made some advances on it. So my father bought a lithograph press. It was a big one. It was a 35" X 45" inches press. Most of these printers now just have little equipment. I mean, the job printers. We were in job printing. So he bought this press. I went around trying to convert people to using it for the kind of printing that was produced in letterpress printing, changing over the method. I was quite successful with it. I brought in quite a bit of business with that. But it was awfully hard for us to get any information on the process. People didn't want to give up their trade secrets and things like that. They had ways of working that they thought were better than anybody else, and it was secret, even so they wouldn't put it out.

RATNER

So who was using the equipment in your father's shop? He had hired people who were familiar with the process?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

And even they didn't want to tell you how they did it?

KISTLER

Well, they were reticent too, yes, even though they worked with it. So I got the books and went back to [Alois] Senefelder. At the time that we got into it, we were doing offset work. It printed from a zinc plate to a rubber blanket and then transferred from the rubber blanket to the paper. So there was an awful lot to understand there. But I decided to go back to the stone and commence to play around with that. I did worm some information out of some of the employees, and I got some books on lithography. There had been some. Most of them had a lot of misinformation in them, just to throw you off. [laughter] So then I finally got to the point where I was getting the artist to draw on zinc plates, and in my spare time I'd come back and I would pull up some prints and I'd give them [the artists] half of them.

RATNER

At your dad's place?

KISTLER

At my dad's place. He had the transfer equipment there and a transfer press, Fuchs and Lang presses.

RATNER

Was that state-of-the-art at the time, the Fuchs and Lang?

KISTLER

Yes, I think they were the best. They were the best transfer presses. At that time they were using them, more or less, to make plates by pulling up stick-ups and then putting them up and putting multiple images on another zinc plate by the transfer method. So that that did give me-- I watched the men too, and I knew what they were doing. Finally, I commenced to get interested in stone. I said, "Yeah, I'd like to try some stone work." So I got quite a number of stones. Some of them were big, and some of them were little. I had a couple of stones that size there . Amongst my customers I had been doing

letterpress work for and advertising was Merle Armitage, who was an impresario and manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company at that time. My friend Carl Haverlin was quite a circulator around town. He got acquainted with Merle and brought him in to me. Merle liked the work that I was doing, and so he turned over the work at the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra] .

RATNER

The letterpress work?

KISTLER

Letterpress work, yes. That was about the time that we put in the lithograph press, the big lithograph press.

RATNER

Which I think was about 1928, I read in some of your correspondence.

KISTLER

Yes, that's right. It was about 1928. So then I commenced to accumulate these stones and rollers and materials and things, and--

RATNER

And were they easy to come by at that time?

KISTLER

Paper was hard to find. But you could get all the transfer presses that you wanted, because the printers were commencing to change over from letterpress printing to offset work. Believe me, now printing has gone beyond the point where I can understand it. Just the new way of working and everything, I wouldn't know how to handle it in the printing plant today, and that's just a few years back.

RATNER

It changes so quickly, I guess.

KISTLER

Yes. It's all changed around. It's all pasteup and everything . They don't even have type anymore . Well, anyway, I was working in the plant doing something one day, and Merle walked in with a kind of a small, unassuming-looking sort of man. He said, "This is Jean Charlot." And he says, "Charlot, this is Lynton Kistler. He's the best stone lithographer in the country." [laughter] That put me on the spot. I knew what to do, but I had never done it. That was the whole trouble. Here was a good customer who had made an exaggerated statement about me, and I was embarrassed.

RATNER

Did he know you'd never printed from stone?

KISTLER

Sure he did. But he went headlong into things - He was the kind of man that went ahead whether it looked like it was going to work or not because he was a promoter. He usually had several things in the fire. If two of them failed, why, the third one would succeed so well that he'd come out smelling like a rose. [laughter] So that's the way that he worked. Well, anyway, there's the print that I pulled. I went ahead and worked it out with the help of some of the men that I had there. Thomas Barr helped me out in the printing of that and kind of held my hand as I went through it. That was the first lithograph that I had pulled. Then I got so enthused about it that I wanted to do nothing but stone printing, which was kind of crazy, I guess. But the Depression came along, and my father was getting old and he was kind of depressed and everything. He decided to sell the plant, so I went to work for another printer and only stayed there about a year.

RATNER

What year was this?

KISTLER

Well, it was along in the early thirties. So I decided to buy a transfer press, and I sent to New York for a ton of stone. That was quite a bit of stone to order at one time. I opened up my place in the gallery of [Earl] Stendahl. I worked there. And I did get quite a-- I worked up quite a business there. But Christmas came along, and it was in his candy factory that I had my lithograph

equipment, so I had to shut down during the season. So I decided to move out. My wife at that time [Naomi Tucker Kistler] had a sister in the East, in Boston. She [the sister] was going to have a baby, and she had been East once and had stayed about three months . So I told her I'd go back with her. I went back to New York, where I stayed for about four years. I worked in a printing plant there, and I also went to work for my brother-in-law in his factory. We were making some fixtures for engines. They were water injectors, and I worked on those and I worked there for a while. Then--

RATNER

What year is this that you're talking about?

KISTLER

Well, this is-- The war broke out while I was in the East. That was in 1941. So I was there from '41 to about '45. I came home in '45. By that time, I had built a house. Well, before I left and while I was working at my father's place, when I built a house on Patricia Avenue.

RATNER

And that's where you first had your press? I read that you had it in your garage at first.

KISTLER

Well, yes. I moved my-- This all seems to be kind of disjointed and not very well organized. [laughter]

RATNER

It's fine. We'll back up a little and pick up some of that, because I did want to ask you a little about that earlier period.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, I decided that I would, when I came back-- No, wait a minute. While I was working at my father's plant, I sent out and got these stones. I also got a lithograph transfer press of my own to print stones on. I brought it down and put it in a two-car garage. I put it on one side of a two-car garage. I did my printing there. The artists used to come out to my place there and they would fill up the streets, and the neighbors got annoyed with it, that there was so

much activity and everything. But they couldn't do anything about it, because all I was doing was just doing some-- It was recreational with me. They would come and they would bring these stones, and I'd print them.

RATNER

I was just going to ask you, how did you meet all these artists? Was it word of mouth that they found out about you, or--?

KISTLER

Yes. It was at that time. So then when my father sold his business and my wife had gone East to deliver her baby, why, I said, "I'm not going to put up with this anymore." So I took her back there, and we were back there for four years.

RATNER

Could I just back up one minute? I'm sorry to interrupt you. Why did you decide to rent the space in the Stendahl factory? Because you were getting so much business in your garage? Is that why you decided to move your press up there?

KISTLER

Well, by that time-- Yes. I felt as though I had to have the location. I put it up there because I thought there would be a lot of artists [who would] come. And I did get quite a few.

RATNER

How did you choose that location?

KISTLER

Well, I knew Stendahl. I'd met him. Somebody introduced him to me. I don't recall just how I did meet him, but he was known in the trade. I had commenced to circulate around to try to get the art dealers to take on the lithographs. You know, I thought that it would get people started collecting art, and that way they would get to be art collectors and maybe buy things that were important. Well, the art dealers, when I got the artists in there, they got excited about the artists that I brought in and wanted to sell their work

instead of what I had to sell. [laughter] Because I was really doing it too cheap. I hadn't raised it to the proper appreciation of the public.

RATNER

How much interest was there in lithography amongst the art schools at that time in the early thirties, like Otis [Art Institute] and Chouinard [Art Institute]?

KISTLER

Well, there was only what I had started off there. They knew about lithography. Of course, Millard's work-- Millard [Sheets] had been working in New York for quite a while, and the artists are pretty knowledgeable people. They found out about it, but they didn't have any contact with it. So that the equipment that I brought here and the way that I started out, it was the first chance that they'd had here to do anything about it. Then USC [University of Southern California] put in a lithographic department, and UCLA got interested in it. Well, that's further down the line, though.

RATNER

So were there any galleries at all that were showing prints at that time, in the thirties, in Los Angeles?

KISTLER

Yes, there were. The Los Angeles County Museum [of History, Science, and Art] , before they moved out on Wilshire Boulevard, was showing prints and paintings. About half the time, I had more than half the prints that were being shown out there.

RATNER

They were artists that you had printed?

KISTLER

Yes, artists that I had printed. But I was doing it for nothing. I mean, it was just a recreation with me to start out. But I finally got interested in it and made my first effort at Stendahl's. When that didn't work out, why, I went back East and thought it over for about four years and came back here. I sold the house that I had built on Patricia Avenue and bought a place at the corner, an old house, a two-story flat. That is, an upper and a lower apartment. So I put my

considerable printing equipment that I had accumulated by that time downstairs, and we lived upstairs. That's where the UCLA people came to me. I had been printing for [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright and--

RATNER

How did you meet him?

KISTLER

I met him at the Art Students League in Los Angeles. I went up there to-- I don't know whether I was trying to take up drawing or whether there was something else I was doing. Something up there anyway. It was up at the Art Students League. And I told Macdonald-Wright about it, and he got interested in it. We made, oh, I guess a dozen lithographs. The only ones that he made I printed for him. He was an instructor at UCLA. So he got so interested in it that he recommended that they come down and see me and learn about lithography. They were interested in it. They'd heard of it, and most of them just by hearsay. The first time they saw a lithograph printed or saw a lithograph was in my shop. So I printed for them. I had ridiculously low prices to try to get the place going and get the volume of business through the place. And I was getting along okay. But I got enamored of the money that there was in the printing business. That is, the commercial business. So I went into that. I sold my house at Carondelet [Street] . I was there about five years. There was a little church across the street from our place. Property was going up around there, and they wanted the corner that I had. So they came over one day and said Mother Trust wanted to see me. She was the head of the thing. She asked me how much I wanted for the place, and I told her. She reached down in her sock and she gave me $30,000.

RATNER

Out of her sock?

KISTLER

Yes. [laughter] Yes, she was doing all right with her-- [laughter] And I just said, "No, no, you keep it here. I want a contract on this." So I went over and wrote up a contract and sold the place to her myself and didn't have to pay a commission to the real estate people. It was lucky for me, though. Because

when I'd moved in, I'd had a termite inspection. When I sold it, I got the same termite people to come and go over the place, and they gave it a clean bill. So they had a lot of changes that they wanted to make on the place, and they started to tear the place apart. And gosh, the place was about ready to fall down. Of course, I was in the clear, because there was insurance on it. I had insurance on the termite through this termite company, and they had to put up with straightening it all out. So I felt as though I was pretty lucky in getting out of that deal. They got it taken care of by the termite people, who had insured their work. I don't know what was the matter with them. They certainly were taking chances. Now, where were we?

RATNER

Well, I wanted to back up a little. I know that that happened later, that you sold that property. But when you came back in 1945, back to Los Angeles, and you bought that place at Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street] , how much art activity was there in Los Angeles at that time, right after the war?

KISTLER

There was quite a bit. Well, of course, the Works Progress [Administration] was going on. They were teaching lithography over at the headquarters of the Works Progress place. What's his name? The man who made that picture there. Macdonald-Wright more or less had charge over there. So when they cut down the Works Progress place, why, that left me with considerably more business.

RATNER

When that program wrapped up, you had more business?

KISTLER

Yes. I didn't participate in that, because I was in business myself. So I did some work for them on the offset press before. I printed a large poster, 35" X 45", for Millard Sheets, which was quite a task, for the Works Progress people. But that was about all.

RATNER

How did you meet Millard Sheets? You worked with him for a long time, I know, for a number of years.

KISTLER

I met him through Merle Armitage. Merle. I printed fifty books for Merle while I was at my father's place. I met him through Merle. I printed two books for Millard, one while at my father's plant and one at my own plant.

RATNER

So Merle Armitage seems to have known a lot of people and introduced you to a number of people also.

KISTLER

Oh, yes. I met Edward Weston. I did a book for Edward Weston. And Warren Newcombe and his wife, Beatrice Wood. Do you know her?

RATNER

I know her work.

KISTLER

Yes. She's a screwy one.

RATNER

[laughter] So I hear.

KISTLER

She's as smart as she can be, but she has a screwy approach to her artwork. I enjoyed working with her. And he brought quite a number of people to my place. I did two books for Edward Weston. I did the first Edward Weston book [*The Art of Edward Weston*] at my father's plant. But the best thing I ever did was a book of thirty-two lithographs in full color, from four to eight colors in them. It was a book that was about 8 ½" X 11" in size. There were thirty- two lithographs on one great big sheet. And those all had to be registered as to color and position on the sheet. The colors had to be printed exactly over the colors before. On top of that, we didn't have a plant that was air-conditioned. We went to all kinds of tricks to keep the paper from stretching, you know? We put it through the press eight times with nothing on it, just the pressure on the paper to spread it out, get all of the stretch out of it that we could. Then it would be liable to shrink if the weather changed. When we'd get one

of those forms on them-- We had four forms, and they had eight on each form, eight pictures. All those pictures had to fit, and they all had to be in the same position.

RATNER

Was this one of the books for Jean Charlot?

KISTLER

Yes, it was. Jean Charlot. It was an unusual book all the way through. The plates were drawn by hand on zinc, and the printing was done directly from those plates. We put those plates on the press and printed them from his work. It's the way that lithography works.

RATNER

Was that one of the later projects that you--? I know that you worked with him for so many years, and we're going to spend probably one whole session just talking about your relationship with him. But since you brought that up, was this one of the later projects you did with him?

KISTLER

No, that was one of the earliest.

RATNER

The *Picture Book*, the first *Picture Book* ?

KISTLER

Yes. I've got one back there.

RATNER

Okay. I'd like to see it. But we could talk about that a little bit more in depth. I thought maybe that we would wrap it up here for today, and then next time we could pick up some of the things from the thirties and a little bit more about the forties, unless you had anything else you wanted to add today.

KISTLER

I don't know of anything. We'll let it stand there.

RATNER

Okay. Then we'll talk about the *Picture Book* really in depth another time. Because I know that was a monumental project and was very well received.

KISTLER

Yes, it was.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (January 3, 1989)

RATNER

During our last meeting we talked about, among other things, your early involvement with lithography. I wanted to begin today by discussing a little bit more in depth those early years. We had talked about your father [William A. Kistler] quite a bit. You mentioned that in 1910, while you were still in school, he purchased the Out West magazine. I wondered if you could tell me a little more about that magazine.

KISTLER

It was a magazine that had been running. It started out as the Land of Sunshine originally. It got into financial difficulties, and my father bought it and published it for five or six years, I believe, and then he sold it. It was a magazine that recorded much of the early history of California. I had a complete file of the magazine, which I turned over to my younger brother [Rodney J. Kistler], and he gave it to one of his daughters. So there is a complete file of Out West magazine still in the family. They live in Seattle at the present time, and they have taken the file up there. This granddaughter of mine-- Not my granddaughter, but-- Let's see, it's my brother's daughter. She has surveyed the whole magazine and done quite a bit of work on it. She went to University High School. It was a special high school that she went to. She was a very brilliant girl. She did a complete survey of the whole magazine, the whole file. I think that that magazine ran for some, oh, about twenty or twenty- five years.

RATNER

Why did your father sell it, finally?

KISTLER

Well, he had more than he could carry, and it was an expensive thing to promote. He really didn't have the money to put into it, so he sold it to another person, who published it for a while, and I don't know who they were. But it is a very fine file of early California history, the history of California from around the fifties, I think, up to maybe 1925 or '26. Jack London and a lot of those early writers had their stories and articles in them. It's a file of a lot of California history and California culture and writing.

RATNER

When we were going over the names a few minutes ago from our last session, you were talking a little bit about the two editors.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How did your father find them?

KISTLER

Well, I really don't know. The magazine was well known at the time. There were several people that tried to associate themselves with it. George Horton James was a well-known author around the turn of the century. My father got a hold of him. I don't know exactly what basis he worked on. I know that he was paid for being editor of the magazine. He was a very well known figure. He was associated with the Southwest Museum. He did a lot of research, archaeological and literary research, and was well acquainted with the literary people around the turn of the century. George Vail Steep came to him after George Horton James quit the editorship. George Horton James was editor for maybe five or six years or something of that sort. The magazine wasn't paying, and my father had to get rid of it. It was a financial burden to him. But he got George Vail Steep, who was a brilliant man and, as I told you, who was an alcoholic. He did his best to overcome it, but-- Do you want this on the tape or not?

RATNER

Yeah, that's fine.

KISTLER

I don't know whether I'm doing him any good or not. But his bad habit was certainly not a detriment to his reputation as a human being. He had traveled rather broadly and was a brilliant writer. In this present day, he would be on television, I'm sure, because he had a fund of experience and a fund of information that was unusual. He was a very competent man himself. He was well educated. It's a shame that he didn't accomplish more in his life. But he came to my father. I don't know just how my father got a hold of these various people, but the magazine was well known and a number of people tried to associate themselves with the magazine. It probably would have been beneficial to him, but my father couldn't afford to pay their demands.

RATNER

Okay. I also wanted to know a little bit more about your schooling. When we were talking about it last time, you mentioned that you had attended Hollywood High [School] for one term, which gave you enough credits to enter Manual Arts High School. I wasn't really clear on what you meant by that .

KISTLER

Well, when I was in grammar school I first went to Fremont Street Elementary School . Then we moved out to the west side of the city. I went over to Twenty- fourth Street [Elementary] School for three or four years. By the time I got to the seventh and eighth grades, why, they had built a school on Seventh Avenue in Los Angeles. It was called the Arlington Heights Elementary School. But they didn't have the eighth grade there. It only went to the seventh grade. At that time, they were forming the intermediate-school educational plan. I had to go clear down to Berendo [Intermediate] School. I lived on Van Ness Avenue at that time, which was about three miles that I had to go to school every day. My folks gave me a dime, which was supposed to pay my car fare down there and my car fare back. But we saved the dime by getting rides on people in automobiles and on the backs of delivery wagons and things like that. [laughter] That way I managed to eke out the ten cents a day for what I could use it for, I've forgotten. It usually went for some kind of a hot dog or something like that after coming into town. Well, anyway, the school was a mess. They were trying to organize it. So I went there for one term. I was alert to the fact that I had to have an education by that time, and I

was serious about it. Well, I just didn't learn anything in the eighth grade at Berendo. English classes were disorganized. I took German as a second language because my friend, Carl Haverlin, was taking German. So I took German, too. This man Sabesti was a young German who had come to this country. Of course, he had the German classes at the Berendo School. Gee, we had nothing but riots there for the thirty-five or forty minutes of the period of the German session. The kids throwing spitballs up against the blackboard and things like that. This poor German was just at his wit's end. The strange thing about it was that he blamed this friend of mine, Carl Haverlin, for most of the disorder that there was in the class. He really wasn't responsible for it at all. He was serious about learning German, as I was. Most of the class, they were just rioting all the time. They just had this poor German upset to the point of distraction. I don't know how he put up with it. So in order to get out of the district, out of the Berendo district, I went over to Hollywood and lived with my grandfather [John Kistler] for a couple of terms. I went to Hollywood High School over there. It was the only way that I could get an education. Of course, Hollywood High School was well organized at that time. It was one of the principal high schools. From there, why, I came back to my own home in West Los Angeles the next year or two and enrolled in Manual Arts High School.

RATNER

I see. Which was closer to your parents' house.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Okay. I understand now.

KISTLER

But to give you some idea of the disorganization of the school district even at that time, it really is in better shape now than it was then. But you can imagine what it was like in the city here at that time.

RATNER

Okay. Also, when we were talking about your father, you mentioned that he was one of L.A.'s premier printers and that he was also quite progressive. You

said-- I'm quoting here-- "Father always had an eye out for something new." One of the most progressive things he did, it seems, was converting his plant in 1928 from a letterpress plant to an offset lithographic printing plant. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about his decision to make that change, and what it really meant in terms of the type, quality, and quantity of work being done.

KISTLER

Yes. My father was established and had learned the printing business in letterpress work. Along in the late twenties and early thirties, there had been progress made in lithography that it became apparent that it had an application to the ordinary run of printing, regular commercial printing. The offset press, which was invented in San Francisco, I believe, in 1905, had been progressively adopted by the industry, the lithographic industry, which was more or less a separate entity in itself. There was the lithographic industry, and then there was the printing industry, which was more or less-- They were separate entities. They didn't mix at all. But when the offset press came into general use, it produced a lot faster than the old stone lithographic presses did. Over a period of years, there had been a tremendous development in photography, too. The halftone method of printing pictures--in other words, taking a photograph and screening it and making a negative that would print a lot of dots and make what they call a halftone cut--had gained precedence in the letterpress printing. It was found that it could be applied to a lithographic plate. The improvement that had been made was that they got a better negative. They got to the point where they could make negatives that could be printed onto a thin zinc plate photographically, and they wouldn't have to be staged and etched. In order to get a good halftone plate, it was necessary in the beginning to make a negative. Then they would give it to what they called an etcher, and he would work on it with acid and things like that and reduce some of the dots and flatten some of the other dots so that they printed heavier and gave more brilliance to the halftone cut. But they improved the negative that they could make, so that they eliminated the hand-etching in the letterpress work. So that it became possible to take the negative fresh from the camera, print it down on a plate, make a halftone print on a thin plate, and put it on an offset press and get excellent quality. I don't know if I've made myself clear there or not.

RATNER

Yes, you have.

KISTLER

But it was the combination of the offset press, which increased the speed with which the work could be produced, and also through photography-- The quality of the printing plate, in both the letterpress and lithographic offset plate, could be printed without having any hand- etching on it. I don't know if I've made myself clear on that or not. I haven't thought about it for the longest time. It's hard for me to recall.

RATNER

No, it's clear. So you eliminated a whole step.

KISTLER

Yes. It became apparent that offset lithography was going to take over most of the commercial printing, which it has. All these magazines and everything are printed and made possible by the-- They can do it photographically with a minimum of handwork, and they can get perfect work. The offset press improved the speed with which the work could be produced. A stone press would- - Fifteen hundred or two thousand an hour was as many sheets as you could print in an hour. With the offset press, you could print up to twelve thousand sheets an hour. Of course, there are limitations that enter in there. There was another thing that was very important. Chemically, the inks were improved, too. When I went into the business, a lot of our colors were what they call "earth colors." In other words, they ground up stone, and they had certain substances that they precipitated and used for their colored inks. They had different materials that were used. They ground up, as I say, stone and different precipitations and different things that they could precipitate and use for color. But the invention of aniline colors, the use of aniline colors, and the development of certain chemicals and things that they mixed in the ink, they got it so that the inks-- You could print them rapidly. Even though the offset press could run at twelve thousand an hour, they couldn't run it that fast, because they didn't have ink that would work on it. I know at one time I bought a press that had a capacity of twelve thousand an hour. I thought I was going to go right to town with it. I got a long run and made a good price on it,

thinking that I was going to be able to run it at twelve thousand an hour. I stepped it up to about eight thousand an hour, and the ink just flew into the air. It covered a lot of our stuff in my plant and everything else, so that I had to reduce the speed of the press down quite a bit in order to get it to print. It just tore that ink apart and just threw it into fine mist throughout the plant. But today, they have presses that run up to fifteen thousand an hour, and they can print one color over the other immediately. When I went into the business, we would print one color, and then we would let it lay until it had set. Then we'd take it and run another color over it, and another and another. Four-color printing that way was a lengthy matter. It was a hard thing to do. We hadn't gone into air-conditioning, which is another factor that had to be dealt with in the printing business. It became necessary to air-condition our plants in order to get the high speed. At first, we were printing one color over the other, and we had two-color presses. Then it went into four-color presses. They have presses now that you can print as high as six colors, once through the press.

RATNER

Wow.

KISTLER

Once through the press. It goes through, really, six presses, one after the other, to print the six colors. Most of these magazines now are printed in four colors. They may have one or two extra colors that they want to print that are special. So they'll have five and six colors on some of them. They've got the inks made so that they will run on those presses and can be printed one after another immediately. Because the six-color press is really six presses set up one after the other, so that the sheet of paper goes through--one, two, three, four, five, six--one right after the other. It's almost immediate, because they run very fast. They print up to 4,000 and 5,000 impressions an hour on them now. So it has been a combination of the mechanical presses and the chemicals and chemicalization and the inks and the handling of the paper. It's all done automatically today, almost.

RATNER

Was your father the first printer in Los Angeles to convert to an offset plant?

KISTLER

No. There were a couple. All of the printers were interested in them. My father was one of the first. He bought a one-color offset press, a 35" X 45" press. We made our own negatives. We stripped our own and put them together, put the negatives together, and printed them down on the plates and made the plates. We did the whole process in our shop. We sent the binding out, however. We did simple binding: folding and things like that. But books that we printed were bound outside of the shop. The binding of the books was done outside of our place of the books .

RATNER

How receptive were his customers to the change?

KISTLER

It was a rather hard job to sell the new method to people. They didn't understand it. There was a lot of educational work that had to be done. In other words, they knew how to prepare the copy for letterpress printing, but they didn't know how to prepare for offset work or how it was going to come out. We had to do a lot of experimentation. We did a lot of advertising printing, and we had to do a lot of talking in order to get people to use the new process.

RATNER

I guess eventually you convinced them, or at least most of them.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, we were fortunate in that regard. My friend Carl Haverlin made friends with Merle Armitage, who was the manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company that was operating along in the twenties and early thirties. Merle was interested in prints, and he was interested in books. When we put in the new process, why, he was one of the people that was willing to go along with what everyone figured was an experimentation. It was an experimentation on our part, too. We had to run experiments before we could even convince him. But he was interested in doing books, so he brought his books to me through my friend Carl Haverlin. Carl Haverlin brought Merle Armitage into my plant and introduced him to me. He was impressed with the

letterpress work we were doing. He was also enthusiastic about the offset, the possibility of printing books by offset. So the first book that we did for Merle Armitage was a book of-- Let's see, what--?

RATNER

Here's something from 1932, The Work of Maier- Krieg. Was that it?

KISTLER

Yes, [Eugen] Maier-Krieg. That's what I was trying to recall. We did a book for Merle Armitage and Maier-Krieg. We did the photography on it and we made the plates, and it came out a very handsome book. He was well pleased with it, and we were well pleased with the work that we had done on the book. It created quite a sensation. Merle Armitage was interested in prints, so I found out something about stone printing. It was awfully difficult to get any information, even from our own workmen, about methods and about improvements and about special things that people knew about that they could do with lithography. They wouldn't pass the information around. It was very secret, a secretive sort of thing. So Merle was a collector of prints, and he had gotten some prints that were made from stone. I decided that I would go back and get what information I could and start right in at the bottom and build the thing up from the start so that I understood the process from start to finish. In order to do that, why, I got some stones in. At first, I took zinc plates around, small zinc plates around to my customers. By that time, I was out of the plant and was doing sales and contact work. I was calling on artists and advertising agencies and Merle Armitage. Armitage had a very fine collection of prints. Amongst them were a lot of stone lithographs. So I got a hold of a book [The Invention of Lithography]. It was published by the Fuchs and Lang [Manufacturing Company] people. It was a book that was written by the inventor of lithography, whose name was Alois Senefelder. Lithography was one of those inventions that didn't have any background at all. Senefelder started out-- He wanted to print music.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (January 3, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, when we flipped the tape, you were saying Senefelder started out wanting to print music.

KISTLER

So he practiced writing music backwards, which he had to do because the printing plate they made would print backwards if it was written on the plate the right way. So letterpress printing and the early lithography was done by pressing the paper against the printing plate, so that what you got was a reverse of what was on the printing plate. So you had to have it backwards to start with. Do you understand?

RATNER

Yes.

KISTLER

So he lived in Munich near the Solnhofen quarries. That was a big quarry for the limestone that was being used at that time in lithography. Not in lithography, but it was being used in building. Lithography hadn't been invented yet. So he got some of this limestone, and he was practicing reversed writing on it. He would etch it so that it stood up in relief, and he could ink it at the top and it would print. Progressively, he found it was not necessary to etch it so far. Finally, he got it down to a chemical method of printing where it depended upon creating a greasy surface from which to print, and a hydroscopic surface could be chemically established. So you had a planographic plate, but there were two different-- You changed the character of the stone on the surface to-- First, the printing surface has changed to a surface that would take ink. The other surface was treated chemically so that it would only take water. So one place the water was was where your printing surface was, and it wouldn't take water because it was greasy. And the blank surfaces would not take ink because they were damp. You'd dampen the stone first, and then you rolled it with an inky roller. The printing surface would pick up the ink. The hydroscopic surfaces were damp, and they would repel the ink. You inked the stone and you put a piece of paper on it, and you'd pull your print and you'd get what was on the stone. It would be the right way, because it was backwards on the stone and it would come out reverse. So that was-- Let's see, where was I?

RATNER

You were telling me that you had gotten this book from Fuchs and Lang to learn about lithography.

KISTLER

Oh, yes. Lithography was an invention of one man. There was no background to it at all, except that he wanted to make a printing process that he could print music with. So, progressively, he worked this method out until he had a planographic plate, and from there it took off. But all of the work on the stone at first was done by hand. Of course, there was no photography until very late in the nineteenth century. Senefelder invented lithography in 1796. So just about a hundred years [later], approximately, why, it commenced to come out, the whole process. So I went ahead and went through all of his explanation of stone work. I accumulated some stones to experiment on. I experimented, went to artists and asked them to make a drawing on a stone or on a zinc plate, which was also possible to work on lithographically at that time. I'd bring them back and pull a half dozen or a dozen prints, and I'd give the artist half the prints and I'd take half myself.

RATNER

Instead of charging them?

KISTLER

Yes. I couldn't get anybody to pay for it. [laughter] Merle Armitage was a friend of artists: Edward Weston, the photographer, and-- Well, one day, he walked into our plant, and I was working on some of the things that I was doing there. He brought a man by the name of Jean Charlot.

RATNER

Right. We mentioned that a little bit last time.

KISTLER

Yes, into the plant. He introduced me as "the best lithographer in Southern California." Charlot was impressed. I had some big stones there, the size of that one there.

RATNER

How big is that, would you say?

KISTLER

Well, that's about 26" X 30" I guess. I agreed to print this piece for Jean Charlot.

RATNER

Which is called Woman with Child on Back, is that right?

KISTLER

Yes, that's right. I did that with the help of one of my men, Tom [Thomas] Barr. He was one of the men that I could get information from. He was a friend of the family, too. He gave me some information on it. I went ahead and I printed it and pulled about twenty prints in two colors. That was my start in the thing.

RATNER

So that was very ambitious to start with color when you'd never done a stone print before.

KISTLER

Well, I was kind of stuck, because Merle Armitage was my best customer at that time. I was doing books for him. Or he was getting ready to do books, rather, at that time. So, after that first work, the first book that I did with Armitage-- I guess I had printed about five or six books on the offset press by the time I had gotten in touch with Charlot. Charlot was a Frenchman. He'd spent about four or five years down in Yucatan making drawings of the stone work at Chichen Itza. So he had made friends with [Jose Clemente] Orozco and [Diego] Rivera and a lot of those Mexican artists. They were doing some work on stone. They were drawing on stone. So when he came up here, he started to look around for a printer to do stone. Merle Armitage, who was interested in his work, brought him into my shop. That's the way I got acquainted with him.

RATNER

And had he ever done color before?

KISTLER

No. He had never done any color lithographs before. So we pulled that one off, and it came off so well. Then I expanded and I did, oh, maybe a couple of hundred different lithographs for him. He had quite a number of drawings, and he wanted to put them into a book. So I talked my father into doing it on this large offset press that we had. We had eight different images on a sheet, and we printed them in from one to six colors, and they had to be run through separately. Each one of these drawings had to be registered with the whole sheet, and all of them had to hit right in the right position. The size of the sheet that we were running was 35" X 45", which is pretty big. It was really an ambitious undertaking to undertake a hand-drawn book from four to eight colors . We had to run each color separately, let it dry for a day. We had no air-conditioning. It was awfully hazardous running them. We had five forms on them. We had four forms of the drawings. We turned out this book [Picture Book] . It was really an accomplishment because of the problems, the undertaking. I don't believe that there ' d ever been anything done like it, and I've never seen anything like it anyplace that was done before we accomplished this in our plant. Each color was drawn separately on a separate plate. Then the colors were printed separately, one at a time. It would take us about a week or more to finish the printing on one of the forms that we had. We had five forms .

RATNER

But a total of thirty- two lithographs made up that book, right?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

So that must have taken an awfully long time. Do you remember how long the entire project was?

KISTLER

Well, it took us about six months, I guess, to finish it.

RATNER

I have here too that it was designed by Merle Armitage. What does that mean?

KISTLER

Well, he laid out the book. He was the designer of the book, and I set the type. It was a handset type. I set the type, and we had to make a separate plate for the printing that went with it. You haven't seen the book, have you?

RATNER

I saw just one. I saw a copy at the [William Andrews] Clark [Memorial] Library.

KISTLER

Oh, you did?

RATNER

I enjoyed looking at it. If you had a copy here, I'd like to look at it again with you if there was anything you wanted to tell me more specifically about it.

KISTLER

Well, I'll go and get it. [tape recorder off]

RATNER

So this is the original Picture Book right here?

KISTLER

Yes. There was a wrapper that went around it, and I had--

RATNER

Instead of a slipcover like that?

KISTLER

Yes, instead. This was a wrapper, but it deteriorated. I found one in a bookstore and bought it. So I made a slipcase out of it.

RATNER

Oh, that was a good idea. So you printed five hundred of these, I know.

KISTLER

Yes, that's right.

RATNER

And to whom were they sold initially?

KISTLER

Well, they were sold to subscribers. They sold them by subscription.

RATNER

So that's how you financed the project?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

That's right.

RATNER

Well, maybe you should be showing it to me and telling me.

KISTLER

Well, I don't know. It's a picture book. [laughter] That one, I believe there are four or five colors on that. Each one of those colors was drawn on a plate.

RATNER

On a separate plate.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

I know at the Clark they have-- I think maybe you gave them some of the trial proofs or something, because I know I saw something that was progressive stages of colors.

KISTLER

Yes, yes.

RATNER

Then whose idea was it to have--? Paul Claudel, I guess, was the Frenchman who wrote the inscriptions?

KISTLER

Well, he [Charlot] was a Frenchman, and he was a friend of Paul Claudel. He wanted to sell some in France. So he had a friend of Merle Armitage's [Elise Cavanna Seeds] translate. It was written in French at first, and this friend of Merle's translated it from French into English.

RATNER

Then it also won an award, right? It was one of the fifty--

KISTLER

One of the Fifty Books of the Year from the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

RATNER

So considering this was your first effort at something like this, you must have all been very thrilled, beyond words, I imagine.

KISTLER

[laughter] I'm still thrilled with it, you know. It's one of the things that I'm proudest of that I've made.

