

## **A TEI Project**

# **Interview of William Pajaud**

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## **1. Transcript**

### **1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE AUGUST 17, 1989**

MASON:

The first question we always like to ask is, when and where were you born, Mr. Pajaud?

PAJAUD:

I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, August 3, 1925.

MASON:

Do you have any siblings?

PAJAUD:

No, none whatsoever—that I know of. [laughter] No, I'm the only one, the only button on Gabriel's coat, as they say.

MASON:

Could you tell us about your parents? Who were your parents? Could you give us their names and a little about their background?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. My mother was—is—Audrey Du Congé, a very enlightened woman before the days of women's liberation and all that kind of business. She was a graduate of the first class in pharmacy of Xavier University of Louisiana. Subsequently, because she couldn't find a job as a black pharmacist in New Orleans, Louisiana, she went back to school, went into the School of Social Work, got her social work degree, subsequently, her master's degree from Atlanta University—with Whitney Young, in fact—and did her Ph.D. work at the University of Michigan.

MASON:

That's amazing.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, when you consider that woman now is eighty-seven years old and went back to school after I was born in '25 to do all this—yeah, she did not get her Ph.D. only because she did not finish a dissertation. She did all of the other work for the Ph.D.

MASON:

And what year was this when she—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, my god, my dear, I would have no idea. I know that it had to have been in the late forties. That's all I can tell you.

MASON:

So Xavier University was admitting black students, obviously.

PAJAUD:

Oh, it was all black then.

MASON:

Oh, I didn't know that.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, Xavier University was a school which was started by Mother Katharine Drexel of the Philadelphia Drexels. You know the Drexels—the money, money, money Drexels. She was one of the heirs of that money, and rather than be a millionaire, billionaire, trillionaire or whatever these people might have been in those days, she decided to begin schools for blacks and Indians in this country.

MASON:

Oh, I see.

PAJAUD:

Subsequently, I think maybe seventeen schools were established by her and the nuns of her order [Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament], Xavier only being one of them—the university of Xavier being one. But there are others in Indian Missions; in Newcastle, Virginia, or North Carolina? She established a number of schools for blacks and Indians. I really didn't appreciate what they were doing—the nuns, Mother Katharine, the whole order—until many years after I'd left Xavier and recognized then the tremendous education which I had received from them. But at that time, I thought, "Hey, what the hell? I mean, these people, they didn't give me shoes or anything." I was into a whole lot of foolishness as a kid.

MASON:

Oh, really?

PAJAUD:

Boy, where did I start that? You ask me a question, and I start going crazy.

MASON:

Well, yeah, I asked whether Xavier University admitted blacks.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. It was years after I left Xavier before whites, not were admitted, but before they even applied, because Xavier was a black school. It is still primarily a black school, but now there are a number of non-blacks who are students

there. In fact, I would guess that the student body now maybe is as much as 10 percent, 20 percent non-blacks.

MASON:

So what about your father? What was his name?

PAJAUD:

My father [William E. Pajaud, Sr.] was a musician. My father was one of the, well, New Orleans jazz musicians.

MASON:

Sounds very romantic.

PAJAUD:

Not really. It's hard, funky work, really. It's romantic in terms of people on the outside looking in, and that may have been the cause of some of my father's problems, because he was a womanizer when womanizing was a big thing. He was the king. The creme de la creme.

MASON:

Oh, no.

PAJAUD:

But his big thing was music. Wonderful musician. In fact, he had two names. He was called "The Reader." He [was] one of the few black musicians who had learned to read music.

MASON:

Oh, I see.

PAJAUD:

And he was called "Sweet Lips Willie" because he played a cornet. This is not a trumpet, now. This is a cornet—you must be very specific about that—which sounded so sweet that it was almost like an alto saxophone. That's why he was called "Sweet Lips." So he was "Sweet Lips Willie" and "The Reader." In fact, he was quoted in *Time* magazine many years ago. I still have the article up in my studio at home. He was quoted in *Time* magazine as saying that he'd

rather play a funeral than eat a turkey dinner. And in those days, turkey was—you know, it wasn't what it is today. But that was his big thing. He had the opportunity at one time to go to the North, the North at that time being Chicago, because he used to play on the riverboats up to Saint Louis and that kind of thing, with the New Orleans jazz thing. In addition to funerals, I mean. Funerals were kind of a special slice of the life of those musicians, but they had to make a living, you know, try to make a living other places. Two things I remember most about my father, over and above his music and the other things. One has to do with whenever he came back from playing a job, or gig, or whatever they call them these days, he would bring a bag full of hot glazed donuts. I always remember that. Hot glazed—they were still warm, you know, as though he had just gone somewhere and made them. I could never figure out how, at that time of morning—you know, I'm talking about before daybreak. Why, these hot, hot donuts would show up. Glazed donuts.

MASON:

Oh, sounds delicious.

PAJAUD:

I've never had anything like that for the rest of my life. I tried. I've eaten donuts all over the world, and I've never had any donuts that tasted like those. And the other thing I remember about him was—well, there are other things I remember about him, because you won't get too many references to him as we go along, I'll tell you that. So I might as well give you as much of it now as I can remember.

MASON:

Could we pause for one second?

PAJAUD:

Surely. [tape recorder off] The two positive things have to do with the donuts, which I've already mentioned, and with him making kites for me. He was a master at making kites. He made kites that today remind me of some of the kites that are made by the Japanese or Chinese kite makers of some world renown.

MASON:

These were a fabric? Or were they paper?

PAJAUD:

No, paper. Silk paper. Paper, with the frame being made of the old wood that we had in New Orleans and around there: cypress, a very soft, red wood that you could just do beautiful things with. I guess the most positive memory I have of him, with him, with the two of us together, had to do with us sitting at the kitchen table with him making one of these kites for me. I still remember what they looked like, the filigreed corners and all kinds of crazy stuff. He was amazed that I didn't want to play music. He could never figure out how I could draw something—a vase, let's say—which was the same on the left as it was on the right. He thought that was absolute, goddamn genius. Obviously, it wasn't. But anyway, he still wanted me to be a musician. A negative thing, probably, is the time he beat the hell out of me with a skillet—I mean, one of the big iron skillets—because I did do what he said don't do. I had on a white shirt, and I was putting—at that time, Shinola polish had just come out. You know, the liquid polish?

MASON:

This is for shoes? Is this a shoe polish?

PAJAUD:

Yes. Oh, I'm sorry. I've got to remember the difference in our ages as we talk about these things, [laughter] Yeah, it was a shoe polish. Dye and Shine was what it was called. I think it had just come out. I was a youngster then. I had on a white shirt, the only good white shirt I had. So he said, son, go and take off your shirt and then do the shoes. I said, "Oh, Pops, I won't get it on me." I turned back and [squirt sound] the next minute the black polish was all over my shirt, at which time he just beat the living hell out of me with the skillet. And that is a rather formidable weapon.

MASON:

Especially in the hands of a man.

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

Incredible.

PAJAUD:

Anyway, that was one of the things. Now, he and my grandfather—his father, when I say my grandfather, Sidney [Pajaud]—had a cigar factory in New Orleans. In addition to his music, he also ran numbers. We have a lottery, which is a strip of numbers, not the kind of thing you have here, where you have five numbers and you win or you lose or whatever. I don't know what it is because I'm not a gambler. I have learned long since not to gamble. I gamble with my life, but I don't gamble on numbers and luck and that kind of business. So he used to run the numbers, and we had the cigar factory. In fact, I used to strip tobacco and clean the tobacco for the guys in the factory to roll the cigars. One of them was named for a doctor who brought me into the world, a Dr. Cato. We had a Cato cigar. That, you know, in the family. I was paid something like one penny a day, or two pennies—I forget the amount—to read the newspaper to the cigar workers or cigar makers in the factory. A small factory. When I say factory, it was not as big as this room. You're talking about something that is maybe ten feet, twelve feet wide, let's say, and maybe fourteen feet long or something like that.

MASON:

Okay. How old were you then?

PAJAUD:

Oh, god. I couldn't have been much more than eight, nine, ten, somewhere in there. But I had to read the newspaper—not had to—they paid me—as I say, I forget what the pennies were then—to read the newspaper to them, because many of the guys who worked in the factory were not—not many. There probably were eight people in the entire factory. I don't want to sound like it's a great big, you know, R.J. Reynolds operation. It was a little entrepreneurial kind of thing. But most of them were from Cuba or from Martinique and did not read anything, much less being able to read the daily newspaper.

MASON:

Sure.

PAJAUD:

So they paid me to read the newspaper and explain it to them. And they would ask me questions about it after I read it, you know, this kind of thing. It was kind of a neat—I didn't realize I was going through so goddamn much history of what black entrepreneurs were all about in New Orleans at that time, because as a kid you don't realize this. All you're thinking about is flying kites and shooting marbles or whatever you might want to do other than that.

MASON:

Your mother and father seemed to come from such different backgrounds. What was your mother's family background like?

PAJAUD:

How shall I put this? Because I want to be honest and I also want to be fair. My mother came from a family of—she was one of fourteen children, number one.

MASON:

Oh, my goodness. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

And she was the oldest girl, number two.

MASON:

Oh, no. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

Her mother [Daniska St. Aurin Du Congé]—her father [Adolph Du Congé]—let's start with him. That's the simplest way of doing it. Her father was a barber in downtown New Orleans and cut the hair of all the wealthy whites who were in the banking and securities and cotton exchange and all this kind of stuff. He worked in that kind of establishment. My grandmother, I have no idea what her background might have been prior to being married to him. But they married, children began to come. She was a martinet. Oh, yes, she was a martinet. She was one of those people who you did not question, number one.

MASON:

I'm sorry, I don't—a martinet?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, a martinet is a person who is so militarily inclined that, when they tell you to do something, they demand the performance of that order. It's a military term, really, a French military term. When you say martinet, it means, "Don't question what I tell you. Don't do anything except what I tell you. Shut up! Just do it!" And you know it to the point that you don't question. There is a word in Creole for what she was, which is *fiant*. Now, *fiant* is a word in Creole which means—I guess the closest thing to it would be to say in English somebody who is full of bullshit. You want to look so high, you want people to look up at you, and yet you have no reason for even feeling that way. She played piano. Almost all of the kids were musicians, my mother included.

MASON:

Sorry. We'll have to pause. [tape recorder off]

PAJAUD:

Many of the things that I talk about related to her had to do with what I've heard from family things over the years. Because when she died, she died when I was much too young to know a lot of the things that I now perceive about her—not know about her, but perceive. A very religious person, quote, very "educated," in terms of the classics. Classical music. Virtually all of the kids learned to play music—all of the older kids, anyway. There might have been three of the youngest of all of her children who did not, or were not exposed to this kind of thing. But the knowledge about music and all of that kind of thing came largely from her, not from schools or anything of that sort. Virtually all of her older children played music. My mother is no exception.

MASON:

You say your mother played the piano?

PAJAUD:

Yes. At least three of my uncles are in the annals of jazz history.

MASON:

What are their names?

PAJAUD:

Du Congé. There was Albert, Adolf, [and] Peter [Du Congé]. In fact, there are others, too. Well, with fourteen kids, you know—

MASON:

Yeah, it's hard. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

You're going to have a few failures, but you're going to have a few successes, too.

MASON:

How did your grandmother learn music? Was she mostly self-taught or—?

PAJAUD:

I have no idea. I'll have to ask Mother that question. She should know it, but I don't know it. But, you know, she was a staunch Catholic. There was a pew in the church which belonged to the family, and they marched down every Sunday and went into this pew as a family and that kind of thing.

MASON:

So your father, his family's also Catholic?

PAJAUD:

My father's family probably were Catholics, but they didn't practice a damn thing. He had no—he had two siblings, both boys. There were three boys. My father was William. The next brother was Albert [Pajaud], and the next brother, the youngest one, was a fellow called Rene [Pajaud]. They died within three months of each other, all three.

MASON:

Oh, no.

PAJAUD:

Rene died with cirrhosis of the liver. I don't remember what Albert died with. My father died immediately of a heart attack while he was dressing to go play a funeral.

MASON:

That's so tragic.

PAJAUD:

Well, I don't know whether it was or it wasn't, [laughter] You have to really—it's one of the things which will be interesting, because we're going to get to this point—I guess you will ask me at one time what I feel about death because of what you will hear about the funerals which my father played, about many of the paintings which I've done over the years and am still doing. In fact, I'm getting ready a whole new series on funerals and graveyards and burials and that kind of thing. I don't fear death. I don't even think about death. Death to me is not a negative thing at all, which sounds kind of crazy, maybe. But the older I get, the less inclined I am to have any problems with the dying process. Now, I don't wish to die in pain, you know, pain forever, as one of my uncles did. In fact, one who—my mother's brother Oscar [Du Congé], who became the mayor of Waco, Texas, at one time, but before that was an alcoholic. I mean, a stone alcoholic. When he was dying, and he died with—he gave up drinking, oh, for years, but he died with cancer of the tongue, of all things. They wanted to give him medication, but he was really—he had really gotten to the point that he said, "Hey—." And he could still say this at that time. He said, "Jesus died for all of us, including me, and I have been such a no-good son of a bitch, let me pay some dues to him. I will die with the pain. Do not try to give me any medication." He died with cancer of the tongue without ever having had morphine or any of the other stuff that they were giving these people.

MASON:

That's incredible.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. I come from a strange kind of family. They're wonderful people; they're bastard people. Yeah, yeah. In fact, all of them have some good—well, maybe

they're just human. You know, they all have a lot of good and they all have a lot of bad!

MASON:

That's every family.

PAJAUD:

Or some bad, anyway. But I don't know, I kind of like where I'm from, who I'm from, in spite of all of these things. I don't have any problems with them.

MASON:

Now, you were sick yourself when you were young.

PAJAUD:

Oh, when I was seven, yes. Oh, god, that was a deal. That was the Chicago World's Fair. My mother had gone there for some reason—I have no idea what—and left me with my father. And it wasn't for that long a time, maybe a week or something, something like that—I don't even know what it was all about—that she left. And a mosquito bit me. In fact, look at this. See that right there?

MASON:

Uh-huh.

PAJAUD:

That's a mosquito bite.

MASON:

You can still see the—

PAJAUD:

That was a mosquito bite, which I scratched, as kids will do. You can't see this on tape, so I'm going to show graphically what that mosquito bite did. Come around and look at that. That's that mosquito bite.

MASON:

Were you allergic to mosquitoes? Or was it just one bad mosquito?

PAJAUD:

No, I scratched it, and it became poisonous, and it developed osteomyelitis to the point that I had at least seven bones gone from this foot.

MASON:

Oh, my god.

PAJAUD:

To the point that the only way they saved my life after four blood transfusions and three operations—two things saved my life. My mother still swears, and I do too, that her prayers to Saint Jude—do you know anything about Saint Jude?

MASON:

I know of Saint Jude, but—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, he is the saint of the impossible. I mean, if you know you can't win, then you give it up to Saint Jude. So that's what mother did. And they also—my doctor was a Russian guy. The people in Louisiana thought he was a nut because he started off giving me iodine, just a drop of iodine in a small glass of water. Next time it was two drops in a small glass of water. To the point that, when I was in my twenties, I could still take a bottle of iodine and set it up to my mouth and drink it, because, you know, I had no problem with it. This is what had saved me. I guess in my twenties I said, "Hey, now, let's not be a fool. Let's just forget about this. Whatever this is might have worn off by now." So I stopped being a show-off.

MASON:

Oh, you used to actually do that?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah, I'd show off to—oh, yes, indeed. Yes, indeedy.

MASON:

Was that common, osteomyelitis in children in that area? Or was it just a fluke?

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. It was relatively common. Yeah, I think so.

MASON:

So when you were—

PAJAUD:

That's when I was seven.

MASON:

Yeah. So when you were in the hospital, do you remember anything?

PAJAUD:

Yes, that's when I started becoming an artist. In fact, there was a fellow in the bed next to me—I now know he wasn't great, but at the time I thought he was [gasps] fantastic. He started telling me to draw and giving me paper and pencil and this kind of thing. He died, subsequently, in the hospital, right next to me. But two or three days or nights before he died, he says—he called me Willy. He said, "Willy, don't ever stop drawing, and begin to paint someday, because you're the only thing I've got left." Now, there are many things when I was seven, eight, nine years old I don't remember, especially not exact phraseology, but I remember his "You're the only thing I've got left" was a very important thing to me. When people said, "Well, you can't do this, you can't that," I said, "Pee on you! I'm gonna do it!" And the same thing, you know, when I went to Chouinard [Art Institute]. When they said, "Well, you know, you're competing with all of these people from so-and-so and so-and-so," I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll make it." One of the best things, from my standpoint, that you can tell me is, "I can't do it." Oh, goddamn, don't do that to me, because you're really blowing your own mind. Don't tell me that. That's exactly what they told me going to Chouinard. And in going to Chouinard, I think I made a B in one class in three years. Everything else was A to A-minus.

MASON:

Well, good for you.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. I had to do it. I mean, I had the whole black race on my shoulders and everything else, you know. And I was working in the post office at that time. I had a 1937 Dodge. I had a wife [Harriette Craft Pajaud] and three children [William E., III, Ernest A., and Joseph Pajaud]. My wife had never worked. I was in the post office supporting them and going to school. I was working from six at night until two—well, six to six. Six at night till six in the morning for a while. But that didn't last too many months. Then I was going from six at night to two in the morning. I tore the back out of that 1937 Dodge I had, and I would park under the lights at the post office when it was dark, you know, during the winter, when it got dark early, and that's when I did my homework.

MASON:

That's dedication.

PAJAUD:

Well, I mean, you do it because you've got to do it, especially if you're thinking in terms of you are the first black who's ever been to this school, you know, and they're telling you what you can't do. So I proceeded to kick ass. Oh, my goodness. Well, you can edit that kind of stuff.

MASON:

[laughter] Don't worry about it.

PAJAUD:

And I had to. I made one B in three years and worked eight to twelve hours a day and had a wife and three children and the whole works. You see, I love for folks to tell me what I can't do. Just love it! I love it with a passion! Don't pat me on the head and say, "Well, son, you're gonna do that. It's easy." No. Tell me, "You can't do it. You're too dumb." In fact, that's what my stepfather [Ernest Neal] told me when I wanted to go to college. Right out of high school in Tyler, Texas, out of Emmett Scott High School. I said to my stepfather before I got out—in fact, the last year I was there—I said to my stepfather [that] I wanted to go to college. He said, "No, man." He said, "You don't have enough brains to go to college."

MASON:

He—frankly—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah! Well, he was a sociologist, one of these really great sociological kinds of folks. He said, "You don't have enough brains." And he said, "If you want to go to work in a gas station or something like that, I'll be more than happy to—" I said, "Thank you." And in two months I had sent my portfolio to Xavier, had gotten a full scholarship for four years, and would live with one of my aunts down there, and that was it. So I said, "I'm leaving for college."

MASON:

Was he happy? Or just—

PAJAUD:

Oh, no, no. He was a no-good—no, no. But anyway—

MASON:

So before you got sick, you had never been interested—

PAJAUD:

No, until I was seven, I wasn't interested in art at all. I don't ever remember doing anything like kids do with Crayola or anything of that sort. I still remember, however, the first watercolor I did.

MASON:

What was that?

PAJAUD:

You wouldn't even remember this. In fact, you couldn't remember it. There was a cleanser which had come out called Dutch Cleanser, and there was a blue windmill on the back—at least on this can, on the backside from the label—and that was my first watercolor, copying that blue windmill on that Dutch Cleanser can.

MASON:

Why did you choose watercolor? Was it just that that was what was available?

PAJAUD:

Then, yeah. That's what was available. Subsequently, I became—boy, this is really going—we're kind of bouncing back and forth here. But you deal with that.

MASON:

Yeah, that's okay.

PAJAUD:

Okay. I became—I fell in love with the Chinese drawings and paintings many, many years ago. To my way of thinking, the only way to paint would be to paint in watercolor like the Chinese. So for many years I was a quasi-Chinese painter. I studied under Tyrus Wong and a number of other folks. In fact, when I got to Chicago from New Orleans, it was right after the Second World War, and they had just brought out many of the Chinese paintings. The dumb-ass, whoever they were, folks in Chicago didn't recognize that these were Chinese, not Japanese, so they considered themselves striking a blow for great white America, and they started destroying with paint or with knives or whatever the Chinese paintings, which then had to be taken back to storage and what have you. It was years before they brought any more Oriental pieces out, because of this great patriotic fervor.

MASON:

This was just some mob?

PAJAUD:

No, it wasn't a mob. It was just little old, straight-laced folks who were going through there and—it wasn't something that all happened in one day. It happened over a period of time. It was determined the best thing to do was just to put the stuff away.

MASON:

So what year did you go to Chicago?

PAJAUD:

I graduated from Xavier in 1946 and went to Chicago upon graduation. I became twenty-one August 3 that same year and got married—very foolishly—August 4 of that same year. The day after I made twenty-one, I got married. Something you young people today don't believe in.

MASON:

Marriage or—?

PAJAUD:

That young. [laughter]

MASON:

That's true. Well, is there anything that you remember from high school or from college—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, so many things.

MASON:

Anything you want to talk about?

PAJAUD:

Oh, my goodness, you don't want to get into that now! You do?

MASON:

Sure, we can go more or less chronologically.

PAJAUD:

Okay. Oh, chronologically. Let's try and get back on track chronologically. I went to a Catholic grammar school from kindergarten through the eighth grade. That was Corpus Christi in New Orleans. At that time, a big black Catholic parish, Corpus Christi Grammar School. Then I went into Catholic high school, and I think that lasted two weeks. And then Mom moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and I naturally went with her.

MASON:

Did she—? I'm sorry.

PAJAUD:

No, go ahead.

MASON:

I was going to ask why she moved to Nashville.

PAJAUD:

Opportunities. Opportunities. By that time, she had become a social worker. She became head of the—oh, god, I forget the name of the place. Anyway, it was a center there, a community center there in Nashville. That's where I lived for a little over a year. I went to a Catholic high school there, and that's really when I became interested in languages. Latin was a big thing—I guess it always has been—in those schools. I've always done very well in school, not because I'm smart, but because I work like hell. Once I decide to do something, I do it, that's all. I don't look upon myself as being any brain. I have children who are much more brilliant than I ever thought about being, which is, I guess, one of the problems I have with my children, because they are so damn lazy with all these brains. Where am I? Oh, I'm in Nashville now. I was there one year, and then I went to live with my stepfather's people outside of Chattanooga, Tennessee, which was right near the TVA dam. That's where I went to high school. Between riding buses and mules to go to high school, that's when I became interested in home economics, animal husbandry—I can still tell the gestation period of a hog, believe it or not.

MASON:

[laughter] Why was that? Because you were in such a rural area?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, yeah. I remember also—well, the gestation period of a hog, just for your information, is three months and twenty-one days.

MASON:

I can't challenge you on that one! [laughter]

PAJAUD:

No, that's it. Don't try it, don't try it. It's been tried by so many people. Don't even do it. Don't waste your time. [laughter] It's three months and twenty-one days. But I remember that in this little community there were a number of people who were related in one way or another. One was a mean son of a gun. You know, he was selfish. He was the one with the most money and the most everything. Oh, he was a hateful so-and-so. One day his place caught on fire. Well, now, when I say his place, most people think in terms of a house with furniture and that kind of stuff. But his wealth was in his cellar. We had to break out of school and go there and help put out this fire. Well, all of us knew how no-good this s. o. b. was, so when the fire got into the cellar and the butter started running all over the sweet potatoes—

MASON:

Oh, it was food storage. Oh, I see.