RATNER

Was your father resistant at first?

KISTLER

No, he was-- He should have spanked me instead of letting me do it. [laughter] But he was very cooperative.

RATNER

I remember also reading in some of the correspondence at the Clark that, I guess, if you can even find this in a rare bookstore now, it's quite costly. Do you remember what it cost when it first was completed in 1932?

KISTLER

Fifteen dollars, I believe.

RATNER

Fifteen dollars. What's it going for now? Do you know?

KISTLER

Well, it has sold for as high as $3,500 for a single book. That one there I think I bought from a bookstore recently--about two years ago, I think--and I paid $1,000 for it! [laughter]

RATNER

My goodness. So you didn't keep any for yourself at the beginning? [laughter]

KISTLER

No. I've always wanted to get my work out. I printed because I wanted people to have prints. My ambition was to print and make good artwork of important artists available at a reasonable price. I was interested in doing that, and I thought that lithographs were suited to that purpose. So I always priced everything as low as I could and tried to get widespread distribution. But I think my idea was wrong, because if you want to impress anybody you want to put a high price on it, and then they'll want it real bad.

RATNER

[laughter] That's unfortunately true.

KISTLER

If it's too cheap, why, they don't think it's worth much.

RATNER

You're right about that. I think I also remember reading that initially you couldn't sell all of them and that you sold some of the plates individually. Is that true? Am I mixing that up with another project?

KISTLER

I think that I did frame some of them and sell them signed, individual prints.

RATNER

This is in beautiful condition. The quality of the paper is really lovely. That was during the Depression. How difficult was it to get good quality paper and inks and things at that time?

KISTLER

Well, the paper industry had not recovered at that time. This was the best paper that I could buy, and it was from the Strathmore Paper Company, which had a very good name at that time. It was the best paper that was available. I had it shipped in from out of town. They made the special paper that they were making at that time.

RATNER

How had the Depression affected the lithography industry, in Los Angeles in particular?

KISTLER

Well, eventually it put my father out of business, really, is what happened. Financing wasn't as available. We had a lot of equipment. We had a good business, but we hadn't-- That is, we had good equipment and everything, but we didn't have enough to keep us in business.

RATNER

And it was that way pretty much across the board?

KISTLER

Yes, it was pretty much that way. A lot of them went out of business at that time.

RATNER

What year was that that your father finally went out of business?

KISTLER

Nineteen thirty-six.

RATNER

Well, I know you said last time also that after you had printed your first lithograph with Charlot, the Woman with Child on Back, you wanted to do nothing but print from stone. I think you said that that was a crazy thing to want to do. What was so crazy about that?

KISTLER

[laughter] Well, there was too much promotional work to be done, and there were not enough artists that were available that could do the work, that their work was available. There was really no market for it, except an occasional collector like Merle Armitage. There weren't any of the fine marketing techniques that they have today, you know, to get people in to buy things. Gee, the way that they razz you on the television. The amount of advertising matter that we get here is just-- Well, it disturbs me that there's so much of it, just loaded. The advertising is written by people that studied psychology, and they're highly educated in the use of the products and everything. Marketing has become-- Well, I think that it's a nuisance today. I don't think that half of the products that are on the market are worth the money that they ask for them if they do what they're supposed to do. But they're just sold on the basis of the pressure that's put on people. You get on the television here, and almost all of the stations are just loaded with advertising. Look at your newspapers and look at-- I'll bet you get a lot of direct mail yourself.

RATNER

Yes, I do.

KISTLER

We get a stack like that almost every day, solicitations of various art. And these people are experienced in changing your mind, too. They know how to do it. They just keep after it, and in spite of the fact that you say no, why, they've got yes in their mind all the time. That's what happens to you when you get so much of this stuff. We throw away tons of stuff here that we don't even open the letters on. Some of these solicitations that are made almost make you cry, they're written so well and are so persuasive. And they don't take no for an answer. You tell them no once, why, they send you some more, and then they pass it around. They pass your name around. They trade names

with other people. I don't know what's going to become of this advertising business. When people get as smart as I am about it, well, then-- [laughter]

RATNER

Then maybe they'll stop a little bit. [laughter] They won't be getting any money in the mail.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Well, I thought we'd go on now and talk about-- In 1933, after you had, I guess, gotten some artists to print from stone- -

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

As you say, after you had done this print with Charlot, and I guess actually even completed the first Picture Book. You must have done a fair amount, because I have a little brochure here from an exhibition that you held. It was your first exhibition of your work, entitled "Impressions Printed by Hand from Stone and Zinc by Lynton Kistler at the Stendahl Gallery." Then that little catalog includes an introduction by Merle Armitage. Here, I can show it to you. I don't know--it's a xerox--how well you can see it, but-- I wondered how that project came into being.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, I don't-- I'm just trying to think when that was done.

RATNER

Nineteen thirty- three, I think it says.

KISTLER

Well, that was done when I was still at my father's shop. Yes. Yes, I remember it now. Thomas Barr, Edwin Botsford, John Breneiser, Stanley Breneiser, Jean

Charlot, Richard Day, Franz Geritz, Paul Landacre. I did one of the few lithographs that he ever did.

RATNER

He did mostly etching, Landacre?

KISTLER

Yes. He was a very good friend of mine. He wanted to do more, but I advised him to stay with his wood engraving, because he had a specialty there that he was trying to sell. Gerd Lovick, Warren Newcombe. Yes, I remember that .

RATNER

And then there are more names here, too.

KISTLER

Yes. Warren Newcombe, Elise Seeds. That was Merle Armitage's wife at that time. He was married several times. I think he was married six times.

RATNER

Oh, my goodness.

KISTLER

Henrietta Shore, Blanding Sloane, Beatrice Wood. That was all.

RATNER

So what made you decide to mount this exhibition?

KISTLER

Well, I wanted to sell the prints. I wanted to get more printing. I wanted to get more printing to do by selling the prints. It was the whole idea.

RATNER

And did you know [Earl] Stendahl before this, before you asked him if you could have the exhibition there?

KISTLER

Yes, I think I did.

RATNER

And did many prints sell?

KISTLER

Not very many. The trouble was that the people came in and-- Well, when I had my gallery at Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street], why, they'd come in and go through my whole stock and pick one or two and say, "Well, I'll be in in a couple of days, and I'll think about it." They'd go through everything that I had. They'd come back and then decide that they didn't want it. Or if they did buy a print, why, it was $5 or $10 I got out of it, which didn't amount to a hill of beans as far as keeping me in business was concerned. I had my prints in several galleries, but the galleries just used them as a come-on. They get them in and they find out that they liked a certain artist, why, then they would try to sell them a painting--and usually did before they got through- -rather than a lithograph. It was just too big an emotional job for me to undertake all by myself.

RATNER

Right, to do the printing and to do that, too.

KISTLER

Yes. But I liked the work, and I did work at it for quite a number of years.

RATNER

How much increased business from artists, for example, did you get from having that exhibition?

KISTLER

Well, I had regular contact with artists right along.

RATNER

So, I mean, additional artists that hadn't known about you, then they found out about you from that?

KISTLER

Yes. Yes, they came from all over. I had them come from Arizona and New Mexico. I was back in New York at one time. I was walking down the street. At the Rockefeller Center there's a gallery on Fifth Avenue there, and I saw some pictures of some horses. Bug-eyed horses. I've got the lithographs in the back that I made. [Florencio] Molino Campos, he was an Argentine who was run out of Argentina by [Juan] Peron. He either had to get out or they were going to shoot him. So he came up to this country, and he made calendars for the International Harvester Company. He had some paintings on exhibit in the window on Fifth Avenue. I saw these paintings and them bug-eyed horses, and they're as cute as they can be. So I said, "Gee, I'd sure like to get him into my studio and get him to do some work." After I opened my studio at Third and Carondelet, why, he walked into my place one day--

RATNER

Just coincidentally?

KISTLER

Just coincidentally, yes.

RATNER

Oh, my goodness.

KISTLER

What a thrill that was for me. I thought, gee, I'm going to get some marvelous lithographs now, even if I have to print them for nothing. [laughter] But he couldn't work in black and white. He had to have color. And I wasn't in the position at that time to do color. I had quite a bit of black and white work that I was doing. But later on, when I got into printing offset lithographs, why, I printed some in color, and they turned out marvelous. But they didn't sell any better than any of the others. There was a sales problem there that needed solving, and it needed somebody to take it over and sell it.

RATNER

From the works that you showed in the Stendahl show in '33, were those artists--? How were you paid for that work?

KISTLER

Well, some of it I printed just for experience. Some of them were the pictures that I had printed in my father's plant in experimentation. I'd go around to these artists and I'd tell them about it and give them a piece of zinc and say, "Make a drawing on it with a lithograph crayon, and I'll print them for you." I would take half of the prints, I'd give them half of the prints, and we were in business.

RATNER

So at that point you were still maybe taking part of the edition.

KISTLER

Yes, I'd still. And some of those that I included in that Stendahl-- I think that those were done in that catalog. I think that's the first catalog that I put out.

RATNER

I think so, from what I read.

KISTLER

Yes. They were all printed either in my father's shop or in my garage. It didn't work out very well for me to have my stone printing in the shop, in my father's shop. So I bought a lithograph press, a lithograph transfer press. I took it out and I put it in my garage. A lot of the things that I've printed were printed in the garage there. I set up a place to grain my plates and everything. Saturdays and Sundays, why, I would put in my time printing. And I had the neighbors all upset. There was one neighbor that was upset, the man across the street from me, because I had so many people in my place. I was doing it for nothing then because I was doing it just as a trade-off. You know, I'd give them prints and not charge them for them, and I'd take prints as pay for my work. That's the way that I had to do most of it. So that there wasn't very much money coming out of it, but of course I didn't have any rent there. But there was a time when the artists were interested enough that they would come to my place and, well, practically, there would be no place to park on the street because of the people who were there. This one neighbor went to the planning commission and complained about it. I said, "Well, it's a hobby. What are you going to do about it?" [laughter] So he couldn't do anything because I wasn't taking any money for what I was doing.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (January 10, 1989)

RATNER

We spoke last time about your show in 1933 at the Stendahl Gallery. I'd like to know a little bit more about some of the other galleries that were active in Los Angeles during the thirties, and particularly their interest in prints, such as the [Dalzell] Hatfield Gallery and Jake Zeitlin's gallery.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, I would say that Hatfield and Zeitlin were the best known galleries. Dalzell Hatfield was a dealer in paintings, of course. With his wife Ruth [Hatfield] , they had quite an extensive business in Los Angeles here. They were the leading dealers and very active in handling the work of local artists and bringing new things into the area here. They had several rooms in the Ambassador Hotel, and they were the most active people in paintings. Unfortunately for printmakers, they used-- All of the dealers here used the prints that were delivered to them to drum up business. They [the customers] would come in interested in prints, and they would swing them over to paintings. They were more interested in selling their paintings. Of course, you couldn't blame them for doing that, because they had considerable expense. Prints at that time needed quite a lot done on them to make them popular, make them generally collected. Merle Armitage, who was the most active print collector in this area at that time, he had a considerable collection of etchings and lithographs and things of that sort that antedated all the work that I had done. He was immensely interested in the work that I had taken up in the printing of lithographs, the fact that I got interested in printing the art lithographs. So that there weren't too many galleries that were handling the prints. We not only had to print the prints and promote the media of lithography amongst the artists, but we also had to do our best to sell some of the prints in order to get people interested in them. There was a lot of work to be done. There still is a lot of work to be done as far as prints are concerned. I think that prints are really a very fine opportunity for the average person to accumulate first-class artwork and fine artists' work at a reasonable price. It brings it within the reach of the average man, so that the average person can possess the work of real well known artists. Here on my walls right now, I've got the work of Jean Charlot and [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright and these two

woodblock cutters. Let's see, it's Thomas Wolfe and-- I can't think of the other one right now.

RATNER

Paul Landacre?

KISTLER

Well, yes, Paul Landacre. And, let's see, Wolfe, and I don't know this other one here. What's his name?

RATNER

[pause] I can't read it. Henry something maybe?

KISTLER

Oh, isn't that something? Gee, he's well known. [pause] Hmm. Well, put it aside. It will come to me. My memory's not as good as it used to be. Then there are two there that are very well known. Laura Knight, there's an aquatint by her, and a lithograph by Rockwell Kent. At the time that I accumulated these things, I couldn't afford a painting, so I feel as though it's a real opportunity to own something worthwhile, not just have a lot of junk on the wall. You don't have to cut magazines apart and put them up. I got the real artwork on. I appreciate it very much, being able to have them. I think that lithography is something that the average person can afford. Even the watercolors of some of the better- known artists are very expensive. Prints that are signed are really of real value.

RATNER

Why do you feel there was so little regard during the thirties, for example, for prints? You know, by these gallery owners who preferred to sell paintings over prints.

KISTLER

Well, because they got more money for them, they promoted them more. The artists didn't hold their work as valuable enough. The prices that are asked for prints today are far above what we were able to ask for, I mean. Ask for them and not get it. [laughter] You get an idea. Not even get the sale of them. They used to come into my place and they would go through all of the prints that I

had. When I was at Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street] , why, I was operating in the whole field of the business. I was producing the prints and doing everything but drawing them. I had a gallery as well as a printing shop. I sent prints that were printed in my plant throughout the United States, up and down the coast. I had a little gallery in my place, and then I sent all of the shows up as far as Seattle and over to Brooklyn, New York, Cleveland, and places like that. At the Los Angeles [County] Museum [of History, Science, and Art] , when it was over in Exposition Park, I had shows every year of prints. I had from a third to a half of the prints that were shown in the show at that time, sometimes. For four or five years there, I had--

RATNER

How actively were they collecting prints?

KISTLER

Well, they were taking all that were given to them. They were not buying any or anything like that. There were no prizes offered, but they did run a show every year for several years while they were over in Exposition Park.

RATNER

How about Jake Zeitlin's gallery? Because wasn't he more oriented towards prints?

KISTLER

Yes. He was very active in prints. Of course, he was more interested in prints than he was in paintings, because he didn't have a painting gallery. The Los Angeles museum and-- Let's see, that outfit there that was out there next to Jake's. Wasn't that the Los Angeles museum of--? Hmm. I can't remember. It was the Southern California--

RATNER

In the thirties?

KISTLER

Yes, yes. Helen Wurdemann was--

RATNER

I think I came across her name somewhere. I'll have to check. Her name sounds familiar to me. I'll have to check on that, but that does sound familiar.

KISTLER

Yes. I ought to be able to tell you these things, but I'm just [snaps fingers] --

RATNER

That's all right. I'll check on that and then we can talk about it next time.

KISTLER

Do you know where that gallery is out there? It was--

RATNER

I don't know where it was originally. I know on La Cienega [Boulevard] .

KISTLER

Yes, and it was next door to Jake Zeitlin's place. I can't remember what that was called, and I am an honorary member there, too. I can't think of it. I can't be sure of the name.

LELAH KISTLER

Is it in your date book?

KISTLER

Yes, I think it is. Southern California, it might be that. Or it might be Los Angeles. I can't remember now. [Los Angeles Art Association]

RATNER

So that was located, though, next to the Zeitlin gallery, and it was interested in prints also?

KISTLER

Yes. Then there was another lady that had a gallery. That was along in the sixties and seventies.

RATNER

Yes, a little later. And I know there were some more in the forties, too, that I'll want to talk to you about in a few minutes.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What about some of the artists that you worked with during the thirties? For example, I know you worked with Conrad Buff and Palmer Schoppe. How did you happen to meet them?

KISTLER

Well, I think that they came into my place. Or I may have looked them up. I called on a lot of the artists and would go around and see them and talk to them about doing lithographs. I'd try to get them interested in it. Palmer Schoppe, I don't remember just how I did meet him, but he worked with me. He was one of the early ones that I worked with, because he was my assistant for quite a little while. I tried to get him to take up the printing of lithography, but I couldn't get anybody else interested in doing the printing. I was going to do the promotion, but I had to do the promotion and the printing, too. [laughter] I didn't have much choice. I had to do everything. I had to provide the gallery, I had to do the printing of the prints and had to promote it and everything else. I used to take my press apart and take it around the city here in various places. I don't mind telling you that it really was a job to do.

RATNER

I bet! It must have been very heavy.

KISTLER

Yes. Sometimes it was upstairs and things like that, but I'd take it down in order just to make one demonstration, you know, get people interested in it. I think that I did encourage the first interest in lithography. But it was too much of a job. I had to do it all. There was nobody else that was interested in it. There was the man at the *Times*. These names escape me just when I want them. I can't think. He was editor, the art editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. He was very helpful in promoting the work, and he gave my gallery and my work quite a bit of publicity, and the artists that I was working with.

RATNER

Is that Arthur Millier?

KISTLER

Arthur Millier, yes. He was very active. He really deserves an awful lot of credit for putting this city on the map as far as art was concerned. He was very active in telling people about the new artists and the artists that were accomplishing something.

RATNER

So when you were printing for these early artists. how did that work? Most of the people would take a stone or a zinc plate to their studio and then come back and have you print it? Or did they work in your studio? What was the set-up?

KISTLER

Well, the setup was-- I ran a school, too. [laughter]

RATNER

When was that? That was like in the forties, I think.

KISTLER

Yes, in the fifties, sixties. When I was on Third and Carondelet.

RATNER

Yes. What about when you were first starting out in the thirties there?

KISTLER

Well, I got interested in lithography. My father [William A. Kistler] bought an offset press.

RATNER

Right, we talked about that.

KISTLER

And we couldn't get an awful lot of information. The craft was closed pretty well.

RATNER

Right, you were telling me about that. So when you were able to entice the artists to work, to get them interested in lithography during the thirties, were they working right in your studio, or were you taking the things to them?

KISTLER

Well, I didn't have a studio to start with. It was my father's business. My first impulse was to learn more about lithography and find out about it. I couldn't get information on it, and we had a lot of misinformation. We had workmen that had secrets that if we lost the workmen, why, we lost our ability to produce work. So the time that my father got into lithography was a time in which there was a conversion being made. There's two things that had happened: there had been an offset press invented, which made high-speed production possible, and there was a tremendous step forward in photography, in the accuracy with which they could make negatives. Whereas they used to have to do a lot of staging and etching and photoengraving and a lot of handwork on the negatives and on the plates to make them, they got the negatives to the point where they could take a photograph or anything and they could make a halftone of it and just print it directly on the metal and not have to do a lot of handwork on it. When they got to that point, why, then it was applicable to the lithography. It wasn't possible to do that before because you couldn't work by hand on the lithograph negatives to correct them if it needed correcting. When they got to the point where they could put the subject up and photograph it and make a halftone and get an accurate reproduction without a lot of excess handwork, why, then they could go ahead and apply lithography to general printing. When we got to the point where we could do halftone work, why, then we could expand into the letterpress market, and we converted a lot of the letterpress work to lithography. So, in order to understand the situation from start to finish, I went clear back and got books on lithography, the few that existed, which probably-- The Fuchs and Lang [Manufacturing Company] book on lithography [*The Invention of Lithography*] was just about all that was available in English, and one or two English books that were available that I had access to. I got

stones and just started in working. And then I would go out to-- I was doing sales work at that time, and I'd go to the advertising agencies and people who were doing artwork and I would talk to them about it. I would get them to sketch on the zinc plates at first, and then I commenced to get stones and--

RATNER

So you brought the stones and the plates to the artists?

KISTLER

Yes. They would make drawings on the plates or the stones, and I would print them and would give them ten copies and keep ten copies for myself. I got so interested in it that I finally bought material, bought equipment, and took it out to my home and worked in my garage. I'd get home at night and work for a couple of hours after I got home, and I'd put in my Saturdays and Sundays making lithographs. A lot of the work was done for nothing. I couldn't charge for the work that I was doing when I was printing it at my home, because it was in a residential district and the people objected to it. So the only way that I'd get by was to just print and give the artist some of the prints and keep some myself.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

That was the only way that I worked for two or three years. A good many of the things that I made for Jean Charlot, the first ones, were done that way.

RATNER

After you had been printing for a little while, I guess, you began using your chop, which is a stylized "LK" in a circle. Do you remember when you began to use that?

KISTLER

Well, that was after I established the studio at Third and Carondelet.

RATNER

Oh, so that was later.

KISTLER

Yes, that was later. That was in the forties and fifties.

RATNER

Who designed that?

KISTLER

Well, the Marsh Art Service drew it for me. I'd laid it out. I told them what I wanted, and it just kind of evolved.

RATNER

How unusual was it to use a chop at that time?

KISTLER

Well, there had been some artists that had used it, but they hadn't made a real practice of it. I was the one that got it started and got it going. There was nobody else that was doing it regularly that I know of.

RATNER

Did anybody raise objections to your using it, any of the artists or anything?

KISTLER

No, none of them. They were glad to have the chop on there.

RATNER

Okay. Also, just to jump back to the thirties a little bit, I was wondering how aware you were of the activities and efforts of the New York-based Associated American Artists, particularly during the thirties. In doing some research--I think it was during the thirties--I noticed that you printed some lithographs for them, and I wondered how that all happened.

KISTLER

Well, that came through Jean Charlot. It was Jean Charlot's prints that I did. He was out here, and they wanted him to make lithographs, and they sent the order out here. Jean drew them on the stone, and I printed them and sent them back to New York. That's the way that I got that. He was the only one

that I ever printed for for the Associated American Artists. Most of that work was done in the East. Millard [Sheets] had been in business for quite a while at that time.

RATNER

I know part of their idea during the thirties was-- I guess they were maybe the first group to start packaging and marketing prints. I read that they wanted to market them through department stores and mail subscriptions and that they really believed that there was a market for the $5 print. I wondered at the time how you felt about that whole concept .

KISTLER

Well, I thought that $5 was pretty low for the prints. We had to compete with them, of course. But it was a lot of work to do. When you figure that the artists today are getting $5 and $10 apiece just for pulling one print-- We had to print prints for as low as fifty cents apiece for Associated American Artists. They were taking advantage of the situation amongst the lithographers to get a low price. I think that that is the reason that it didn't work out, because they didn't make the prints valuable enough. They didn't put a high enough price on them. Gee whiz, just hinky-dink artists today get $200 and $300 for one print.

RATNER

At least.

KISTLER

Yes. All of them think that they ought to have more than that, too. But, gee, we were selling prints for $5 and $10. The prices were too low and there wasn't a high enough value placed on the work. There is a print right there- -

RATNER

The Charlot?

KISTLER

Charlot, yes. Charlot priced that print at about ten dollars, and the last price that I saw on it was $600. This print here of Macdonald-Wright , that print, the last price I saw on it was about $1,750.

RATNER

So they've gone up a lot. Prices have escalated.

KISTLER

Yes. This print of Millard Sheets, I think I sold that for $1,200. I don't know what price is on it now. But we didn't value the work high enough. That was the trouble. And there was some beautiful work done.

RATNER

How much impact do you feel the Depression had on the fact that people weren't buying prints during the thirties?

KISTLER

[laughter] I think that lithography took a beating along with the rest of the things- -

RATNER

Right, it would seem like that would happen.

KISTLER

Yeah. People didn't buy more prints because they were cheaper and they could afford them. All of us had difficulties with money at that time. Things were cheap. You have no idea how cheap things were, how inexpensive it was to live in those days, back in the thirties.

LELAH KISTLER

She wasn't alive then.

RATNER

No. [laughter] Just from reading my history.

KISTLER

We used to get a hot dog or a hamburger for fifteen cents. A dime for a hot dog or fifteen cents for a hamburger. You can imagine that-- [laughter] They get four dollars and five dollars for just one hamburger today. Of course, they

fancy them up a little bit, but there isn't a difference there, I can tell you. [laughter]

RATNER

I also wanted to ask you what you knew about a group called the California Printmakers. Does that ring a bell?

KISTLER

Well, I just knew of them. That was all. I had some of them that worked on this-- I can't recall a lot of these names now. [inaudible] Los Angeles Art Association is what I was thinking of.

RATNER

And that was a print gallery?

KISTLER

Yes.

LELAH KISTLER

They were on 325 North La Cienega Boulevard.

KISTLER

Yes, they were right next door to Jake Zeitlin. Helen Wurdemann was really a-- She contributed an awful lot to the print world here, the promotion of it and everything. Do you know her? Do you remember?

RATNER

No. As I said, in doing the research I know that I came across that name, because it sounded familiar. But there was very little information on her. That's why it didn't stick with me.

KISTLER

I think that she would be a very good one to do.

RATNER

Is she still alive, do you know?

KISTLER

The last that I heard. I hadn't heard that she passed away. No. RANIER: I was asking about that group, the California Printmakers, because I know in doing the research I came across something about the Cleveland Print Club, which, I guess, was one of the most famous print clubs for selling subscriptions and having works printed by very well known artists. I just wondered-- I couldn't find anything about the California Printmakers, and I wondered if they did anything similar to that, you know, whether you had printed anything for them.

KISTLER

No. They were just a group of artists, and they were mostly etchers.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

Let's see, there's one girl that's still-- I can't remember her name. Gee, I'm sorry that I'm so fuzzy about these names. If you had been in touch with me a couple of years ago, I could have given them all to you, but I just cannot recall a lot of them now. [tape recorder off] And then here, this is a book of prints that I think I sold to Lord.

RATNER

Jack Lord?

KISTLER

Jack Lord.

RATNER

And those are the things that went to the Smithsonian [Institution]?

KISTLER

I think so.

RATNER

Okay. Well, that will be a good thing to go over later, maybe at the time you sold those. You didn't sell those till like the sixties or seventies, right?

KISTLER

Yes, that's correct.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (January 10, 1989)

KISTLER

--Southern California something. I can't recall just what it is now.

RATNER

That's the Los Angeles Art Association, run by Helen Wurdemann? You were just mentioning Stephen Longstreet. He was involved with that?

KISTLER

Well, I think that he is president now, or had been for the last four or five years. But that has been a print gallery principally.

RATNER

And so you showed your work there also?

KISTLER

Yes, I showed my work there and other galleries, the Dalzell Hatfield Gallery and there were some other galleries I can't remember. There's a gallery out in Beverly Hills that--

RATNER

I know a number opened in Beverly Hills in the forties. There were a lot more galleries then. But I just wanted to go ahead and finish up the thirties, if that was okay. Because one thing that you spent a lot of time doing during the thirties was printing books with Merle Armitage.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

I thought maybe we could talk a little bit more about that. There apparently was an exhibition of the books that you printed in 1975 at Cal[ifornia] State University, Northridge. They put together a catalog. So I have a copy of that here with a list of the various books that you did. Although you printed beyond the thirties, it seems like the majority of the books that you printed with Merle Armitage, in particular, were done in the thirties. So I thought if it was okay with you, I'd just ask you about some of the books, and you could tell me what you remembered about printing those or if there was anything particularly special about the books. I know last time we talked about the first book you did with Merle Armitage, which wasThe Work of Maier-Krieg.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How did that whole project, the very first one, come into being?

KISTLER

Well, Merle Armitage was the manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company. I had a friend by the name of Carl Haverlin, who is a lifelong friend. He was quite active around town. He worked for me for a while as a salesman. He called on Merle. He's the one that introduced me to Merle, brought Merle down to my place and showed him what we were doing and the fact that we had put in an offset press and that we were a progressive firm and trying to get ahead in the world. So Merle was interested in designing books. He designed, I guess, some hundred different books, and I printed about fifty of them. I printed the first ones. I printed Eugen Maier-Krieg and the work of Richard Day [The Lithographs of Richard Day] . He was interested, too, in the fact that we could print by offset rather than by letterpress. I had three of the books that were accepted as Fifty Books of the Year [by the American Institute of Graphic Arts] . The first Picture Book was one that we printed by offset. It was done in from four to eight colors. There were thirty- two pictures, mostly material from Mexico. Jean Charlot had just come up from Mexico, where he had been making sketches of the stone work at Chichen Itza. He came to Los Angeles here and met Merle Armitage, and Merle Armitage brought him into my place. That way we got started on it, and that's the way I got started on

the books of Merle's. We felt as though we were taking a step forward in printing books that were hand drawn and also printed by lithography rather than letterpress. Because up to that time, practically all book work was done by letterpress rather than lithography. Lithography at that time had degenerated into box labels and things of that sort. Stationery and fruit-crate labels. There's quite a collection on those, too. There's been a lot of work done on those box labels and been quite an interest in them, too.

RATNER

So when you and Merle Armitage would get together to work on a book, for example, what was your part in the whole process? Did he make all the aesthetic decisions ahead of time, or how involved were you with that?

KISTLER

Well, I would work along with him. We'd consult together just what type we were going to use and how we were going to set it. The format was very often left to me. I would make up a dummy. Then Merle would sketch out the way that he thought it ought to be, and I would interpret it and type. My father had a very fine collection of type. We had one of the best type collections in the city. I had quite a bit of latitude in what we could do with putting type together in various ways. Merle would make a sketch of it, and I would make the type and the size in the way that it was to be set and oversee that it was set properly for the book.

RATNER

So it was a real collaboration?

KISTLER

It was a collaboration, yes.

RATNER

I think it was the third book, at least according to this catalog, that you printed with Merle Armitage that was one of the ones you mentioned that was one of the American Institute of Graphic Arts' Fifty Books of the Year. That was on Warren Newcombe?

KISTLER

Yes. [Warren Newcombe]

RATNER

And that had a photograph of Newcombe by Edward Weston, it looks like.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What do you remember about that project?

KISTLER

Well, Newcombe was an employee at the Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer company. He had a studio there, and he had a key to it. I think I told you this before.

RATNER

No.

KISTLER

He had his own studio at Metro-Goldwyn. He is the man that worked out this proposition where-- They had to have a scene on, say, the capitol steps. Of course, they couldn't build the whole thing, but they would have to make a set of maybe the steps. Then they would take a picture of the capitol. They would photograph each one of those separately and put them together. It would be the actual top of the capitol, and they would fit the other material that they needed for the lower half. They would make a set of that. They would put those together, believe it or not, all of the columns and everything fitting. If they happened to cut them in half or anything like that, it would come perfect. You wouldn't be able to-- You couldn't tell because they-- And they still do it, I think. They just build a part of the set and then take a picture of something else and fit the lower part with a motion picture set. Isn't that amazing?

RATNER

It is. I didn't realize it was done like that.

KISTLER

So that was the kind of man that Warren Newcombe was. He was the one that worked it out. Metro-Goldwyn valued his work and everything, but they failed to renew his contract when it came due. So when he didn't have a new contract, he had the only keys to this studio, and he just walked away. They didn't know where he'd gone or anything. Metro-Goldwyn closed down for two weeks because they didn't know where Warren Newcombe had gone or why or how to get a hold of him or what to do, and they didn't have the keys to the place. They didn't have anybody that understood it if they did have the keys. So they were good boys when he came back. [laughter] He got his contract amended. They didn't neglect to sign him up.

RATNER

And get an extra copy of the keys. [laughter]

KISTLER

No, they never got an extra copy of the key. But the method is generally known now.

RATNER

There's a little picture on here of the cover of that particular book. Then at the bottom, I guess, it was published by--

KISTLER

E. Weyhe.

RATNER

I came across their name a lot in association with your work with Armitage. What--?

KISTLER

Well, Weyhe handled the books in New York. Armitage had an agreement with E. Weyhe, and he worked with E. Weyhe. E. Weyhe sold a lot of books that we printed together. I don't know where Merle got the money, but he always came up with enough to-- That was the principal thing, as far as we were concerned, [laughter] getting the books paid for. Then we collaborated on the printing of the books and the design. We collaborated on that. We did the printing.

RATNER

So there were five hundred copies of that one printed?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It seems like a lot of books. Was it a lot of books? I mean, for somebody-- How well known was Warren Newcombe that they would have been able to sell five hundred books?

KISTLER

Well, you've got something there. [laughter] Five hundred books proved to be an awful lot. The first Picture Book, before we got through, we had sold a good many of them.

RATNER

Then here's another one, also from 1932--you were busy that year — The Art of Edward Weston. [laughter]

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

And that was also distributed by this E. Weyhe.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It had thirty-nine plates?

KISTLER

Yes. We printed that to letterpress. I've forgotten just how many reproductions of Edward Weston's work-- About thirty or forty reproductions

of his work. It was one of the finest letterpress, halftone jobs that had been done.

RATNER

This particular book was inscribed, too. It says, "Inscribed to L. K. , a real craftsman. Ever since we first met, I knew that no effort would be spared to make this book a splendid work. In gratitude, Edward."

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

That's nice. So what do you remember about working with Edward Weston? I guess you printed two books of his work?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

But what do you remember about that first experience? He obviously was very happy with you.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, it was an unusual thing. It was a large book. I think it was 12" X 16" in size, something like that in size. It was one of the Fifty Books of the Year. It was the finest reproduction of Edward Weston's work that had been done at that time. He was very much pleased with it. It took us a whole week to get the first form printed. We just printed two illustrations at the time. It was quite a long job. It took a lot of skillful work. We had worked out a couple of blocks of metal that we thought would anchor the thing right so that there couldn't possibly be any difficulty about printing it at all. We found out, when we got started, that we couldn't get it to print. It took us a whole week. We worked on it. We would get streaks in it and we didn't know why. We thought maybe the blocks were rocking, you know. But inasmuch as we had metal foundations for them--and blocks are usually mounted on wood, you know- - we thought that there would just be no chance of getting any slur in them at all. So we were just about to give up on the thing because we couldn't get the

streaks out of it. A pressman came in on Friday afternoon. He wanted to know if he could get a job. So we told him that we had a problem and if he could solve it, why, he'd have a job. He went back and he worked for a little while and got the press all set up and the ink all set and everything. Then he went and got a gasoline can, and he poured it on these plates that we had. He lit the gasoline, and it heated those plates, and they printed.

RATNER

My goodness! You must have been surprised.

KISTLER

Well, we were certainly relieved after that, because we had a lot of money tied up in the cuts. We'd had the cuts made already, the plates made. Los Angeles Engraving Company furnished the plates. We gave them credit for it, and they were glad to do it. About thirty- two plates, and they were about the actual size of Edward's work. They were very fussy in working out Edward's work, because in photographing, Edward didn't have small films that he enlarged. All of his work is photographed on negatives the same size as the photographic print that he makes from them. He just does it complete. So they're all big negatives. None of these small negatives or anything. It was really quite an accomplishment all the way through: working it out, getting a plate company that would make the plates for us, and also printing them after we got them made. We were afraid we weren't going to be able to print them, they were so large. We had excellent equipment, too, and we had a very good pressman outside of this man that came in. But this man that came in was just an itinerant printer and had run into trouble like that before. Just put a little gasoline on it, on each one of the plates, and then he would light it. It would get warm, and he would start his press and get his job off. So there's more than one way to skin a cat in the printing business.