PAJAUD:

—and the ham started cooking. Yeah, you know, all this business is going on, boy, and we're just sitting there saying, "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" And we started reaching there with rakes and shovels and bringing this stuff out, but we made sure that it was already cooked. I mean, the potatoes were just melting in butter

MASON:

Sounds delicious. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

Yeah, it was a crazy. It was a great, crazy thing. And he never forgave—in fact, he died not too many months after that, because he just knew that the whole community had just done him in.

MASON:

So he was humbled by that.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. But, boy, did we eat some ham and sweet potatoes, all the stuff that was down in that cellar. Yeah, we had a ball. [laughter]

MASON:

So you were—

PAJAUD:

I left there and—let's see, I was there one summer, one school year, and part of the next summer. And then Mother was transferred to Texas College down in Tyler, Texas. When I left Chattanooga and the farm, then I went to Tyler, Texas, where I finished high school, my last two years of high school.

MASON:

I see. We'll just pause for a moment. [tape recorder off]

PAJAUD:

So now I'm in Tyler, Texas.

MASON:

Yeah, you've gone back to Texas.

PAJAUD:

I'm not back now; this is the first time I've been there. This is when I started bootlegging whiskey.

MASON:

Bootlegging whiskey? [laughter] How did you get into that?

PAJAUD:

Well, no, I'm still in high school. I mean, I'm going to school. But I had a friend, his name was Willy [William] Smith, who could drive. I couldn't drive at that point. [tape recorder off] My mother had a 1936 Plymouth. It was green with white sidewall tires and everything you could get on a car in those days. I think it had cost something like \$700.

MASON:

Was that a lot back then?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. My lord, yes. It had a heater—no air-conditioning—it had a heater, a fan kind of heater like you put in a bathroom today, I guess. It was a big gross kind of thing. We would back it out, and Willy and I would drive to Marshall, Texas. And I'll never forget, the favorite product we bought was Old Drum, which was a bourbon. It was sixty-five cents a half pint, and we sold it for \$1.50 a half pint in Tyler, because Smith County, where Tyler was, was dry. So you couldn't buy whiskey except white lightning, you know, bootleg whiskey. I don't mean bootleg whiskey, but moonshine kind of whiskey. I think we were relatively successful. Now, I should really say we were successful for virtually two years. And then, at the junior and senior prom, we had gone down, and Willy had taken the first half of the party and I had taken the second half. I had one bottle in my pocket, and I had one bottle left. I saw this figure coming toward me, and I said, "Hey, I've got one more. One more, one more. I'll give it to you right now for a buck." It was the principal!

MASON:

Okay. [laughter] Bad luck.

PAJAUD:

So anyway, I was, at that time, I was so—my stuff was so tight. I was the president of the senior class. So he came to the senior class meeting the next day or day after, whatever it was—probably, it was Monday after this Friday night—

## **1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO AUGUST 17, 1989**

PAJAUD:

He recommended to the class that I be impeached. In those days, most youngsters were very respectful of authority and what have you, so I was impeached. And there was an election for class president. Do you remember, I mentioned a name Willy Smith?

MASON:

Uh-huh.

PAJAUD:

Well, he was elected president!

MASON:

Oh, no! [laughter] Oh, no. Whose idea was it to bootleg this whiskey to begin with?

PAJAUD:

I don't know.

MASON:

Was it yours or—?

PAJAUD:

No, I have no idea if it was his or mine.

MASON:

Just seemed like a good idea at the time? [laughter]

PAJAUD:

But anyway, I was very much a part of it. But there was some unusual—well, for one thing, the principal thought I should be expelled and went through a whole lot of this kind of stuff. But we were—and my friends were kind of different folks. We knew things about the principal and what he had been doing with some of the young ladies—

MASON:

Oh, my goodness.

PAJAUD:

So that when he started really pressing hard—you know, impeachment, that's no big thing. But when he started pressing hard about not letting me graduate and all this kind of business, why, then, then the dragon started roaring, or at least whispering, and said, "Hey, hey, looky here. Do this and we'll then let everybody know what's been going on in your office." And he looks up and said, "Okay."

MASON:

[laughter] You can't see the face on the tape, but—. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

No, I'm sure you can't get that on the tape.

MASON:

Yeah, "I surrender."

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

Almost like a little mafia. [laughter] So art really wasn't on your mind?

PAJAUD:

No, at that time art was. Oh, yeah. No, I was still—oh, yeah, I was still drawing—you see, I was kind of in a catch-22 position. I was a high school student, but my mother and my stepfather were teaching college. I lived on campus with them. So I knew all of the older girls and older men—older girls, older boys—who were going to college, but I was still, you know, like, fourteen, fifteen years old. I used to steal exams and swap them to the young ladies for favors, even when I was fourteen. I wasn't so stupid that I would give them to anybody until the night before the examination, because everybody had to pay their dues for their particular set of questions. So, yeah, I was a kind of no-good fella, but I was always—I didn't do it in a way—I think maybe this is what I hate about young people today. They do it in almost a, "Yeah, I'm doing it, and you go to hell." I did it as a gentleman. At least I thought I was doing it that way. Whatever I did, you know, I was always polite to people. I never tried to wash anybody's face with anything bad or anything of that sort. I'm just not that way as a person. I never have been. Even when I had people under my supervision, I treated them with the same kind of gentility as I would want to be treated. Today kids are so—I can't understand what the hell they're doing. Because everything with them is "Let it all hang out. I'm gonna do my thing," you know. Oh, lord have mercy. That sounds so gauche and foolish. But, hey.

MASON:

So in high school you were—

PAJAUD:

Oh! You'll never get to this again, either. I won first prize for singing, as a tenor in the state of Texas, in 1940—either '40 or '41. Got the gold medal for tenors. I'll never forget the song I sang.

MASON:

Which was?

PAJAUD:

"I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen."

MASON:

[laughter] So had you been singing in church?

PAJAUD:

No, no, no.

MASON:

No? You just went up there and sang?

PAJAUD:

No, I had been singing in the school choir or something, I don't know. They just said, "Hey, get up there and sing." So I got up there and sang. I think some of it had to be the music background and all that kind of business, but—oh yeah.

MASON:

After that, did you ever enter another?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no, indeed. No, indeed. I wasn't thinking about—no, no. All I wanted to do was paint pictures.

MASON:

You must have entered some contests in school for postermaking or those kinds of things.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Well, I won all of those.

MASON:

Really? [laughter]

PAJAUD:

[laughter] I can't even think about that kind of stuff.

MASON:

I see. So when you decided to go to college, you knew you wanted to go for art.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. No question about that.

MASON:

You had always known that.

PAJAUD:

My major was art; my minor was Romance languages.

MASON:

So did you think that you wanted to have art as a career? Or you just didn't think about what you wanted to do—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no. I thought very strongly about what I wanted to do with it. The world was waiting for me to paint watercolors. Oh, my god! Yes, indeed, I'd never have to work for a living. I was going to paint watercolors for the rest of my life. Yes, indeed! No, I would never have a job. Paint pictures. That was my thing. And then I found out, hey, nobody's waiting out there for you to paint pictures.

MASON:

So how did you choose Xavier? How did you decide?

PAJAUD:

Family. Mother graduated from Xavier. And one, two, three—let's see—one, two, three uncles, Mother, one sister, one cousin, seven of us graduated from Xavier before me. And then I went. Now my youngest daughter [Anne Pajaud] swears that's where she wants to go to school.

MASON:

Are you happy about that?

PAJAUD:

I'm not happy; I'm not sad. I mean, if she's happy with it—because I believe I have gotten to the place now, as, I guess, my age, my maturity, or what I hope is my maturity, that I think young people should do whatever they want to do. Just be damn good at it, that's all. My oldest daughter [Gayle Pajaud] who finished Immaculate Heart High School, where my youngest daughter is going into her junior year, when she got out of there, she kind of jived her way into Santa Monica for just a little while, Santa Monica College, for less than a semester, and she decided she didn't want to go to college. I said, "Hey, that's fine, baby. Don't go to college. I mean, what do you want to do?" She's into merchandising, and she's a heavy talent with design and art and color coordination and that kind of thing. Right now that's what she's doing in a store with a commission and all this kind of business. She'll do other things later, but right now, if that's what she wants, hey, you've got to give young people the freedom to do what they want.

MASON:

Yeah. I think you're right. I'll go home and tell my father that.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Because, after all, you can't live for young people. Like, you know, she said she wanted to move out. She wanted to go to live with a couple of her friends. I said, "Hey, you're eighteen now, you finished high school, baby. You go ahead." I think she was gone for about six or seven weeks. She called home, she asked to talk with her mother, and she asked her mother for some help. She said, "No, no." She said, "We have a home for you right here. You have a bed, you have a room of your own, you have closets, you have your

lights, your gas, everything, already. I don't think we should be paying for two places for you to live. You're gonna have to figure out how to do it, or else come home. That's all." Which, you know, is only sensible. If you're going to be an adult, then you've got to go ahead and take the responsibilities of being an adult.

MASON:

That's true.

PAJAUD:

You can't have it both ways. [laughter] That's right.

MASON:

We were talking about Xavier University and your studying art there. You knew that you wanted to paint pictures for your career and—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. There was never any question about that, no.

MASON:

Did you know where you wanted to do that? Did you think about going to New York?

PAJAUD:

No, no. Everything was—no, in those days, you didn't even think about New York. As a black, you didn't think about things like that. You just wanted to go somewhere where you could paint and make a living painting. That's all. The fact that New York was a big art mecca and all that kind of business just never entered our heads, any of us.

MASON:

So is that why you chose Chicago? You thought that was a place that would be—

PAJAUD:

No, Chicago happened to be the home of the woman I married the day after I made twenty-one. So I moved to Chicago, big city, etc., etc., etc. That's all.

There was nothing there. In fact, my first job was in an F.W. Woolworth store at 20 North State [Street] designing backbars, which are the decorations behind the soda fountains and all that kind of business, which I don't think they even have anymore.

MASON:

I don't know if they even have soda fountains anymore.

PAJAUD:

No, they probably don't.

MASON:

So how long did you stay in Chicago?

PAJAUD:

Just about two years. My oldest boy [William E. Pajaud] was born there in July after we married in August. He was born the next July. And I think one day, it was New Year's of that next year, he was still a baby—well, six months old, whatever it was. It had been snowing so badly in Chicago that the first-floor windows—which would be about as high as these windows, maybe a little more from the lawns—snow was all the way up to those windows. We had gone to somebody's house, and we were looking at the Rose Parade and saw all these palm trees and shirt sleeves and gals in bathing suits and everything. I said, "Oh, my god, that's where I'll be next year at this time." And sure enough, November of that year, I left. I got here with—I left on a train called the Chief or the Superchief coming out of Chicago to Los Angeles. One of the highlights of the trip was a fountain pen I lost. I mean, an old-fashioned fountain pen. Since then I have acquired many fountain pens. In fact, old-fashioned fountain pens are one of my weaknesses. Old-fashioned fountain pens, knives—well, those are probably my two collecting weaknesses. I got here with a wife and a child, minus the fountain pen, with \$35 in my pocket.

MASON:

So you didn't know anybody out here? You didn't have a job contact or anything like that?

PAJAUD:

Uh-uh.

MASON:

Nothing?

PAJAUD:

Uh-uh.

MASON:

That's incredible.

PAJAUD:

I found a room over here on Brighton [Avenue] just off of Adams [Boulevard], a few blocks down the street, with kitchen privileges, for \$10 a week. When I found it, I had to pay the cab driver \$5 or \$6. So now I'm down to \$31 or whatever.

MASON:

And some change.

PAJAUD:

My first week's rent was \$10. So now I'm down to \$21 dollars, let's say. Well, you've got a baby and a wife, so you've got to go to the market and get a few things like milk and eggs and stuff like that. Now I'm down to—well, it didn't cost that much. Maybe I'm down another \$4 or \$5 dollars. I hit the streets all over this town, and when I got my first job, I had exactly \$7 left.

MASON:

How did your wife feel about this? Was she pretty supportive or—?

PAJAUD:

Well, she was young and a very brilliant woman, young, and at that time had a tremendous amount of faith in me and what I could do or would do and so forth, so no problem. So I got a job. My first job was wrapping, working in the shipping department of Hartfield's [department store], which was a store downtown that specialized in big women's clothes, that kind of stuff. Then, from there, I went from that to—I was a janitor with the Singer Sewing

Machine Company at Eighth [Street] and Broadway, I think it is, or whatever it is. I was the best—I've always been the best at whatever I did. I worked like hell to be the best at whatever I did. My brass—and that was the brass on the building—on the Singer Sewing Machine building was the finest brass on Broadway. Oh, yeah. I mean, I take great pride in doing whatever I do. When my name is on it, I don't need a boss. In fact, my boss will never expect as much from me as I expect from me. And that's true whether it's Golden State [Mutual Life Insurance Company] or wherever I've ever been. In fact, I've cleaned toilets. Subsequently, at Singer, I started repairing sewing machines. I cleaned toilets at the Beverly Hills Hotel. In fact, I was paid a dime by one of the big British movie stars—I forget his name now. Every time he called me a nigger, he had to throw a dime on the floor of the washroom, and he just kept on doing it, and I kept on picking up the dimes. Finally, he said, "Oh, you're one of them smart niggers." I said, "One more dime."

MASON:

So was there any other—? When you came out here, did you feel a sense of—? Did you feel, as a black person, that there was a lot of prejudice or there wasn't a lot of prejudice? Or you just didn't have time to think about it?

PAJAUD:

Didn't even think about those things in those days. No. No. In those days, you didn't even think about that kind of stuff. I know now there was, but at that time it wasn't anything that crossed my mind or the minds of most of us. There were some, I guess, who had been here much longer, who probably had been exposed to a lot more things. But at that time, for me, it was not a problem. But don't forget, my background was the South, Chicago. I mean, the South, and then Chicago. The prejudice to which I had been exposed would have made this stuff at that time look like nothing. As we say, "Ned in the first reader."

MASON:

I'm sorry?

PAJAUD:

"Ned in the first reader." That means "not of any great consequence." Boy, you're getting an education! [laughter]

### **1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE AUGUST 24, 1989**

MASON:

Mr. Pajaud, the last time we met, you had come to Los Angeles and you had taken a number of odd jobs to support yourself and your family. But before we get into that, I wanted to take you back a little bit and ask you a few more questions about your family background and some of your early artistic interests and influences. The first question I wanted to ask you was about your father [William E. Pajaud, Sr.]. The last time you said that you wanted to tell us a little about him because he wouldn't come up much later.

PAJAUD:

No, because he died. He died almost thirty years ago.

MASON:

So after your mother [Audrey Du Congé] and father divorced, you never really had—

PAJAUD:

No, not too much contact, no. In fact, virtually none. We moved from New Orleans and went to a number of different cities, as I indicated, following Mother's work and everything else. So just gradually over a period of years, I virtually lost all contact until I went back to college, which was in the early forties.

MASON:

Okay. Now, what about—? You said that your stepfather [Ernest Neal] really didn't have much faith in your ability to pursue a career in art.

PAJAUD:

No. No, not in art.

MASON:

Or any kind of career?

PAJAUD:

Any. Yes. He had very little respect, or none, for my intellectual ability. So it was virtually—if I were going to go on to higher education, I had to either go to one of the public colleges or find one to go to where I could get a scholarship. In this case, it turned out to be Xavier [University]. I had family there on my mother's side, sisters and what have you, who were still living in New Orleans at that time. So it wasn't too big a jump for me.

MASON:

Okay. What about your mother? How did she feel through all of this? Did she support your interest in art?

PAJAUD:

No, she's always had faith in me, but I don't think she—she is not a very confrontational kind of person, so she pretty much just laid back. She helped me all she could, but that was, you know, one of those things, that's all.

MASON:

So she had no feeling at all about whether you did art or anything else?

PAJAUD:

No, no. She wanted me to go to college; I know that. But how much of a fight she was willing to put up with her then husband to see that I got to college, I just don't know, very frankly. I know I got to Xavier on a scholarship and did rather well, I think. In fact, much of my stepfather's attitude, at that point, is what made me excel when I went to college. That negative attitude, when I perceive it on the part of people, and I wish to do something, that is what I really—that is my motivation. To kind of show you how damn dumb you are. No matter how much work I have to do to accomplish my goals, I'll just do it. So it's the best thing in the world that someone tells me I can't do so-and-so.

MASON:

And also last time, you talked about the sort of things you were into in high school, like bootlegging whiskey and all these other sort of things, and you said that you also continued to be interested in artistic things.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah.

MASON:

Drawing and painting and that sort of thing. When you went to apply for the scholarship at Xavier, you said you had to submit a portfolio. How did you put the portfolio together? Do you remember what kinds of things were in the portfolio?

PAJAUD:

No, no. Peripherally, there must have been some things out of some of the art classes at the high school where I was. I, no doubt, had other things. As I indicated, because of my bum leg, there were many things that I couldn't do as a youngster. So I turned to reading and pretty much drawing and painting as the things which would be my substitute. I did finally shoot marbles and flew kites, but that came a few years after the young people of my age were into things like baseball and basketball and all that business. Well, I couldn't compete with that. In fact, the only sport I've ever excelled at is the one I still excel at, and that's fishing. Deep-sea fishing.

MASON:

Oh, yeah. When you got to Xavier, you said that you had a double major in art and Romance languages. What kinds of art courses did you take? Did you have a choice?

PAJAUD:

No. Xavier University was and to a degree still is a very strict university. You don't have all the options that young people have today, like, for instance, you can elect whether you want to come to school in the morning or early afternoon and all that. No, no. The hours of school were in concrete. You didn't have any options. The classes you took, once you elected a major, all of them took the same classes. The only divergence from that, to a degree, and only to a limited degree at that time, if you wanted to get into sculpture eventually, then you added, you never subtracted. Any special classes you wanted, you just added them to the workload. And it was the kind of university that you had four years of religion, four years of philosophy, four years of some kind of English, whether it be literature, public speaking, or

whatever, but everybody had it. So you knew if you were a junior in fine arts that you would be in a class with all of the other juniors in fine arts. That was your class. I didn't realize the wisdom of that kind of education until many years after I graduated from Xavier. Whatever successes I've had over and above painting, art, what have you, in the business world, had to do with the education I've had at Xavier. I've never—I became vice president, director of public relations in advertising. I have never taken a public relations course.

MASON:

This is at Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company?

PAJAUD:

Right. For thirty-one years. I have never taken a public relations course. The only advertising I have been involved with has been the advertising of the graphic ad, developing the physical ad itself, to put in a newspaper, magazine, whatever. But when you've had four years of philosophy and so many years of psychology and so many years of English and so many years of this and so many years of that, and then, on top of that, you put all your fine arts, including aesthetics, you are a pretty together kind of person, you know, if you made fairly good grades. I think the lowest grade I made in college was a B+. And I was working—in most cases I was working—I mean, most years that I was there, except my senior year—the years that I was there, I worked in what is thought of as being a very elegant courtyard restaurant, the Court of the Two Sisters. I was hired there as a busboy, and I worked six nights a week.

MASON:

Now, what about art history courses? Did you have any—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. All that was just part—oh, yes, indeedy. In fact, the book which we used at Xavier in '44, my oldest daughter [Gayle Pajaud] used, in fact had to buy the new version, or the new edition, when she entered the art department at Santa Monica College. The same book, Helen Gardner's book on the history of art [*Art Through the Ages*]. It's still the bible.

MASON:

Yeah, that's true.

PAJAUD:

It's still the bible.

MASON:

But it probably doesn't include—I've never read the book—but it probably doesn't include much about black artists.

PAJAUD:

The new edition might, but back in those days, no. No, no, no, no. My whole black experience came—well, you say not to be bothered about time constraints, so I'll just ramble on.

MASON:

Please do.

PAJAUD:

The black art experience for me was one that was virtually unknown until I went to Chicago for a visit.

MASON:

What year?

PAJAUD:

That would be about '44, '45, somewhere in there. I went there for a visit and ran into some of the black artists who were working in the Southside Community Arts Center, which more or less had been developed by Eleanor Roosevelt and some of the other people who believed in blacks and this kind of thing—in Negroes, I think we were called then. [laughter] Anyway, whatever. And those guys, some of them became names to really conjure with in the black art field. Eldzier Cortor being one of the giants. Charles White. Margaret [Taylor] Goss [Burroughs], who is now the director of the—Margaret must be in her eighties now. She's the founder and director of the Du Sable Museum [of African-American History] in Chicago, which is a museum in Chicago devoted to black art and named after [Jean Baptiste Point] du Sable who founded Chicago, who was also black. That's when I started recognizing that there were black artists. Although, kind of—I had been exposed to

Atlanta University's annual competition, but I always thought that was kind of for little guys like me, you know, guys just getting started and what have you. I didn't realize the tremendous names that were exhibiting at Atlanta.

MASON:

Do you remember some, just as an example?

PAJAUD:

Oh, gosh. I'd almost have to get my [Cedric] Dover book [*American Negro Art*] and just go through and pick. William Smith, Eldzier Cortor, William Carter. I don't think Jake [Jacob] Lawrence or some of those ever got into that thing, because they pretty much came out of that whole Harlem Renaissance-type movement. Oh, [Elizabeth] Betty Catlett, who was Charlie White's first wife. She ended up, in fact, as head of the sculpture department at the University of Mexico City and lives in Mexico. She's married to another artist named Paco Mora [Francisco]. One of her sons is an artist and the other's a musician. Anyway, then, as I grew older and studied more about black art, black artists, what have you, I began to run into some of these people, run into their work, and one would point me towards some others, realizing my ignorance. I had a lot of knowledge about black history but virtually none about black history as it relates to art.

MASON:

And your knowledge of black history came from Xavier? Or was that family?

PAJAUD:

No, that was pretty much part of the—no. In the South, more than anywhere else in the country, younger blacks were exposed to black history. Where, in other parts of the country, I mention names to people who went to school through high school, grammar school, and what have you in other places, in other sections, they don't know anything about black history. They don't—well, anyway, a lot of them don't. Many of us have gotten a further education as we've gotten older. I have books all over this place, outside, inside. In fact, looking for them—I couldn't put them all together if I started out to do it in a day; I couldn't put them all together, because I don't know where all of them are. They're somewhere in the house.

MASON:

And I have some.

PAJAUD:

Well, you don't have too many of my black art, I mean, my black books, do you?

MASON:

No.

PAJAUD:

No, I think you gave me two or three back.

MASON:

Yeah, I gave you about half of them back.

PAJAUD:

And then I ran into the people like [Ivan] Van Sertima and his—the book which really opened my eyes was his *They Came Before Columbus*, and then I started going back and forward on van Sertima. It's then that I began to learn about the origins of medicine, the fact that the Greek who is given the accolades as being the founder of modern medicine [Hippocrates] stole it from right there in Africa. I learned that Saint Augustine, who is just everybody's hero, he was black. He's the only reason that we have white madonnas in churches today. He said, "Look, if the white people need that to really become a part of our religion, then let them have white madonnas." Before that, madonnas were black. In fact, the biggest, most famous one is the black madonna of Poland. But they're all over the world. All over the world.

MASON:

When did you meet Van Sertima?

PAJAUD:

No, I didn't meet him.

MASON:

Oh, you didn't meet him. You read his books.

PAJAUD:

When I said met him, I meant—

MASON:

Through his books.

PAJAUD:

Through his books and through his features, because I have tapes that—you might like to hear some of these things.

MASON:

Actually, I haven't read his book. I just understand it's quite controversial, but—

PAJAUD:

Well, it's controversial because he tells the truth! White man's been lying all these years! [laughter] There's a book right on top, that big stack right over there, which says *Mysteries of Ancient South America*. Those are all the civilizations that existed before the white man ever thought about coming to this land. And the new one they just found down in—not new one, but the one that they're really now spending all their time on down in Bolivia was in the paper the other day. They predated the Mayans. They predated the Aztecs. And they had a sewer system and just the whole—everything. Everything that, quote, the white man says is "culture" they had, and more. But they—Columbus, or whichever one—Leif Ericksson, whichever one of those white people they like to give this honor to—you know, you've all kinds of schools of thought on that—civilization was here before they got here. They destroyed the civilizations.