RATNER

Yeah, that's a great story. [laughter]

KISTLER

We were amazed. My father had been at the business for thirty-five years at that time, and I knew a little bit about printing then, but there's always a new

trick in the printing business. There's always some way to overcome difficulties that you have. So that the printing of the Edward Weston book was quite an accomplishment. It was quite a triumph when we got it done. And it became one of the Fifty Books of the Year.

RATNER

So two of the books you printed that year--which was the first year it looks like you printed books --became one of the Fifty Books of the Year.
Because Warren Newcombe was printed in ' 32 and the Edward Weston book was printed in '32.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

So that was quite a way to begin.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

That's great. Another book you printed in '32 was on Rockwell Kent [Rockwell Kent] .

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

This one says, "Printed under the supervision of Lynton Kistler, " whereas the other ones have said, "Printed by." What was the difference there?

KISTLER

Gee, I don't think there was any difference, really. It was printed by lithography.

RATNER

How well did you know Rockwell Kent?

KISTLER

I never met him. He was one of Merle Armitage's customers, one of the people that Merle Armitage admired. He wanted to do a book on Rockwell Kent.

RATNER

Okay. We talked about the Picture Book last time. Then another one that was done in '33 was the work of Henrietta Shore.

KISTLER

Yes. [laughter] Well, that was an amusing situation, too. We had all of the plates on Henrietta Shore's book [Henrietta Shore] made. Jean Charlot came to town at that time. It was when we first contacted Jean Charlot. The Henrietta Shore book was one of Merle Armitage's babies. Jean Charlot saw the work that we were doing then on it and he said, "Well, I'd like to make the frontispiece for it. " So there was a frontispiece added to this book by Jean Charlot, and Henrietta Shore didn't know anything about it at all. He did a portrait of Henrietta Shore. It was a modern version and did nothing to compliment Henrietta Shore's looks. She was furious when she saw this thing. There are only two hundred of those books printed. She became reconciled to it finally, but it raised quite a ruckus for a while when it was published.

RATNER

She was a local artist?

KISTLER

No. She was of that group up there in Carmel .

RATNER

Okay. Then how about another one from 1934? That was--I was just curious--a book called Elise. Was that Armitage's wife at the time?

KISTLER

Yes. [Elise Cavanna Seeds]

RATNER

So now he's only printing the books in copies of two hundred. I guess maybe--

KISTLER

Yes. Well, some of them are more or less promotional work, you know? On the record, there were people that hadn't pushed to made a big splash, but their work needed promotional work, and that was one way to promote it.

RATNER

You said you don't know how he was able to finance all these projects.

KISTLER

Well, he got his friends to put up the money on it. He was doing very well himself. He was manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company, and he made a good salary and spent most of it on this kind of work.

RATNER

This one also had a portrait of Elise. It says, "Drawn directly on the zinc plate and hand colored by Beatrice Wood."

KISTLER

Yes. Yes, that's true. Elise and Beatrice Wood were good friends. They were both screwy artists. [laughter]

RATNER

And you had both of them included in your show that you did at the Stendahl Gallery ["Impressions Printed by Hand from Stone and Zinc by Lynton Kistler at the Stendahl Gallery"].

KISTLER

That's right, I did.

RATNER

Okay, here's one from 1935 on Millard Sheets. It says "Millard Sheets in Los Angeles, Dalzell Hatfield."

KISTLER

Yes. Well, Hatfield put up the money on that one.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

Of course, Dalzell Hatfield was handling all of his work at that time, all of Millard Sheets 's work. So he was glad to promote it and put up-- So that was a book [Millard Sheets] that I printed for Millard Sheets.

RATNER

Had you worked with Millard Sheets prior to this?

KISTLER

I'm just trying to think. Yes, I had. We printed a great big lithograph in four colors. It was one of the largest things I ever did. It was printed on a sheet 35" X 45" in four colors for the WPA [Works Progress Administration] process. It was a WPA project. They were making work for the artists, and Millard furnished it. It was drawn in four colors. That's an awfully big plate, you know, 35" X 45". I saw one for sale up in Santa Rosa for, I don't know, I think it was $1,200 or something like that. It was one of those prints that we made for the WPA people. Millard probably got a couple of copies, and that gallery [Annex Gallery] up there was handling a lot of Millard's work.

RATNER

This particular copy that they had in the exhibition was inscribed, "This copy for the fine printer Ward Ritchie, 1935, from Merle Armitage." How well did you know Ward Ritchie?

KISTLER

Well, I knew him very well. We conferred together. We went over each other's work and were interested in each other's work. We get together every once in a while and meet in various places, have meetings. Ward's a very fine printer, a very good designer, and we're very good friends.

RATNER

So there were a thousand copies of Millard Sheets ' s book printed?

KISTLER

Well, Millard was a little more ambitious, and I think he paid for printing on that. I've seen copies of that book for sale at Millard's shows, oh, as recently as ten years ago. So he used it for promotion for quite a long time.

RATNER

Was there any text in a book like that? Had Merle Armitage written something about Millard Sheets or--?

KISTLER

Yes. Merle usually wrote an article in each one of the books. He had something to say about it. He had an opinion on everything that there was. [laughter]

RATNER

So it seems. [laughter]

KISTLER

It was an opportunity for him to express himself and make himself known. He was very knowledgeable. He was a very active man and into everything, acquainted with everybody. He knew everyone and was interested in things like grand opera and people that were talented. Mary Garden was one of his outstanding-- He had the running of her productions for a while and did quite a bit of work for her and brought her things to the Los Angeles area. You've heard of her, presumably, Mary Garden? Never heard of her? She was as big as, oh, any of the big stars that you have today.

RATNER

She was a singer?

LELAH KISTLER

Grand opera.

RATNER

Grand opera.

KISTLER

Yes. A singer. Mary Garden. So Merle was interested in telling about these people. He had some weird experiences with them. One time, the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra] was held up. He had all of the cash in the bottom of the drawer that he had taken in. And, of course, he had to pay off the Philharmonic and give Mary Garden her cut on the thing and pay all of his advertising expenses and everything on top of that. Shortly after the show had opened, why, this man came and stuck a gun in his ribs. He had put this money in a false bottom in a drawer. He pulled the drawer out and he says, "Eh? There's nothing here." I don't know, there was some change or something like that, a few dollars. This robber took that. But it was a pretty courageous thing to do, to open the drawer and say, "Here, look. There's nothing in there. You can take it all if you want it." He said, "That was sent to the bank already. There's nothing you can do about it." All of his income from this appearance of this outstanding star-- He had sold out the house and had I don't know how many thousand dollars in that bottom drawer that he had to protect. The police department told him he was silly for doing it, but he was that kind of a guy. He got away with whatever he was doing. [laughter] He didn't let anybody put anything over on him.

RATNER

Okay. Well, I think we need to wrap it up here for today, but we'll continue on talking about the books next time. You can tell me any other stories you remember about Merle Armitage, and then we'll go on and talk about Jean Charlot.

KISTLER

All right.

RATNER

Okay?

KISTLER

All right. I'll try to be better prepared.

RATNER

No, you don't-- You just leave the work to me.

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (January 17, 1989)

RATNER

When we ended our last meeting, you were telling me how Merle Armitage had been robbed when he was working at the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company, and then you said that he had had many unusual experiences. I was wondering what you remember about some of those experiences.

KISTLER

Well, I remember that he had a theatrical company come over from Russia and land in Seattle, and they just attached themselves to him. It was one of the most remarkable experiences that you ever heard of. It was completely unorganized and without finances at all, and it really created quite a stir in the United States here. It was one of the first Russian cultural things that came to this country. It was very colorful. Armitage was one of those men that could take an unorganized thing with a lot of hazards in it, without finances and everything else. He took it throughout the United States, and it made quite an impress. It was one of the first cultural things from Russia that we had here. I didn't have anything to do with it, so it was just one of those stories he told about. Most of his things were done without a great deal of organization. He took the loose ends and put them together so that they really were enjoyed by the people of the country. He took the shows and people like Mary Garden and others throughout the United States and was an impresario and an outstanding cultural developer on the Pacific Coast here. He was responsible for the introduction of Edward Weston's work, and he was very enthusiastic about anyone that he ran into and any cultural thing. He was very aggressive in helping me promote my work. He was very much interested in the fact that what I was doing was introducing something to this coast here and to the West. It turned out to be the United States, that my work got to be known throughout the country. He gave me a lot of encouragement and a lot of information on how to go about it, to introduce lithography to the artists. He was interested in artists. He knew many of the working artists and he brought them into contact with me. He also did everything he could to promote my work, and he gave me quite a few things, like that Laura Knight and those others that we spoke about. He was never heavily financed himself, I mean in his own right, but he was able to get a good many people to put up money to

have the books printed that he was interested in. He did an awful lot to promote the work of authors and things like that and people that had accomplished things. The first book that I did with him was Eugen Maier-Krieg [*The Work of Maier-Krieg*]. Maier-Krieg was a German who came to this country, and his work was outstanding. Merle raised money to print a book which cost quite a bit, and it was an experiment on our part, too. It was the first book that we attempted to publish at the Kistler Company when we put in the lithograph equipment. It was really over our heads in a lot of ways, but we had the complete outfit and we had a man with us by the name of Ludwig Melzner who we bought the lithographic equipment from. We had a complete printing plant for the conversion of all kinds of printed matter to printing by the lithographic method, the offset method/lithographic method rather than the letterpress method. We turned quite a bit of our work over into the lithographic method, and it entailed a tremendous amount of information that was not available, only through our workmen and one or two books that were available. The lithographic work had become almost a label business entirely. By the time that we got into it, it had become offset lithography, and they had dispensed with the stone work, except that they would put an original on stone and then they would pull transfers from that and stick a lot of them up on a plate. It was used more for printing labels and colors. It was used also for printing of stationery. Now, that was about the extent of the lithographic work when it came into our hands. The people who were established in the lithographic work in Los Angeles-- There was the Neuner Stationery Company and there was the Los Angeles Lithograph Company. The Neuner lithograph company, they didn't attempt to convert ordinary printed matter to the offset lithograph method. Ludwig Melzner didn't have the financing to carry his work on. He had a lithograph press and he had a camera and all the facilities that went with the method of lithography, and we depended upon him for the information, the initial information. We expanded our work so that we made our plates in the plant and did all of the operations that were necessary for the lithographic business. In the printing business we bought our printing plates out. It was done by photoengraving. But the lithography allowed us to go ahead and convert ordinary printing into-- Well, to produce ordinary printing by the offset lithograph method. It was due to the fact that photography had developed to quite an extent. There had been a lot of improvement in the quality of negatives that we get. But there was a lot that

we needed to know besides what we could get out of our workmen, which was available from talking to others that had lithographic equipment. But we went ahead and actually converted a lot of printed matter to the offset lithographic method. This book of Eugen Maier-Krieg ' s, it was a book of his sculpturing. He was one of the outstanding sculptors of that particular period. His work was fairly well known, and the book itself created quite a sensation, because it came out beautifully. We could do a lot of things with lithography that we couldn't do very well with letterpress printing. Letterpress printing might-- If we had halftone work, why, we had to use a very smooth, slick-coated paper. With the offset lithography, why, we could print on papers that were rough and papers that were antiques and things like that. It made it possible to do a lot of very creative work. Also, the fact that we could make our own plates allowed us quite a bit of latitude, because you could actually stand over them and see what was being done. But we did need a lot of information that wasn't available to us through books or through our workmen, so I undertook to go back clear to the stone printing and research it and build it up and see the steps it had gone through in order to bring it to the point of offset lithography.

RATNER

I was wondering, then, how long did it take to print the Maier-Krieg book? I mean, from the beginning of the project to the end, since it was the first one, was it a rather lengthy process?

KISTLER

Well, it was in the plant a month or maybe a month and a half.

RATNER

And was that about average or--?

KISTLER

Yes, yes, it was. I don't know whether I told you that [Jean Charlot] was just back from Mexico--

RATNER

Right, we talked about that last time. We got that on tape.

KISTLER

Yeah, yeah. And the making of *Picture Book*.

RATNER

Right, we talked about that. We talked about a number of the books that you printed during the early thirties, but we didn't talk about all of the books that I wanted to talk about, so I thought maybe we could go on and continue talking about some of the books that you printed with Merle Armitage. Another one I wanted to ask you about was called [*Giovanni*]*Napolitano; Fifteen Reproductions of His Work*.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What do you recall about that? What kind of an artist was he?

KISTLER

Well, he was a muralist and a working artist and not very well known. The book that we printed for him was a rather small one, and it was done in one color. It wasn't as elaborate as the book that we printed for Maier- Krieg. The format was smaller, and it was only done in one color. It was done to promote Napolitano 's work.

RATNER

How did Armitage select him as a candidate for a book?

KISTLER

Well, Armitage selected him the way he selected me: he liked his work and he liked his approach. Napolitano's approach to his sculpturing was unusual. He had an unusual presentation of his work. He had an unusual style, and his background loaned it to an unusual presentation.

RATNER

Where was his home base?

KISTLER

Los Angeles.

RATNER

Los Angeles.

KISTLER

Yes, he was a Los Angeles man. He's still living, as a matter of fact, and he has quite a few of the Armitage books. I don't believe that there are very many of the first *Picture Book* left, because quite a few of them were destroyed.

RATNER

Oh, really?

KISTLER

Yes. There were only five hundred printed, which is rather a small edition.

RATNER

Why were some of those *Picture Books* destroyed?

KISTLER

Well, they disappeared one way and another. As quite a few people were fascinated by the pictures themselves, they simply cut them up and framed them.

RATNER

Oh, I see. So they took them apart, the books apart .

KISTLER

Yes. Did you see one of those books?

RATNER

I did. Yeah, I enjoyed looking at it. Well, here's another one you printed in 1935 that was on a little bit different track from the ones we've talked about. It was *Modern Dance*. This one says it was compiled by Virginia Stewart, that it was designed by Merle Armitage, and printed by you. It had an original lithograph drawn directly on the stone by Elise [Cavanna Seeds] and hand printed by you.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What do you recall about that book?

KISTLER

Gee, I don't remember very much about that right now. I hadn't thought about that for quite a long time. It was one of Merle Armitage 's enthusiasms, one of the people that he was very enthusiastic about. He got Virginia Stewart to write the book, and we printed it for him.

RATNER

Who was Virginia Stewart?

KISTLER

Virginia Stewart? Well, she was a person that was interested in cultural matters and interested in dancers and Martha Graham and a number of others that were in the limelight at that time. She researched all of these people and made quite an outstanding book of their work.

RATNER

It said inserted in this book--it must have just been inserted by the person who owned it--were two articles on the Armitage-Kistler collaboration, one by Carl Haverlin and one by Jose Rodriguez. I would have liked to have seen those articles. Do you happen to have copies of those?

KISTLER

Gee, I'd forgotten about them altogether. I don't know where I could get those.

RATNER

That would have been nice to have looked at. [pause] Okay, now here's another one that was interesting. This was a series of concert programs it looks like you did for KECA concert programs?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

From October 1935 to September 1936. These all included wood engravings of the composers on the covers by Paul Landacre.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How did you get that project?

KISTLER

Well, Carl Haverlin was my friend. He was program manager at Earl C. Anthony's. Earl C. Anthony had the KECA. And Carl was another enthusiast, like Merle, and he was enthusiastic about Paul Landacre 's woodblocks. He was also enthusiastic about the programs that were being put on by KECA. I don't know, it's hard to explain. It was a publication like is put out today by the television people, you know, to promote their programs.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

That's what they were, and we printed those. That was printed by letterpress rather than lithography. It was a letterpress project, because it was all material about the musical concerts that were coming up, and it was over radio. It wasn't television. It was before the development of television. Joe Rodriguez, who was at KECA, and Carl Haverlin and, oh, another printer-- What was his name? Well, there were quite a number of us printers who were interested in Paul Landacre's engravings. He has become one of the finest wood engravers in the country, and his work is very well known. Of course, he's passed on now. He was from the Midwest. I believe he was from Ohio, and he was an athlete and was very outstanding in athletic work and everything. But he contracted this infantile paralysis. It crippled him so that he didn't have good control of his limbs and things, and he had to take up something besides running. So he took up woodcutting. He started out with

linoleum blocks and finally got down to wood engraving. He bought a Washington handpress and not only engraved his blocks, but he printed them too. I have one of them here. I don't know whether you're acquainted with his work or not.

RATNER

Yes, it's very beautiful. I've always admired it.

KISTLER

Yes. But his work was more or less limited because he couldn't produce rapidly. His wife helped him in his work. They were very, very devoted. She passed on in her fifties, I think, and that just devastated him. He finally died in a fire. I think he set it himself. He was just so despondent, because his wife was so essential to his getting on and doing his work. He felt as though he had nobody to help him out at that time, so that when she passed on, why, that just ended things for him. It was really very tragic. But what there is left of his work is beautiful, and it is well appreciated. Ward Ritchie has printed a book on him [*Paul Landacre*]. He did two lithographs with me, and his drawing on the stone-- He was a very meticulous worker and a beautiful worker, and his concepts were just marvelous. He was a natural artist. I steered him away from lithography, because it was drawing, and I thought that he should just concentrate on woodblocks. So that I didn't encourage him to go any further with the lithography, although the one or two things that he did with me were really quite beautiful. But the woodcutting was unique, and he had established himself, more or less, for that. He did make a name for himself, and there is no other woodcutter that I know in this area that has achieved what Paul Landacre did. His work was quite beautiful, and it's due to the fact that he concentrated on wood engraving rather than working in so many areas. Because he just didn't have the time to do it. He was a very slow worker, and it was difficult for him to work, even with his wife's help. His wife helped him at the press, too. She helped him pull the lever on the press and exert some of the physical exercise that ' s necessary in working a Washington handpress. It's a physical thing. It's necessary to exert yourself quite a bit.

RATNER

There was a show a few years ago at the [Los Angeles] County Museum of Art of his work ["Paul Landacre: Prints and Drawings," 1983]. Did you happen to see that?

KISTLER

Yes, I did. Yes.

RATNER

It was nice. I think they did a small catalog with that.

KISTLER

Yeah. Yes, we went. Do you remember, Lelah? We went to see Paul Landacre ' s prints at the Los Angeles Museum.

LELAH KISTLER

I've gone to so many places and seen so many people's prints, I'm not sure I remember that particular--

KISTLER

Don't you remember we were surprised at the way that the Los Angeles Museum had been--

LELAH KISTLER

Oh, the last time we went up there?

KISTLER

Yes.

LELAH KISTLER

Yes. They remodeled the museum and added to it and so forth. It's beautiful now. Yes, but I didn't remember it was Landacre ' s work in particular.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It was a nice show. Okay, here's another one that you did for the Hollywood Bowl, and this was by Isabel Morse Jones and designed by Merle Armitage and printed by Lynton Kistler. What was that for?

KISTLER

Well, that was just a history of the Hollywood Bowl. It was all typeset, and there was nothing really outstanding about it except it was a well-printed job. It was another one of those things that Merle Armitage was enthusiastic about and promoted. Isabel Morse Jones at that time was the historian of the Hollywood Bowl, and it's a complete story of the Hollywood Bowl up to the thirties sometime.

RATNER

Right, 1936. It was 203 pages, so I guess it was pretty complete.

KISTLER

Yes. It told how the Bowl was started and the people that were connected with it, how it grew. She had kept a record of the whole thing. It was a very good exposition of the history of the Hollywood Bowl.

RATNER

Here's another one from 1935 on Stravinsky [Igor Stravinsky] . I guess this was one that Armitage wrote also. "Designed by Merle Armitage, printed under the direction of Lynton Kistler, 158 pages."

KISTLER

Yes, well, that was another one of Armitage 's enthusiasms: Stravinsky. He was interested in music. He was not a musician himself, but he appreciated people who had accomplished things in music, and Stravinsky was one of them that he was interested in. He designed the book and-- I've forgotten who it was who did some artwork on that. It was very nicely done.

RATNER

On this little thing it doesn't mention that there's any artwork.

KISTLER

Well, it was just design.

RATNER

I see. Here's one, *Two Statements by Pablo Picasso*. It says, "New York, Los Angeles, Merle Armitage, 1936, designed by Merle Armitage, printed by Lynton Kistler." And bound in was an original lithograph by Giovanni Napolitano, pulled from the stone by Lynton Kistler.

KISTLER

Gee, I don't remember much about that really.

RATNER

It seems interesting that it says "two statements by Pablo Picasso." I wonder whether Merle Armitage had just found those particular statements interesting and decided to put them in a book or what.

KISTLER

Well, I think that that is probably what happened, yes. He was in touch with all of these artists and musicians. It's quite possible that he did get that directly from Picasso. He knew them. He presented them on the stage here. Most of these things were done at the [Los Angeles] Philharmonic [Orchestra] . He was the manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company. In the off-season, why, he brought in these people, these musicians.

RATNER

Where was Armitage's home base?

KISTLER

Los Angeles. He put in quite a bit of time with Edward Weston. He was very much interested in Weston's work. I did two books [*The Art of Edward Weston* and *Fifty Photographs by Edward Weston*] on Edward Weston, and Armitage got financing for them. It [*The Art of Edward Weston*] was a large book. It was about 9" X 12" in size, and there were thirty-six, I think, reproductions of Edward's work. It was printed letterpress, and I think I told you the experience we had in starting the book.

RATNER

Right.

KISTLER

It was beautifully designed. It was one of the [American Institute of Graphic Arts'] Fifty Books of the Year.

RATNER

Right, that was the earlier one. Right. And I know that you did do another one later also, the second book. In 1947 was the second one.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (January 17, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, we were talking about some of the books you had printed with Armitage before we flipped the tape. Here's another one [Martha Graham] from 1937 that was done on Martha Graham. You mentioned her a few minutes ago and his interest in modern dance. What do you recall about that book?

KISTLER

Well, it was just a book of essays. I've forgotten just what the material was on it, but it was just a well-printed book. It was done letterpress. It was one of the fifty books of Armitage 's that I did. I guess it was the first book that was printed on Martha Graham. From the standpoint of design, just well printed is all that I can say about it. There was no departure there as far as printing is concerned. Of course, it was unique because of Armitage 's layout and his approach to it and the material that was presented. The book was well bound-- It was a full-bound book. But it was another book we printed.

RATNER

It says, "Binding by C. Frank Fox." Was that a local firm?

KISTLER

Yeah. Well, that was a bookbinder that did some very good work for us, and he did the binding on quite a number of our books. He was a man that was willing to put in a little extra effort on his binding work. He was a very competent man and he bound, well, I guess, several of the books that we printed, if it was a full-bound book.

RATNER

What does that mean, full bound?

KISTLER

Well, it means that it had the stiff covers and it was bound in cloth. It wasn't a paperback. As a matter of fact, all of the books we did were full-bound books. Henrietta Shore and the Warren Newcombe book were paperbacks. We didn't have the money for a binding, but they were well put together, and some people rebound them in boards. Full binding, even in those days, was pretty expensive and hand sewed, usually. They didn't have the automatic machinery for binding. They were put together by hand.

RATNER

So I guess that added pretty significantly to the cost of the book.

KISTLER

Yes, it did. Then it's amazing the amount of progress that there has been made in the printing business since I got into it. It is of a different character today--the printing itself--the way that it's put together and everything. When I came into it, the average printer was just getting to the point where they were getting into setting type. I mean, setting type by machinery, and doing a lot of it. My father [William A. Kistler] was one of the first printers in Los Angeles, commercial printers, to put a typesetting machine in. Even newspaper work, when I first came into the business, a lot of it was being set by hand. It picked up every letter individually and put it into a stick and put it together. There were two machines. One was the Monotype machine, which my father had, and that set and justified, or made the lines all the same length, so they came out just as-- Better than you could do it by hand setting. It was absolutely perfect setting. But they were individual letters. They cast them and put them together at the same time. There was a keyboard that had-- Like a typewriter, you know. It made the letters of different widths just like they were in hand setting, and it duplicated hand setting right to a tee, but it improved it. It did perfectly what, you know, you were doing in the hand setting. That is, it justified those lines so that they came out all the same length. It was really a marvelous machine. I learned that. I learned to run both the keyboard and the

caster. I wasn't very good at it, but it was one of the things that I got into learning in the printing business.

RATNER

So your father had you learn everything?

KISTLER

Yes, I was into everything in the plant. I didn't do an awful lot of presswork. I did some, but I was more interested in the typography, and my father was a compositor. He got into the business of setting newspaper by hand .

RATNER

So it seems to have served you well to have learned all the bits and pieces.

KISTLER

Yeah, I got a smattering of all of it.

RATNER

That's good.

KISTLER

But I got hooked on the lithography. That was the thing that fascinated me more than anything else. It is my ambition to have lithography accepted as fine art, and I just never had the financing to do it. The artists couldn't afford to pay me the modest sums that I asked for printing their work, and I didn't have the money to do the exploitation that has been done on lithography. It took years to do it and it's pretty well accepted now. But it was my ambition to get the best artists that were available and get their work into the hands of collectors. I gave talks all over the city to every organization that would listen to me. I'd even take my presses apart. They were handpresses. I'd take them apart and take them out and give demonstrations for printing, just for one evening. One year I took the whole outfit to Sacramento to the [California] State Fair and took a bunch of stones, and I worked with quite a number of artists up there in San Francisco at that time. There are a lot of heartbreakers, too, about the thing. I wanted to get as many presses as I could, and I used a transfer press to do my printing. They were a press that was used in the lithographic industry, and they were commencing to be phased out. They

could make the plates without making these transfers. But there was a very neat little press that you pull pictures on. There was one firm up in San Francisco that had about six or eight of these presses. When I came back from Sacramento, why, I made a point to stop in at San Francisco to see this firm. I knew that they had these presses. I asked and I tried to get them to let me buy the presses, and they wouldn't sell any of them to me. "Oh," they said, "they might come back again a little bit later, " and they might need them. So I waited three or four or five years, something like that, and I went up to San Francisco again when I was up there. I stopped in and asked them if they were willing to turn over some of the presses to me, if they were ready to release them. They said no, that they had just sold them for old iron--

RATNER

Oh, no.

KISTLER

--and that they had that day sent them down to a wrecking company, and they broke them up for the iron that was in them. I went down to the wrecking company and I tried to get the presses, and they said no, they had just broken them up.

RATNER

Oh, that is a heartbreaker .

KISTLER

It is a heartbreaker, for a fact.

RATNER

What year was that? About what year?

KISTLER

Oh, that was during the thirties sometime. I can't recall just when it was. One of the big lithograph companies in San Francisco found it possible to get rid of their stones. They were working on metal then. They had gone to offset lithography, so they just had tons of stone, great racks of this stone. I was anxious to get stones, and I went up there to San Francisco and tried to buy this stone from them. My capital was limited, so I could only get so much of it.

What I wanted to do was go up there with a truck and load the truck with all of the stone that I could and bring it down to Los Angeles, here. I told these people that I would be glad to take a whole load of this stone if they would sell it to me. They said, "Oh, we'll sell you all that you can pay for, but you will have to pay for it in cash. " They took tons of it and dumped it into San Francisco Bay, and, of course, it was no good after it had been in the salt water, no good at all. It really broke my heart.

RATNER

I would think so.

KISTLER

That was during the forties and fifties when I was at Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street] . I thought it was awfully shortsighted, because I could have sold the stones to the artists, you know. The artists wanted to buy my stones. I wouldn't sell them because I had a limited number of stones, and most of them--the artists--were working on them. But I needed the supply because the stones disappeared. The artists would take them out, and the artists would disappear and the stones with them. So that I had stones all over the place that were out, and I needed a new supply all the time. If I could buy them cheaply enough, why, it would have been possible for me to sell quite a bunch of them. I could have sold a truckload of this stone. I had places to store it and everything. That was the way that the materials disappeared. So that, eventually, it got to the point where there wasn't very much stone available. I sent back to New York and bought a whole two or three tons of stone, and I told them that I would be glad to have used stone. By that time, why, they had a lot of original stones that had never been used at all, and they shipped me brand-new stone. I was surprised to get a stone that had never been worked at all.

RATNER

Was the stone all from Germany?

KISTLER

Yes. The German stone is from the Kelheim quarries in Munich, and it's a-- I don't know whether it was a good sales job that determines bid, but according

to lithographers who were using this stone, there was only one stone that was any good at all, and that was the stone from the Solnhofen and the Kelheim quarries, which is just outside Munich. And Munich is where lithography was invented. So that it's quite an interesting thing that-- But I know that there's been stone found in-- Well, limestone is a pretty generally known kind of stone.

RATNER

And the German stone was limestone, right?

KISTLER

Yes. Well, limestone is the only stone that was good for lithography--they ' re right about that--but limestone is known all over the world. They even made cement out of it. It's really quite an ordinary stone. But this stone from these quarries just a few miles outside of Munich-- The finest limestone came from there, and we all wanted the German stone. It was strange here when some of the lithograph companies closed their stone department. Why, a lot of them took and paved their patios with them. That was a very hazardous thing to do, because they became very slippery when they got wet, and they found out that they couldn't walk on them. A lot of them had to take the stone up again. But a lot of the stone ended up in that way--they built walls of it and made cement of it. A lot of the very fine lithograph stone disappeared that we would have liked to have had.

RATNER

How often could a stone be reused? Because I know it could be regrained and--

KISTLER

I don't know how many times. I never wore out a stone. I had over a hundred myself. Of course, I used them, I passed them around. But lithograph stones, the real fine stone is unique. It runs in grade from almost chalky white clear through to a gray or a blue-gray that is so hard that you can hardly use it for artwork. And the quality of the work varies according to the stones, so that the first job that a lithographer has is to select a proper stone for the work that the artist is doing. Just the light gray stones are the ones that are the

best, because the drawing shows up on there more like on white paper than on any of the others. The real soft ones, the chalky ones, don't hold the work well, but they can be used for, oh, tint blocks and work that isn't critical. But that lithograph there is one that is done--

RATNER

The Charlot?

KISTLER

Yes, that Charlot. It was done on the best stone that I had. It was a light gray stone, and it was hard enough so that it held all of the work that was put on it. And it would stand the etch, so that I didn't etch off the light work that was put on by the artist. It would hold light work and it would also print the solids, so that it really was an exceptional stone.

RATNER

What's that piece called?

KISTLER

That's called [The] Tortilla Lesson. The tonality there is really remarkable. It's a good example of what a lithograph can do in holding real delicate work against real dark areas. That's one of Charlot's.

RATNER

Okay, there's just one last book that you printed with Armitage that I wanted to ask you about. It was called Fit for a King: The Merle Armitage Book of Food.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It was a little different than the others, and it was printed in 1939 with four photographs by Edward Weston, designed by Armitage, printed by you. In this particular copy it's inscribed, "For Carl Haverlin, the man we hope will come to dinner. Salute, Merle." And then, "For Carl Haverlin, a darn good egg. Lynt." You must have written that.

KISTLER

Where did you run into that?

RATNER

Oh, it was in this catalog from the Cal[ifornia] State [University] Northridge show.

KISTLER

Oh, it was? I wonder who has that now.

RATNER

I don't know. Oh, it also had drawings by Elise.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What kind of a book was that? A cookbook?

KISTLER

Cookbook, yes. Merle was a gourmet and very much interested in food. He ate all kinds of food and drank all kinds of wine, an authority on all of it, so he put together the cookbook and we printed it for him.

RATNER

So that was the last book you printed--at least it seems that way from this catalog--during the thirties, before you left for New York, which we had talked about, maybe in our first session, that you had gone to New York in the forties. You closed up your shop and went to New York .

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

You mentioned that on your New York trip, you worked in a printing plant. What type of work did you do?

KISTLER

Oh, just commercial printing for one of the printing firms in New Haven. Worked for them for a while. Nothing spectacular at all.

RATNER

I also read somewhere that during the war you met George Miller, the well-known New York lithographer.

KISTLER

Yes, I did.

RATNER

Who introduced you?

KISTLER

Well, I just went up there and said hello to him. We talked for a while.

RATNER

At his plant?

KISTLER

Yes. His plant was on Fourteenth Street, and he had one press up there and he was doing the work. He did more for lithography than I did. He got into it before I did. I don't know just how he got into it, but I think that his son [Burr Miller] is still carrying on in New York.

RATNER

Oh, really? I didn't know that. So you knew about him in Los Angeles?

KISTLER

Yes, I knew about him.

RATNER

How impressed were you with the quality of his work?

KISTLER

Well, his work was tops. He was an excellent man. He's probably the outstanding lithographer in the United States. He started several years before I did. His work was very well known. There was an outfit that published lithographs for a while and sold them for $5 apiece--

RATNER

Right, Associated American Artists.

KISTLER

Associated American Artists. Of course, there was nobody here that took up that work and tried to sell them, but Miller had that work available and did quite a bit of it, quite a number of prints for them. He had a business going. Well, I did one or two prints for Associated American Artists, but they wouldn't send their prints out here, and I couldn't get enough out of them. If there had been a large volume, I might have done something with it the way that Miller did, but I just got a job like that once in a while. I think that they printed somewhere between one hundred and five hundred prints. But I had to print them for fifty cents apiece, and I just couldn't get anyplace.

RATNER

It's too low.

KISTLER

Too low. I didn't have volume and I didn't have the price either. Associated American Artists were very tough to work with. I tried to get the prints down to less than half of that. And it cost money in those days to ship the stones back and forth. I can't blame them for it. But I did one or two stones for them. They accepted them. They thought they were good. I think the largest edition that I ever printed was five hundred.

RATNER

For them?

KISTLER

It was for-- I can't remember. I can't recall the artist's name now, but I can look it up if you'd like to know.

RATNER

Yeah, if you think of it, that would be interesting. You also, while you were in New York, gave a lithography demonstration at the New York World's Fair. How did that come about?

KISTLER

Well, the people asked me to come and demonstrate lithography, so I went there and had a group. I gave a talk on lithography, told them what I knew about it, and showed them how it was done. I pulled my prints and things.

RATNER

Well, how did they know about you, though, in New York? Your reputation had preceded you?

KISTLER

Oh, yes. My work was known in New York. By that time, I had work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and had quite a-- My work was pretty well known. They tried to get me to go to work there, but I didn't want to because, well, I thought they had enough lithographers there.

RATNER

While you were in New York was during the war. What kinds of limitations were there at that time on available lithographic materials?

KISTLER

Well, they had commenced to curtail the manufacture of some materials at that time. Good paper was hard to get a hold of until, oh, about ten years ago good handmade paper became available again. Well, it was available all the time I was printing, but there wasn't very much of it, and I had to resort to the use of some machine-made papers. I had papers from the Strathmore Paper Company, who were the best makers of fine paper at that time. I did quite a few of my editions on Strathmore paper, but it was machine-made paper. I could get some handmade paper, but it was very expensive and a lot of it wasn't properly made. It would deteriorate if you weren't careful.