MASON:

Yeah. That's true. So you also said—we'll talk more later about your contacts with black artists. I was also wondering about your knowledge of or interaction with black artists in New Orleans, because, as we know today, New Orleans has a particularly strong tradition in the crafts during the slavery

period and that sort of thing. I was just wondering if you were somehow made aware of that while you were still there, young.

PAJAUD:

Well, yeah. You see, that was just a part of living in that society at that time, because most of those people—well, let's say that the people around me all had some kind of trade, craft, or whatever. In my father's case, it was his music, but in the case of others, it was the bricklayers, the stone masons, the people who worked with iron. You know, this was just an everyday thing. It's almost like being in Africa and thinking about the apprentice system and how young people just come up seeing masters work and they start helping masters to work and, you know, they end up a master. And pretty much the same thing took place. It was never a question of, "Now we're going to go and study; we're going to go and study this craft." I mean, the people were around you every day, you know. You saw people doing all these things. And—well, that's it. You know, it was there. You'd have to be blind not to see that kind of thing going on right around you all the time.

MASON:

I see. Now, what about your interest—? You said that you developed an early interest in Chinese art, in Chinese painting.

PAJAUD:

Now, that would have been about when I was—well, that was after I got to Xavier—I guess when I was about seventeen, eighteen years old. Early on, I zeroed in on watercolor as the medium in which I wanted to work most. In fact, oh, I had this grandiose dream that one day I would be the greatest black watercolorist in the world, you know, which—I learned early on that that was a stupid goal.

MASON:

Why?

PAJAUD:

There's no such thing. There's no such thing as being the finest black artist or the finest artist. You know, tastes just run the gamut. So all you can do is do a craftsmanlike job and do it with originality, with all of the technical proficiency

you can bring to it. And then it becomes a question of, "Is the idea original? Have you treated it in an original sense?" Or whatever. So I don't, you know, I just threw that out of my mind. But watercolor naturally led to the experts in brush work, which were the Chinese. The Chinese, the Japanese—there are others—but primarily the Chinese. They're kind of the fathers of that whole Eastern culture. In fact, as I understand it from some of the scholars with whom I've spoken, the Chinese, the written language, the ideograms which make up the Chinese language, are virtually identical in Japanese and in Korean, except that they're shaped—they're shaped the same way, but they become more military as they leave China. The Japanese became a lot more—I'm talking about now the written language only. They became a lot more military and rigid in what they did with the brush work to write the characters. Then, with the Koreans, it got to be so, so rigid that I see many guys painting Korean signs with masking tape. They just paste the tape down and spray the background and lift the tape up. It has none of that soft, cursive kind of feel that you get from the Chinese brush work of the same character.

MASON:

I see. So you said you studied—

PAJAUD:

You know, I looked at—I started looking at Chinese paintings and said, "Oh, my god! That's the way to paint watercolors."

MASON:

This is through books?

PAJAUD:

Through books, primarily, although there were a few pieces of Chinese artwork at Xavier—you know, classic pieces—because Xavier was founded by a multimillionaire woman, Mother Katharine Drexel. That being the case, she brought many things, many great, original things to Xavier. We had one or two original [Frederic] Remington bronzes. We had all kinds of stuff, all kinds of stuff. We had some of the original bibles that had been illustrated by the monks back in the thirteenth, fourteenth centuries, in which everything was

hand lettered. That was before the days of printing presses and all that kind of business.

MASON:

Yeah. So there was a special art collection? Or these were things that were just around in the university?

PAJAUD:

No, just around, primarily in the art department.

MASON:

Okay. In an interview that you did with *Black Art* quarterly a few years ago, you said that at Xavier University there was a man named Numa—

PAJAUD:

Numa Rousseve.

MASON:

—Rousseve, who particularly helped you or influenced you in some way.

PAJAUD:

Yes, he did, not by his own work, because I didn't see any of his work until I was a senior in college. The influences had to do with his recognition that I was—see, I enrolled at Xavier when I was fifteen, a boy. I made sixteen the August before my freshman year, which was '42. He recognized that I was kind of a wild sort from Texas and I didn't follow the same line that the nice boys and nice girls—at least, quote, "nice girls and nice boys," end quote—followed in New Orleans. I was a little on the—I was never a criminal. I don't mean anything of that sort, but I was—. [tape recorder off]

MASON:

Okay. Could you start again?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, I think the hardest thing about this entire process for me is how much of what I remember is real and how much of it is from a perspective of having happened then. I'm sixty-four years old. You know. So how much of this is

really real, and how much of it am I dreaming up and have been dreaming up, you know, for many years? But I'll get a chance to read the book and—thank god, Mom is still very strong and able to read, so she can check a lot of these facts for me.

MASON:

Yeah, I think writers and philosophers have been dealing with that question for centuries.

PAJAUD:

[laughter] Yeah\*

MASON:

Oh, the last time I asked you—I don't know if you've had a chance to find out—about how your grandmother [Daniska St. Aurin Du Congé] got her training in—

PAJAUD:

How my grandmother got her training?

MASON:

Yeah, in the piano.

PAJAUD:

Oh! No, I haven't had a chance to ask Mother. The reason for that is my [current] stepfather right now is dying, so it's been kind of—it's been a rough year for us, really, in more ways than one. His name is James Jones. He's been a very dear person both to Mom and to me and my family and everything, but in February he had a triple bypass. Twenty-four hours later, he had a stroke.

MASON:

Oh, my god.

PAJAUD:

Forty-eight hours after that he had another stroke. Then they found that he—oh, he ended up with inflammation of the urinary tract. They put him back in

the hospital for prostate surgery, and Mother just found out yesterday that the biopsy proved to be malignant.

MASON:

I'm sorry to hear that.

PAJAUD:

So he's gone through all of this. She's had to go through all of this, plus one or two minor operations. But when you get to be eighty-seven, no operation is minor. But she's in, apparently, pretty good shape. So no, in fact, the farthest thing from my mind, except that I knew I would see you at ten o'clock. Thank you, thank god, for calling last night, because I'm telling you—but it worked out just beautifully. But anyway, that's—I haven't really had a way—I haven't even thought about checking.

MASON:

Well, that's all right, we can get that later, if you want.

PAJAUD:

Well, I'll put it down now.

MASON:

Writing a note to yourself?

PAJAUD:

Uh-huh. Including the clef.

MASON:

All right. Well, before we paused, we were talking a little about one person who helped you at Xavier.

PAJAUD:

Oh, Numa Rousseve, yeah.

MASON:

He knew that you had not quite followed the same path as other students had and that you needed to be tamed down a little bit.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, to a degree. I was a little too big for my britches, as the folks used to say in the old days. See, for one thing, I had never been exposed to young girls.

MASON:

Right. You were saying you lived on the campus with your mother—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, at Texas College. The girls there were much older than the ones I would have been associated with in high school, so I was pretty big for my britches, as a result. [laughter] But he also had a tremendous influence on me in the field of art. He was the art department. He was head of the art department. His brother, who came and taught aesthetics for a while, was a graduate of the Boston School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and, in fact, he was on the faculty there. Whenever he got some time, then he would come down to New Orleans and he would talk the philosophy of art, that is, the aesthetics of art.

MASON:

Do you remember what his name was?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, Ferdinand. Ferdinand Rousseve. Yeah, it's a big family, a big family with nuns and priests and everything else. It was a big family. [laughter]

MASON:

Kind of a typical Catholic family, perhaps.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. But Numa, Numa helped—he really was kind of a surrogate father, grandfather, uncle figure to virtually all of us there in the department, men and women. I was extremely fortunate to have had a lot of interfacing with him, because my big years of college were the years when all of the other men were away at war [World War II]. So '42, '43, '44, '45, '46, you know, that span, I was one of the few young men, I guess, in the art department. There might have been three of us or four of us. One or two of them went off to war before we finished our four years.

MASON:

How did you feel about being left behind? I mean, obviously you couldn't go because of your childhood—

PAJAUD:

That leg. Well, I can say, at the time, I hated it.

MASON:

You felt like you were missing out on something big?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. And, in fact, I still wish I had had that opportunity. Even if it had meant that I would have been killed, I wish I had had that opportunity. I find myself quite often now pulling people to me. I'm a people person. I don't like being alone. My family's gone off on a little two-week vacation. I'm in this house alone, except for this woman who is doing some work for my wife [Donlapy Wangcharoensuk Pajaud] out there, sewing. I'm here alone, and I don't know what to do with myself. I get up in the morning, and my usual bent is to get up in the morning and have a cup of tea and back out the car and take my daughters to school. I don't have that to do, so I get up, back the car out, and run over to my uncle [Edwin Du Congé]'s house. We have tea, talk about nothing, read the newspaper together, all three of us, he, his wife [Florestine Du Congé], and myself. That's sort of a headquarters for a number of people who are like me, because every now and then one or two women will show up who are on their way to work. They stop by to have tea and toast or coffee and toast, you know, this kind of thing. Now, after that, I'm down at the studio working. When I leave their house, I go to the firehouse. When I leave the firehouse, it's usually three-thirty, four o'clock, four-thirty. I've been painting or drawing virtually all day, so unless an idea just comes crashing in, I come here and sit out on the porch and read, because I'm strictly an outside—I'm a real New Orleans person of the old school. I'm not going to get behind that door and lock up things. No. I sit right on that front porch\* If people start shooting, they just have to shoot me. [laughter]

MASON:

That doesn't go on in your neighborhood, does it? I hope not. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

You think it only happens out in Watts?

MASON:

Well, no, I'm sure it happens everywhere.

PAJAUD:

It happens everywhere.

MASON:

If it happens in Westwood, it can happen anywhere.

PAJAUD:

And that little Japanese lady wasn't the only person who's been killed in Westwood, either.

MASON:

That's true.

PAJAUD:

So Rousseve—I remember the greatest lesson I've ever learned from an individual came from him. It had to do with watercolor, and he was not a watercolorist. I mean, he could do watercolor.

MASON:

What did he do mostly?

PAJAUD:

Oils. Portraits, primarily. Gorgeous things, which I hadn't seen until I was ready to leave there. But before he died—I was able to visit him twice before he died. And at that time, he wasn't even sick. Boy, he was so proud of what I had done since I'd left Xavier, that he just made me cry. I mean, you know, he said, "God, I just never knew you'd be able to get it together. Not you! Not Willie Pajaud! No, not you!" You know, that's what he felt. But the lesson—the worst fear, the greatest fear that a watercolorist has, or a person who wants to paint in watercolor, is looking at that white sheet of paper and wondering whether

the mark you're about to put on it is going to be right or if it's going to be a messed up piece of junk. I'm talking about the days when watercolor paper that I was using was relatively cheap. But I would look at this paper and look at this paper, and, oh boy, I would draw all these fine lines and all this business. He kept asking, he said, "When are you going to start painting?" He said, "That's not doing a watercolor." He said, "All you're going to do is a rendering." I'd just keep on and keep on. One day he came over, and we used—I'll have to show you one of those brushes. I have some here. It's about that big around.

MASON:

A little larger than a quarter?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Yeah, the fattest part of it would be, but it comes to a fine point. I dipped this thing in a—he stood over me and looked at this piece of white paper and all this drawing and stuff I was doing on it. He took this brush, he dipped it in some red paint, and he just put a great big X on it. He said, "Now, that's watercolor." And I don't know what it was. It was like dawn breaking. You know, it's a stormy, stormy day, and suddenly there's the bright sun. It just came out. I've never been afraid of a piece of watercolor paper since. Never. And very, very seldom do I ever—the only time I do any drawing prior to doing a watercolor, at least on the paper, that is, that I'm putting the watercolor on, is if I'm doing a technical job which is related to a publication or something of that sort, more or less, a commercial job to satisfy a client. But generally—that painting over there, that big *Jonah and the Great Fish*—that painting has no pencil work on it at all. It was done in a period of less than forty-five minutes.