RATNER

How about inks?

KISTLER

Well, the industry was changing all the way down the line, and some of the materials and some of the things disappeared. For instance, it was hard to get grainers at one time. It got to be impossible, almost, to get plates grained properly. Not the stones. The stones were always grained by hand, so that wasn't a problem. But when we got into working on metal-- A lot of the hand lithographers in later years did work on metal quite a bit, and they couldn't get the plates grained properly.

RATNER

This is during the forties?

KISTLER

Yes. Another thing that was very bad-- At the time when I put my lithograph presses in, why, we used a lot of zinc plates. And the zinc plates were very good. They were almost like a stone. You would get almost the same quality. But aluminum is not as sensitive to ink as zinc is. Zinc was very hard to run. It would get all clogged up if your inks weren't just right and if you didn't have just the right etch on them and it wasn't done just absolutely to perfection. So that when aluminum came in, why, aluminum wasn't quite as sensitive to the taking of the ink, but then the place was run cleaner. You didn't have the trouble with them scumming up and things like that. So that now, the last time I tried to get some zinc, I couldn't get it at all. Nobody had any zinc. It was the right thickness, you know. Because the zinc and the aluminum plates are very thin, and aluminum and zinc are the only metals that have worked out satisfactorily in lithography. By the time that I got to working on this print here of [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright's, why, I had to do it on zinc or on aluminum. It was very hard to get what we wanted there. Aluminum won't take a nice grain like zinc will, but it will run clean. And that's the--

RATNER

That was the key.

KISTLER

That's the incentive. So it disappeared. Zinc disappeared in the industry altogether. I was very fortunate, as far as ink is concerned. When I first started printing, we were working with earth colors. I mean, they ground up certain minerals--

RATNER

Right, I think you were telling me something about that.

KISTLER

--and they precipitated certain things to make their colors, you know. We had an awful lot of earth colors. Some of them are quite fugitive and very hard to handle, very hard to have colors that wouldn't fade or wouldn't change color after a period of time. Eventually, we got a lot better ink. I worked with a firm here, the Gans Ink Company, and Bob [Robert] Gans was very helpful in making inks for me and mixing inks and things like that. The later printings are done with aniline colors, and they are much better, but you have to be careful to get colors that will last. Those colors there have been on the wall for, I don't know, maybe twenty years, something like that, and they stand up. Even the delicate colors are not faded in that, and those are all aniline colors. But the industry changed as to equipment that was available. The printing industry has just changed tremendously, clear through the whole industry. When I started in the business, why, a lot of press printing--you know, 90 percent of the printing--was done with type. When I first got acquainted with the business, my father used to set me up on a stool and give me a stick to put the set type in, and he taught me to set type. I set type when I was just a kid, about ten years old. I learned to set type, how to justify it and everything, make use of it. But then it went from handset type-- It was one of the first things that-- And machine automatic presses came into being during my time. The first presses that I worked on were hand-fed presses. I put the paper into the press and let the press take a whack at it, and then I'd pull it out and put in another one. They were called "snappers."

RATNER

Snap the paper right up.

KISTLER

Yeah, platen presses. Then they commenced to get the-- Oh, rotary presses came in. Then they got automatic typesetting. Now there's very few people that have type in their plant. They don't work with type at all. It is done on computers and things like that. I don't know anything about it at all.

RATNER

It's changes so much.

KISTLER

I didn't get into that.

RATNER

It will probably keep changing, too.

KISTLER

Well, I don't know what else they can do except to think about it and it will put itself on the paper.

RATNER

That's right, all by itself.

KISTLER

Yeah. These machines that they have, that's done by precipitation of some sort. I first saw that in New York when I went back there and spent three years, and they were commencing to work with this precipitation and it has-- [tape recorder off]

KISTLER

There are a lot of printing processes that have been worked out on the basis of precipitation and sensitizing the paper to take the image, so that that was just beginning to be worked on during the later fifties and early sixties when I was back in New York.

1.9. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (January 24, 1989)

RATNER

I'd like to begin today by discussing your long and very productive relationship with the artist Jean Charlot, whom we've mentioned during our previous discussions. You had told me that Merle Armitage introduced him to you and that the first two projects you worked on together were the lithograph *Woman with Child on Back* and the book entitled *Picture Book*. So I'd like to move on from those projects in 1933 to a letter you received from Charlot in May of 1935 in which he says--I'm quoting here-- "You were handsomely represented in the Graphic Arts Book Show here in New York. The school has a little gallery for shows, and I would like next season to give a show of your group of lithographers. I saw a nice article in Prints about you." What was Charlot doing in New York at that time?

KISTLER

Well, he was just doing artwork and working there, as he usually did. He did some lithography, principally, I think, for that outfit that was marketing lithographs at that time. I can't recall the name of it right--

RATNER

Associated American Artists?

KISTLER

Yes, Associated American Artists. He made a number of lithographs for them. There was one of them that I printed. I sent a stone back to Charlot, and he made a drawing on it. And I printed the edition, and it turned out very well. I can't remember what the subject was now.

RATNER

What was the size of the edition for something like that?

KISTLER

I think it was about a hundred.

RATNER

So when he says in here that the school has a little gallery for shows and "I'd like to give a show of your group of lithographers, " what school was he talking about?

KISTLER

Gee, I can't recall, can't recall.

RATNER

What about the lithographers he says he wants to show? Who might that have been at that time?

KISTLER

Well, I'll have to look it up in this book here, just to be sure that I'm reminded of them.

RATNER

Okay.

KISTLER

There was Warren Newcombe and Phil Dike and Phil Paradise and Bob [Robert] Majors, Elise [Cavanna] Seeds, and-- I'm trying to think of the name of that gal that was-- [pause] There was Carl Beetz, Standish Backus, John Baldwin, Thomas Barr, Ivan Bartlett--

RATNER

A big group.

KISTLER

Yes. All of these may not have been represented, but they were the ones that I was working with at--

RATNER

During those early years.

KISTLER

Yes. I'd have been in that group. Jean Negulesco and Clinton Adams.

RATNER

He was a little later, I think, wasn't he, Clinton Adams? In the late forties?

KISTLER

Yes, he was one of the later ones. I guess that he wasn't in that group that was shown there. Beatrice Wood is the one that I was trying to think of. I'm trying to get the early ones that-- Emil Bisttram, I think, was one of those that I was working with then. This is the early group. George Biddle, Fanny Blumberg, Edwin Botsford. He was a very competent artist and was with an advertising company, one of the first ones that I worked with. John Breneiser and Stanley Breneiser--

RATNER

So these are a lot of the people who were in the Stendahl [Gallery] show, too, that you had had in '33.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

I recognize some of those names. So it sounds like he was organizing some sort of exhibition while he was--

KISTLER

Oh, I was into everything. In other words, I was not only printing, but I was trying to promote and trying to get a wider acceptance of lithography as a fine art. That was my purpose. I was very successful in getting a lot of artists interested in it, but as far as reaching the public, I didn't do so well with that. Another very fine artist was Tom [Thomas] Craig. He was really a splendid artist. He was also interested in growing flowers. Richard Day was another one, one of those early ones that might have been in that show.

RATNER

What about the article in the journal *Prints*? I think that was one of the very top print periodicals in the country at that time, wasn't it?

KISTLER

The *Print* journal? I don't remember that. I don't recall it. Tom [Thomas] Farmer was another one. Tom Farmer was the son of the man who promoted the first Olympics. Lorser Feitelson was one of the first ones that-- He was a

very good artist, but I could only get him to do one lithograph in all the time that I've printed.

RATNER

That was the early thirties? This is like 1935.

KISTLER

Yes. This is early, even before '35. Alexander Patrick Fleming--

RATNER

So those are records that you kept at the time in that notebook? Like receipts or something?

KISTLER

No, this was a list that I made of the prints that I had that's an appraisal of what was made down on my--

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

I believe that this collection went to the Smithsonian Institution and is on exhibit there now. Gene Fleury. Don [Donald] Freeman, who was a New York man.

RATNER

The children's books.

KISTLER

I've mentioned him before. Mary Finley Fry could have been in that group. I don't suppose that all of these people would have been in the show, but--

RATNER

No, that would have been a lot.

KISTLER

Richard Haines, who was a very fine artist here. Peter Hurd was another one that I printed for. As a matter of fact, that was one of the largest editions I ever pulled. I think it was five hundred prints that I pulled on that.

RATNER

You mentioned that last time, but you couldn't remember the person's name. I was going to ask you if you had remembered .

KISTLER

Yes, Peter Hurd. He was a very well known western artist.

RATNER

And that was that early? The thirties, the early thirties?

KISTLER

No, that wasn't the early thirties. That was in the fifties.

RATNER

Maybe we could talk about some of the people you printed later in a little bit and stick to the group in the thirties.

KISTLER

All right. Yes, I'm trying to pick out those of the thirties now. Paul Landacre was one of those. Helen Lundeberg was another one. She's another one that I did just one lithograph with. Of course, Helen Lundeberg finally became Lorser Feitelson's wife. Robert Majors was one of those early ones. I believe that Fletcher Martin was another one. [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright was one of the early ones, and William E. McKee was an early one. As a matter of fact, William E. McKee was the first one that I did any lithographs with. He was a friend of the family and an artist, and he's the one that made that poster for the First World War: the farmer and the mechanic and somebody else, the three of them marching with the fife and the drum and the flag. A takeoff on that early association. Ivan Messenger was another one. James Patrick was another one in that time. Elmer Plummer, James Pinto. Herbert Ryman, who was the designer of practically all of Disneyland.

RATNER

Oh, really?

KISTLER

A lot of the attractions in Disneyland. He had a very lively imagination, and he adapted a lot of the rides and things like that to Disneyland, the Disneyland experience. Palmer Schoppe was another one who I worked with in the early times. As a matter of fact, he worked as an assistant to me. He did my stone grinding and helped me out with the handling of the paper, wetting it down and flattening the prints. There was quite a lot of just regular, routine work that had to be done, and he helped me with that.

RATNER

Did you teach him how to do all that?

KISTLER

Yes, I did. He did a lot of lithographs. I paid him in lithographs principally. [laughter]

RATNER

It was a good deal for both of you.

KISTLER

Yes. Henrietta Shore was one of my early ones. That association of the artist and Northern California around-- Oh, what is the name of that place? I'm trying to push myself too much now and--

RATNER

Did you tell me one time she lived in Carmel?

KISTLER

Yes. I had an association with Edward Weston and that whole group of artists there too at that time, and that came through Merle Armitage. Merle was very active, and he got me into a lot of the associations with the artists. Jack Martin Smith was one of the early ones that I worked with. For a while it seemed to me like every motion picture that came out. Jack Martin Smith's name appeared on it as the art director. I did work with quite a number of the art directors at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer . He was one of them. Jean Swiggett, I

think that I mentioned him. He was one of those that was in that era. That just about covers the early ones that I can remember. Okay?

RATNER

Okay. So the article in *Prints* is not something you remember? Apparently, it must have been an article about you.

KISTLER

Yes, it was, but I can't recall.

RATNER

Okay.

KISTLER

Do you have the date on it?

RATNER

No, he didn't say that in the letter. It must have been sometime in 1935 though, possibly a little earlier. Maybe I can track it down. Then later in '35, in July, Charlot writes to you--he's still in New York--that he's concerned about settling his account with your father on the *Picture Book*, and he offers to buy each book for $10 to enable him to settle the account. You had begun work, we mentioned, on the *Picture Book* in 1933, and this is mid- '35, so I guess the edition had not sold out at that point.

KISTLER

No, it had not.

RATNER

What was the reason for that extended period of time to sell out the edition, do you think?

KISTLER

Well, I don't know. I can't recall what the circumstances were and how it turned out. It just is blotted out of my recollection. Where do you get all of this information?

RATNER

[laughter] In the correspondence that you gave to the [William Andrews] Clark [Memorial] Library.

KISTLER

It is?

RATNER

Okay, then there's a jump in that correspondence with Charlot. I came across a letter from 1947, when you have returned from New York to Los Angeles, and you have written to Charlot about a new register rack which brings the prints, apparently, into perfect register. There was a man named Bill [William] Philbrook who was apparently responsible for working on that register rack with you. Tell me a little bit about that innovation.

KISTLER

Well, it is a method that I worked out that was unusual. It was a three-point register and it was a frame that went around the stone, and then there was a rack that you could put on this frame. Then you would lay the paper to a three-point register just like you would in a printing machine, and it was a kind of complicated thing. You have to take it off to pull it through the press, but you had perfect register, and I could register very rapidly and very accurately for color work when I commenced to work on color work. I worked out that frame myself, and this Philbrook helped me in really putting it together. I told him what I wanted, and he did the work that I laid out for him.

RATNER

So how often were you tinkering with all the various technical features?

KISTLER

Oh, all the time. I was always doing something. Experimenting with different acid strengths and things like that, and doing just blanks on stone, just grinding a stone and laying some tones on the stone and seeing how they would come out. I did quite a bit of that at that time, too, just to find out what I could get by the use of certain crayons and certain etches that I used. One

thing that I found out was that if I put a little-- Oh, let's see. What is that acid in it? I'm sorry I'm so fuzzy on these things.

RATNER

You're doing fine.

KISTLER

[pause] I can't think of some of these things now. I can't think of the names of them.

RATNER

Well, you will later, and then we'll get it.

KISTLER

Yeah. I'm not doing very good on this, I'm sure.

RATNER

Yes, you are. Don't worry about it. It's fine. Well, so it was some kind of acid?

KISTLER

Yes. It was recommended, and it was generally the practice, to use just nitric acid and gum in order to etch the stone. But we had quite a bit of trouble with the stone catching up and filling and the work spreading. With the use of this acid that I worked out, which included two other acids-- Hmm, I can't think of the names of them now. Well, anyway, it will come to me.

RATNER

So it was an improved method with the other acids.

KISTLER

Yes. [tape recorder off]

RATNER

In 1947, and I think actually even earlier, you and Charlot frequently worked through the mail. In fact, you had mentioned that before.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

When he was in New York, you would send him zinc plates, I guess, through the mail?

KISTLER

Uh-huh.

RATNER

How did you work out that system? How did that work?

KISTLER

Well, I grained the plates and I sent them back to Charlot, and he drew on them. I would then send him proofs, and he would-- Sometimes I would send the plates back with him, and he would make corrections on the plates and, if it was necessary, take out work he didn't want on them. Then I would pull the editions and I would send them back to him. I sent some stones back to him, too.

RATNER

I wondered about that. That must have been very expensive to send a heavy stone like that through the mail.

KISTLER

Well, at that time it wasn't as expensive as it is now. It would be practically impossible to do it at the present time because rates are so high, but it wasn't so awfully expensive to do it. And I had a very nice box worked out so that you could draw on both sides of the stone and clear out to the edge if you wanted to. That way the artist could work on both sides of the stone. That gave them an opportunity to get two prints for the price of one, as far as the shipping was concerned.

RATNER

How often, if at all, actually, were the stones damaged because they had gone through the mail?

KISTLER

I never had any trouble at all with them.

RATNER

Oh, that was lucky.

KISTLER

Yeah, I never once had difficulty. It worked out very well, the method I had. The stone was held rigid in the box so it just couldn't move at all. They were very heavy plywood boxes that I had, so I shipped them all over the United States. That way the different artists who wanted to work-- I had several boxes that I used and sent the boxes to the artists and did quite a few stones that way.

RATNER

So even though, I guess, it was a little more time-consuming, because you had to be sending the proofs back and forth, it seems to have worked out very well.

KISTLER

Yes. Lithography is a very responsive medium to work in, very well suited to artists working with a great deal of freedom, you know. It's just like drawing on a piece of paper. It can be corrected and it can be modified, and you can open the stones up and redraw on them if they haven't got enough work on them. It's a very practical method of working.

RATNER

Okay. Then later in '47, in the letter you've written to Charlot--this is in regard to what you were saying about promoting the work--you said, "The prints arrived, and I am getting them into retail outlets. I'm handling sales of some of them myself. I am sending a set to E. Weyhe this afternoon. The Chouinard school [Chouinard Art Institute] is putting these later prints on display again and a note that they can be bought on time as we discussed." What kind of an arrangement did you have with these outlets?

KISTLER

Well, it was a consignment proposition. I couldn't get them to buy the prints and buy the editions, but I would put them up in mats and frames and things like that in consignment to them. It was an effort to get acceptance of the prints. I talked to different groups, clubs, and organizations of one sort and another about the prints and tried to get them to handle the work, but I never did get, you know, the kind of distribution that I hoped for. [laughter]

RATNER

How about any of the other art schools in Los Angeles? How receptive were they to showing some of the prints and trying to sell them?

KISTLER

There were about a half a dozen art schools in Los Angeles, and they were all quite cooperative in working with me. They attempted to sell the work, both to the artists and to the public, too. Do you have the names of those art schools?

RATNER

Well, there was Otis [Art Institute].

KISTLER

Otis Art Institute, yes. They had presses, but they didn't have anybody that was interested in developing lithography. There were two or three others, too, that--

RATNER

During the forties there was a place called Jepson [Art Institute] , also.

KISTLER

Jepson art school, yes. I had some of the artists from Jepson' s, and they were quite helpful. I will have to say that Chouinard was the most active and the most helpful. They sent the most students to me. Richard Haines there and Ernie De Soto and, oh, quite a number of others came over to me and worked out prints with me. But it was all on that $30, six-stone deal. There wasn't much profit then--

RATNER

What does that mean?

KISTLER

Well, I had a proposition that I would give the artist six stones that were grained, ready for drawing, for $30, and I would pull two prints for them. If they wanted more, they'd have to pay for them. I don't know, about seventy-five cents or a dollar apiece. So it wasn't a very profitable thing, but it was a promotional deal, and there were quite a number of the artists that took it up. But they were short on money the same as I was. [laughter] There wasn't a great deal of financing at that time. I also had the competition of the WPA [Works Progress Administration] . The government had instituted a course in lithography too, and some of the artists that I might have gotten a few dollars from to help me out-- The promotion of the work was done by and paid for by the government through the WPA. It didn't help me out very much.

RATNER

No, I guess not. [laughter] Except for I guess it had-- At least there were more people in Los Angeles working on lithography.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

From that standpoint-- It seems like, from what you're saying about Chouinard-- Also, here in another letter from '47, you talk about Mrs. [Nelbert M.] Chouinard, who started that art school. I think one of the prints you're talking about when you say that "The prints have arrived, and I'm getting them into retail outlets"-- I think one of them was Charlot's *Sunday Dress*. About that you say, "I would like to give one set to Mrs. Chouinard and inscribed to her, because she has been very helpful promoting sales among the students."

KISTLER

Yes. Well, that was done, I know. Where it is now, I couldn't say.

RATNER

That was a print, *Sunday Dress*, that you had done through the mail?

KISTLER

No, no, that *Sunday Dress* was done in my shop on-- I had my shop at various places. I had it at Union [Avenue] and Venice Boulevard. I had a little shop in there. I had my shop there before I moved over to Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street], where I rented that shop.

RATNER

Which is where you must have been in '47, Third and Carondelet. I think that's where you went right after the war.

KISTLER

Yes, that's right.

1.10. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (January 24, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, before we flipped the tape we were talking about the location of your studios and your relationship with the various art schools. How had you met Mrs. Chouinard?

KISTLER

Oh, I think I went over and said hello to her, as I recall, and told her about my-- Probably that's the way that that came about. I did a lot of just ordinary contact work, you know. Go in and see people about the proposition and try to get them interested in doing lithographs or handling lithographs or doing something that had to do with it.

RATNER

So in addition to all the things we've talked about already in '47--I guess that was really a busy year for you--in December of that year. Charlot writes to you and mentions that you've been-- He must have curated a show, I guess, because he says that you've been mentioned in his catalog foreword with appropriate honors for a show called "Brooklyn Museum Retrospective Print Show, 1913- 1947." You had apparently loaned some lithographs for that show. Brooklyn, of course, was really in the forefront at that time for

collecting and exhibiting prints. Tell me about that exhibition and your involvement with it.

KISTLER

Well, I just sent prints to it. I don't remember just-- I sent everything that I could. All the artists that had recognition. I think that they paid me for sending them. I'd mount them up and send them in. There was quite a bit of recognition of the work in Brooklyn at that time.

RATNER

How involved was Charlot in that exhibition?

KISTLER

Well, many of the prints that I had made for him up to that time were in the exhibition. I know that I sent them.

RATNER

It just seems like, from what he says, that he either helped curate it or he did curate it by himself, since he says in his catalog foreword-- Or maybe he just wrote the foreword, I don't know.

KISTLER

Probably.

RATNER

Here's an example of when you were talking about promoting the work. In 1948 you're talking about how actively you're promoting Charlot's work, and you've just sent his Sunday Dress and The Tortilla Lesson to a national print show in Washington. When you were working through the mail like that, how did you work out the aesthetic decisions in terms of--? I know you would send him proofs, but what about the size and the size of the edition and things like that? Who made those decisions?

KISTLER

Well, the artists usually made them or we made them together. I did an awful lot of work just on speculation, you know, hoping that we'd sell the prints. So if I did make any money from the editions that I printed, why, I put the profits

right back into the promotion of the work of lithography. I was really very enthusiastic about it and just devoted all my time and effort to the promotion of lithography. I still think that it's a wonderful medium. The only thing is that it's too facile in a lot of ways. Because it's so easy to make these prints and buy lithography, people don't value them in the way that they should. They're really very fine works of art. Usually, it's necessary to have a collaboration in order to turn out a lithograph. Because a lithographer has to work at it every day-- And I did work at it every day. It's just like playing a musical instrument. If you're not doing it all the time, why, you get so that you're stale at it. So if you don't have a sufficient amount of work, if you don't have contacts, if you don't have the work coming to you all the time, why, you won't turn out good work. The more work that you're turning out, why, the better work you're turning out, because you keep your hand at it. It's necessary to have skills in the making of the lithographs. It's necessary to have actual physical and mechanical skills. Those are important. The average person can take up with the lithograph, but if they don't keep at it all the time, keep alert on the skills that are necessary, why, they won't get good work. Just like anything else, it is a skill that takes constant practice. [pause] Isn't that funny? I can't think of the name of those acids.

RATNER

It will come to you later. Moving on with Charlot, then-- Well, from what you were saying, it was obvious that's why he wanted to continue to work with you. That's the difference between a master printer and somebody else, which is why, I guess, Charlot was willing to work through the mail, because he wanted to work with you. Because you had such a long relationship. In the spring of '49-- Apparently he had been in Colorado Springs for some time, where I think he was running an art school.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

He left there in the spring of '49 and was considering opening a small printing school in Los Angeles. What happened to that idea?

KISTLER

He was?

RATNER

Yes.

KISTLER

I don't remember a thing about that.

RATNER

Okay. Then we move on--

KISTLER

He was head of the art department of the University of Colorado, and he worked with Lawrence Barrett over there.

RATNER

Barrett was a printer?

KISTLER

Yes. Yes, he was a printer and very well known. Charlot went over there as a teacher, and he was more interested in teaching than he was in administration. They wanted to put him in charge of the art department, the administration of the art department at the University of Colorado. He left there because they insisted on it, and that's when he went to Hawaii. He went to Hawaii as a teacher, and I don't think that he had any duties beyond teaching. He was interested in art and in archaeology and things like that that had to do with art. He was interested in philosophy and languages too, to the extent that-- Well, it was amazing to me. French was his native tongue. He went to Mexico and learned the Mexican language and one of the ancient Indian languages. He mastered it. When he went to Hawaii, why, he took up Hawaiian and learned to speak all of these languages and wrote a series of plays in the Hawaiian language.

RATNER

Wow, a very versatile man.

KISTLER

Yes, he was a scholar, and he was very bright and very much interested in everything that he associated himself with. He was very, very strict in his-- In the observance of his-- He was very religious. He had what I thought were some very cute things that came up that had to do with his religion, his ethics. There was an art collector in Los Angeles here that was very active in building an art collection and was buying modern artists. When Charlot came to town, why, Armitage got him in touch with this man. When he met this man-- I won't mention his name, but when he met this man, Zohmah [Day Charlot] was-- He came to Los Angeles to see Zohmah, really, because--

RATNER

Who would be his wife.

KISTLER

His wife, yes, at his home. She was a young girl and didn't have any-- Well, she was just a young girl. That's the only way to put it. She was with Charlot when he met this man. This man asked Charlot to come to dinner. He said, "Miss so-and-so. Miss Zohmah, we'd like to have you come, too." But when the actual invitation came through to come to this dinner, why, it was just for Charlot and not for Zohmah, too. So Jean asked this man, he says, "Isn't Miss Day invited, too?" And this man said, well, he didn't think that she'd fit into the group and that she wouldn't be interested anyway. It would be best just for him to come alone. And Charlot said, "Well, in that case I won't be able to attend either," which I thought was a very fine gesture for him to make, because this man was really buying prints and artwork in Los Angeles. So he got Zohmah there, too. Some of his religious predilections entered into this thing, these associations, too, which I thought were very amusing and indicative of the integrity of the man. He was a very strict Catholic. At that time the Catholics all had to eat fish on Friday, and he was religious about it. Some of these parties turned out to be on Friday, and he wouldn't attend unless he could have fish. He used to come to our house on Friday night and stay over until Monday morning when I was living and working at Patricia Avenue and had my press down in my garage. He'd insist on having fish every Friday. We weren't very crazy about it, but we were fond of him, and so we had fish. So along in the time while we were working together there, why, the Catholic church decided that it would no longer be necessary for them to have

fish on Friday, that they could dispense with that particular thing. So the first time he came to our house after the necessity to eat fish had been removed from the Catholics, why, I said, "Well, come on over to the house tonight and we'll have fish." He said, "Lynton, you know, I'm a little tired of fish." I thought it was so cute. [laughter] But that's indicative of the way that he ran his life. He had his ideas about everything. But he was very generous with his students. I saw some of the most, well, inept students make drawings. You know, their first efforts were almost childish. And it didn't make any difference how bad the drawing was, why, he didn't dwell on how bad it was, but he would always find something about them that was-- He would say, "Well, that's a very nice idea that you have there, and it needs a little here." He didn't intimidate his students. He tried to encourage even the most inept students that he had, and some of them were pretty bad, of course, and never did get very far. He would always find something that was interesting or something that he could point out to them, and that was the reason that he was so popular with the students. I think that he's one of the most popular teachers that I ever ran into.

RATNER

Was his wife related to the artist Richard Day?

KISTLER

No, no.

RATNER

No, just a coincidence. Well, it seems like maybe after he left Colorado Springs that he thought for a while about coming to Los Angeles before he went on to Hawaii, because there's a letter from you to him in October 1952, and in the postscript you mention that the Los Angeles Art Institute is going to be changing directors. You say that Lorser Feitelson and Kenneth Ross are in line for the job. "Both are friends of mine, " you say. "Would you like to have me contact them in regard to your being engaged there?" What do you recall about that?

KISTLER

Nothing came of it. He went to Hawaii. Yes, that's really what had transpired.

RATNER

But he had initially hoped to come back to Los Angeles?

KISTLER

No, he became enamored with Hawaii. He fit in there with the culture, with the life in Hawaii. It is a delightful place to live. And Charlot was at home no matter where he was, because he had a love of people and a tremendous art interest. He settled in there very easily, bought a home there, and did teaching. He taught in the university, was very well known and very well liked by all the students. I never ran into a student that didn't like Charlot .

RATNER

How well did you know Kenneth Ross, who, I guess, did become director of the L.A. Art Institute?

KISTLER

Well, I never had much contact with him. He had his own niche and I had mine, and he wasn't much interested in what I was doing.

RATNER

Oh, okay.

KISTLER

He was interested in the school itself. They did have a lithograph press there, but they never did much with it, because there was no one that was sufficiently interested that got it off the ground in the Los Angeles Art Institute.

RATNER

I guess if Lorser Feitelson had taken that job, things might have been a little bit different.

KISTLER

Probably would. But I don't think that lithography would have gone any further than it did anyway, because Lorser was not interested in lithography as a medium of expression. He did one lithograph. The only one that he ever did

in his life, he did with me. It was a beautiful lithograph, well done and everything. He had all the skills and the materials, but he and his wife, neither one could I get to do more than one lithograph. And they didn't work with anybody else either.

RATNER

They just wanted to paint, I guess.

KISTLER

Yes, they were interested in painting.

RATNER

Okay, moving on with Charlot then. We move up to 1961. You've written a letter to Charlot, and I'm quoting here. You say, "The news about the Metropolitan Museum is very much appreciated. I do think it most generous of you to include me in this honor. Your generosity is fully appreciated." What was all that about?

KISTLER

Well, the Metropolitan Museum of Art got a lot of his work. And I had quite a bit of recognition from the Metropolitan Museum in New York because of Charlot's work and because they were impressed with what I was doing because of Charlot ' s promotion of the efforts that I was making. So that when I went back to New York during the war, they made an effort to get me to stay there at that time, but I didn't want to locate to New York.

RATNER

Who were they? The Metropolitan?

KISTLER

The Metropolitan, yes.

RATNER

Because they were already aware of your--

KISTLER

Yes, they were already aware of my work. They didn't want to put up any money or anything like that. They didn't offer me any jobs, but they did try to get me to do in New York what I was doing in Los Angeles . But there were several people working in New York-- [George] Miller principally, really — who were doing a very good job there, so I didn't try to break into that field.

RATNER

But still that must have been very flattering for you.

KISTLER

Yes, it was. But New York is that way. They try to get all of the people that they can there that are doing any work at all. They try to get them to work in New York if possible.

RATNER

When you say that the Metropolitan received a number of Charlot's works, how did that happen? Through donation or purchase?

KISTLER

Purchase, I believe. Yes, they have a considerable collection in New York there of his work, both the lithographs and paintings.

RATNER

Okay, then there's another big jump in the correspondence to 1970, where you discuss in the letter with Charlot the proofs for a print called Hawaiian Drummer. It seems that it was quite involved. What can you tell me about that project?

KISTLER

Well, I don't remember now. I think that there was quite a bit of correction and things like that that had to be made on the stone . I don ' t know whether he was here. He must have been here to work on it. He went back to Hawaii, I believe, before it was finished, and we had to do some of the corrections and things like that after he had gone to Hawaii. So that's what that was about.

RATNER

I have a copy of the letter here, and it says, "I had much trouble with the background due to the tusche you used and was relieved to get as much from it as I did. There are some faults in register still, and some areas will need some correction. This can be done here with a correction sheet from you."

KISTLER

Well, I don't know, that says about all that I could say about it. There just were corrections made on it. I don't recall what they were. I remember that there was a red plate that was added after he got to Hawaii that improved the print considerably.

RATNER

So once he was in Hawaii, his subject matter began to reflect what he was seeing there?

KISTLER

Yes, that is true. His work is pretty well contemporary with his residence.

RATNER

I guess he had also in this print reversed his signature, not realizing, I guess, that the offset press eliminated the need to reverse the image. Then you go on to say, "New materials, inks, and lacquers now make possible this way of working, making lithography more responsive to the artist's talents and removing many of the difficulties." So you were pleased with working in this method apparently.

KISTLER

Well, Hawaiian Drummer was done on stone.

RATNER

Hmm, well, maybe-- It seems like that's what you're talking about in this letter, but maybe it's something else. Hmm. I don't know.

KISTLER

Yeah, I don't think that that can be in regard to Hawaiian Drummer, because that was done on stone.

RATNER

Maybe there's a little piece missing from the letter or something. It seems like that's what you're talking about, but I guess not. Okay, well, what I thought maybe we would do is go ahead and wrap it up here, because the next thing I wanted to talk about was Picture Book No. II, which you began in 1971, and that was kind of a big project. Maybe we'll just pick up with that next time and talk about that whole project, and then the last portfolio that you did with Charlot as well.

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (January 31, 1989)

RATNER

At our last meeting, we were talking about your long relationship with the artist Jean Charlot, and I thought we'd continue discussing your work with Charlot today. In October of '71, you and Charlot began discussing a second *Picture Book*, which would be called *Picture Book* [*No.*] *II*, and I'm wondering what inspired the idea to go ahead with that project.

KISTLER

Well, Peter Morse was a moving spirit in that book. He was so intrigued by the work that I had done and the success of the first *Picture Book* that he had wanted to have another *Picture Book* printed. So he arranged the financing on it, and we went ahead with it. It was handled by mail entirely. Charlot was in Hawaii, and I was in Los Angeles. The equipment on which it was printed was a good deal different than on the first *Picture Book*. There was a period of some forty years between the two *Picture Books*, so by that time I had my own plant and I had my equipment set up on West Washington Street. I was doing nothing but lithographs directly drawn on the plate, and I was not doing any photographic work, or very little, at that time. I had worked out a method of registry that proved to be quite effective and very easy to use, but there was some photography that was included in it. The artist drew on the plate the right way a linear outline for each one of the pictures that he was going to draw in color later. Then I took that outline and I took a naked negative from it and printed it down on each one of the plates. For each color that was used in the picture, I made a print, an outline, and that way Charlot could draw right to the area of color where he wanted to use the various colors. I just printed

two pictures at a time, and I didn't have eight pictures on a plate as I did in the first *Picture Book*. It made it a little more colorful. We could print with less colors and get a good deal different effect in the second *Picture Book* than we had for the first. Jack Lord, the motion picture actor who was in Hawaii, was the one that furnished the finances for that book.

RATNER

So it wasn't sold through subscriptions?

KISTLER

It wasn't by subscription, no. But Peter Morse is the one responsible for getting the whole thing together and getting Lord's finances on it.

RATNER

And who was Peter Morse?

KISTLER

Well, Peter Morse is a friend of Jean Charlot's, and he is very knowledgeable in art and is especially interested in oriental art. At the present time, he is working on a catalog of the work of Hokusai . He has been in Japan several times to work directly in that country with the Hokusai prints, and he is considered the most outstanding authority on the Hokusai art at this time, oriental art and Hokusai in particular.

RATNER

So at the time he lived in Hawaii--that's how it started?

KISTLER

Yes, he lives in Hawaii and is in Hawaii now, working on this Hokusai catalog.

RATNER

So what did Jack Lord get in return for putting up the money?

KISTLER

Oh, I think he got a hundred books or something like that for putting up the money. As I recall, I got about $26,000 for doing the job. It was a big job.

RATNER

And who distributed the books?

KISTLER

Jake Zeitlin.

RATNER

So he handled that end of it.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

And given the success of *Picture Book* number one, how did *Picture Book II* sell?