MASON:

I'm sorry, forty-five minutes?

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

Okay. What year was this?

PAJAUD:

That goes back to 1970, I think. But none of these have any—that photograph is not mine, but that watercolor, that watercolor, the one above it, that one, the horses out there in the hall, that one over there, and hundreds and hundreds of others that I've done—

MASON:

I'm sorry you can't see all these on tape, but we'll talk about them more specifically later. So that's how you started off. You just never—is that how you had trained? To not draw? Or did some people draw before—?

PAJAUD:

Well, some people draw. Oh, yeah. Some of the great ones draw. But basically, people who draw something on paper and then paint it tend to lose freedom, because they're now constrained by the lines.

MASON:

Right.

PAJAUD:

And they try to exactly fill in those lines.

MASON:

The *Jonah and the Great Fish*, to me, is amazingly free in the strokes—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah, it's absolutely free. The paper was soaked until—it's done on wet paper, and almost all the brushwork is with a brush that wide, except for Jonah, and except for the scratched-out portions that I've done with a razor blade. But everything else is, boom. And the drying time—

MASON:

That's about three inches?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, about a two-and-a-half-inch brush. Excuse me, I better check this pot over here again.

MASON:

Sorry, we have to pause again. [tape recorder off] Okay, you're telling me about the dish that—

PAJAUD:

About the gumbo now. [laughter]

MASON:

About the gumbo that we paused to take care of. Okay, what's it called again? Gumbo—

PAJAUD:

Gumbo zab. I'll give you the exact spelling from a Creole cookbook I have over there. Most people say z-a-b, but it's not that at all. It's actually l'herbe, Gumbo l'herbe. But it has spinach, collards, mustard, turnip, kale—

MASON:

A few dandelion greens?

PAJAUD:

Seven different kinds of greens. Yeah, and there are some dandelion greens in there. I don't go through all that business as the housewives did in New Orleans, which is—the idea was to put in one, the slowest cooking one, the collard greens you would start with. And you would take it out, chop it as fine as you could get it, put that back in, and then put the second most, which would, say, be turnips. Let that one cook, and take the turnips and the other out and chop those, then. You do that seven times. So you end up, the whole—you know, it becomes a mush of greens. But those are the way I like greens. I don't like greens with stems and all that kind of business. [makes shuddering sound] Okay, enough of that.

MASON:

So is there anything else you want to say about Numa and Xavier University?

PAJAUD:

I could never—yes, I would, in fact. I'd like to say something about both of them. I will never be able to repay Numa. He's dead. I guess the only payment he ever had was his satisfaction that I had accomplished what I had at that time. He was just a magnificent individual.

MASON:

Was he like that with all the students?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. Yes. I was kind of special because I was a little wilder than the rest of them, but yeah. He would walk across the campus and see me sitting down and talking with somebody. He'd tell me later on, he said, "You're messing up. That's not the kind of lady for you to be talking with." [laughter] You know, this kind of thing. But about Xavier, no, I can never, never say enough about Xavier. The happiest day of my life since I left Xavier, believe it or not, was when my youngest daughter [Anne Pajaud] said to me she thought, when she finished high school, she'd like to go to Xavier. Because Xavier is a magnificent school. It's not the plant. You know, you don't have all the stuff that you have in many of the colleges and universities, but you get an education. Oh, you get an education, believe me. I guess the thing that really made me happy about Anne's telling me that is that—

MASON:

I'm sorry, Anne?

PAJAUD:

Anne is my youngest daughter. See, my mother graduated from Xavier in 1927. That was the first class of pharmacy. I was two years old when she graduated in pharmacy. I've had, oh, more than one uncle. Let's see, one, two, two uncles to graduate from Xavier, one aunt to graduate from Xavier, one cousin to graduate from—well, for, virtually, the years of Xavier's existence, somebody in my family has been at Xavier until maybe the last twenty-five, thirty years, because the only son of mine who went to college decided he wanted to go to—he went to UCLA for a little while and then to Prairie View [A and M University].

MASON:

And what's his name?

PAJAUD:

That's Joseph [Pajaud], He didn't go to Xavier. The other two didn't go to college. My oldest daughter now is at [Los Angeles] Pierce [College].

MASON:

And what's her name?

PAJAUD:

Gayle [Pajaud].

MASON:

Don't be shy about giving names.

PAJAUD:

Oh, no, no, no. Well, maybe I should tell you this. We can do this right now. I have five children. I have a son who is William [E. Pajaud III], just like me, just like my father, and his son also is a William [E. Pajaud IV]. My oldest boy's name is William. My second boy's named Ernest [A. Pajaud]. My third boy's named Joseph [Pajaud]. And these ages there are like—let's see, forty—my oldest boy should be forty. He was born in '46. So he was forty-two in July. Forty-two. I have Ernest who is forty, Joseph who is thirty-eight, so they're about two years apart, almost exactly. And then—

MASON:

And that's from your—

PAJAUD:

My first wife.

MASON:

Whose name is—

PAJAUD:

Harriette [Craft Pajaud], but she also is deceased. Then my two girls are by my present wife, whose name is Donlaply, and that's Gayle and Anne. And that's it.

MASON:

All right. We got all that. Okay. Also, the last time, I asked if you wanted to have a career as an artist, and you said, well, a black person doesn't really—there are limited career opportunities for blacks. And then you just went off to Chicago because your first wife's relatives were there.

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

You said earlier in the tape that you did come into contact with black artists there, but that was by accident.

PAJAUD:

Pretty much. Yeah, I didn't plan to. We lived, or at least her people lived, not too far away from Southside Community Arts Center, within three or four blocks. So it was almost a natural to just walk down the street, and there's Southside Community Arts Center. "Oh!" And so I went in. I went in not expecting blacks; I had no idea there'd be blacks in there. But, yeah, it was just accidental.

MASON:

How much did you get in—?

PAJAUD:

Excuse me, excuse me. There's one other thing I need to do to get back to Numa Rousseve just for a second.

MASON:

Okay, I'm sorry. I want to turn over the tape so it doesn't run out.

#### **1.4. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO AUGUST 24, 1989**

MASON:

Okay, you wanted to say some things about—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, about Numa Rousseve. What he did for me, I have attempted in my way to do for a number of young artists of, well, many colors. But I think I told you about the—no. That's getting—later, we'll get to that. Because it has to do with the Tutor/Art program, which Golden State sponsored, with some other help, for a number of years.

MASON:

Okay. Yes, we'll talk about that a little.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, okay. We can talk about that when we get into Golden State and the art collection and that kind of business. In frames of reference, that would be roughly 1965, '66. You go ahead, please.

MASON:

Okay. Well, I just wanted to get you back to Chicago, and I was just asking how much you were involved with this group at the Southside Community Arts Center. Did you just casually talk? Or did you also—? I know that they sponsored classes and things like that, or sort of small group exhibitions and things like that.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Well, I was in some of those, and I did attend the life drawing sessions which they had there. Because, believe it or not, at Xavier we never had life drawing.

MASON:

Oh, really?

PAJAUD:

No, you didn't draw from nudes at Xavier. Xavier was a very strict Catholic university. In fact, one of the art instructors was a nun. In those days, the nuns

were not like today's nuns who wear virtually anything they want to wear and this kind of business. They still had the habit and the whole bit. And you learned to draw from—if you had any life drawing at all, you had a very—a young lady who was not too concerned about the proprieties of life and what have you. She would pose for you. But we drew from classic sculpture. One of the favorite subjects was to draw Michelangelo's *David* and Michelangelo's *Moses* and the *Laocoön* and, you know, classic Greek things. The only thing I hated about my education, my art education, now as I know so much more than I did then about it, is the absence of African art. Now, I'm not talking about Afro-American, but I mean African art. So that right now I'm playing catch-up. I'm on a treadmill trying to be able to look at a Dogon piece and recognize it as Dogon. I have friends, like my brother John [Thomas] Biggers, down in Houston, who has an African collection which—he has more African pieces in his living room than I have hanging in this whole house. In his kitchen, his wife collects—or he collects for his wife—combs, African combs. But the knowledge of Egypt and, you know, Egypt for us was a wall with these figures on it or the hieroglyphs or the pyramids or the sphinx. I was forty-five years old before I learned how the sphinx lost his nose. Do you know the story?

MASON:

No, I don't know that story.

PAJAUD:

Well, actually, Napoleon destroyed the nose on the sphinx.

MASON:

Oh, yeah, I think I heard about that from somewhere.

PAJAUD:

He shot it off. He shot it off because he—he wasn't trying to shoot off the nose; he was trying to destroy the sphinx. He had all of his cannons trained on the sphinx and simultaneously shot at it, and the nose fell off. The nose is still in Europe, and the only person who really would know how to put that nose back together, or onto the sphinx, is a black, scholar whose name was [Chiekh Anta] Diop. And Van Sertima says without Diop they'll probably just keep the

nose now because the pressure to get the nose back is no longer there. But to learn about Osiris, and Horus, and all of the gods of Egypt, and the Upper and Lower Nile, the two crowns, all this kind of business, no, we didn't have it.

MASON:

Do you think it was because they just didn't know?

PAJAUD:

No, I think, in a classical education, what—I don't want to put it quite that way, because that sounds too cold and brutal. I think what happens, though, when you mention the word "classics" to someone, there are two groups of people they think about: the Greeks and the Romans.

MASON:

Right.

PAJAUD:

So everything starts with Greece. Oh, boy. The influence of the African on world culture has been so great, and yet it's been pooh-poohed by virtually everybody except some very, very, very, honest Europeans and some black scholars. Really scholars, I mean. I'm not talking about people who—like this fellow who writes for—oh, maybe I shouldn't mention his name. Well—

MASON:

What the heck. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Lerone Bennett. I mean, what the hell does Lerone Bennett know? You know, that same old problem he puts in *Ebony* every month is—

MASON:

Yeah, it's tiresome.

PAJAUD:

That's not—that's boring. And he's not even a good writer. But—oh, yeah, you have a tape recorder. I'll give you one or two tapes to take with you. But I want them back.

MASON:

Okay.

PAJAUD:

Oh, I want them back, believe me! But this is the only part of my art education, and my education, period, which was lacking. I'm familiar with all the great Mexican painters, all of the great—well, virtually all the great painters of history. But, boy, those magnificent Africans, the ones that made Picasso great, because all he did was copy those statues that had been stolen from Africa. And it made so many of the other ones—so many great, great, great European artists did nothing but just copy black African art.

MASON:

Is this the kind of thing you talked about with your artist friends at the Community Arts Center in Chicago? Did you talk about—?

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. I was still ignorant in those days. No. No, I thought Chinese art was the greatest art in the world in those days. No, no, no. No, that came much later. In fact, it came about twenty-three years ago when I first met John Biggers. And John started directing my reading and—not directing, but saying, "Hey, you need to get this, you need to get this, you need to look at this, you need to look at that." So that now we are so attuned to what the other one needs and doesn't have, or has, that we want to know how each of us feels about that. I can tell when I look at a book, I need to buy two instead of one.

MASON:

Yeah, one for him and—

PAJAUD:

One for him, one for me. And he does the same thing. And these books are, you know, they're all kinds, all different kinds of titles. All different kinds of titles, but primarily related to Africa, Egypt, and Third World art of many nations, because they have some great Third World artists. My daughter Gayle is even a part of this because, for my birthday, she gave me a book on Indian art of the Indians of the Western hemisphere. The Seri Indians. I have to show

you things, and yet it doesn't make any sense because you can't do anything with it on tape.

MASON:

No. Maybe we can somehow fill things in later or when you edit the transcript. So in spite of this community in Chicago, you wanted to leave and go to Los Angeles because the weather was so fine. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

Yeah, the weather looked so fine, and the crime in Chicago, even in those days, was beginning to get kind of rough. I just knew out here there wouldn't be any of that kind of thing! Now, at sixty-four years old, I'm trying to figure out where I'm going to move to! Because this city is savage, a savage city!