KISTLER

Well, the edition has never been exhausted, but it has had very wide distribution. The subject matter in *Picture Book II* was mostly Hawaiian and some South Seas experiences of Jean's.

RATNER

I wanted to ask you a technical question about it, too. I was reading one of the letters between you and Charlot from October of '72, and it talks about splitting colors on the plate. What exactly does that mean?

KISTLER

Well, it didn't work out very well and we didn't follow through on that, but what we planned at first-- We had two images on the plate, and we were going to run on half the press one color and on the other half run another color. But it didn't work out well, so we didn't follow through on it, and we just ran one color on a plate.

RATNER

What would have been the advantage of doing that had it worked out?

KISTLER

Well, we could get a greater variety of colors that way.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

We only used four colors on each one of the plates that we had. On each one of the pictures in the book, we just used four colors. So it cut down the number of colors that we could use. For instance, we could run red, yellow, blue, and black on one side, and we'd run a chartreuse and an orange and a powder blue and gray on the other picture, all at one-- If it worked out. But it wasn't practical to do that, so we didn't carry through with it.

RATNER

That must have been costly to do that. Would it--?

KISTLER

No, it wouldn't have been costly, but it complicated the problem too much to match both of those colors. Another thing, the mechanism on the press didn't lend itself to printing it that way. There's an oscillation on the rollers, you know, to distribute the ink. It works back and forth, as well as around like that. We had to cut down the oscillation of the rollers in order to keep the colors from mixing, and that didn't prove to be a practical answer either. We didn't go through with it.

RATNER

So how disappointed was Charlot that he wasn't able to use these additional colors?

KISTLER

Oh, not too disappointed. It worked out, nevertheless, that we needed extra colors. Our basic colors were four different colors in each one of the pictures, and, if necessary, why, we ran an extra color to give a difference in it. It wasn't necessary for us to do that very often, but I think that we did that several times. I had a great deal of help from the Gans Ink Company. They furnished all of the ink on the job for me, and all of our colors were mixed to a match. They all had to be permanent colors so they wouldn't fade, and the color

matches had to be very accurate. Sometimes we'd have to get two or three mixes on one color before we got to just what we needed. Gans Ink Company furnished all of the ink on the job. Bob [Robert] Gans was very helpful in following through with that. He went out of his way to give us what we wanted. To mix colors it costs, especially to mix just the one pound, and we never needed more than one pound for a run. To mix a pound of ink it costs a good deal more than what he got for it. As a matter of fact, he furnished a lot of ink without cost to us. I gave him a book.

RATNER

[laughter] Because you'd had such a long relationship with him?

KISTLER

Yes, I did. But he cooperated with me and was a very fine friend and very supportive of my work.

RATNER

That's great. I also read in a letter from about this time, while you were working on *Picture Book II*, that you were apparently having some difficulty getting plates. You said something about the fact that you had ordered some from Chicago in September and they had yet to arrive.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Why was it so difficult to be getting plates at that time, in the early seventies?

KISTLER

Well, I don't recall why it was, but I think that that had to do with the graining. We were having a hard time getting the proper grain. As a matter of fact, today it is almost impossible to get plates grained the way that you want them, because for this handwork it takes a little coarser grain than we used to use on the plates for commercial work. The plates that were furnished at that time, most of them didn't have a grain on them at all. I went all over the country trying to get a little coarser grain on the plates than they were willing to put on them. Even people that were in the business of working with artists,

they didn't seem to understand at that time that different grains were necessary on the plates for different results. I even went into graining by, oh, the people who grained for us, you know, and put a grain on the glass, and I did get some satisfactory results that way, but I didn't work with it long enough. Along about the time they were closing the plant, I had to quit working entirely because I got to-- Well, my pressman became ill and quit, and I was commencing to get difficulty with my breathing and things like that, and so I decided to close my plant, too. I was financially able to do it at that time, and so I just closed the plant rather than try to-- It became apparent to me at that time that lithographic work should be carried on in a plant that was completely, oh, air-conditioned, and that would have been a very expensive thing. At the same time, I would have had to train a pressman. It was with a great deal of reluctance that I did close my plant for those two factors: the fact that it would have cost me literally thousands of dollars to properly air-condition my plant and the fact that I would have had to, at the same time, train another pressman. My pressman that left me at that time was Ernest Perry. He was very cooperative, although much of the time we didn't agree on how things should be done . But we always came to an understanding before we went ahead. He very often did things on the press that I asked him to do that were out of the ordinary. For one thing, at that time we printed a plate for Marcia Maris--that is Peter Morse's wife--with a plate that was drawn to print four colors from one plate. That was done by running the four colors separately and turning the plate a quarter of the way around and returning it to four different positions and printing one color over the other. And the design fit exactly. To start with, I can't imagine getting another artist that could draw so that you could rotate the plate that way and get a result out of it. That was the first problem. Then there was a problem on the press turning it around. My pressman was not in favor of doing it at all, but my plant was an experimental plant, and we did a lot of things that were unorthodox as far as work was concerned. Marcia Maris, who is at the University of Hawaii now as one of the instructors, also made a plate with-- There are twenty-eight plates [for the print *Rainbow Castle*] that she made with separate colors. It was all made of little dots, and there was a white line between all of these dots. With the method of registry that I had worked out, it was possible to make the twenty-eight plates, and all twenty- eight plates fit exactly. We got perfect register so that the twenty-eight plates printed just exactly where they should.

RATNER

That must have been an interesting print.

KISTLER

It was. Well, both of those were interesting, and they were indicative of the experimentation that we did in the plant and the lengths that I was willing to go to to achieve a different result. Marcia Maris, I believe, has a set of progressive proofs of each one of the plates separately, so that you can see how they are put together. That's either in her hands or it's in the hands of the Smithsonian Institution, I don't know which now.

RATNER

So when you were working on *Picture Book II*, it was you and Ernest Perry in your plant at the time who printed that.

KISTLER

That's right.

RATNER

So it was just the two of you.

KISTLER

He deserves a lot of credit for the work on the *Picture Book*. It was under my direction that we used this method of registry that I found to be so effective.

RATNER

I also read in a letter from November of '72 that the assistant curator of prints from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art [Joseph Young] was coming to your plant to see the printing of *Picture Book II* in process. What came of that visit?

KISTLER

Gee, I don't-- [pause] I don't remember it, really. I don't remember it.

RATNER

Was a copy of *Picture Book II* purchased by the museum?

KISTLER

I think that it was, yes.

RATNER

So *Picture Book II* was ready for delivery in July of '73, and you personally took it to Hawaii to Jean Charlot. After you returned you wrote to him saying--I'm quoting here-- "I had no desire to see Jack Lord on my trip to Hawaii. The delivery was"--I guess this must have been to Zohmah [Day] Charlot-- "for Jean and Peter, so there was no disappointment. I am put out, however, that Jean was not invited to this presentation." End of quote. So evidently the relationship with Jack Lord had maybe turned a little bit sour. What happened there?

KISTLER

Well, it was at this point I had spent quite a bit of money getting over to Hawaii. It was expensive to get there, and I thought that I would see on that trip-- I really put in a whole day waiting around just to present the book to him, and I was disappointed, but there were no hard feelings about it. I know that he was busy and that it was difficult for him to get away. He did keep me waiting all day long, saying that he would be there in an hour, or two hours or something like that. Instead of enjoying the island I had to wait at Jean's house for Jack Lord to show up, and he never did show up. I spent the whole day in. But I did meet Lord before, and he was very gracious with me. There's no hard feelings about it. It's just indicative of the pressure under which Lord was working at that time.

RATNER

What was the presentation that you were talking about? You said, "I am put out, however, that Jean was not invited to this presentation. "

KISTLER

I don't remember about what that-- What I told you now is what transpired there.

RATNER

Okay. Then shortly after you returned- -

KISTLER

I don't care about having that included in this.

RATNER

Okay, we can talk about how you can take that out if you want.

KISTLER

I don't want to cast any reflection on Lord, because I appreciate the fact, as far as I was concerned, that he did put up the money for the book. I could also appreciate the fact that he was a very busy man and that he had a lot of difficulties, a lot of things going at the same time that I was there and that had to be taken care of, and for that reason he missed seeing me. So I didn't necessarily feel slighted or anything like that.

RATNER

Okay. In September of '73, not too long after you had returned from Hawaii, you began, through correspondence, to discuss with Charlot the production of a miniature book, with Dawson's Book Shop handling the distribution.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Tell me about how you decided which book to produce as a miniature and about that whole project.

KISTLER

Well, that was the first *Picture Book*. I've got one out in there. I'll give you one. I took the *Picture Book* itself and reduced it in four colors to a small book, a miniature book, and the reason I did it was that-- Jean wrote the original text for the *Picture Book*. He wanted to sell the book in France as well as the United States, and so he got the ambassador to Brussels-- Now then, that name skips my mind just when I want to bring it up. Paul Claudel. He got the ambassador, Paul Claudel, to write his version of the pictures in the original *Picture Book*.

RATNER

Claudel's version.

KISTLER

Yes. I thought that Jean's text was so interesting that it ought to be preserved in some way, and so I got out this little picture book that was principally to give Jean's version of the pictures. That was done quite a few years later. Let's see, that was done in the sixties, I think.

RATNER

' Seventy- three, I have here, I think it happened.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What was the relationship with Dawson's? Did they publish a lot of miniature books, or why were they so interested in--? Apparently, they approached you and asked if you would be interested in producing a miniature.

KISTLER

Dawson's? Well, I had a relationship with Dawson's over the years. I think I told them about it, and they said they would like to handle the book and would like to be the publishers.

RATNER

How well did that sell?

KISTLER

Well, it's sold very well. I think that I printed three hundred copies, and we sold half of them anyway and we gave away quite a few.

RATNER

So that was completed forty years after the first *Picture Book*. That must have made a nice companion piece for people who had collected the first one.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What kind of equipment, special equipment, did you need to print a miniature like that?

KISTLER

I printed it on a regular press. It didn't take any special equipment. It took a lot of special work though, special binding. The A-1 Binding Company did a beautiful binding job on it, made a nice little slipcase for it.

RATNER

What did it sell for?

KISTLER

A hundred dollars.

RATNER

How about the *Picture Book II*? What did that sell for?

KISTLER

I don't recall. I don't recall what that sold for. I could find out from Peter Morse.

RATNER

I was just curious about the difference in the prices from the first *Picture Book*, which I guess sold for $15. Is that correct?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How the prices have changed in forty years.

KISTLER

I think that it sold for-- It must have sold for $125. And the special edition, which had a sketch bound in of one of the plates, sold for $500, I think.

RATNER

And those were signed?

KISTLER

Yes, they were signed, too.

RATNER

Then later in '73, December, you mention in a letter to Charlot that your friend Carl Haverlin, who we mentioned before, had volunteered to present some material on the fortieth anniversary of the *Picture Book* to *Time* magazine. What, if anything, came of that?

KISTLER

Nothing. Nothing came of it, I'm sure. There may be an article on it, but I don't recall it. Carl Haverlin was the manager of Broadcast Music Incorporated [BMI], and he had quite an important job in New York and in the industry. He is the one that set up an opposition to ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers], who were attempting to take over the whole radio industry at that time. He got the radio stations together and researched a lot of work, everything that he could find in the field of the public domain. He gathered all of the public domain work, in which there was no copyrights or the copyrights had expired, and he made them available to the industry so that they didn't have to depend upon ASCAP ' s copyrights. That way, why, he kept the TV industry free of monopoly by ASCAP. He was quite an important man in the industry and a boyhood friend of mine, so when I was in New York, why, I printed a catalog of all of the things that were in the public domain for-- [tape recorder off] The things that were in the public domain were published by BMI and made available to the industry, and I printed it at the Blanchard Press, where I was working at that time when I was in New York. That is one job that I did in New York. Another one is when the war broke out there. I was working at Blanchard, and I got together a booklet of the silhouettes of all of the planes that were available. And we published that for the public defense people so that they could recognize any of the planes that came over--the German planes principally. We published the complete book of all of the German planes at that time, and that was done for the Richfield Oil Company, and they distributed them.

1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (January 31, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, before we flipped the tape, you were just telling me a little bit about some of your jobs in New York. If you had anything else to add, you could. Otherwise, we could go ahead and talk about Charlot again.

KISTLER

Well, we can go ahead and talk about Charlot. I have nothing to add to that.

RATNER

Okay. Following the project with the miniature, apparently Charlot went to Caracas for a while--this was in the fall of '74--and you sent him some plates there. Though it seems that by this time zinc was becoming unavailable and you had to send him aluminum. Why was the zinc so difficult to come by?

KISTLER

The metal plates that we were using were those that were used on the offset press. Originally, the plates were of zinc but they found that aluminum worked a lot better than zinc, as far as the commercial industry was concerned, and so they had no reason to roll this thin zinc anymore. So the zinc plates are impossible to get, even to the present day. I spent an awful lot of time trying to find out where I could buy the zinc, and I couldn't get it at all. The zinc lithographic plates, for handwork, are more sensitive to the drawing on the plate than plates drawn on aluminum. But the aluminum runs cleaner and is easier to keep from filling and easier to keep from scumming up. They're sensitive to the grease and are more sensitive to gum arabic, and for that reason they were preferred in the industry. We had to depend upon the materials that were available to the industry in doing our lithographs on the offset press. That was a consideration there. It doesn't have-- Did I make it clear?

RATNER

Yes.

KISTLER

The zinc plates were better for the artwork, the work that was put on the plate, but they were very difficult to keep open, keep them from scumming.

The aluminum plates were not quite as sensitive, but they were not as liable to scum or fill in, and they were easier to keep open in production. For that reason the industry had gone to aluminum plates, and they no longer rolled the zinc plates. As far as I know, those thin zinc plates were the only reason that they rolled zinc in the first place.

RATNER

How was it working through the mails to a foreign country like that?

KISTLER

Well, Charlot's daughter had married a man who was in the oil business in Caracas, Venezuela. He and his wife went down there to Venezuela to visit them. At the same time, why, we had a project making a lithograph. The Little Seamstress I think it is called. So I sent two plates down there, all prepared for printing, and that put a-- Well, the whole thing was handled by mail. They were down in Caracas for a couple of months visiting his daughter, and we handled the whole thing by mail. Of course, the mail was very slow between the United States and Caracas, and we had some trouble with the immigration people about getting these plates back after I had sent them down there. Jean had drawn them. I had a hard time getting them out of the immigration department, because they wanted to put a price on the plates because they came from a foreign country. But I went down there and talked them out of it. They released them without charging me anything in the way of a fee for getting them out of the immigration department. But we handled the whole thing by mail. I sent the plates down there. It took two or three weeks to get the plates down there and two or three weeks to get them back up here. We were using aluminum plates at that time, but even at that, it made it very difficult for me to get out of the drawing what Charlot had put on it, because the plates had a decided tendency to fill by the time that-- It had taken two or three weeks to get them down there, and then it took Jean a month or so to do the plates. It was in a tropical country, and it was hot and sticky there. Then he sent them back, and it took two or three weeks to get them from Venezuela to the United States again. And they stuck around in the-- Not the immigration but the--

RATNER

Customs?

KISTLER

Customs department for a week before I could get them out of there, so they were really a mess by the time I got a hold of them. It was one of the most difficult printing jobs that I ever did to get anything out of those plates because of the way that they were handled, the lapse of time and the fact that they were done in a tropical country, hot and sticky. I really had a job on my hands.

RATNER

Yeah, it sounds like it.

KISTLER

But we did get a very presentable-- The Little Seamstress, that was the name of the lithograph. It was done in two colors.

RATNER

Once you actually had it there to print, how much extra time did it take because of all those problems? Because it started to fill in and things like that.

KISTLER

Well, I don't know how much extra time I put in on the art form or whatever. I know that it was difficult. Not time-wise, as far as that was concerned, so much as it was the elapsed time between the time I sent the plates down there and the fact that they went through so much handling and so much time elapsed after the drawing was put on the plates and the elapsed time between when they were drawn and when they were printed that made the difficulty.

RATNER

I see, I see. Okay, then we move ahead to February of '76, and you apparently made another trip to Hawaii, this time for the launching of the Jean Charlot catalog of prints [Jean Charlot's Prints: A Catalogue Raisonne] . Who organized that?

KISTLER

Peter Morse did. That is a resume of prints of Jean Charlot. My work is represented in there, and all of the prints that I printed are designated there. I have a copy of it if you want to see it.

RATNER

Yeah, I ' d be interested.

KISTLER

Isn't there one at the [William Andrews] Clark [Memorial] Library?

RATNER

No.

KISTLER

I have a copy of it here.

RATNER

Okay, then I came across a letter from July of '76 from Charlot to you, where he says, "Regarding yours of 28 July, saying that using colors for the text is a new idea and would cost more came as a surprise. I enclose passages from my letter explicitly stating my desire to use color from the beginning. If we can't resolve it, it would be the first failure in our long collaboration and nothing to rejoice about." But I couldn't figure out what project he was talking about.

KISTLER

I couldn't say. Using color for the text?

RATNER

Yeah.

KISTLER

I don't know why you should want to use color in the text.

RATNER

That's what it said, but it didn't make any reference to which work he was talking about.

KISTLER

Well, it must have been the second Picture Book, but there would be no reason to use multiple colors on the text.

RATNER

It was a little later than that. I was just curious what had happened there.

KISTLER

Yeah, well, we resolved that.

RATNER

Whatever it was.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Okay. Then by February '78 you have sold your plant, as you mentioned earlier, and you sent to Charlot what you hoped would be the last draft of the prospectus for the portfolio of the Melanesian images. I don't know how to pronounce that.

KISTLER

I'm not an expert. I just pronounce it the way it's spelled, Kei Viti.

RATNER

Okay. So anyway, you sent him what you hoped would be the final prospectus for that. That turned out to be a portfolio that used a rather large format. It contained eight original lithographs printed in four to six colors. The paper size was 20" X 26", and the image was 16" X 20". How did this project, which was your final collaboration with Charlot, how did that evolve?

KISTLER

Well, I just wanted to do a portfolio of Jean's work in full color. He had been down to the Pacific islands. So he wanted to make some lithographs, and we got together a portfolio. I think his portfolio is at the Clark Library.

RATNER

Yes, I saw it.

KISTLER

I had one here, but it's packed, ready for shipping, and I--

RATNER

I did see the portfolio at the Clark.

KISTLER

You did see. There were only five lithographs in that. But it turned out very nicely.

RATNER

Was that sold through subscription also?

KISTLER

No, it was just published on speculation.

RATNER

And how successful was it?

KISTLER

Very successful. We sold all of them except one or two that I kept, one for each one of my grandchildren. I have one that is wrapped here, ready to ship to one of my grandchildren now, when he settles down and is ready to keep it, when he has a place to keep it.

RATNER

I guess it sold for $600, I have. The portfolio sold for $600 and the individual prints sold for $175.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What was Jake Zeitlin's involvement in the project? I came across his name in reference to it.

KISTLER

Well, he undertook to sell them.

RATNER

To sell them for you. So was he involved from the outset?

KISTLER

Yes. He didn't put up any money. I think that I financed that printing of it.

RATNER

Then later, in July of '78 in a letter from you to Zohmah Charlot, you say, "Unless we can get someone to buy the plates and take a tax deduction on them, our best out is to get an appraisal on the plates and donate them to the Smithsonian Institution as stated in our brochure." What happened there?

KISTLER

It went to the Smithsonian. One way I made a little money.

RATNER

Good for you. [laughter] So that was your final project with Charlot. He died not too long after that, I think.

KISTLER

That's right. He was quite ill at the time that he finished his-- He was settled in his own mind that he was on his way out and-- But he did a very nice job on it.

RATNER

Whose idea was it to go with the larger format on that?

KISTLER

Well, I guess it was mine.

RATNER

So during your long collaboration with Jean Charlot, you produced more than 250 lithographs. Quite a sizable number.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How would you explain the longevity of your relationship with him?

KISTLER

Oh, very pleasant. He used to come out to my house when I first started, and we'd work on weekends. When I started out, I did my work down in the garage, and it was a collaboration then. The neighbors-- Well, the neighbor across the street from me, who was kind of fussy about things, got upset and went to the city and tried to put a stop to it. I told them, "I'm not charging anything for doing these prints at all. They're a recreation and it's not a business. It just happens that I've got a press there in my garage and that I'm doing them there. But I'm not selling anything. " So it squashed the whole business. The artists were coming to my place at that time, and sometimes they would fill up the street pretty well with cars, which made the parking a little difficult right there at the time. But I felt as though I was entitled to deal with this. It was a recreation, and I had people at my house to enjoy recreation with me. It couldn't be interfered with. So he didn't get to first base with it.

RATNER

So how would you explain--? Obviously, you and Charlot were very compatible in order to be able to work together for so long, especially the fact that you worked through the mail for a good part of the time because he was living in Hawaii for so many of those years. What was it? I mean, how do explain that longevity? For instance, you didn't work with somebody else for so many years, but with him you must have been simpatico in some way.

KISTLER

Well, I don't know. He liked my work, and I enjoyed doing it. That's the only way that I can explain it. I had quite a number of artists that I had a long association with, that were with me for a long time.

RATNER

Was there something about his philosophy towards printing or--?

KISTLER

Well, he liked the way I printed.

RATNER

Just liked the way you printed. Okay, good enough.

KISTLER

I followed his desires, I followed his instructions, and the work came out onto my hand the way that pleased him. So he brought all of his work to me.

RATNER

If you had to pick one particular project or one particular print that was a favorite to do with him, does anything stand out in your mind?

KISTLER

Well, I think that Picture Book number one was the highlight of our whole relation. It was early. Many things happened-- When Charlot first came to me, we had a book underway for Henrietta Shore [Henrietta Shore] , who was a friend of Jean Charlot's. It was all just about ready to put together, and Jean said, "Well, gee, you ought to have a picture of Henrietta in there." We said, "Well, we haven't got a photograph or anything." And he said, "Well, I'll draw a picture." So he made a two-color lithograph which we printed, a lithograph that we printed at my father [William A. Kistler]'s plant. It wasn't a spitting image of Henrietta Shore. It was a little bit wild, you know. When Henrietta saw it, why, she plumb nearly dropped to the floor, because she didn't know that it was going to be in there. It was a surprise. She got very upset about it, but finally she realized that it was what it was and it was a very nice thing, and she became very fond of it. But it didn't make her out to be a movie star or anything. [laughter] But that was one of the things that came up. I told you about the difficulties that Charlot had with the print collector. Yeah. I think since his name is not mentioned there that that's all right to tell it, don't you?

RATNER

Fine. I couldn't figure out who it was.

KISTLER

Let's see, what was his name? Well, he was a big collector in Los Angeles here. But I thought it was indicative of Charlot's character the way that he acted, the fact that he had refused to go to this dinner. There had been a tentative invitation, and it wasn't carried through. So he told the man that he wouldn't come unless Zohmah was invited.

RATNER

So is there anything else about Charlot that you would like to add before we finish this little session talking about him?

KISTLER

Let's see.

RATNER

Of course, if you think of something later, that's fine, too. But just if you think of anything now.

KISTLER

Yeah. I can't think of anything else right now. I told you about coming in about the fish on Fridays, which I thought was kind of cute.

RATNER

Okay, well, we'll finish up here then and pick up with your return from New York another time.

1.13. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (February 21, 1989)

RATNER

We spent our previous two meetings talking about your relationship with Jean Charlot. I thought that we would back up today and talk about your return to Los Angeles from New York following the war. We've discussed that briefly during some earlier meetings, but I thought we could talk about it a little bit more in depth today. I know you came back to Los Angeles in 1945 when you set up a shop in your house--I guess you purchased a house at Third [Street]

and Carondelet Street--at which time you decided that you would work exclusively as a fine art lithographer. How did you come to that decision?

KISTLER

Well, I had severed-- We had severed our relation in the East, that is, and had decided to come back to Los Angeles, and the war was ending at that time. I hadn't been able to carry on the kind of activity that I had planned in working with artists through the wartime. I hadn't found any application there for the work. I had this house on Patricia Avenue. It had increased in value considerably, and I practically had it paid for, so it gave me capital to go ahead and put in a plant. I made up my mind that I was going to go ahead with the work in working with artists. So I sold the house, and I had sufficient capital to buy a house at Third and Carondelet, and we set up our lithograph business there. We lived upstairs. It was a two-apartment flat, and the upper part of the house we used for living, and downstairs, why, I put in a gallery and a workshop, moved my stones and things into the lower part of the house and started soliciting artists and the people at Chouinard art school [Chouinard Art Institute] and several other art schools that were operating at that time. They sent their students over to me. There were three or four other art schools--I can't remember the names of them--but Chouinard was the principal art school here. The University of California, through Stanton Macdonald-Wright, who I had done work for before I went East-- He was in charge of the art department at UCLA. He arranged to have the teachers at UCLA come down to my shop and learn about lithography from me. Of course, they did lithographs at my shop, and that's the way that I got along. Amongst them was Clinton Adams, who was one of the instructors at UCLA, and June Wayne, who was not connected with the university, but she walked into my plant one day. She was sent there by a friend of hers--I can't recall his name right now [Jules Langsner] --but she wanted to learn about lithography. I had an arrangement that I had made as an introductory offer, which was of no profit to me at all financially, but I thought it would get the artists interested in the work. June came in and looked around the place, and I told her about this proposition that I had to print six prints. I prepare the stone and give her instruction on the drawing of the lithographs on six of the stones and would attempt to sell any of the work that she produced. I had complete arrangement of the sale of the prints and also the printing of the prints worked out. For $30, why, I

agreed to do these six stones. She said that she didn't think that was any sort of a deal that she would be interested in. It didn't seem like I had earned my $30, and she wouldn't have any part of it. And after looking around for about thirty days, at the end of thirty days she came back to me and said that she would like to have individual instruction in lithography from me, and she paid me quite well. But she was the kind of a person that wanted complete attention when you were working with her. She didn't want anybody else around at all. She even wanted me to clear out the rest of the plant and give instruction to her and have my time available completely, which if it was convenient for me to do and make arrangements, why, I did. I worked with her that way directly. We made quite a number of lithographs. But even at that, there was not sufficient income from the whole setup that I had. I couldn't generate enough activity to continue in the work as an exclusive thing, and the property that I had bought had increased in price in the four or five years that I was at Third and Carondelet. To the point where I found that I could go into commercial work and do so much better that I decided that I would continue with the stone work as far as I could, and in the new plant that I set up I bought two offset presses and went into commercial work. Of course, I was experienced in commercial printing at that time. I was able to go into business, and I had a name in the Los Angeles area as being a successful printer, and so I've built up a very nice business. I could never become completely out of the artistic business. The artists kept coming to me to do lithographs, so I commenced to work out a deal where I could handle the work on an offset press rather than on the stone work.

RATNER

Which is what you were doing exclusively at Third and Carondelet, correct, just stone work?

KISTLER

Yes, I was doing it exclusively. So then I sold the property at Third and Carondelet and took the money and put it into a plant on Temple Street. I never did get over the idea of working with the artists, and I converted many of them to lithographs that were printed on offset press. As far as I know, I was one of-- Well, the first one, I guess, that went into the business of printing fine art on offset presses. For a while I did have my stone presses there too

and I did some work on the stone press. Those artists that were able to work with me, why, I converted them to the offset work, and they did very well with it. As long as zinc plates were available, which were the plates that were first used in the offset work, why, it went very well. Then they commenced to bring the aluminum plates into use and banned the zinc plates. They quit making--rolling--zinc, so it was not available to offset work, and I had to work it out in aluminum. The difference there is that the zinc plates have many of the characteristics of stone. The zinc is sensitive to the same materials that you use on stone. But they are also very difficult to print because they have a tendency to fill. You have to have a very skillful pressman, and you have to be very careful in working with them or your work will fill up and you'll lose your design. I was able to overcome those characteristics. By the time it was almost impossible to get zinc plates, why, the aluminum plates had taken over, and I had to convert to aluminum plates rather than zinc plates.

RATNER

About what year was that that you couldn't get zinc anymore?

KISTLER

Oh, I don't have any dates in mind.

RATNER

Like by the sixties or something? Or later than that?

KISTLER

Yes, in the sixties. I found that some of my artists could convert very well, and it gave me more of an opportunity to work in color than I had before. Jean Charlot and Stanton Macdonald-Wright and one or two others, Millard Sheets, all had a color concept and could work in both the zinc and the aluminum, and I worked out considerable work. It was drawn directly on the plates. I printed *Picture Book No. II*. It was financed by Jack Lord; it was promoted by Peter Morse. Jean Charlot drew a second *Picture Book*, thirty- two lithographs, and made quite a different proposition for me to work with, because I could only print two pictures at a time on the press, whereas in the first *Picture Book* we did eight pictures on a sheet at a time. My presses were smaller. They were more up-to-date. I did quite a bit of color work and experimental work in

converting the original lithographs drawn on the plate to the offset press. I worked out methods of registration and working with the Gans Ink Company, and we developed inks that were suitable for the artwork. They mixed the colors for me just the way that the artists wanted them, and I worked out registration and things like that. I worked out a method of registry where the artist would make a line drawing which served as the color registration guide. Then we photographed that and photographed it onto the plate. Then the artist drew the plate so that the colors all registered exactly. It saved us quite a bit of time in registry work. Then this color guide that we put on the plate didn't print. We worked it out so that we could get rid of the original color guide on the plate and we had just the drawing left, with the register marks to keep the design in register. I worked with Marcia Maris making one color lithograph [*The Castle*] that we ran twenty-eight colors on.

RATNER

Right, I think you told me about that last time.

KISTLER

Yes. And I did another one with Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and there were eleven colors on that. That's that one we have on the wall there.

RATNER

What's the title of that?

KISTLER

That's *Gershwin's Music*. I did a couple of prints with Millard Sheets the same way. But I commenced to run into trouble, because my pressman [Ernest Perry] had developed an allergy from the acids and things that we worked with, and he quit. The materials that were available for making lithographs, even on aluminum plates, were disappearing from the market, because they were no longer required in the commercial printing business. I had to depend upon that source for the materials that were available. And it was quite evident to me at that time that to continue with the work I would have to air-condition my plant, which would cost me several thousands of dollars, more money than I could afford to spend on it. So I decided at that time not to go ahead with the work any further and let it lie where it was. I also did-- Well, I

told you about the thirty- two-page design book. *Picture Book II*. That's about it.

RATNER

No, you skipped a lot. You don't know what I have in store for you. [laughter] I want to back up to the forties for a few minutes if we could. I just want to ask you, when you first returned to Los Angeles, how available were materials, given the war situation?

KISTLER

Real good paper had disappeared, but the industry was converting entirely to offset lithography rather than stone lithography, and there is a complete difference there. The presses were improved and materials were changing very rapidly. Let's see, where were we, anyway? What was your question?

RATNER

I was asking how available the materials were right after the war, so that's right on line.

KISTLER

Yes. Oh, a flood of new materials came into being, and the ink situation changed from earth colors and things like that to aniline dyes entirely.

RATNER

That was around that time.

KISTLER

That made some of the colors more fugitive and others it made more permanent. New mediums for mixing the colors were developed, and the Gans Ink Company, who I worked with, had put in a department for mixing the inks for the printers, so I could get the kind of ink that I wanted and get the colors that matched very accurately by then. It saved us quite a bit of work and gave us permanent colors in the things that I have printed, which have stood up over the years and have not faded. Previous to the working out of formulas that Bob [Robert] Gans worked out for me-- My colors were not only brilliant and I could get very clear and very precise colors, but they were permanent too, which was an essential thing as I saw things. But the

combination of my pressman quitting and the fact that I would have to spend more money than I had on the plant-- There didn't seem to be enough available business at that time to continue with. It wasn't possible for me to spend $100,000 in air-conditioning the plant, and that would have been on an experimental basis, too. So that about covers the situation as it was in the time that I could.

RATNER

Well, I also read in some of the earlier correspondence at the [William Andrews] Clark [Memorial] Library that you did some work with some of the [Walt] Disney [Studio] artists in 1947. How did that all come about?

KISTLER

Let's see. That came about through a combination of my work with some of the artists in the studios. I made an acquaintance with quite a number of artists in the studios and had done work for them on stone. Then my acquaintance with Herbert Ryman, which I told you about.

RATNER

Right.

KISTLER

He introduced me to artists at Disney, and word got around, one way and another, to the studios that I was doing lithograph both in offset and on stone. That helped out my contacts. I worked with practically-- Many of the well-known artists at the studio. Warren Newcombe was one man that I worked with. He was the man that worked out the proposition that they would build a set portraying the capitol steps and then they would take a photograph of the capitol. He worked it out so that they would photograph the lower part first, where the action took place, and the background would be from a photograph of the capitol itself. It was all fit together, but it was photographed separately, the top and the bottom. It was a very complicated deal that I can't describe because he wouldn't even let the principals at Metro-Goldwyn[-Mayer] into his studio there. He was a man that worked it out, and I guess it is still used today. He was one of the men that I had worked with.

RATNER

That's right. I remember we talked about him a little.

KISTLER

Herbert Ryman worked at the studios. And he talked about my work, and it got around town that I was a competent lithographer. The artists came, floods of them, on Sundays. Weekends were the only time the artists had to work when I first started in and was working in my home at Patricia Avenue. They'd practically fill up the streets there with their cars, and the neighbors got upset about it. One man undertook to go to the city, and I had quite a stew about it, because they wanted to stop my doing work. But I carried it on as a hobby. I wasn't charging them any money for it, and it wasn't a commercial business at that time, so they didn't do anything about it. They just said, well, I had a right to such parking as was available, and I wasn't doing anything that was against the law.

RATNER

How much competition was there in Los Angeles, during the late forties, amongst fine art lithographers?

KISTLER

The only competition that I had was workmen who in their spare time would work with the artists on it.

RATNER

So you were really it in terms of a full-time fine art lithographer.

KISTLER

Yes, I was the only one that made my time available on any reasonable basis. Most of the lithographers, by the time that they put in a full week's work, which at the start was six days a week, why, they didn't want to do any more of it. They didn't want to work on it any further with the stone. But there was one man by the name of Graff who worked for me in the Kistler plant, my father's plant. He used to pull prints. Another man, Paul Rohrer, he was a very fine printer and a very fine lithographer. But they weren't very anxious to give me any information on the printing of stone. They wanted to keep it as their own prerogative.

RATNER

Right. But you fooled them.

KISTLER

So I wasn't able to get much information from them.

RATNER

But that was early on, right, that you're talking about, when you proceeded to learn yourself.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

When you were mentioning earlier about the--

KISTLER

This is as rambling as my life has been. We've been going back and forth here. I really had no organization, I think. I didn't keep any real records. I never have, so it's--

RATNER

Well, in all the correspondence that you have, I was able to, you know, come up with an outline that told me what you were doing and when. So that's what I'm trying to worm out of you. [laughter]

KISTLER

Trying to pry out of me. [laughter]

RATNER

When you were mentioning earlier about your contact with the people at UCLA through Stanton Macdonald- Wright-- That's how you met Clinton Adams and other people as well. How much did that contact with UCLA increase your work load?

KISTLER

Well, it was a substantial part of it.

RATNER

It wasn't like a onetime thing with those artists? They became genuinely interested in lithography? I guess that's what I'm trying to find out.

KISTLER

Artists draw pictures when they feel like it, when they feel a picture coming on. That is, unless they have an assignment. I didn't have any assignments and they didn't have any assignments, so it was just whenever they got a feeling that they wanted to make a lithograph or that they wanted to make a drawing that they came to me. Sometimes it would be a year or more. There were-- When I was working with June Wayne, I printed an awful lot of work for her. I did work on both stone and offset work with her. There were lapses the whole year when I wouldn't see her. She was just doing something else. The same way with the other artists. I had no permanent customers. I had nobody that I could get interested in or would work on lithography and make it a medium. If I had had more time and more money, I could have gone ahead with it and done more promotional work. But I did lay the groundwork for its acceptance amongst the artists, and there were two or three other people who went into business after I started the work in Los Angeles.

1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (February 21, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, before we flipped the tape we were talking about your relationship with various artists and the fact that you had laid the groundwork for an interest in lithography in Los Angeles. I wanted to ask you, I know that you had your own gallery in your plant because you felt you needed a place to show the work, because there, for a time, wasn't a lot of interest in prints. But I know by the late forties that there were more fine art galleries in the Los Angeles area. I believe that Vincent Price had opened his Little Gallery in Beverly Hills, as well as helping to found the Modern Institute of Art, which was in Beverly Hills. Also by this time, Frank Perls, Felix Landau, William Copley, and Paul Kantor had also opened their own galleries. Also Associated American Artists opened up a short-lived, but apparently very lavish, Beverly Hills branch in '47. There

was also something called the American Contemporary Gallery run by Barbara Byrnes. With all this new activity, I wondered how much interest there was in prints.

KISTLER

Well, there wasn't enough to keep a printer going. None of those people have cooperated with me in developing prints. You mean that those people were active in the sale of prints at that time?

RATNER

No, no, no. I don't know. I know that they had opened up galleries. What I didn't know was whether they were showing paintings exclusively or whether there was some interest in prints by this point. I didn't know. I just knew that the galleries had opened by then.

KISTLER

Yes. Well, none of them took up the cudgel and went after print sales and specialized in prints. It was a sideline, entirely, with them. I don't know. I didn't get any real help from any of the galleries. There weren't any of them that made prints a specialty, you know. None of them that had galleries that specialized in prints and saw the value of marketing them.

RATNER

Why do you feel the Associated American Artists decided to open up a place out here for a little while?

KISTLER

I don't know, because they didn't make much of a splash. I didn't know that they had opened up a gallery here. That's how much it amounted to. I think I was pretty alert for anyone who could have helped with the promotion of prints. But there wasn't a one of them that I knew of that-- They didn't use my facilities, they didn't bring any customers to me, and, frankly, I wasn't even conscious and am not at the present time that Associated American Artists opened. I don't remember their having opened a gallery here, so they certainly didn't contribute much to this area of prints. There were some of them that were very enthusiastic about my work, and if I had had the work of major artists to offer them, it would have made it possible to work out the

work more. There was one gallery that was owned-- I don't-- Name over those galleries again,

RATNER

Was it the Copley Gallery that you're thinking of that you worked with?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

That was considered by many to be the most avant- garde of the galleries at the time.

KISTLER

Yes, I did work with Copley. That was one gallery that did work with me quite a bit. I printed a couple of books for them and also did an etching for the man who was the outstanding-- Oh, what do you call it? Artist--

RATNER

Well, you did two projects with the Copley Gallery: one in '48 with Man Ray and a second one in '49 with Max Ernst.

KISTLER

Yes, and Max Ernst is the one I was trying to think of.

RATNER

Let me ask you about the one with Man Ray, since that occurred first, in '48. In 1948 the Copley Gallery published the first edition of Man Ray's Alphabet For Adults, and that was designed by the artist and printed by you. How did you become involved with that project?

KISTLER

Well, he came to me and worked with me, and I printed a book for them that was done on an offset press. And that's about it. Then I handled their commercial printing, too. If I had had two or three more people of that caliber that had money to spend or were willing to work with me, it would have gotten me a good deal further with it.

RATNER

Then you also collaborated on one lithograph with Man Ray called Le Roman Noir. How did that develop?

KISTLER

Well, he just wanted to make a lithograph. He came in, and I gave him a stone, and he--

RATNER

Went to work.

KISTLER

He went to work on it. I handled it like I did the others. He had some innovations in that printing. I've forgotten just what they were now, but--

RATNER

Well, I read something about the fact that he- -Man Ray--suggested using four colors, blue, red, black and brown. And then they were blended together, which was something that neither of you had done before.

KISTLER

Yes, I knew how to do it. I knew what he wanted and--

RATNER

Apparently, that was some kind of innovation, I guess.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

So how would you describe him, Man Ray? How was he to work with?

KISTLER

Well, he was very imaginative and placed quite a bit of requirements on my imagination and everything. He was stimulating to work with because he did

have ideas about lithography that we could have carried out. I would like to have done more work with him.

RATNER

But he wasn't interested in doing more litho- graphs? Is that what happened?

KISTLER

Well, he was interested in painting and things of that sort that were paying more money. That was the breach that we had was the difference in price between a painting and a lithograph. Lithographs were selling-- For even fine artists, they were seldom priced at more than a few dollars; and paintings, they were really getting high prices for them.

RATNER

Then, as we mentioned, another artist you worked with that was connected with the Copley Gallery was Max Ernst. In 1949, I guess carrying over to '50, the Copley Gallery held a Max Ernst retrospective. The artist designed the catalog and you printed it [Max Ernst: Thirty Years of His Work], apparently, in an edition of 513 numbered copies, of which the first 22 contained an original etching printed by Joe [Joseph] Funk at Jules Heller's USC [University of Southern California] workshop.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How did you become involved with that project?

KISTLER

Well, Copley was working with me at that time, and I handled some commercial printing for them. I worked with whoever was available to pull the prints. That was just collaboration that I had. When something was outside of the scope of my facilities, why, I went someplace else to get them. I did occasionally use a letterpress printer and another lithographer and a compositor in that case.

RATNER

How would you describe Max Ernst?

KISTLER

I didn't know him very well. I just got his plates. I'm not sure that I ever met him.

RATNER

Well, in an interview I read that you later did with Clinton Adams, you recount a story to Clinton Adams about Ernst and his desire to print with you if you would take part of the edition as payment. You said that you refused because you had a policy to take only cash for your work. But then you later said you regretted it as a major error in judgment on your part.

KISTLER

Well, I found out later the importance of the artists. It was one mistake that I made. If I had been alert to the value of Ernst's work, as it finally worked out, why, I wouldn't have had to have worried the rest of my life. [laughter] I'm sorry now that I didn't go ahead with it on that basis. But I did have to eat, too. That's another thing.

RATNER

That's right. You couldn't eat prints. So up until that time, you weren't real familiar with his work? He was just somebody that the artist was bringing you to work with.

KISTLER

Yes, yes, he was just another artist that was available.

RATNER

What sort of a working relationship did you have, if any, with any of the other Copley Gallery artists? I know that they showed the other surrealists: [Roberto] Matta, [Rene] Magritte, [Joseph] Cornell, and [Yves] Tanguy.

KISTLER

Well, most of those artists were out of the country even. They specialized in-- Oh, a man from Chile and another one from Peru and French artists that weren't even in this country, Man Ray and Max Ernst were two of the artists

that they brought to this country in person. The rest of them weren't able to come here. They didn't have the finances and they didn't have the standing. Copley was specializing in abstract art, and it was having quite a time getting by at that time. It wasn't generally accepted. It wasn't even as accepted as it is today, and so not so many of them got to this country.

RATNER

So those were the two main artists that you worked with from that gallery, other than commercial work that you just did for the gallery.

KISTLER

Yes, that's right.

RATNER

I mentioned a minute ago that Joe Funk had printed that etching at USC for the Ernst project. What was your opinion of that lithography workshop at USC? It was begun in the late forties.

KISTLER

Well, I think that it was valuable, but I wasn't very well acquainted with what they were doing. They weren't poking around my shop, and I didn't poke around theirs. But I suppose that I could have. If there had been more cooperation, lithography would have taken hold a good deal better than it did.

RATNER

But you just both kept to yourselves.

KISTLER

Yes, we worked independently, and they didn't seem to be interested in what I was doing.

RATNER

So even though you had been in town for quite a while and had been operating even before they opened up, they didn't come to you ahead of time seeking any advice or anything like that.

KISTLER

No, no.

RATNER

Okay, also in '48, as you mentioned earlier, that was when June Wayne first came to your plant, and you worked with her over the next nine or ten years. Because you worked with her for such a long time-- I know you've worked with other artists for a long time as well. But what would you say makes a good collaboration between an artist and a printer?

KISTLER

Well, it's a mutual viewpoint. It is an appreciation of the work, the skill of each of them, and the concept that they have. Their respect for each other's viewpoints. It's kind of like a marriage, you know. You get along because you get along, or you just don't get along at all. Very often there is an awful lot of patience on the part of one side or the other. Eugene Berman was an awfully impatient man to work with, very critical of everything that was done. He criticized the things that I did and the way that they were printed, and I was just patient with him to get what he wanted. On the part of the printer, it's a matter of being able to project the concepts of the artist by cooperation and patience with sometimes rather pointed criticism. Other times, you find artists that are very easy to work with, that they are not critical and that they are cooperative. It's a question of the temperaments of the people that are working together. There are all kinds of combinations between patience and impatience and charitableness towards each other's work and their-- Well, it's just living together, really. You've got to forgive a lot of things that occur, a lot of things that are said. The printers make mistakes, and the artist has to be patient with it. And the artist sometimes puts demands upon the printer that are almost impossible. For instance, in working with Stanton Macdonald-Wright-- He was a very fine artist, very competent and very capable. He didn't know exactly how colors would work out, having drawn them on a plate, how they would print. With my experience, I could tell him, "Stanton, this thing here, you've got to put more crayon on that if you want that to come out the way that you want it to." And he'd say, "I want to see how it looks from here just the way I've drawn it there." I would have to be patient enough to go ahead and print it, put it on the press and print it and go through all the motions of making a trial print. And he'd say, "Well, gee, that isn't what I

wanted at all." He'd come back to the original concept that I had. Sometimes that went on two or three times on a color. Or if I was doing a color, I'd tell him that there had to be more drawing on the plate or something was going to come out too dark, or something of that kind, and he would demand to see it. He lived way up on the beach, up north of Santa Monica there, and I would have to take proofs to him, clear down to his place, which was a matter of twenty or thirty miles. I'd have to take them down to him for his approval. He had a funny thing about being afraid of traffic and everything, so I had to do all the legwork on that. I couldn't be in my plant when I was in my car and going to consult with him. It made it an expensive thing to work out. But he helped me out so much in bringing artists to me and things like that that I felt that it was worthwhile to work with him. On this expense, my time ran considerably more than he'd pay for, than he was willing to pay for, and I had to reduce the bill considerably from what I thought was a fair and reasonable charge. It was indicative of what I was willing to do to please the artist. I think that a printer has to be that way if he is going to work with an artist. Either that or you won't get any place at all.

RATNER

I wondered how you felt about that in terms of subject matter, because, speaking of June Wayne again, to prepare for this interview, I was reading an interview done with her. In it she mentions a print that she was working on with you, the subject matter of which you apparently didn't approve of. Initially you refused to print it.

KISTLER

Yeah.

RATNER

But you ultimately did agree to print it, and I wondered what you remembered about that particular situation.

KISTLER

Well, I just didn't think it was worth printing. That's it.

RATNER

Aesthetically or because of the subject matter?

KISTLER

Oh, the subject matter and aesthetically. It didn't seem to come up to her standard or mine either.

RATNER

What was your feeling regarding the artist's choice of subject? Was that the artist's decision, or was there a point at which you felt--?

KISTLER

Well, there's a fine line between promiscuity and art, and sometimes that was the basis at which I didn't want to print anything that was pornographic. I wouldn't print it, as a matter of fact.

RATNER

So what--? It had more to do with that than, say, for instance, a political subject or something like that?

KISTLER

Yes. That was the only thing that I drew the line on. I wouldn't handle pornography of any kind or a print that I felt bordered on pornography. There's an awful lot of things that I wouldn't print today.

RATNER

But how often did that come up when you were printing?

KISTLER

Not very often.

RATNER

Not very often.

KISTLER

No.

RATNER

Okay, I discovered that during the late forties and early fifties, most of Southern California's prominent artists came to work with you, including William Brice, Hans Burkhardt, Phil Dike, Lorser Feitelson, Rico Lebrun, Helen Lundeberg, Dan Lutz, Phil Paradise, Millard Sheets, Wayne Thiebaud, and June Wayne, some of whom, of course, we've already mentioned. With whom did you particularly enjoy working?

KISTLER

Oh, I enjoyed working with all of them. I enjoyed the work all the time. There isn't an artist that I worked with that I would say that I didn't enjoy working with them. I enjoyed my work.

RATNER

You just loved printing so much.

KISTLER

Yeah. There isn't an artist that I ever worked with that I didn't enjoy my experience with them.

RATNER

Well, that's a pretty impressive list I just read, and I know that it's much longer than that. Those were just a few names that I pulled out. Are there any memorable experiences with those people? Any of those people that stand out in your mind?

KISTLER

Oh, I probably could dredge some up, but I can't think of any right off.

RATNER

Well, maybe you'll think of it over the next week or so, and you can tell me next time if you think of anything that was--

KISTLER

Well, I had the closest association with Jean Charlot of any of them.

RATNER

Right, which we covered last time.

KISTLER

Yes, and I did-- I think that I have told you some of the--

RATNER

Right, of those stories.

KISTLER

--experiences that I had with him.

RATNER

Right. I just wondered if anything stood out in your mind with any of these other artists, but maybe it will just come to you while you're thinking about another time.

KISTLER

I don't know. It's hard for me to recall —

RATNER

I know I'm putting you on the spot here.

KISTLER

Yeah, I'm just trying to--

LELAH KISTLER

He worked with over seven hundred artists.

RATNER

I know. Well, maybe we'll wrap it up here for today. Then if some funny story or interesting situation comes to you over the next week or so, maybe you'll remember it or jot it down or something, and you can tell me about it next time we meet.

KISTLER

Well, some of the experiences I had were outside of the printing experience: personal experiences and things like that. And I've told you about the association that Jean Charlot had with one collector here--

RATNER

Right. Yes, you told me about that.

KISTLER

Which I thought — I don't like to place the man in any bad judgment at all, because we all have our peculiarities, and to me they were just little strange quirks that they had. The same way as I have some strange quirks. I find there are people who feel that I am strange in a lot of ways.

RATNER

Okay, well, maybe we'll wrap it up here, and then we can pick up with some other subjects next time we meet.

KISTLER

Okay.

1.15. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (March 7, 1989)

RATNER

I'd like to begin today by talking about some of your publishing and publicity efforts. The first thing I wanted to talk about was in regard to your publication entitled Bulletin. I first came across a mention of this in some correspondence dated from February 1948. Unfortunately, it was only mentioned--I wasn't able to see a copy. But in a letter to Jean Charlot of that date, you say that the publication is doing quite well, that the artists like it very much, and it's bringing in both new artists and buyers. What can you tell me about that?

KISTLER

Oh, gee, that's so long ago I can hardly tell you very much. It was a publicity effort on my part, and I carried on for a short length of time, maybe a year or two, and sent out little bulletins about the artists' work and about the work that I was doing there. It was promotional entirely, and that's about all it amounted to. It did attract some attention and it got me some business, and that's what it was, a business-building effort. It was slanted towards the interests of the artists. I didn't take any editorial positions. I didn't try to change any of the marketing or anything like that, or the movement, but it

was just to tell them about what we were doing in the business. And getting artists to come into the print room and get them working on stone--that was my principal object. It was an effort, too, as far as possible, to reach the public in the distribution of prints and get them to come in, and it did have some effect. One thing about it that would bring them in-- They'd come in and they'd go through my entire file of prints, and they'd have one or two that they thought that they might like and that they'd be back in a day or two and tell me whether they wanted them. And after having put in two or three hours with them and going through my files and everything, why, they decided that that wasn't exactly what they wanted, but they wanted something else. [laughter] So it was one of those things that made an awful lot of work and didn't pay off as far as the sale of prints was concerned, although I remember it did bring in one print collector that bought, oh, $1,000 or $1,500 worth of prints at one time. Of course, that hooped things up greatly.

RATNER

I bet.

KISTLER

That helped a lot, [laughter] and kept it going for a while longer. But it was my means of keeping in touch with the artists and letting them know that I was still active and everything.

RATNER

What was the format like?

KISTLER

Oh, it was just a little 4" X 9" folder that I think was either six or eight pages.

RATNER

And where did the mailing list come from?

KISTLER

Well, it came from a good many sources. It was sent out to the art schools and all of the artists that I had on my list. And I did have a pretty good list of artists. I had 400 or 500 that I was working with at one time, and during the time that I was active in printing from stone, why, I printed with over 700

different artists. I had a list of most of them. I had a list of 450 names when I finally compiled it, but I know that there were more than that during the time that I was in the business that I worked with. I wasn't in the business of collecting as much as I was trying to get distribution, and I should have kept a file of everything that I printed. It would have been a nice thing to have, and it would have been very valuable today. But I was so anxious to get people to buy just that one copy of the thing that they wanted, why, I sold it to them, and in some cases gave it away if people were interested in my work and I felt they could be of help to promote lithography. If they liked something, why, if I thought that it was important enough, I would give it to them to get them started, so that my files were depleted. Sometimes I had two or three copies and I could dispose of them. I'd give away the third copy, in lots of cases, if it was something that seemed to have a possibility of furthering my work.

RATNER

How about the list of potential collectors? How did you come up with that list?

KISTLER

Well, people were interested in what I was doing. They came to my place, and I kept their names. I'd see their name in the paper and look up their address, and I'd put them on my list. I'd accumulate my list of collectors in various ways. The dealers, of course, would not cooperate with me to the point of where they would put their customers' names in my hands, and so I had to compile my own list. It was the kind of a job that I had to do on my own. I couldn't depend upon anyone turning a list over to me.

RATNER

Do you have any copies of it left anywhere, do you know?

KISTLER

No, I don't. Oh, I may in some of my papers.

RATNER

You could try and track one down. In that letter to Jean Charlot that I just mentioned a few minutes ago, you ask him to write a short signed article for the Bulletin of two hundred to three hundred words on the importance of a competent printer. Then in a later correspondence, Charlot mentions to you

that Lawrence Barrett, I guess, was hoping that you would publish a Barrett-submitted article in your Bulletin, so I guess you were asking a variety of people to write articles as well.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Who else did you ask to contribute?

KISTLER

I can't remember. I just —

RATNER

So you think you published that for about a year or so?

KISTLER

Oh, a year or two. It didn't have a regular publication date. It just came out such times as there was something to publish.

RATNER

Well, then in 1950, shortly thereafter, you published your own lithography manual [How To Make a Lithograph]. I want to read a few of the remarks on the book jacket, which are really eloquent testimony to your skill. [Kistler laughs.] They are! So I'm going to start with Jean Charlot. Of course, he was the artist that you printed with for a long time. It says, "Lynton Kistler and I started printing colored lithographs together close to twenty years ago. He is one of the master printers today and has done more to raise the quality of original art on the West Coast than most artists. " Then Carl Zigrosser, who was curator of prints at that time at the Philadelphia Museum of Art--of course, went on to do other things--says, "Mr. Lynton Kistler--" So here's somebody all the way on the other side of the country who is writing about you. "Mr. Lynton Kistler is one of the most distinguished lithographic printers of our time, and it is indeed good news that he is preparing a handbook on the craft. Technical manipulation in the graphic arts, particularly in lithography, too often has been treated as a jealously guarded trade secret. It is, therefore, gratifying that one more master is willing to share his know-how with the

world. As to Mr. Kistler's competence in the field, I need but say his work speaks for itself." Then--I'm not finished--Lorser Feitelson, of course a Los Angeles artist, says, "I consider Lynton Kistler's book on lithography an important contribution to the technical literature of the graphic arts. Kistler's long experience in fine art lithographic printing has established him as one of the leading authorities in this specialized craft." Then Stanton Macdonald-Wright, of course an important modernist and a professor of art at UCLA, says, "Lynton Kistler is, in my opinion, one of the most craftsman-like lithograph printers living today. His sensibility to fine art goes far beyond that of all save the most savant artists. His book should be welcomed by every department of art of our educational system that cherishes excellent workmanship." So with that said, how did that whole project come about?

KISTLER

[laughter] I don't know. Well, I just wanted to publish a manual on printing lithographs. You've seen it, I guess.

RATNER

Yes, I did.

KISTLER

It isn't an outstanding printing job, but I still think that it is one of the most concise books of directions that anyone could have. It covered the whole field, and if you followed the instructions in the book, why, you'd get a good lithograph. That's my feeling about it.

RATNER

So what made you decide to do that at that particular time?

KISTLER

Oh, well, I can't remember. I can't tell you what the motive was. I was active in everything that had to do with lithography at that time, and I felt as though if there were more printers and more people interested in the art, it would be beneficial. If there were more people that were bringing promotional efforts to lithography, that it would be beneficial to me and to the whole movement in the long run.

RATNER

To whom did you distribute the book?

KISTLER

Well, everybody that would buy it. I sold it through the bookstores. Dawson's Book Shop handled quite a few of them. People bought them by mail--I sold some by mail. Libraries bought it. It received general distribution. I was cramped for funds and I had to resort to reproduction for the text. I printed it on 8 l/2" X 11" sheets, the text. Then it was published with a series of illustrations, and those were printed in regular offset printing. The size of the book, I believe, is 9" X 12". It was a fairly good size. You've seen it.

RATNER

Yes, with really nice photographs in it.

KISTLER

Yes, the series of photographs I felt were exceedingly good. There was a young chap [Fred Swartz] that was taking a course in photography at one of the art schools here--I can't remember which one it was--but each one of them had to have a project, and he came to me and asked me if I would allow him to photograph my process. I told him that I would be glad to, and he made a project of photographing my work. He was an excellent craftsman and did a very good job, I thought, both in the selection of the various stages of the process and in posing the people that were involved. I engaged him to do some work for me. I didn't have-- One feature of the thing was that he did it, but it didn't cost me anything, and he gave me a set of the photographs for the privilege of doing the work, so that it worked out awfully well for me. Then, later, when he went into business, why, I did buy some photography from him. He photographed quite a number of the people that I was working with, but that was rather hard for me to carry the burden of the expense, and also it was difficult to get the artists into the shop at the right time and everything. There were a lot of arrangements necessary. But I did photograph quite a number of people that I worked with: Eugene Berman and Charlot and Phil Dike and quite a number of others that I worked with.

RATNER

How long was that book in print?

KISTLER

Well, until it was sold out.

RATNER

So you just did the one printing?

KISTLER

Yes, we just did the one printing. I always intended to revise it and bring it out in a regular library edition, but I never got around to it. It's still kind of a hanging activity that might crop up someplace. Peter Morse was very anxious to do a complete book on lithography with me, but it didn't seem to come off in my mind, so we never got to it. I'd rather do, I think, a series of books on lithography than do a thing like Peter Morse had in mind and wanted to get out, a complete searching of the process and going into a lot of the technical, chemical aspects of it, which I wasn't interested in. I was interested in the art of lithography rather than its technical aspects. It's been done by Tamarind [Lithography Workshop]. A thing that I should have done, I guess, but it seemed too much to undertake. Too much research, too much fiddling around in the libraries and things like that. And I was interested in getting my sleeves rolled up and doing things on the lithograph press. That was the thing that interested me. My work was done from that standpoint. I wanted to see a product when I did it. I didn't want to write about it very much. I was willing to give such information as I had. A lot of people came to me and asked me about various aspects of the lithography, and I went out to clubs and to art schools and to various groups and talked about lithography and told them how it was done and everything. But I wasn't much interested in researching the chemical reactions and just how they turned out. I was interested in the artistic end of it.

RATNER

Well, it's obvious that you enjoyed that part of it.

KISTLER

I did. I loved to print. It was a great thrill to me to pull a piece of paper off a stone and have a beautiful print. I loved it.

RATNER

I bet. It must have been exciting.

KISTLER

As long as I could eat, why, I was satisfied.

RATNER

Not too much to ask. [laughter]

KISTLER

All I wanted to do was print and eat. Eating was a very necessary adjunct to my printing. [laughter]

RATNER

Well, it's evident that you wanted to share your love of the work with other people. Not only so you could eat, but just, you know, all the incredible effort you put into promoting the work, I read in one place that in October '51 you're saying in a letter, I think to Charlot, that you have so much to do in the way of promotion: spending three hours for the promotional work versus one hour for production time. Then in 1951, also, I read that you were planning a catalog and a traveling show that would include about twenty-five artists, which is kind of a big show to circulate yourself. What was the level of interest in prints at this time, in the early fifties, around the country that you were able to circulate a show like that?

KISTLER

Oh, gee, I don't recall. I don't even recall right off the top of my head where I sent them, I know that I did exhibit in Oakland, San Francisco, Seattle, and on the East Coast--Cincinnati and Chicago and New York, Brooklyn- -

RATNER

So a pretty wide distribution.

KISTLER

Yes, I did. Anyplace that would make a place for my show, why, I sent it. I don't remember just how many there were. I don't even remember any of the

prints, but if I knew the date on them, why, I could probably tell you who the artists were. But Jean Charlot was very helpful. His name became very well known. He was a much loved teacher, and the artists followed his work quite actively. His name meant quite a bit. There were other artists that their name meant a lot too, as Joe [Joseph] Mugnaini, who was a very, very well known teacher. I got an awful lot of work through him. I did quite a bit of work with Mugnaini. He was very prolific and imaginative and well founded in mythology and history and art, and he was a very good man to work with. I think that his work will be worth a good deal, and I did quite a volume of printing with him. I did a ten-lithograph portfolio with him that I think someday will be sought after with a great deal of effort. One of those is that print up there. That's one of the ten.

RATNER

What's that called?

KISTLER

That is called-- Oh, I think it's [pause] A Tower on Mars.

RATNER

A Tower on Mars.

KISTLER

And there's this one here, which I think has a lot of imagination and a tremendously interesting print.

RATNER

And does that have a title on it?

KISTLER

What is the title?

RATNER

I might be able to get up and look at that. Let's see how far I can go. It's this one right here--

KISTLER

No, no--

RATNER

The Dragon, it's called. Yeah, The Dragon. He did some work with Ray Bradbury, I think, didn't he?

KISTLER

Yes, he did. Ray Bradbury worked with Joe Mugnaini, and I think he is still working with him. He is someone that you ought to look up and do the same thing for him that you're doing on my work here. You'd have a tremendous lot. I think that you'd find him really worthwhile.

RATNER

Okay.

KISTLER

He's been a teacher for a long period of time. He works in all kinds of media and is very prolific, quite profane in a lot of ways. But his imagination has a broad aspect to it.

RATNER

Well, I was wondering how you had time to organize those kinds of activities when you were also so busy printing.

KISTLER

Well, they just came off the top of my head, that was all.

RATNER

How much help did you have, though, to pull those kinds of things together?

KISTLER

I don't remember. I think that I did them when I didn't have anybody to print for.

RATNER

So you were really a one-man show in a lot of ways.

KISTLER

Well--

RATNER

You had a pressman, I know.

KISTLER

--really I was too much that way. I should have put in some time organizing a lithographic club and gotten a group together, and I think that my work would have received more attention if I had worked on a broader basis. But I think that my work was more or less personal. I just liked to print, that was all. And I went about it in the most direct way, and that was to get artists in. When they came to me, why, I printed for them .

RATNER

Well, in addition to all these promotional kinds of things we've talked about and the publishing of the Bulletin and the book on lithography--I can't believe how busy you were--in April of '51, you mention in a letter to Charlot that you are going to begin to give lithography classes with guest artists. Each session would last approximately one month and would teach both technique and the art. The teachers that you had lined up included Stanton Macdonald-Wright , Clinton Adams, and Richard Haines. I guess you asked Charlot, also, if he would be willing to teach.

KISTLER

Yes, I did, but I never got that organized.

RATNER

That program never got off the ground?

KISTLER

No, no, it didn't.

RATNER

Oh, it was a great idea.

KISTLER

Well, it was, but it would have been a great idea if I had gotten the artists that I had expected to and had wanted to.

RATNER

So it was on the part of the artists that it didn't work out? You couldn't get the--

KISTLER

Oh, I can't blame them.

RATNER

Artists who were going to come in and learn or artists who were going to teach?

KISTLER

They were going to teach.

RATNER

Those were the people that you were having trouble lining up?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

I see.

KISTLER

I really bit off too much sometimes.

RATNER

Well, you certainly had a lot going in those two or three years there.

KISTLER

Yes. I tried to work in too many directions. I should have had people that could help me out on it. But there was nobody that was available. There were one or two teachers and a teacher at USC [University of Southern California] . And

UCLA finally got their own art department, and June Wayne ran off in her own direction, and--

RATNER

Then here's another thing you planned at about the same time also, which I'm not sure happened, but in a letter to Jean Charlot dated July '51, you mention plans to write a definitive textbook for students on lithography. Apparently, a number of people had already agreed to contribute chapters, including Merle Armitage, Clinton Adams, June Wayne, William Brice, Richard Haines, and possibly Eugene Berman and Rico Lebrun. You go on to say that you're basing the book on the best artists that you've printed and that each artist would discuss how he had approached the medium, the technical aspects, etc., and that it would include one example of each artist's work with the individual ' s commentary on how the work was accomplished. Then you would, in turn, discuss what was involved in printing that particular work. What was the genesis of that whole project?

KISTLER

Well, I think what you read there is a genesis of it. It was a thing that I wanted to do that I just had too much that I was trying to do. I couldn't bring it all off.

RATNER

That was another good idea.

KISTLER

Yeah, it was a good idea.

RATNER

Well, that's great that all of those people had agreed to participate and to contribute.

KISTLER

But none of them ever turned in their papers or anything, so I never-- I had too many fish to fry all in one skillet. [laughter] Some of them just never got into the frying pan. Maybe I had too many ideas. Sounds to me like I did, now that you bring them to my attention.

RATNER

Well, they were a lot of very good ideas.

KISTLER

Yes, I think they were.

RATNER

At least the ideas you had were good ones.

KISTLER

Well, I've had a lot of good ideas. My whole trouble is getting them going.

RATNER

Well, here's something you did do. In 1952 you prepared and circulated a catalog of prints for Jean Charlot and Eugene Berman. You mailed it to art schools, museums, and collectors to help sell their prints. And you, in previous sessions, mentioned Eugene Berman, but we never talked about how you met him.

KISTLER

Well, I met him through Jean Charlot. He brought him to me, and I worked with him. He was one of the outstanding artists that I did work with. He was not particularly fond of the lithographic medium. He expected more of it than he put into it, really. He worked very hard, but he was a hard man to satisfy and he was very critical of the work that I did. He didn't think that I was getting out of the stone the thing that he put on it, and I tried to convince him that I did do his work as well as it could be done. He seemed to think that there ought to be things that come out of the stone that he didn't put on the stone. He was not a finished technician, and I couldn't take him beyond his own abilities. So he started to look around town for another lithographer. He thought he'd get somebody who would do a better job than I was doing. And he went to Lorser Feitelson, and he said, "Lorser, I'm working with a lithographer down here, and I don't think that he's getting--" [tape recorder off] He went to Lorser and said, "Lorser, I'm working with a lithographer down here, and I don't think he knows his business." So Lorser says, "Well, who are you working with?" He said, "Well, I'm working with Kistler." And Lorser said,

"Well, good Lord," he says, "that's the best man there is. What do you want?" [laughter] So he very humbly came back to me, and he was a good dog after that. [laughter] I had no more trouble with him. He realized that I had my problems in getting out of the stone what he expected of it, and if it wasn't there, that we could work around some way to get it out of the stone or get it on the stone so that I could get it out of the stone. There's one print that I did with Eugene Berman which is called Nocturnal Cathedral. It was a four-color lithograph, and we worked on it quite a long time. I remember one proof of the Nocturnal Cathedral that I pulled for him, and, gee, he just marked it up in all kinds of ways. This was wrong and that was wrong, too dark here, too light there, too much this, too much that, the ink wasn't right, and everything else. Then he left for the East, and I sent him the final print on it. He sent it back as a proof for me to work to, and it said, "Bravo! Beautiful." [laughter] But I've never had so much markup and so much to correct and so much to do on a stone to bring it into what he expected of it, and I was very much elated when I got it back. Both the print that is all marked up and also the final printing of the print is in the Smithsonian Institution now.

1.16. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (March 7, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, before I flipped the tape, you were just telling me--wrapping up the story about Eugene Berman--that the print's in the Smithsonian. What else did you want to add about that?

KISTLER

Well, that's about all. It ended up in the collection in the Smithsonian Institution: the marked-up print, the corrections that he wanted on it, and also this final print that had written on it, "Bravo! Beautiful. Excellent."

RATNER

That's great, that's great. Those were prints that were part of your collection that went to the Smithsonian?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

What gallery represented him in town?

KISTLER

I don't believe he had any recognition here. He was more a set designer for stage sets and things like that. The work that we did together, they all reflected that theatrical aspect. This print the Nocturnal Cathedral was very, oh, theatrical, you know. It reflected that, the theater, very much.

RATNER

Okay. Well, shortly thereafter, in 1952, which we've talked about a little bit previously, actually, you apparently developed a really painful allergy to the acids used in the hand printing.

KISTLER

Yeah.

RATNER

And so you had stop most of your printing from stone. I guess your wife at the time, Helen [Mikesell Kistler] , she seems to have been fairly involved in the business. I read somewhere that she was really urging you to increase your commercial clientele, which was not only more lucrative, but it seems it was less abrasive on your skin. So you sold the property at Third [Street] and Carondelet [Street] and set up a shop at 1653 West Temple [Street], which you've mentioned before, where you installed power printing equipment.

KISTLER

I bought two printing presses there to start with. The business went very well. I could never get away from the artistic end of the thing, and this thing with Stanton Macdonald-Wright and several of the prints that I did with Jean Charlot-- The second Picture Book [Picture Book No. II] was done by a direct printing from a lithographic plate on an offset press. I explored the possibilities there to quite an extent.