MASON:

Yeah, it's out of control. You were saying that you didn't really—it's sort of paradoxical. You felt that, as a black person, you couldn't necessarily—the world wasn't waiting for you to come out and paint.

PAJAUD:

Oh, that wasn't only because I was black. The world is just like that. The world wasn't ready for anybody to come out and paint.

MASON:

Especially the United States.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Yeah, that's it. Right. That had nothing to do with my blackness.

MASON:

Okay. But when you got to Los Angeles, were you—? After you kind of got yourself established and your family settled, did you look for jobs related to art? Or were you just looking for something to support your family and you happened to come across certain jobs that allowed you to paint and draw?

PAJAUD:

No. It wasn't that way. When I came here, I came here to get a job. I hoped I'd get an art-related job. I had painted signs and designed backbars and window displays and what have you in Chicago right across the street from Marshall Field's [department store], at the [F.W.] Woolworth store, which is 20 North Street. It was the kind of leader of the fleet. All of the Woolworth stores, they followed what we did. We established the parameters of things, and then it spread through the Woolworth system. When I came out here, I just wanted a job. I went to a lot of different places, all kinds of jobs. I got the newspaper like everybody does, you know, running down there trying to find something I might be interested in. I finally landed a job at a women's dress shop called Hartfield's, which was downtown on Broadway. I think my salary was \$28.50 a week. Then I found another job printing signs, not too far away from where we were living, but I could do that freelance. So I worked on one job during the day, and I went to the other one in the afternoon or in the evening and on Saturday and what have you and painted signs. Between the two, because they were paying me piecework for the signs—and I've always been very fast at whatever. My painting has always been very, very quick. I do a lot of thinking, but I do an immediate kind of boom, [bangs hand on table] this is the image, [bang] put it down. That translated into being able to paint show cards very quickly.

MASON:

I'm sorry, what kind of—?

PAJAUD:

Show cards. It's a little cardboard poster. We would glue a picture, let's say, a photograph of a big malt with a straw coming out of it. "Thick creamy malts, twenty-five cents," or whatever it was. I don't even remember the price. The only thing that made me mad is you always had to work in two colors: green on a yellow show card, or yellow on a green show card, because those were the colors of the dairy that I did all this work for. Beverly Dairies. Green and yellow, those were their colors. Oh, they went to doing backbars and all kinds of stuff. And that was going along fine, except the young man, older fellow, I guess, came in one day, and his wife, who was the bookkeeper, was trying to become a little more intimate than I had allowed her to be, and so this was when I was fired.

MASON:

When you were—

PAJAUD:

Fired. Oh, yes. And don't forget, I come from the South, see, and here's a white man who's walked in on his wife trying to romance this black man. Boy, hey, wait a minute, wait a minute, now! I found out about a better job at the Singer Sewing Machine Company. I went to work across the street from where I was, at Singer, which is at Eighth [Street] and Broadway. And again, I always take pride in my work. I had the shiniest brass in all of South Broadway. It was the brass outside of the Singer Machine Sewing Machine Company. I mean, everything was just spic and span. I was a good janitor. I was so good that they gave me a ten-dollar raise, a ten-dollar-a-week raise, and they put me in the back to fix sewing machines. My wife to this day can't figure out how I used to fix sewing machines and now I can't even thread a needle. But anyway, that was coming along just fine. And then a young black ceramist—actually, he was an enamelist. You know, they put the ground glass on copper then fire it and it becomes like liquid, looks almost like a watercolor. He was designing neckties for an outfit and he needed another designer, and they gave him the job of finding a designer. He knew I was a watercolorist.

MASON:

What was this man's name?

PAJAUD:

Curtis Tann. He knew that I was a watercolorist and had been exposed to a lot of my work. He told me about the job. I went down there and got hired. I had the job of being assistant designer, and then we dropped the assistant and I just became a designer, just as he was. The kind of people we designed for were Countess Mara [company]. You wouldn't know anything about that probably, but when you see a man with a necktie and at the bottom of it are embroidered the initials C.M., that's Countess Mara. That's one of her ties. Very expensive, even in those days. Today I guess a good Mara tie will probably run you around \$50. Maybe less, I don't know. I'm not into neckties anymore. We started doing yardage and we did neckties. I left the designing end of—I still designed, but I designed part-time and ran the production line

part-time. The production line for neckties is one of the most fantastic things you'll ever see.

MASON:

I can't imagine what—

PAJAUD:

It's a table, for instance, that would start at my back fence and go all the way through to the street, built like this. And there would be, maybe, three of those in the shop. On those tables are boards, aluminum boards, with a piece of cloth pasted to it with a water-soluble paste. Now, every one of those boards represented two neckties, because out of one square you get two ties when cut properly. Believe it or not, you can get so damn bored doing the same design over and over and over again, no matter how much money they pay you, you'd go crazy. But that was one of my jobs.

MASON:

Can I ask, how did Curtis Tann find out about your work?

PAJAUD:

Well, in those days black artists had virtually no place to show. So you showed in churches and community centers and things all over Los Angeles. And everybody who was ever in that show then, we just sort of stayed in contact with each other and were supportive of each other for, you know, whatever. There was no other support.

MASON:

What year was this, then, that you had this necktie painting job?

PAJAUD:

That would have been, like, '50, 1950.

MASON:

That was before you went to Chouinard [Art Institute].

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

MASON:

That would have been before then. But you were still showing?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. I was showing watercolors and I was—one of the stories I tell young artists today or young people today who aspire to art—they say, "Yeah, but those prices, my goodness! You don't expect too many people to buy your work." I say, "No, I don't. I don't need a lot." [laughter] But I'll tell you a story. All of this took place—now, this took place during the same period. I bought a house, an old, boarded house. It was \$8,500, out on 104th Street. My son lives there right now, my youngest son [Joseph Pajaud]. In the back of this house was a little, really, what it amounted to was a tool shed with a lot of windows in it, with a cement floor. I made it my studio. Every weekend, and every other minute I got, until I started at Chouinard, I did watercolors. Because I had a connection—I don't remember how that connection came about—but I had a connection with Robinson's [department store] in Pasadena. They were handling my paintings. They would take all I brought. I was paid \$15 for the half sheets and \$25 for the whole sheet. That's slightly less than a full sheet of watercolor paper right there.

MASON:

Okay, that's about—

PAJAUD:

Around twenty-two by thirty inches. Every Monday I'd truck on out to Pasadena, get on the bus, go to Pasadena, Robinson's. They'd take whatever I had in the portfolio and give me a check, right then, you know. When this had gone on for a few months, one Monday morning I went out with my portfolio. Somehow I'd had a good week, because I'd sold something to somebody else for around \$50 or \$60 dollars or something, and I'm kind of floating on air.

MASON:

Was this your first painting that you'd sold?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no, no, no, no. I sold paintings years ago. Back in Chicago, I sold paintings. But it was the first time a private party out here had bought what I thought was a nice painting and paid me a decent price. It might have been as much as \$75, I don't know. But anyway, I walked in Robinson's with my portfolio, and the fellow I usually talked with was busy. I opened the portfolio, just looking at some of the stuff, and a woman, obviously a monied person, came over and asked me if I was Mr. Pajaud. I said yes. She said, "Oh, my son"—she was a white woman, obviously, but anyway—"Oh, my son. I just hung two of your paintings at home, and, believe me, I thought they were cheap at the price. I only paid \$150 apiece for them."

MASON:

[laughter] Which wasn't what Robinson's was paying you.

PAJAUD:

Nothing like it. Nothing like it.

MASON:

What kinds of things were these that you were selling?

PAJAUD:

Oh, all kinds of stuff. Just scenes, primarily. I have, oh, some things from the Old Testament, a head of Moses. I still have that one. I have one of virtually every series I've ever done, just about. I either have it or I have the slides, just hundreds of slides of my work. But anyway, that was at a time when, as they say, you know, hard times will make a monkey eat red pepper, but I did tell—so I waited for him. He came over and said, "Hi, Bill, how are you doing?" I said, "I'm not." He said, "Well, what do you have in the portfolio for me today?" I said, "Nothing. The well ran dry. I found out that you sold paintings that you paid me \$15 for \$150, plus the frame." So I think [he said] at this point, "Oh, you're one of these smart niggers." I said, "Uh-huh. Bye-bye." And I walked out with the portfolio. Yep! Yep, boy. Then there was the time that I put a portfolio together, a really elegant portfolio, and brought it to two or three advertising agencies, left it with the receptionist. And the first one, I got a call telling me to show up. They needed me as an illustrator. They were especially interested in my watercolors. So I go out there and, "Oh, there must

be some mistake. That job was filled three days ago." You go through this kind of stuff, you know. I've been through that any number of times. But then, other people have gone through the same thing, not only blacks. Jews went through the same thing. They're one of the greatest designers, certainly, in the history of the Western world. Saul Bass had the same problems because he was a Jew. He's the one who did the new logo for the entire United Airlines fleet, including the hostess uniforms, you know, everything. The napkins—it was one of those, just a complete, total revamp of an image. That double U is his. He helped me quite a bit just in telling me, "Hey, what those bastards tell you about why you can't come to work or why they don't want you, one of these days, one of these days, they'll want you to do work for them. Just keep on working. Just keep on working."

MASON:

So who were some of the artists you were showing with in the early fifties?

PAJAUD:

Oh, Curtis Tann, again, Bill Smith, Leon Leonard, Alice Gafford, Beulah Woodard, P'lla Mills. Any number. In fact, actually, at one time, there was a black art gallery on South Hill Street in Los Angeles—

MASON:

Called?

PAJAUD:

Called Eleven Associated. There were eleven artists there and I think only one nonblack in that group, and that was Tyrus, Tyrus Wong, who also—a tremendous illustrator more than watercolorist, although he did beautiful watercolor, but I know now that his is primarily illustration. You still see his Christmas cards on the market. You see an Oriental-looking-something, with small, very delicately done figures, and just a really simple kind of thing. If you look on the back you'll see "Tyrus Wong."

MASON:

So this was a cooperative gallery?

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

Do you know whose idea it was or what year it got started? Because I've never heard of this gallery. That's really interesting.

PAJAUD:

I know some people who have newspaper articles. Some people save all that stuff. I've never been a saver, because I was forever getting in and out of marriages and going through divorces and all that kind of business. Eleven Associated.

MASON:

So you got together as—did you do more than just exhibit together? You were probably friendly with each other and went out and would hang out.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. No, not hang out. We didn't do much hanging out in those days. No, in fact, it's one of those things that I don't miss. Actually, I cannot work well with a group. I'm not a group kind of artist. Many artists need a group to motivate them to work. They go to exhibitions and see what other artists are doing and it gives them ideas about what they want to do. Not me. Never. In fact, I've had one-man shows open on La Cienega [Boulevard] and didn't even go. Group thinking is not my cup of tea. I don't mean I'm a loner. I can go through the motions, you know. I BS folks, and they think, "Oh, boy, boy. He's a great guy, isn't he?" You know. But I really believe that I could spend my life all over again and never run out of subject matter if a new idea never came into my head. I have thousands and thousands of drawings that have never been painted. There's no way, if I just paint twenty-four hours a day for the rest of my life, I would be able to do all of those paintings. It's impossible. So hang out? No. There are a lot of guys I respect greatly. Like John Outterbridge, who is out at Watts Towers, I love to spend time with. But everytime I think about spending time with him, I say, "Hey, wait a minute. What are you going to do about your own work?" This is really the reason I retired from Golden State. I wanted to retire from Golden State when I was young enough to still effectively produce. And after you reach that magic sixty, you start to—

MASON:

Slow down a little?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, you slow down. There's no question about it. Right now, there are quite a few days that if I didn't jump in my tequila bottle, it would be easy for me just to lay back and watch television and read. I have artist friends like that, very talented people who spend all their time just reading and watching television and talking about the picture they're going to paint.