RATNER

That's what I was wondering. By using the offset, what additional or innovative materials were you able to use, in terms of the fine art printing, that you couldn't do with stone lithography?

KISTLER

Well, I think that what I did was to try to apply to the offset press the results that I got in hand printing, and I think that I did it to an unusual degree.

RATNER

What kind of effects would the average printer lose in offset, as opposed to stone, that you were trying to achieve? Do you know what I'm saying?

KISTLER

Oh, that's a tough one. Well, principally, the intimacy of working on the stone. The printer could have greater access to corrective facilities. I never-- There are certain things about a stone quality that are awfully hard to duplicate exactly on an offset press, but I think that I came pretty close to doing it. I could print larger editions on the offset press than I could by hand because of the cost, because it costs too much to print them by hand. But, on the other hand, you had to have large editions to make it pay, because it was more expensive to set up the press, get it started, and get the prints printing the way that you wanted them to. On the offset press it was harder than on the handpress.

RATNER

Really?

KISTLER

On the handpress I could run up a proof in a few minutes. Simply put the stone on the press and yank it up and pull it through the press. But on the offset press you had to make so many adjustments. You had to accommodate the press to the size of the paper that you were printing on, the kind of paper that you were printing on, and you had to get your ink set. You'd have to pull numerous proofs just blank, and I had a stack of paper about three or four feet high that I used as wastepaper that we had to run through the offset press. You'd have to set the press as it was running. You had to set a feeder on the press and the pressures and everything, and they all had to be

accommodated in running condition. To print a hundred prints, why, you'd have to pull two hundred or three hundred prints to get it set, to get the ink flowing evenly over the whole surface of the plate and get the proper amount on and set up all of the requirements. So that you had an expensive piece of machinery tied up, and sometimes it was just laying there while the artist was making changes on it on the offset press. Whereas you could lift the stone off of the stone printing press and give it to the artist and he could work on it on a bench, and you put another stone on and go ahead with it. But you couldn't do that on the offset press, because once you've started the job on the press, you had to achieve your printing, your final printing. Your edition had to be printed at that time, and the artist had to make up his mind in less time to give his okay. For instance, if the artist wanted to think it over for a day, why, that would mean that you would have to lay up your press for a day, because you had it set just the way that it would be for the printing. There are a number of things like that that are really mechanical and indigenous to the offset printing that do not occur in the stone printing. In printing some of the things that I did for Macdonald-Wright and some others that ran into several colors, it became quite complicated and stretched out over a long period of time. You take a press that commercially you could make $200 or $300 a day on just printing commercial work, make that much profit, it became a financial problem. Because, also, if you only had one press, why, you'd have one pressman. You're losing the pressman's time, and also it costs money to keep an offset press on the floor just sitting there. So there was a financial problem that had to be met, and the artist, for that reason, was pushed quite heavily. When they started the thing, they had to be-- Well, they had to know what the result was that they were trying to achieve so that there wasn't too much wasted time in laying around. That could be overcome with larger editions. It would take a day's time to pull a good edition of fifty to a hundred prints by hand in a stone printing, and your capacity on the offset press was several thousand. You could do fifteen thousand or twenty thousand prints in a day. It had that capacity. I never printed quite that many, but you could if you had distribution for them. When I closed my plant completely, I was up against-- I told you before that I had this problem of allergies amongst myself and my health, and my pressman was quitting. It had taken me quite a long time to get somebody that could do the work and would do it and was patient enough to the unorthodox method of running an offset press that we used it for, that is to

stop it and sometimes stand around for an hour or two while corrections were made on the plate or a new plate was provided by the artist. But, by and large, the result that you could get on the offset press matched that that you could get on the stone, that is, if you could get zinc. The commercial people quit using zinc--

RATNER

Right, you mentioned that.

KISTLER

--because it was difficult to print from, and aluminum came in. Aluminum was a much better metal as far as reproductive work was concerned, and so they just quit rolling zinc. So it came down, eventually, so that you couldn't get the zinc grained properly and you couldn't get the metal in the first place, and so we had to accommodate ourselves to the aluminum in the offset work. That was overcome by the number of colors that you would print on a print, for one thing--one way of getting around it--and various accommodations that we had to make in putting the work on the plate. The supply people who were able to furnish good lithographic materials like etches and gums and things of that sort commenced to change their chemicals and things, and that made it a difficulty as far as doing artists' work on the offset press. But it could be worked out. Then this other problem of the fact that you'd have to air-condition your plant for the health of the employees and take some good many other ramifications and use different materials to protect people from, you know, just-- They would develop horrible sores and rashes and things like that, and you'd only overcome it by eliminating materials that you were using. We were up against that. So today they've worked it out so there are more facilities for adjusting the press. You don't have to get your hands into an offset press today to run it as much as we did when I was doing it. We had to have our hands in the acid and in the water and everything, and it's just hard on you, hard on a printer physically. So with all of those problems that I was faced with, I just figured that I couldn't go any further with it. Some of them have been worked out, and I don't know just what they're doing now.

RATNER

Well, let me back up just a little bit to when-- When you first moved to the new location, you started using these power presses. A few artists that you had already been printing with for some time, such as Charlot and Clinton Adams and Eugene Berman and June Wayne, they continued to print with you. Did you still have a stone press in this place, or were they all using the offset?

KISTLER

Yes, I still had a stone press, and I did some stone work for a while.

RATNER

Then I know some artists resisted the idea of using the offset. They just wanted to do the stone printing. I know you just gave me a number of reasons. Were there any other major reasons why an artist would prefer to remain with the stone rather than using the offset?

KISTLER

Well, the cost of short editions was so high on the offset press that there were only a few of them that could use it. The costs went up considerably on the offset press, which at that time was maybe $30 or $40 an hour. The artists just couldn't stand it. It was too much. I couldn't stand it either.

RATNER

You'd think, without knowing all the details, that being able to print more per hour, of course, would be less expensive. But then you don't realize all the setup time and everything involved.

KISTLER

Yes. The whole thing is too big a thing. It was too large a project. In other words, you had to have an expensive printing plant. You had to have the following that wanted the lithographs that would take the production. You could overcome the situation by printing enough prints. If you could print a thousand of a print-- And you could do that in a few minutes of actual running time. After you'd gotten it, of course, set up, it was nothing at all. You could run a thousand prints in fifteen or twenty minutes after you had gotten it to running. But what are you going to do with a thousand prints after you've got them? You've got to have a large organization that is really pushing them the

way that things are pushed on the television now and on radio and newspaper. Gee, the advertising that is done today is just stupendous. You're not buying the product. You're buying today the privilege of being sold. The selling of the product doesn't anywhere match or has no relation to the cost of the materials at the time of the manufacturing of the product. Many of these things, particularly things like canned goods and toothpaste and things like that, there's no relation.

RATNER

Though I guess a lot of artists probably wouldn't have even wanted such a large edition anyway.

KISTLER

They had no way to get rid of them.

RATNER

Yeah, yeah.

KISTLER

Never able to establish a distribution. It's open today if somebody would take it up and really push it and put it on television. People buy anything you —

RATNER

Yeah.

KISTLER

And at any cost.

RATNER

What was the gallery and museum situation in terms of interest during the early fifties? I know I have here in a letter to Jean Charlot during the early fifties, this period when you have just moved your plant and prior to-- You say, "There is considerable new interest in prints here. One or two galleries are specializing in them." This is a gallery I hadn't heard of: "Chabot Gallery is a small gallery on the edge of Beverly Hills with a very good following." What do you recall about that?

KISTLER

Well, Chabot tried to sell prints, but they just didn't see far enough or see big enough, and they didn't have the capitalization to do the job.

RATNER

So how long were they around?

KISTLER

Oh, they were around for eight or ten years, something like that. They eked out a living at it.

RATNER

So they were one of the few that were really concentrating on prints, it sounds like.

KISTLER

Yes, but they couldn't sell any great body of prints. You'd have to have a hundred galleries that were interested in it, and it's something that could be done today if you had enough money--a matter of money entirely — and put on an advertising campaign. That thing there, the television, would be just absolutely perfect for doing it. But I never was in contact with anybody that had the money, because it might run into $2 or $3 million. It would pay off proportionately, but it costs money. It costs more money to sell the goods today in so many instances than it does for the manufacture of the goods. The advertising and the distribution is so expensive. You buy toothpaste, and the cost of the materials that go into the toothpaste, there isn't twenty-five cents worth, including all of the packing, the printing of the boxes, and the materials to make the toothpaste, and everything else. It has absolutely no relation to what you pay for it. It is a few cents, and it sells for three and four dollars a little dinky tube.

RATNER

Yeah. I also just wanted to ask you before we wrapped up today a couple of things about kind of what was happening in Los Angeles during the fifties. I think I mentioned to you before that I had read an interview with June Wayne to help me prepare for your interview, and she recounts an incident that

occurred during the McCarthy era, when some members of the Los Angeles City Council attempted to censor the subject matter in various artists' work. I guess a whole group of artists went down to the city council and protested or something, and I wondered what you recalled about any of those incidents or that period in general .

KISTLER

I didn't get involved in that at all.

RATNER

Okay. Then finally, following some of these incidents, I guess to help people understand modern art better, the Ford Foundation funded a series called "You and Modern Art," which was organized by Jules Langsner, and I wondered how familiar you were with that series.

KISTLER

Well, I wasn't familiar with that at all. That was the thing that he tried to do. It never got off the ground either.

RATNER

It didn't?

KISTLER

No.

RATNER

I guess the idea there--which, of course, would have helped you in a way- -was to help people understand modern art a little bit better, and, of course, to increase the interest in the market.

KISTLER

Well, Jules Langsner was the man who brought June Wayne to me. I was the only one that was doing any offset printing at that time on stone. He was the man that got June Wayne to come into my place.

RATNER

Okay, I think maybe we'll go ahead and wrap it up here and pick it up next time, unless you have anything else you wanted to add about what we've talked about today.

KISTLER

Well, I don't know of anything.

RATNER

Okay.

KISTLER

You pull things out of my memory that I had forgotten about entirely.

RATNER

Well, good, that's my job. Okay, well, we'll pick it up again next time.

KISTLER

All right, and what do you want to talk about next time?

RATNER

We're going to talk a little bit more about the fifties and the opening of Tamarind and then the move of your plant from Temple to Menlo Avenue.

1.17. TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (March 21, 1989)

RATNER

We're going to begin today by looking at a series of slides, both from your book on lithography [How To Make a Lithograph] and then some lithographs that you've printed over the years. So why don't you just go ahead and begin with this first slide.

KISTLER

All right, this is one of my students who established himself in San Francisco, and he is working in his lithograph shop. The stone is on the press. He has a sponge in his hand, and he is damping the stone and getting ready to roll it. [next slide] This is a first operation that I had in making a print. The paper was all damped down so that it was just limp. It wasn't real wet. It was just limp so

that it made-- It fit down onto the stone, and you didn't have to use so much pressure to get the impression off of the stone. [tape recorder off] Well, this is the first operation in preparation of the stone. You put one stone on top of the other, and you grind off the old image, if necessary, and get a nice grain on the stone and get it ready for the artist to work on. [next slide] That stone must be absolutely level all over the same surface. It is leveled out all over by putting a straight edge on the stone and a piece of tissue paper under it, and pull it out and you judge how much the stone has been ground. You go over the whole stone with that straight edge and the piece of tissue paper and pull it out, so that you get the same level all over the whole stone so that it's even. [next slide] That's where the final finish is put on. You start out with a coarse grind, and then you put a finer grain on the stone according to what the artist wants and whether you want a coarse grain or whether you want a fine grain. The grain varies from a very fine grain to a very coarse grain. I've used all kinds of grain in making lithographs. [next slide] That is the artist drawing on the stone. This is Jean Charlot working on one of the stones. The drawing is made with a grease crayon, and various hardness of crayon gives you a difference in the grain on the stone and the intensity of the drawing. [next slide] The artist draws the design on the stone the right way, and the stone-- Of course, some of them object to their drawings being reversed, so this is a method that is used when the artist wants the drawing to come out the way that they have it drawn on the stone. So they draw it backwards, and then it prints the right way.

RATNER

So she's using a mirror there?

KISTLER

She is using a mirror. The sketch is put up and it's reflected into the mirror, and the artist follows the design in the mirror rather than the original.

RATNER

Who is that drawing?

KISTLER

That's Mary Finley Fry. She was one of my lithographers, and she was a very fine lithographer. [next slide] The printer has to judge the strength of the etch according to the drawing, whether it's on a stone light or whether the stone is grained heavily or lightly. According to the drawing, the etch, which is composed of gum arabic and nitric acid-- And I used a few drops of phosphoric acid and a little bit of tannic acid in my etch. Using several different acids did a great deal for the print. The nitric acid, of course, bit into the stone and cleaned it so that the gum arabic would adhere to the stone. The phosphoric acid had a cleaning effect and made the stone run cleaner than just with the plain nitric acid that some of the lithographers used. And the tannic acid had the effect of making the gum a little bit tougher and lasted longer. I could print longer without re-etching. I found that it was necessary to re-etch the stone as I went along, and using this complicated etch I could pull more prints without re- etching. The phosphoric acid was not a mordant etch, so it cleaned the stone and made the gum arabic adhere to the stone more firmly in some ways and got away from scumming as it printed. It made my prints come clean. I didn't have to etch so often. [next slide] The etch was put on with a wide camel's hair brush, and it was smoothed down and dried. Sometimes we would let it, the stone, rest overnight and we wouldn't print until the next day. But I found that with my multiple etch--that is, using three different acids in my etch--that I could print immediately and I wouldn't have any loss of my image. I would get as good an impression as I could if I left the stone overnight. [tape recorder off] Those are the rollers that I used to roll the ink onto the stone. [next slide] The first thing was to clean the old ink off. I started off by scraping the old ink off of the stone. That's a leather-covered roller, and you scraped it to get it so that it was clean. You get the old ink off, because the ink and the water on the stone have a tendency to unite there and make it kind of muddy. You had to scrape your roller every once in a while to keep it nice and clean. [next slide] The ink is rolled out on a slab. I had a large piece of glass that I rolled out my ink on and got it very thin, a nice thin film of ink to go onto the stone. [next slide] The first thing that we did was to wash all of the drawing off of the stone. I used water and turpentine to wash all of the crayon off. And it didn't damage the image at all. When I got through, why, [next slide] there was just the ghost image left on the stone. And the water, of course, went where there was no ink on the stone, and the turpentine took the ink off of the stone, so that you have an absolutely flat surface that you're

printing from. [next slide] That is-- I'm rolling the stone up there, and usually one or two rollings of the stone puts enough ink on so that you get a nice, brilliant print. [next slide] The edges of the design were usually cleaned up before the edition was pulled, because very often the artist wanted a sharp edge on their print, and so I cleaned it up with a stick of-- Oh, I can't seem to function right now.

RATNER

It was some kind of an eraser?

KISTLER

Oh, it's just a-- I'm sorry I can't-- [a pumice stick]

RATNER

That's all right. It will come to you. Do you want to just go ahead to the next slide and then maybe you'll think of it?

KISTLER

[next slide] The stone was dried after it was rolled. It was dried, and then the paper was laid. It was fanned dry. Each one of these prints-- The stone had to be dried before I could pull the print. [next slide] The paper was laid on the stone, and then [next slide] it was pulled through the press. That's the scraper press. You put packing on top of the paper and then a tympan for it to ride on, and you pull it through the press. It's a scraping effect. You put a little grease on the tympan to make it slide easily, and you pull the stone under the scraper, which is held as a part of the press. The stone is pulled under the scraper to get the impression. [next slide] And that is pulling the impression there. You pull the paper off, then you have your print. [next slide] It's examined by the artist, and if there are any corrections, why, you can take out parts and you can put in new parts. The drawing can be corrected or changed considerably after it has been drawn. I have made corrections and changes that changed the complete aspect of the print after the first impression. I use a Carborundum grit to regrain the stone. You take a small piece of stone, and you regrain it right at the point that you want to correct it. And you get so that-- It is something that has to be done with a great deal of precision and skill on the part of the artist and very carefully by the printer not to ruin the

whole drawing. [next slide] This is a device that I made. It's a three-point device for registering the print. I found that I could print much faster with this device. You lay the three points on the paper, which must be uniform. Each one of the pieces of paper that you print from must be uniform, and you can lay it on there and you can print much faster. I had to arrange to take the guide, the three- point guide, off before I pulled it through the press. It was quite an ingenious rig that I had. It gave me a very close registry without too much difficulty, and I could do my own laying. It's necessary to have two people to lay a print to register if you use needles. And I like this method very much. It worked out.

RATNER

Did you patent that or anything?

KISTLER

No, I didn't patent it. I had screws that I could change the register so that it fit just exactly in-- very precise. [next slide] After the prints were printed, they had to be dried. The ink had to be thoroughly dry, and the prints had to be thoroughly dry. They had to be wet down again, and I put them between blotters individually and a piece of tissue paper over the print to keep it from smudging. I had to stack up a stack of prints, fifty or a hundred, and put them in this press and press them down. That way I got the paper back so that it was smooth. [next slide] That is the device that I used to put my chop on the prints that I made. I think that I was the first one to use a chop, and it is universally used by printers throughout the country now. They put that embossing on and that identifies the printer, and that's the printer's mark. [next slide] This is a man by the name of [Theodore] Van Soelen, who was the sheriff of a town in New Mexico. He came over to Los Angeles and worked with me, and I made about a dozen prints with him. I had people come from all over the country to work with me. [next slide] That is Phil Dike, who is one of my artists. I made quite a number of prints with Dike. [next slide] This is Eugene Berman, who I worked with, and he is working on the stone there. [next slide] This is Clinton Adams and myself. He is examining a print that I've pulled for him. [next slide] This is Joe [Joseph] Mugnaini and myself. I did quite a number of prints and a portfolio with Joe Mugnaini. He was one of my finer

printers. [next slide] This is a class in lithography. I'm explaining to them about the prints and how to put the work on the stone.

RATNER

Where was that at?

KISTLER

Well, that was at Third [Street] and--

RATNER

Carondelet [Street]?

KISTLER

Carondelet, yes.

RATNER

At your own place.

KISTLER

Yes. And this is a demonstration that I had up in Sacramento at the state fair. The Southern Pacific Company shipped my press up to the state fair and a number of my stones, and I worked before the public there and explained to them-- I'm rolling up stone there, and there is an artist in the background there and one over at the right that is working on the stone. [next slide] That's Jean Charlot examining a print that I pulled for him. So that gives you an idea of the work that I was doing.

RATNER

Great.

KISTLER

I haven't explained it as well as I should.

RATNER

It was very interesting. So now we're going to go on to some of the actual lithographs?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Okay. [tape recorder off] Okay, so we're beginning here with the lithographs printed by Lynton Kistler .

KISTLER

Right. I've got to recover that last one. I didn't-- [clicks through slides] There we are. That's the first print that I ever made. It's Jean Charlot. It's two colors, and it was about 22" X 30" in size.

RATNER

And that's Woman with Child on Back?

KISTLER

Yes, Woman with Child on Back. [next slide] This is a four-color print that I did with Jean Charlot, and it is called Sunday Dress. It is one of the first prints that I ever made in color. It came out very well and was very popular. I think there were about five or six colors in that. [next slide] That is one of the best prints that I made of his in black and white. It's called The Tortilla Lesson. I have it, a copy of it, in the front room there. It is very fine because of the delicate drawing that there is in the drawing against an absolutely solid black, one of the features of lithography that is so valuable. You can get so many shades of color in one printing. A lot of very delicate work there that has to be held and one of the nicest prints I ever made in black and white. [next slide] That is a Mexican dancer, and it's a little print from the pamphlet that we got out for the first Picture Book, the printing of the first Picture Book. That was printed on my machine. It was drawn on zinc plates. It had six colors in it, I believe. Malinche is what that one's called. [next slide] That is Indian Man and is another Charlot. [next slide] This is one of the things he made after he went to Hawaii, and it's called--

RATNER

Hawaiian Drummer it says right on there.

KISTLER

Yes, Hawaiian Drummer. And it was rather a large print. It was on a 15" X 20" stone, and the print was, oh, about 14" X 18" in size, approximately. [next slide] That is one of the first color prints that I made. It was in four colors, and that is called Pilgrims. [next slide] Wherever Jean Charlot went he was very much interested in the primitive peoples, so when he went through the Indian country, why, he made quite a few things that had American Indians as the subject, and these are our Indian dancers, [next slide] Those prints that you see up above there, they are printed on a machine. The plates were hand drawn, and the printing was directly from the plates themselves. They were printed by the offset process. The advantage in the offset is that because there is a double impression-- You print from the plate itself to a rubber blanket, and then you transfer it from the rubber blanket to the paper. Then that way, the artist can work the right way on the plate, and it is quite an advantage. I experimented with that method of printing and did quite a number of prints by the offset method. When I first started printing, for the first few years, we had thin-rolled zinc, which we put onto the press and wrapped around a cylinder, and they were very receptive to the artists' drawings. They were very good to work with. They seemed to have an affinity for the ink, and for that reason they were very good to use. Later, the commercial industry disposed of the zinc plates because-- They quit using them because they were difficult to print from. You had to be very careful in working with them. They started using aluminum plates. The aluminum plates ran much cleaner without so much trouble in keeping them from scumming and keeping them from filling in. You had to have a very good pressman to print by this [the zinc plate] method.

RATNER

So this was called Mock Battle? How many colors was this, do you think?

KISTLER

That was four colors, four colors on that. That's Mock Battle. [next slide] And that's Mock Victory. They were a pair, and they were both printed from the same plate. That is, the press was large enough so we could draw both images on the plate and then print them both at the same time. [next slide] That is a stone print, and it's Hawaiian Drummer.

RATNER

That's different from the other Hawaiian Drummer we saw.

KISTLER

Yes, he did quite a number of different prints.

RATNER

Was that later or earlier than the first one?

KISTLER

That was later than the first one. The first one that I showed you was made from stone. I think that this one was on a zinc plate. I had quite a few zinc plates left, and I used those when I first started making prints by the offset method. I don't think that Jean was with me when-- He was in Hawaii. I sent the plates to him and he made the drawing and he sent the color that he wanted back to me, or the sample of the color, and I matched it and I printed from a metal plate. I think that one was printed from a zinc plate. I liked them to work on those because they were so sensitive. But quite a number of the prints that I made were made on aluminum plates, and they were harder to get a good impression from. [next slide] That is a proof for a cover for a slip-case; I think it's on Picture Book [No.] II. That is made by stomping out the edges all around the gum arabic, and then the drawing was made with a brush. The drawing was made with an etch. Then the gum arabic was dried, and I took some ink and mixed some ink with asphaltum and rubbed that over the whole surface of the plate and smoothed it down and then put it in the sink and washed it. And wherever the artist had drawn with the gum arabic, the plate was cleaned, and you have that reverse image coming through. [next slide] That is a two-color aluminum plate. Jean was on a trip to Venezuela at the time, and I sent the plates down to him in Venezuela. I sent him two plates, one for the blue and the other for the orange, and he made a tracing on the plate and-- He drew that and made his drawing to that tracing. The tracing was the same on both plates, of course, so that the drawing was in register. It was a very difficult thing to print, because the plates were in transit about two weeks going and coming, and--

1.18. TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side Two (March 21, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, we were talking about how long this print by Charlot, then in Venezuela, was in transit, which made it more difficult to print. I think we talked about that a little another time too.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It's interesting to see which print it is. What is this called?

KISTLER

[*The Little*] *Seamstress*. These plates were of aluminum, and the tropical weather down in Venezuela as well as the shipping, being in shipment for over a month, made them very difficult to print. They were not in very good condition, and I had a very hard time printing them. [next slide] They were printed offset. This is a series of five prints [*Kei Viti* prints]. It's the last lithographs that Jean Charlot made, and they were in 1978. [next slide] That's a kava ceremony. That's the first print in the series. There's three colors in that, and it's printed offset and from aluminum plates. [next slide] This is number two, and that is weaving baskets. There are three colors in that as well. [next slide] This is music. Let's see. He is playing on that, and that's an ancient South Pacific method of playing music, bamboo music. Just how it's done I don't know, but this is a trip that Jean took to the Fiji Islands, prints of Fiji. [next slide] That's bamboo music again. That's just a single piece of bamboo, and he's making music with it. It was two colors. [next slide] And this is the fifth one. It's not a reproduction, but it's the same design as this painting that I have here, and there's two colors in that. There are just five prints in the series. [next slide] This is a young chap that I worked with, and he was a paraplegic. He could do nothing with his hands, and he did all of his work on the plates with a crayon that was held in a crayon holder that was long enough to reach the plate. He drew this, and I made this a two-color lithograph. He got it in register and everything, in spite of the fact that he was drawing with a crayon held in a holder in his mouth. He was very persistent in doing the work, and I thought it was very remarkable that he was able to do anything at all. To attempt a color print with his limitations I thought was really a very persistent and very remarkable thing. There's two colors on that.

The plates were aluminum plates, and they were printed in the offset process. [next slide] This is another of his drawings.

RATNER

What was his name?

KISTLER

Gee, I'm sorry, these names escape me. I knew them all very well, but my memory is not as good as it should be. [next slide] That is a stone print by Henrietta Shore. That's one of the nicest prints that I ever did. It was a very coarse-grained stone, and it worked out beautifully.

RATNER

It's really nice. What's the title of that, do you know?

KISTLER

It's *Waterlily*. [next slide] This is Eugene Berman, and that's *Pisan Fantasy*. That's on stone. [next slide] That's *Appian Way*.

RATNER

Also by Berman?

KISTLER

Also by Berman, and it's on stone. [next slide] This is one of the most difficult prints that I have ever worked on. It's four colors by Eugene Berman, and it's *Nocturnal Cathedral*.

RATNER

Is this the one that he wrote "Bravo" on that you were telling me about last week?

KISTLER

Yes, this is the one that-- He left for New York, and he was very much disgusted with the print. I sent the proof to him in New York, and he turned it down completely. But he marked it all up. Hardly anyplace that he didn't want "A little darker here" or "A little lighter here" and "Take this out all together." I worked over that whole print and sent him this proof of it, and he was very

happy with it and sent me a copy. He marked "Bravo" on it and sent it back, and I was very pleased. That's in the Smithsonian [Institution] now. [next slide] That is another Berman print, and the distance that he has achieved in there, by his drawing, has always amazed me. You can see right down through the canal there. That is called *Verona*. I was in Verona, and I didn't see anything that looked remotely like that. [laughter] [next slide] This is a print that I did with [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright . It was one of those problem prints. There's eleven colors on that, and I had a terrible time with it. He was ill at the time and lived way up the coast in Malibu, and I had to take proofs of this print to him on every one of the colors, all of the eleven colors. It made a lot of running back and forth. He was not an easy man to work with, although I could tell by looking at his drawings very often that he had not put enough work on them to reflect what he wanted to get out of the print. I had to print it anyway and take these proofs down that I knew were not suitable, and it made an awful lot of running around. There were eleven colors on it by the time that I made about twenty- two to twenty-five trips down to Malibu. But I felt as though the print was important enough to do the work on it.

RATNER

It's called *Gershwin's Music* or something like that?

KISTLER

That's called *Gershwin's Music*.

RATNER

Okay.

KISTLER

This is one of Joe Mugnaini's prints. I have that now, and I'm having it framed and I'm going to put it on my walls. Joe had tremendous imagination--has, I should say, has a tremendous imagination--and he was a delightful man to work with. Everything that he brought in had a new concept to it. I think that the imagination that is shown there is really remarkable. I'm very fond of that.

RATNER

What's it called?

KISTLER

Balloon Ascension. [next slide] And that is called *Carnival*.

RATNER

Also by Mugnaini?

KISTLER

Also by Mugnaini. Another example of his very vivid imagination. [next slide] That is called *Flores*, and it is a piece that I sent out as an advertisement. It's drawn directly on the plates and printed from the plates on an offset press, and it is four colors. It was one of those things that I'm very fond of.

RATNER

Is that a Charlot print?

KISTLER

No, that's a Joe Mugnaini print.

RATNER

Oh, also?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

It looks a lot different than the other ones.

KISTLER

Yes, it is. I think I printed about 525. Yes, 525 is the edition on that. They were printed on the offset press, directly from the plates, and it was my Christmas card. Its size is about 16" X 20". It's a good- sized print. [next slide] This is a portfolio of Mugnaini's, and it's called *Ten Views of the Moon*. It was done in collaboration with Ray Bradbury. Ray Bradbury and Joe Mugnaini consulted together, and the prints that we have here are an outcome of these conversations that the two men had together. The prints are signed by both Mugnaini and Bradbury, Ray Bradbury. [next slide] That is-- Can you see that?

RATNER

I can't read that line. Let me see. Let's see. *April Witch*.

KISTLER

April Witch, yes, that's right. That's a four- color print. [next slide] And that is--

RATNER

Robot World this one's called.

KISTLER

Yes, *Robot World*. There's four colors in that, and it is a protest print. Really, there's quite a bit of protest in that print if you follow the symbology there, [next slide] That is *A Tower on Mars*.

RATNER

You have that out in the other room, right?

KISTLER

Yes. [next slide] And this is *The Hound*. [next slide] That is *Halloween*. [next slide]

RATNER

I can't read the writing on this one. Oh, *The Leviathan*, is that what it is?

KISTLER

Yes. [next slide] That is *A Town on Mars*, [next slide] And that one —

RATNER

The Visitor.

KISTLER

The Visitor. [next slide] That is *A Green Morning*. [next slide] And that's *The Dragon*, which has an awful lot of imagination in it. [next slide] This is a-- I can't recall this man's name. I'm sorry. [next slide] They're just sketches, and I've forgotten the names of them.

RATNER

Well, let me see if I can see it on-- Is it Nutting?

KISTLER

Nutting, Myron Nutting, yes. He was a teacher and, I think, a superb draftsman. [next slide] This is my friend Jan Stussy. He was one of the students at UCLA, and his things were very far out all the way through. That's *Unicyclist*. [next slide] And that's a landscape. [next slide] In order to get the ink set and the image in the right position on the paper, it was necessary sometimes to run, oh, as many as fifty to a hundred sheets through the offset press. I had a stack of paper that was about three feet high of these waste sheets. They were run through again and again, sometimes as high as maybe eight or ten times. Consequently, over this there were a lot of abstract designs that just originated themselves.

RATNER

Oh, really? [laughter]

KISTLER

The artists became very intrigued with them, particularly Jan Stussy. This is one that he made a silk screen and printed that over that design, and this is the abstract that evolved from it.

RATNER

Oh, that's interesting.

KISTLER

Of course, they were unique prints, all of them, because there were no two of them alike, and that went on and on in the plant. [next slide] This is called *Wash Day*. It was by Bill [William] Pajaud. He was advertising manager at the-- Oh, that insurance company at Adams [Boulevard] and Western [Avenue] [Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company] . Well, anyway, he was an advertising manager. I'm very fond of that. I think that's a very good character sketch. [next slide] This is another one of his, and that's *Chicken Woman*. That's four colors and that is-- [next slide] This is another man that I had quite a difficult time with in printing. He was at Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer , and he's the man that invented the method of taking the picture of the capitol--

RATNER

Oh, right, you told me that. Warren Newcombe, is that who that--?

KISTLER

Warren Newcombe, yes. They photographed the upper part first and then built a scene that matched right with it. The lower part they had the action on. They couldn't tie up the capitol and they couldn't build a set that big, so they built a construction and photographed the upper part and then the lower part later. How they did that I don't know. But he was so important to Metro-Goldwyn that when his contract expired, why, he just locked up his studio and left and didn't tell them where he was going or anything, and he was gone for two weeks. They practically shut down the studio for that length of time. So they got busy right away, and he got his contract.

RATNER

What was this print called?

KISTLER

That's *The Corral*. [next slide] And that's another one of his, *Malibu Mountains*. [next slide] That man — I don't remember his name. I've got it someplace, but I've forgotten what it is. But that's a proof there. It's not a signed proof, but he was another motion picture director. His little sketches on the edge of the stone there where he tried out his crayons and things, I thought it was kind of nice to keep the whole thing.

RATNER

Right. That is nice to be able to see that.

KISTLER

[next slide] I can't-- That's another one of his. Maybe his name is on that.

RATNER

Yeah, it looks like it is. Let me get situated here. Let's see. Herschel Sanders?

KISTLER

Yes. I'm glad that I discovered that name, Herschel Sanders. Let's see, do I have a slip of paper that I can write that down on?

RATNER

Well, I'll write it down for you. I've got it right here.

KISTLER

Yeah, I've got it listed and I couldn't think of his name, and so I'm glad to discover-- [next slide] This is a man that did *Two Coins in a Fountain*. You know that film? It was very popular at the time. The remarkable thing here is this was done on the offset press, and the plates were made with a pen that fed the ink down to the plate. He drew these without a design or anything. This one here, the black, was drawn without his taking his pen off of the plate. The other one, I think he didn't do it that way, but he drew several and he never took his pen off.

RATNER

What was his name? I couldn't see up there.

KISTLER

Hmm. I can't recall his name now.

RATNER

Okay. [next slide]

KISTLER

I'm trying to think of it. [Jean Negulesco] Gee, I'm sorry that--

RATNER

It's all right. It will come to you. It's fine.

KISTLER

--my memory is so bad on these things. I--

RATNER

Your memory is great. I can't believe you can remember all of the titles.

KISTLER

You should have interviewed me about two or three years ago. I was really sharp, and I don't seem to remember-- This is called *House on Fire*. His name is Herbert Ryman. He is a man that did the overall designing for all four of the Disneyland parks.

RATNER

That's right. I remember you were telling me you went to his funeral a few weeks ago, right?

KISTLER

Yes. He died just about a month ago, and I went to his funeral. It was quite a thing,

RATNER

Right, I remember you told me about that.

KISTLER

But this, I thought, was one of his best lithographs. It's the last one that he did. He was very much dissatisfied with it. He said that he didn't want it printed at all, but I pulled two prints. I have one of them, which I have at the framer's now, and the other one was sold to one of the motion picture people. I don't know who. One of the [Walt] Disney [Studio] people, I presume. [next slide] That's June Wayne. That's *Man and Woman*. [next slide] That's another one of hers, and I don't know what that one is called. Those two are from stone. I don't have any of her work left. And that's *The Tunnel*. [next slide] I don't know what that one is called. It's another one of June's. [next slide] That's another one of hers. [next slide] That's another version of The Tunnel . [next slide] I taught her the lithographic process, and I worked with her for four years. She was very demanding in her work. She was very imaginative. Her concepts were very good, but [next slide] I did an awful lot of work with her. I worked with her for four years and taught her the whole process. This is John Kelly, and that's the three-color lithograph on aluminum. [next slide] That's another one of his. He was an able seaman and never graduated from high school--or any school, as far as I ever knew--but he was at sea for a number of

years and was an accomplished artist and made a complete set of the ships that came over here on the two hundred year anniversary of the--

RATNER

For the bicentennial.

KISTLER

Bicentennial of the United States. They sent ships from all over the world, and he drew quite a number of them. And I made lithographs of quite a number of them. [next slide] That's another one of his. He was interested in trains as well. He was an Englishman. [next slide] That's another one. John Kelly was his name, and that's *San Francisco Cable Car*. Rather peculiar construction that they have in San Francisco, built right up to the edge of the street. [next slide] That is the winter scene by John Kelly [*Winter, New York*] . He was a very good artist. [next slide] That is Millard Sheets. [next slide] That's another Millard Sheets. The first one is called *New Arrivals*, and the next one--this one here--is *Horse Frightened by Lightning*. [next slide] This is Richard Haines, another one of my very fine artists, and this is *Pueblos in the Rain*. [next slide] This is *Bus Stop*, and they're both on stone. [clicks through slides] This is Phil Dike, and this is *Balboa Harbor*. [next slide] And this is *Balboa* again. This is Phil Dike, another one of his. [next slide] This is Marcia Maris. She was the wife of Peter Morse, who is an expert on prints.

RATNER

Right.

KISTLER

Do you know of him?

RATNER

Well, we talked about him, and I know a little bit about him, too.

KISTLER

Yes. [next slide] This is a very complicated thing. This is four colors printed from a single plate.

RATNER

This is by her also?

KISTLER

Yes, Marcia Maris. I turned those around each time, and there's four colors over the four printings: red, yellow, blue, and black.

RATNER

That's interesting.

KISTLER

They all fit, and how she did that I don't know. It's an impossibility as far as I'm concerned, because every one of those had to fit over the other. [next slide] This is another thing that I did with her, and there's twenty-eight plates on that.

RATNER

What was that called?

KISTLER

Rainbow Castle I think is what it was called. Those are all little spots of color, and they're registered perfectly. It's a method of registration that I worked out. The way that she did that was to make an overall drawing, line drawing, of the whole thing, and then she colored the various areas with twenty-eight different colors and twenty-eight printings in that. White lines run between each one of the little dots that make up the picture and are absolutely in register. It's a wonderful piece of work as far as her work is concerned. The registration method that I worked out on it was quite unique, too--make twenty-eight plates that print and register. That's twenty-eight plates printed and registered. [tape recorder off] Yes. That's the only lithograph I ever did with Lorser Feitelson. It's a very fine piece of drawing. I put in about ten or twelve years trying to get him to do another one, but he never would do it.

RATNER

It's really lovely.

KISTLER

Yeah, it's really a very nice thing.

1.19. TAPE NUMBER: X, Side One (March 21, 1989)

RATNER

Okay, so we just flipped the tape, and we're continuing on looking at some of the prints that you've done.

KISTLER

Yeah, well, this is just a bunch of — I've forgotten this man's name. I did-- Well, there it is there .

RATNER

Is it Noel something or--?

KISTLER

Noel Quinn.

RATNER

Noel Quinn.

KISTLER

Yeah, I did a series of racehorses with him, and they were impressionistic. I thought that the horsemen would be crazy about this because it reflects the racing spirit and everything, but I found out that the horsemen were not in the least interested in the spirit of the race. The thing that they were interested in were the points on the horses and things like that. I worked with one woman that was up on the various aspects of the horse, you know. I did some lithographs with her on that, and they had to be exactly right as far as the horse was concerned. And they'd just go for those. She sold quite a number of the things that I printed. [next slide] This is Pablo O'Higgins, an American who migrated to Mexico and became a Mexican. He was quite a character and has quite a display in the museum in Mexico City of his work. [next slide] This man was very delightful to work with. His name is--

RATNER

Don Freeman?

KISTLER

Don Freeman, yes. He had a drawing in the *New York Times* for something in the theatrical section once a week, in the Sunday edition, for about, oh, ten or maybe twenty years. A very competent artist. He was interested in people.

RATNER

And what was this one called?

KISTLER

That's the —

RATNER

Plights of Stardom it's called.

KISTLER

Yeah, *Plights of Stardom*. That's a two-colored lithograph. He was a San Diego man that migrated to New York and really made a name for himself. He, in collaboration with his wife [Lydia Freeman], who lives in Santa Barbara and is still living, wrote, oh, a number of children's books. [next slide] That's the sort of thing that he was interested in, the *Man with Bird on His Head*. [next slide] This is one of the few lithographs that-- What ' s his name? He did *The Woodcutter*.

RATNER

Paul Landacre?

KISTLER

Paul Landacre, yes. It's a beautiful drawing, and his use of the various tones that are possible is outstanding in this. He wanted to do more, but he was cutting woodblocks and he became a very fine wood engraver. I encouraged him to keep on with his woodblock work and abandon lithography, although he was very good at it, but his woodblocks are outstanding. [next slide] This is a son of one of the prominent actresses. She was a comedian. I can't think of her name. Is there--?

RATNER

No, there's nothing on there.

KISTLER

That's not signed. I can't recall that. [next slide] This is Peter Hurd. It's called *Pioneers*, and I printed five hundred copies of that by hand from stone. I did just this one lithograph with him. [next slide] That man, I can't recall his name now either. I think it's signed there. But he was interested in Indians and did quite a number of Indian things. Can you see his name there?

RATNER

Well, it wasn't on the other one. Let's see if it's on this one. John-- Oh, I can't read his last name, [next slide] I can't tell what his last name is.

KISTLER

This is the son of a man that did all of those African things, books on Africa. His name is on there.

RATNER

John Coleman- -

KISTLER

Burroughs. Yes, Edgar Rice Burroughs was his father. He was a splendid artist. [next slide] That's another man that was very prominent in Los Angeles here.

RATNER

Ejnar Hansen.

KISTLER

Yeah, Ejnar Hansen. He had this plate, and he'd bring it in to me, oh, four or five times I think. He'd just have one or two or three prints pulled, and that's all. But he kept adding to it. [next slide] This is Bob [Robert] Majors, who was a very fine artist. [clicks through slides] And this is by that girl there. Geez, I just can't seem to dredge up any of these names. But look on that--

RATNER

Alice Asmar?

KISTLER

Yes, Alice Asmar. [next slide] Tyrus Wong, a Chinese boy. These are a couple of horses that he drew, [clicks through slides] That's one of the finest prints I ever pulled. I can't think of his name right now. Probably it's on there.

RATNER

Very faint. Let me see if I can see it. I can't tell. It's on there so lightly I just can't tell.

KISTLER

[next slide] This man was a barkeeper at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. His things were all abstract. This is an unusual print, because he covered this whole area that's on stone with tusche and then he scraped back there. And he had these kind of forms in mind. Is that signed or not?

RATNER

I don't see it on there. [next slide]

KISTLER

This is a San Diego man. He is very well known. His name is on there.

RATNER

Everett Jackson?

KISTLER

Everett G. Jackson, yes. [next slide] This is a Texas gal from San Antonio. She came over here and did quite a number of prints with me.

RATNER

Vera, let's see. Vera — I can't tell what her last name is. [Vera Wise]

KISTLER

[clicks through slides] That man, he-- That's a gold dredger on the Sacramento River [*Gold Dredger*] . He was a marvelous artist, but he ended up drawing pictures of Campbell's Soup cans. With that talent-- Let's see, what was his name? I think it's on there. He was well known. [Wayne Thiebaud] [next slide] This man was a very good artist.

RATNER

Oh, this is Phil Paradise.

KISTLER

Phil Paradise, that's right. [next slide] That's another one of his. Those first two were *Maria* and *Tomas*, and I don't know what that one was called. [next slide] This is Nicholai Fechin. I did one print with him. He was really a very good artist, but he didn't like it, because I was printing from stone at that time, and he objected to his drawings being reversed. They didn't print the way that they were drawn, and I don't think anybody could tell it--

RATNER

Was that a self-portrait?

KISTLER

No, it's not. It's just a Mexican-- But he did a whole portfolio that he wouldn't work with me because I wouldn't reverse his work. [next slide] Here's Palmer Schoppe. He worked with me as an assistant for a while and did quite a number of things. [next slide] This is a San Diego woman. I had quite a few people come up from San Diego.

RATNER

Yeah, it sounds like it. [next slide]

KISTLER

This is Beatrice Wood. She had these screwy ideas. She called this one *Holiday*. [laughter] It's kind of cute, I think. [next slide] This one here, I think, is her impression of an operation [*Operation*] . It's quite graphic. [next slide] This is Dan Lutz. That's *The Harpist*. I did a number of lithographs with him. He was well known here. [next slide] That one was done by a woman by the name of Muriel Tyler, and it's a printing of I think about six colors by stone there. That's before I had worked out my registry thing. You can see the registration marks on the edge. I had to put those on there to get them in the right place. [clicks through slides] This is kind of interesting. I'm walking down Fifth Avenue one day and it was during a war, and I saw these pictures, these strange horses. I said, "Gee, it would sure be marvelous if I could get that man to do some

lithographs." So he came into my studio one day after I got back to Los Angeles and was doing lithographs again. His name was Florencio Molino Campos, and he's one of the men that-- [Juan] Peron told him to get out of Argentina or he'd have him shot. So he came out here and he went to work. He made calendars for about four or five years for the Moling Plow Company. Walked into my studio one day--

RATNER

You about fell over, I bet.

KISTLER

Yeah. He had quite a bit of trouble with the medium, but I think that we did capture the spirit of his work pretty well. [next slide] The first one is *Gaucho Rider* and this one is *Gaucho Bronco Buster*, and those are four color. [next slide] This is Helen Lundeberg. She's the wife of--

RATNER

Right, Lorser Feitelson.

KISTLER

They were both lone artists as far as lithographs were concerned. They didn't work with anybody else, but they just didn't make any more lithographs. She is a very well known artist. [next slide] This is Arthur Beaumont, and he was lieutenant commander in the navy. I did quite a few things with him. This is *Carmel Mission*. He was a very good artist. [next slide] That's Conrad Buff. I did a couple of lithographs with him. That's *American Pioneers*. [next slide] Mary Finley Fry, she did quite a number of Indian things, and she was a very good lithographer. I did quite a few things with her. [next slide] That is *Boulder Dam* by William Woollett. William Woollett, *Boulder Dam*. [next slide] And that is the man who was in the picture there in the lithograph studio, a student of mine. And that finishes that now.

RATNER

Great. Well, that was very interesting. A very wide variety of styles and subject matter also.

1.20. TAPE NUMBER: XI, Side One (March 28, 1989)

RATNER

I thought we'd begin today by talking about the increased interest in lithography beginning in the 1950s. During the years of your involvement with the field, interest in lithography seemed to increase. For example, two well-known workshops opened in New York in the 1950s. In 1955, Contemporaries Graphic Art Center opened. The precursor, I believe, to the Pratt Institute. Then in 1957 Tatyana Grossman started Universal Limited Art Editions, which, of course, is still going strong. But perhaps the greatest evidence of the increased interest locally was the opening of the three print workshops in Los Angeles between 1960 and '70. These, of course, are Tamarind [Lithography Workshop], which opened in 1960; Gemini G.E.L., which opened in 1966, by Ken [Kenneth] Tyler, a Tamarind alumnus; and Cirrus, which opened four years later in 1970, by Jean Millant, another Tamarind alum. I wondered how you felt about the opening of Tamarind and its program.

KISTLER

Well, I cooperated with them in the establishment of their shop as much as possible. It was somewhat of a departure from my approach to it, and it was a fresh approach. My approach was to make a place where artists could have their prints pulled by competent people. I also did as much as possible to promote the sale of the prints, but none of it was coordinated enough to really make an impression. June [Wayne] 's approach was to get more printers into the field. I didn't feel as though it was necessary to have more printers. I felt as though it was a matter of getting competent artists to be interested in the process. But she felt that by making a lot of printers, there would be more artists interested in lithography. It hasn't proved to be the case at all. There has been a loss of interest in it. And until the artist's work can be presented to the public in such a way that they will appreciate the beauty of lithography and the fact that they can own the work of important artists-- The printers will develop themselves, and there will be more printers to come into the work. I would have trained another man to work with me if there had been enough work available and I had had enough cooperation. I was working on to get the people who were competent to do the work and getting them interested in the method and in the advisability, the fact that they could distribute their work on a broader field, and it would make more work for the artist if I could get it started. But I was always in competition with what was regarded as

more desirable work, like watercolors and oils. And I thought that the lithographs would lead to the interest in some of the other processes. In working that way, I found that I could make work that was just as interesting as paintings themselves. But it has never been exploited and is still open, I think, for exploitation. The idea that I had of getting people interested in art, in good work and important people in the art field through something that they could afford to start out with-- It should appeal to younger people who desire good work, but they haven't reached the point where they can avail themselves of the finer work. The things that I have here are satisfying to me like a very fine painting. I mean, I have work of important people here that has relatively small cost to me. I think that that is the way to give people that are just starting out life an opportunity to have fine artwork earlier in life. That was the way that I looked at it. It wasn't so much a matter of having somebody who could make the prints and do printing from stone; it was a question of getting the artists that were important and making their work available to people that could afford it. It broadens the field of art. Later on, when they get into the money, why, they can spend $50,000 for a painting. But I felt that by making these things available at a nominal price, it would give the artist a broader field and it would make more work for the artist. I still think that if somebody would take up this method right today and pursue the matter vigorously that it could be as important as many of the other interests that people have in collecting. My friend Merle Armitage was not a rich man, and he could never afford the more expensive things, but he did have the work of very important people that he bought for a reasonable price. Like Dame-- Oh, what's her name? That English artist. [Laura Knight] Her work was very desirable, but my friend Armitage couldn't afford to buy a painting of hers. But he could afford that and another one. He gave that to me. And here's a Rockwell Kent, who was a very desirable artist. His work was very desirable. For a few dollars, maybe $25, $50, why, Armitage could afford to pay that much and he had something of value of his work. And it's an original. It's not a reproduction. He really got me interested in the production of prints, and it would take a man like him to exploit this work. But it never occurred to me to put him at that, because, at the time, he was manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Company, so he couldn't give an awful lot of time to it. But he had a collection of, oh, maybe a hundred or two hundred prints that he had bought . I was interested in getting more people interested in collecting

from that standpoint. It would sharpen their critical sense of art by owning these things. So when they got enough money that they could afford the paintings and things like that, why, they would have the experience at a younger age that would make more art collectors and broaden the field for the artists. I think it is an important thing that should be done right now. I would like to see somebody take it up. I can't do it now, as I'm just too far along, but it could be done. There could be-- Well, some of these printers that are working today-- I guess Cirrus is still going, and some of these others. Another man that has come here from New Mexico from the Tamarind Institute [University of New Mexico] is Toby Michel, and I think that he is probably one of the most competent printers that I know of.

RATNER

Getting back to Tamarind [Lithography Workshop] a minute, I did read somewhere, and I didn't know if it was true or not, that at one point you were asked to be the head printer at Tamarind.

KISTLER

That's right.

RATNER

What happened with that?

KISTLER

Well, I had established myself and I had commitments that I had made. I had made commitments in commercial work. I had to do something to make a living. I wasn't making enough money out of it, and I had to get the base for working, so I went into commercial work. It was fortunate that I did. Otherwise, I don't know where I would have come out.

RATNER

So when Tamarind got started, I think I also read that you sold some of your stone presses or your stones to June Wayne?

KISTLER

Yes, I sold most of my equipment to Tamarind, I sold a couple of presses to them, I think, and my stones and some things that I had.

RATNER

Then later, after Tamarind moved to Albuquerque, as you just mentioned a little bit ago, I saw in some of the papers at the [William Andrews] Clark [Memorial] Library that you had a subscription to their fax sheets, you received their press releases, and you began, I think about 1975, getting copies of The Tamarind Technical Papers. Then Clinton Adams, who was running it at that point, invited you to submit a manuscript.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Can you tell me about that?

KISTLER

Well, I never did anything with it.

RATNER

Oh, you didn't?

KISTLER

No, I was too involved. I hope to be able to submit some papers now, starting with Ryman, Herbert Ryman. I was about to call his sister, who has some essential information and dates and things like that. I'm going to get in touch with her, and I'm going to do a paper on his lithographs. I'm starting to work on it now.

RATNER

I think, though, that you did submit something-- maybe it was just a small article — called "Correcting or Changing Lithographic Drawings" that was printed in those papers in 1979.

KISTLER

Yeah.

RATNER

That was a smaller article, I guess?

KISTLER

Yes. I don't remember much about it, but I presume I did.

RATNER

So then when Gemini opened in '56, how did you feel about that program?

KISTLER

Well, I don't know. They were just another group in the field. I didn't have much contact with them. I was so busy in my own shop that I couldn't get around to theirs, and I guess they were so busy that they couldn't get around to mine.

RATNER

And how about Cirrus, which focuses primarily on Southern California artists?

KISTLER

Well, they were just another competitor in the field. I didn't have any contact with them much.

RATNER

So there evidently was some increased interest, or there wouldn't have been a need to open those shops.

KISTLER

Yes, but that was the later things. I was in the field back in 1932.

RATNER

Right. You paved the way.

KISTLER

Yes. The only competition that I had at that time was the Works Progress [Administration] . They established a lithograph shop. There were a few artists, but they just took anybody that came along- -as I did, too. They didn't concentrate on trying to get good men in the field to work for them. They just tried to develop the artists into lithography that were on the Work Projects.

They were on the Work Projects because they didn't have sufficient income from their work to sustain them. It was sort of a charity situation.

RATNER

Okay, then in 1970, after you had been in the field for a very long time and had been in a variety of locations, you moved your plant, once again, to 970 Menlo Avenue. What prompted that move? I guess you had been at Temple [Street] before that.

KISTLER

Well, 970 was my home. That was an apartment that I lived in. I think that I had a plant at that time at Washington [Boulevard] and Normandie [Avenue] .

RATNER

Okay. I must have misunderstood that. So what prompted the move from Temple Street to this next location at Washington and Normandie?

KISTLER

From Temple Street? Well, I was doing so well with my commercial work that I had to have larger facilities, and I just expanded my business, that's all.

RATNER

So it was a bigger space.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

Well, in a letter of about that time to Jean Charlot, you say--I'm quoting here--"The print business is good and getting better all the time. I have worked in offset rather than stone for a long time. I have had quite a time getting my work accepted, but the turn has now come. After much experimentation, I believe I have achieved quality in my printing equal to that of handwork on stone." Then that's the end of the quote. What do you feel changed the tide of opinion?

KISTLER

Why, I couldn't tell you what it was.

RATNER

You're just glad it happened.

KISTLER

Well, yes. I think somebody came along and offered me enough money that I was justified in getting out of the business. I was getting along pretty well in years at that time. In 1970 I was seventy years old.

RATNER

Well, so when you said the print business was good and getting better all the time, were you speaking of the commercial end of it or the art end of it?

KISTLER

I don't know what prompted me to say that. It was just enthusiasm that--

RATNER

Because you say in this letter to Charlot for November 1970, "I'm sure you didn't realize all of my work is now done on offset, eliminating the need for reversing the image. New materials, inks, and lacquers now make possible this way of working in lithography more responsive to the artist's talents and removing many of the difficulties. "

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

So you were-- I know, as we've talked, you were still printing for Charlot at that time and for Millard Sheets. How often were you working with other artists during the seventies?

KISTLER

Well, I was also working with Joe [Joseph] Mugnaini-- LELAH

KISTLER

Well, you were past seventy in 1970.

KISTLER

Well, I meant in the seventies. I was, yes, getting along pretty well in years, and I wanted to-- I felt as though I had done an awful lot of work and I was tired. [laughter]

RATNER

So were you printing with any other artists besides Mugnaini, Sheets, and Charlot at that point?

KISTLER

Well, I did some work with Millard Sheets and with-- Yes, there were several artists who came to me that I worked with at that time. I can't remember the names of all of them.

RATNER

But you focused primarily on commercial work.

KISTLER

Yes, I had to have an income. Then there's an outfit that came along and offered me enough money to take over my commercial business, and I thought, "Well, gee, there's no use fighting this any longer," because the printing business is a very demanding business. You've got to be at it-- Or you did at that time have to keep your attention on your business very actively to make a success. I had a successful business, and there's an outfit came along and offered me a good price for my shop. So I sold it.

RATNER

That was in 1976, I think I read, that you decided to sell.

KISTLER

Yes. I did retain one press, though, which I worked with. That's when I moved, first to-- Let's see. There was a print distributor that I worked with for a while, and I took my press out there and printed. Then I moved from there down to Washington and Normandie. At that time my pressman got this allergy to the acids and things. I saw that it was necessary to make a large investment to

make a safe plant, and I didn't want to bring anybody else in and train them unless I could put in an air-conditioned plant.

RATNER

Right, I remember you mentioning that.

KISTLER

Tamarind has found that it is necessary. Their whole operation is air-conditioned. They work with a great deal of care as far as the handling of the chemicals and the acids and things like that are concerned. I wasn't so careful, and I commenced to have trouble with my hands breaking out and everything. So I just figured that it wasn't worth my going ahead with it. Because I was in my eighties then, and that seemed to be too far along to take up a big project of putting in a plant and paying for it, because I knew that it would take quite a long time to develop it to the point where it would be profitable.

RATNER

I know that you did some printing after 1976, when you sold the plant, though. Where was that press that you kept? Because I know, for example, in '77, and even a little later, '78, you were still working with Charlot. So where was the press that you were using for that?

KISTLER

Well, that was at Washington and Normandie. That's where I did the last thing with Charlot, which was Kei Viti.

RATNER

Right. That Polynesian--

KISTLER

That series of five prints. And I also finished up the Ten Views of the Moon for Joe Mugnaini there.

RATNER

At that plant.

KISTLER

But I found that I would have to train another printer, and it was hard to find anyone that had the temperament that could work with the irregularity that we had in printing by the offset method, that needed to be organized in such a way that it could be profitable. Air- conditioning was an absolute necessity at that time. It became evident as an absolute necessity.

RATNER

Okay, I also wanted to ask you-- Actually, a year before you sold your plant, in 1975, Merle Armitage died. How much contact did you have with him during those years previous to that?

KISTLER

Well, Armitage moved out into the mountains out-- oh, let's see- -near Mount San Gorgonio. He found a place there that he was fond of. He discovered it when he was with the military and he was doing procurement work for them. He was sort of the man that would take and push things, you know, and get them done. He was rather reckless with the chances that he took, and, of course, it's people that take a chance that really make the discoveries. It's these people that sit around and have to have everything perfect before they do anything that never get anything done, although they might be quite competent if they'd just move. But Armitage was one of those people who could take a situation and make it work. He was a very good executive in that respect. He was the kind of man that overcame difficulties as they arose. Very often it seemed as though he was putting himself very much out on the limb, but he managed to get them through. There was a demand for getting things done in the Second World War, and that was what he was doing. So he had to do quite a bit of flying for procurement and things like that, and he passed over this area around the back of Mount San Gorgonio that he liked. So when he got out of the army, he decided he would retire there. That's out at Apple Valley. So that was the reason that he located out there, because he loved the outdoors, and he was pretty well along in years too at that time and was ready for retirement. I used to go out and see him quite often, maintained an association with him, but we had no projects or anything after he came out of the army.

RATNER

Then also in 1975, that was the year you had a show at Cal[ifornia] State University, Northridge, of the books that you had printed, many of which, of course, you printed with Merle Armitage, and we discussed those earlier on.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

How did that exhibition come to be?

KISTLER

Well, it was arranged through my friend Carl Haverlin, who was the manager of Broadcast Music Incorporated [BMI]. He was a boyhood friend, and we had projects together in later life of one sort and another. He was always interested in the printing work that I was doing, and he got me in touch with some of the people at Northridge. And I gave them some books out of my library and some prints. My work was known amongst artists in the [San Fernando] Valley, so that they became interested in what I was doing. I have a collection of books that I gave to them. They have quite a few of my prints out there. Carl Haverlin was responsible for making that exhibition possible. They had a meeting at which I was the honored guest, and that's how it came about was through my friend. Interestingly enough, Carl was one of those people, too, that could get things done. I usually figured out what we would do, and he, with his enthusiasm, would take them up and put them over. [laughter] I gave him the idea very often, and he was the one that carried out the execution of them. He was a very good organizer and things of that sort.

RATNER

It seems like it was an interesting exhibition.

KISTLER

Yes, it was, and they have my work out there now at Northridge.

RATNER

The books and things.

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

That's great. Then in 1975, I discovered--I wasn't sure if this was before or after you sold your plant- -you were on a trip to New York and you met with the art historian and print expert Hyatt Mayor, who urged you apparently to establish a printing plant in New York. Tell me about that meeting and your reaction to his suggestion.

KISTLER

Oh, that was during the war, and I didn't want to locate in New York. He urged me to come back there and go to work, but it was during the war, and there was substantial competition there in [George] Miller, who was doing a very good job and has done more extensive work than I have in lithography. So I didn't think that it was a good idea. Of course. New York tries to get as much notoriety there as they can. They saw a possibility of getting some of Southern California's notoriety, but I knew that I didn't want to locate there permanently. So I didn't do anything with it, although he did urge me to establish my work there. But during the war it wasn't a good idea. I left before the war ended and came home anyway, and I was glad to get back in Southern California. My reason for going to the East was my wife at that time [Naomi Tucker Kistler]-- Her sister had married a man and gone back East, so she [the sister] was pregnant-- and I had my home at 3060 Patricia Avenue in Los Angeles at that time--and she said that she was going to go back to stay with her sister until the baby came. I happened to be at loose ends at that time, and I told her that I would go back there with her if she was going back there. Because she went back once before and stayed about four months, and I practically had to get the police out to get her back. [laughter] So I--

RATNER

You didn't take any chances that time.

KISTLER

No, so I went back, too. Because I didn't want to be alone in my house. I had a beautiful house on Patricia Avenue. It was individually designed and everything. One of the builders came and went through the place and said,

"My God, this man put more wood in this place than is needed." He says, "It's built like a [inaudible]." [laughter] It was really very nicely done. At that time I bought a lot in a very nice neighborhood in Cheviot Hills for $1,000--

RATNER

Wow.

KISTLER

--if you can imagine that.

RATNER

No, I can't.

KISTLER

This house, which was all individually designed-- It wasn't put up like they are now, you know. They take it and make a whole lot of houses and cut them up and have them so they are put together. You've got to have a pattern to put them up in, but they're all the same. There would be dozens of them in a tract that would have the same layout and everything else. But mine was individually designed, hand-rubbed ceilings and everything. It was a beautiful five-room bungalow, two bedrooms and a dining room and a living room and a kitchen. And the building cost me about $2,500. Isn't that amazing?

RATNER

Yes, it's upsetting today. [laughter]

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RATNER

Okay, right before I flipped the tape, you were telling me about your house that you built for $2,500. What were you able to sell it for, then?

KISTLER

I sold it at the end of the war for $20,000.

RATNER

So you had quite a profit.

KISTLER

Yes, it was a profit. That gave me the money to buy the place at Carondelet [Street] and Third Street. The Carondelet and Third Street nearly broke my wife's heart because-- I had to do something. There weren't any jobs that I could get that would pay a decent wage, and so I had to get out and hustle them myself.

RATNER

Oh, so that's when you opened that plant.

KISTLER

Yeah.

RATNER

Okay, well, jumping way up to 1981, I read a letter from Clinton Adams to you dated July 1981. He was responding, I guess, to a letter you'd written to him because you were interested in providing Tamarind with regraining services. I didn't know if stones had become unavailable or they were--

KISTLER

Well, they were getting scarce.

RATNER

So did you end up doing that?

KISTLER

I was going to do some regraining for them?

RATNER

That's what it said.

KISTLER

Well, that must have been some mistake, because I never got into that.

RATNER

Maybe it was just an idea or something.

KISTLER

I might have sent them some information on graining, but I never contemplated doing any graining for them.

RATNER

Okay. Also in 1981, in November of that year, the Heritage Gallery in Beverly Hills held an exhibition "Homage to Lynton Kistler. " Tell me how that came about.

KISTLER

Well, the man who owned the place-- Let's see, what was his name? [Benjamin] Horowitz. Mr. Horowitz was interested in my work, so I made my prints available to him, and he put on an exhibition there and tried to sell them. But there-- Things that are successful today are successful because somebody gets behind them and pushes them, has money to exploit them. The galleries at that time-- I don't know how they do now, but at that time, they were just merchants in art, and there hadn't been enough-- Even today there hasn't been enough exploitation of the art field and the possibility that there is for selling fine art. It hasn't been done on the scale that some of the other things are done. Almost everything is sold today like Campbell's soup. In other words, they spend a lot of money on the cans and on the labels and on getting people to buy the product, and the product doesn't cost half as much as the advertising and the packaging and promotion of the product. There's never been that effort put on fine art.

RATNER

But still some changes have occurred since the thirties in terms of interest in prints, and I'm wondering how you might characterize the changes in gallery interest, increased patronage, the increased interest on the part of museums as well as the increased value of prints over, you know, this span of time since the thirties when you began printing.

KISTLER

Well, there's been more interest. For instance, the Los Angeles County Art Association has started out at what was Exposition Park. They had a gallery out there, and I did my original exhibits out at Exposition Park. For three or

four years, I think I had nearly half of the prints in the show sometimes that I printed of various artists. You know what has happened as far as-- There are more art dealers today and they're more sophisticated and they are doing more promotional work, but there has been no real organization in the associations to sell art to the public and promote it, and that certainly could be done.

RATNER

Well, how would you summarize your contributions to the field?

KISTLER

Well, I would say that I became interested in making art available to the general public on an inexpensive basis and used lithography as an introductory method. I feel as though I made a contribution in drawing attention to an art medium that has developed considerably since I had my first shop in my garage. I explored the possibilities and introduced quite a number of innovations in working and in the method of working in the materials that were used. I feel as though the work that I did in the early thirties and forties made a field that some of the other hand lithographers have been able to exploit since I first took up hand lithography. I had the first organized hand-printing shop for artists in Los Angeles. I was the first one that established a shop for artists where they could have their work done. I tried to sell it, too, and did sell quite a bit of it.

RATNER

What would you say were some of your very best moments as a lithographer?

KISTLER

Oh, I think some of the prints that I've pulled from the stone. I think that this two-color print here was one of the--

RATNER

The Charlot Woman with Child on Back?

KISTLER

Yes.

RATNER

That was your first one, right?

KISTLER

I think that the work that I did with Charlot was the most important that I did. The work that I did with Joe Mugnaini was another one. I was very much pleased with the work that I did with [Stanton] Macdonald-Wright . He was a man of great imagination, and he had a theory that there was a relationship between artwork and music. The print that I did with him was one of the highlights. The books that I printed with Merle Armitage were of great pleasure to me. The first book that we printed offset, which was a departure from regular book production, was the [Eugen] Maier-Krieg book [The Work of Maier-Krieg] . I was very much delighted with that, because it was a departure from regular book production, which depended almost entirely at that time on work from-- Work in the typeset books. The first Charlot Picture Book was a high point. The thirty-two lithographs all hand drawn on the plate and printed on an offset press from the work of the artist and from four to eight colors on a 35" X 45" sheet, eight of them on a plate, registered, I think was-- I don't think it has ever been equaled to this day. I don't think there is anybody who has printed anything quite so important as that book. Did you see it?

RATNER

Yes, I did.

KISTLER

That was a triumph as far as I was concerned. I also printed a book in my father [William A. Kistler]'s plant of a collection of Edward Weston's work [The Art of Edward Weston] . Both of those books made the [American Institute of Graphic Arts] Fifty Books of the Year. So that I not only excelled in printing in offset, but also in letterpress. The Edward Weston book was printed by letterpress, and it became one of the Fifty Books of the Year. Then there was another book [Warren Newcombe] that I printed. It was the work of Warren Newcombe, a collection of his paintings, all done in black and white, and that was printed offset, which at that time was a departure to reproduction. So that all three of those books represented a different approach. The first one was printed from plates that were drawn directly on the lithograph plates and

printed offset. The Warren Newcombe book was a reproduction of his paintings in black and white. It made the Fifty Books of the Year, and that was a reproduction job in offset. The first one was printing from original plates, and the reproduction in offset, and the third one was the photographs of Edward Weston, and that was a letterpress job. So that I was working in all of those different mediums. My father was a very competent printer, and I was working for him at the time, but it was my association with Armitage and my interest in art that brought those books to our plant to be done. I was as proud of the work that I did there as any that I turned out. Of course, the work that I did with Macdonald-Wright I thought was outstanding, particularly the eleven-color lithograph that I printed in my own plant. Those things I thought were the highlights of my work. I'm very proud of the work that I did with Joe Mugnaini. I thought that that was very important. And, of course, this lithograph of Herbert Ryman I think is one of the finest that I've ever seen in printing. It was a very demanding thing to print. We only did two copies. The artist didn't want to make an edition of it. I pulled one copy for the artist, which he disposed of to one of the prominent people in the motion picture business, and the other one, of course, you saw. So that that was the utilization of the lithographic process for the qualities that are inherent in the method itself, which are so important. I think that the print that I showed you on the door there of Ryman ' s is one of the finest lithograph prints that I've ever seen. It was made possible by the selection of the right stone and the right artist, and I do say myself that I did a good job printing on it.

RATNER

It's a lovely print. Those things sound worthy of being highlights definitely.

KISTLER

Another thing that I was very much pleased with was the little miniature book that I gave you of the Picture Book, which I thought came out awfully well. I had a very good binder on it, and it is well done. It tends to be a little bit muddy in some of the prints, but unless you just faked a lot as you-- The making of the plates-- It was made for more or less a record anyway, so that most of them came out awfully well, came out as well as they did in their original. But I was very much pleased with that job. So that's about it.

RATNER

Well, we've talked at length about your career as a lithographer, and I wondered if there was any--I know that took up so much of your time. I wondered if there was anything else with which you were involved over the years that you might want to mention.

KISTLER

Gee, I don't know. I've just been a lithographer all my life.

RATNER

A busy one, too, I know. Well, those are really all the questions I have. Is there anything else at all that you'd like to add?

KISTLER

No, I don't know of anything.

RATNER

Okay, well, thank you very much.

KISTLER

I can't think of anything except that I've enjoyed working with you. I think you've been very patient and--

RATNER

Oh, you've been great. You worry too much. Thank you very much on behalf of UCLA. I enjoyed the experience very much myself and learned a tremendous amount. Thank you.