MASON:

That's sad.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, it is sad, because a lot of them have tremendous talent.

MASON:

Well, we're just about out of time.

PAJAUD:

Oh, all righty. What do you want me to do?

MASON:

Well, I don't want you to be late for your luncheon today.

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. The food is ready. The alcohol is over there. The ice is right there. All I have to do is cook a small pot of rice.

MASON:

Okay. Well, just to end up for today, I just wanted to ask you about Chouinard and how you got into Chouinard. I understand from the same article in the *Black Art* quarterly that you—

PAJAUD:

Oh, that's a long story. That story I don't think you'd want to try and wrap up in a few minutes. That [article] is the substantial truth of what took place, but even that needs some amplification, I think.

MASON:

Okay. Well, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about as far as your early years in Los Angeles? Let's see, if you were here in the fifties when the House Committee on Un-American Activities was very, very active, do you—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. In fact, I exhibited with a group and had no idea of the politics of the group. It turned out that virtually every artist represented was communist.

MASON:

This was proven, or were they accused? This was alleged?

PAJAUD:

Accused, accused, accused, yeah. I have since learned that being a communist is not the worst thing in the world. There are far worse things than being a communist, even today. Of course, now that [Mikhail] Gorbachev is doing what he's doing, why, we all want to embrace communism now, I guess, at least the people. But there was a substantial article in the paper about the exhibition. No mention of this communist influence. Actually, the group putting on the exhibition was communist. There was no question about that.

MASON:

What was the name of this group or these people?

PAJAUD:

I don't remember. A lot of the people who showed were either communists or certainly far-left-leaning. But later, I started getting calls at home about this business of this exhibition. Did I realize what I was letting myself in for?

MASON:

From whom? Calls from whom?

PAJAUD:

They never said.

MASON:

Did you have any idea?

PAJAUD:

Oh, I'm sure it was one of the governmental agencies of some kind or one of the neo-governmental agencies, some such kind of business. But, see, in those days, one of the ways that the [Communist] Party, at least some elements of the party, got people to join was to offer, particularly black men, the bodies of the white women who were in the organization.

MASON:

This was the Communist Party?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. This was a way of getting you in.

MASON:

Did someone ever offer you something like that?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. It wasn't anything as blatant as, "Come on into the party and do so-and-so." It just so happens that I've never been particularly attracted to white women. I mean, I just never have been. I like people who are a lot more exotic than the average white lady, white girl, or whatever. But these were—this was common. Not only—hey, they weren't the only ones to do it. The Democrats did it. They still do it! The Republicans do it! All of them do it!

MASON:

Yeah, you hear stories like that.

PAJAUD:

Sure, it's true! There's no question about that.

MASON:

Well, if you're an eyewitness, then—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. There's no question about that. I know that. Yes, indeedy.

MASON:

Well, we can end here.

PAJAUD:

Okay. I still have a couple of things I want to show you, and I want to give you at least one tape. I'll go out, see which is the best one I have.

MASON:

Okay. And then we'll pick up on this next time.

### **1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 7, 1989**

MASON:

Before we bring you back into Los Angeles again, you said you had some answers to a few questions I asked.

PAJAUD:

Well, I think the primary question you had was how did my family get interested in music. Certainly, on my mother [Audrey Du Congé]'s side, I know how. On my father [William E. Pajaud, Sr.]'s side, I don't. On my mother's side, her mother [Daniska St. Aurin Du Congé] went to the French opera house every Saturday morning as a child. She was taken by her father with one or two other kids—I don't know who they might be—so that every Saturday she was exposed to opera, to concerts. It would be the opera in the original language, or tongue, of French, Italian, or whatever. That became as common to her as a child as, I guess, Michael Jackson is to a lot of people around today. How she herself learned to play music, nobody seems to know. Whether she had the ear for it or studied with someone—in New Orleans of that time, and even through the time that I grew up and left there—it still is. It's a city with so many musicians. Virtually every block had a musician or two somewhere at the corner or at the middle of the block or someplace who played an instrument of some kind, generally the wind instruments or the reed

instruments. I guess people who didn't even have money to do anything else had a little piano in the house.

MASON:

Really? That's interesting.

PAJAUD:

It was considered—I don't know. Some of it has to do with the sociology or the sociological mores of New Orleans and of the other cities in the South in those days. The constant striving was to be, quote, "cultural." You know, to be able to speak more than one language, to be able to play music, to have read literature, this kind of thing. It's the thing that sort of separated the class colored folks, as they were called then, from the low-class colored folks. You know, the high-class colored folks, they could speak—obviously, when I say "colored folks," I'm putting it in quotes, I'm not—you know, that was simply the term then for black people.

MASON:

Right.

PAJAUD:

In fact, until not too many years ago black was, "Hey, what do you mean black? Don't you call me black! What's wrong with you?" [laughter] That kind of thing. But as a result, you had these pockets of culture in the middle of a very, very poor—not poverty-stricken, certainly, but certainly not well-to-do, middle-class kinds of people. And for some reason, after one person in the family started playing music, others tended to follow. My father and both of his brothers all played music. My oldest uncle [Peter Du Congé] on my mother's side played music. Three of them are in the Jazz Museum at Tulane [University]. Mother played music. Virtually everybody of the older generation, or older young people of that generation, in the family played music. Up until maybe—I told you my grandmother had fourteen children.

PAJAUD:

Right.

MASON:

I guess the last five did not play music. All of them before then played music. It was considered a kind of a—a lady who was a lady knew how to play the piano. You know, this kind of thing. It's part of what was then an attempt to be culturally enriched. I don't know if they would choose to call it that. They might have, in some families, chosen to call it being more like the white folks. [laughter] In many cases, that probably was true. So anyway, that much is what I wanted to give you as the answer to that question. Whether she studied with someone or just picked it up on her own, I don't know, but she made sure that all the rest of the kids, certainly the first bunch of them, all played music.

MASON:

So she wasn't playing, say, ragtime or anything like that. She was playing classical pieces.

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. She wouldn't have been into that. That would have been considered—In her day, that would have been barroom music. Scott Joplin and folks like that. No, no, no, no. No, you would quite possibly play something like some of the arias from *Carmen* or Ravel's *Bolero* or Beethoven, you know, this was the kind of—oh, yeah. That other stuff was for those other folks down on the corner drinking beer out of a pitcher.

MASON:

Okay. We'll make a big jump back into—

PAJAUD:

Now, you'll have to put all this together, so I don't envy you. [laughter]

MASON:

Yeah, well, that comes later. Okay, so we'll bring you back into Los Angeles. And the last thing we were talking about in the last session was what happened during the fifties and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and you talked about how you exhibited with a group and you got these anonymous phone calls saying these people were communists and that kind of thing.

PAJAUD:

Uh-huh, uh-huh. I think the question you asked me, if I remember correctly, had to do with my going into Chouinard [Art Institute]. Did we cover that?

MASON:

Well, no, I asked you that, and you said, "Well, that's a long story."

PAJAUD:

Yeah, okay. That is a long story, and I think that was the best way to go at the time, was just to let it lay and then come back to it. I mean, I'm ready now.

MASON:

Yeah, that's fine. Okay. I just wanted to ask you, in the interview that I mentioned with the *Black Art* quarterly, you said that a man named Charles [T.] Coiner helped you, or suggested to you that you should go to Chouinard.

PAJAUD:

No. Let me give you that story. Actually, I told you about the Robinson's fiasco. You know, the store, when they were buying paintings? Well, shortly thereafter I met a couple. They were in interior decoration. They had a place— if I remember correctly, it was out west on San Vincente Boulevard. That might not be it exactly. It doesn't really matter; it's not germane to the story at all. But I met this couple, and they were interior decorators. I remember they asked one day if I would let them show some of my paintings in their place. And, naturally, I wasn't showing anywhere. I was more than happy to have someplace to show the stuff. Well, they had a friend who was a senior officer and senior art director of N.W. Ayer, which is a big advertising agency in Philadelphia. He came to the exhibition. He was visiting out here that weekend and came to the exhibition and saw the stuff. He bought a few things, and then he told me he wanted to see me the next day.

MASON:

Now, I'm sorry, this was an exhibition just with your work? Or did they invite—  
?

PAJAUD:

Just with my work. But I never will forget, they wanted it to be so nice. They bought flowers, and they had them put in the ground in the flower beds for that one day. [laughter] Immediate gardening. Immediate horticulture or whatever it was. Anyway, so Coiner liked my watercolors, and he said he wanted to see me the next day if I could make it. I did. We talked for an hour or so, and he offered me a job in Philadelphia at the advertising agency. Well, here I am now, a fine artist, but I don't know a piece of type from anything, I don't much know what a photograph is except those that happen to have been taken in the family. He said, "Well, I don't want all that. I just want the watercolors. That's all I want you to do." [laughter] I was married at the time, had three children. I had a, quote, "good job" in the post office. So I—oh, he had great dreams. Everything—at that time, the *Ladies Home Journal* was a very popular magazine, and they wanted to do a story on me and my family for the *Ladies Home Journal*. All this depended on my coming back to Philadelphia to work for Ayer. The upshot of it is, I was a stick in the mud, as I have been so many times in my life. I couldn't see my leaving this, quote, "good job" at the post office to go to a strange city with a wife and three children and pick up here and leave. I told him I'd be more than happy to come, but first what I would have to do would be to do some studying of commercial work, you know, advertising, graphic design, this kind of thing. He said, "Well, Bill, that's okay. But," he said, "after you do all that, you're going to end up being just like the other people who finish those schools. You're going to lose the charm that I want." So back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Finally, I said, "Look, I just can't do it without going—I've got to go back to school before I'll be ready to come." He said, "Well, I'm going to tell you, okay, if you feel that way. I'll even suggest the school you go to. And if you have any trouble—." He didn't indicate what kind of trouble. [laughter] Simply "If you have any trouble"—and all I was thinking about was finance—"then have them call me." So about two or three weeks later, I went to Chouinard. When I walked in the office, they were dumbfounded. [laughter] Here was a black person asking to come to Chouinard on a full-time basis. I was not a veteran or any of these things. The full-time basis was what threw them. I think there might have been one or two blacks at that time going to night school, but they would not have us in the day school where you had to associate with the younger people, particularly, as I found out later, the little white ladies. That was a no-no.

MASON:

So the night school was for older professionals. People just brushing up and—

PAJAUD:

Yeah. So I was told that just was out of the question. No way that I could be allowed to go to Chouinard on a full-time basis. At which point—Every now and then, I get crazy and act a fool, and I got crazy and acted a fool. I said, "Well, I suggest you call Charlie Coiner at N. W. Ayer and talk with him about it. He indicated that if I had any problem that you should call him." "Charlie Coiner? You know Charles Coiner?" I said, "Yeah, Charles T. Coiner, N.W. Ayer. Yeah, I know him. He asked that you call him." So they did. And they told Charles Coiner, "Hey, wait a minute. No, no, no. We can't have this." He said, "Well, you know how many of your students now graduate to come to the advertising agency where I am in Philadelphia. Unless Bill Pajaud gets into Chouinard don't send me any more of your students."

MASON:

Wow.

PAJAUD:

At which point, all of the barriers fell, and the statement made to Charles Coiner was, "Yes, Charles."

MASON:

[laughter] That's great! Do you remember who you were talking to, who interviewed you? I mean, who did you have the appointment with?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. Mrs. [Nelbert M.] Chouinard herself. Yeah. So, you know, I'm foolish anyway because I'm in this lady's office with my three sons. At that time they would have been like eight, six, and four [years old], or some such—

MASON:

You entered Chouinard at about '52.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, okay. She said, "You know, we have some very strict rules here at Chouinard." I said, "Well, I'm sure I can follow the rules." "One thing we want to be sure of—" See, in those days, young ladies didn't wear jeans to school, even in art school. They wore dresses. Skirts and dresses. They wanted to be sure that I understood not to stand at the bottom of the stairs and look up under the little white girls' dresses.

MASON:

And she was completely serious when she—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. And the second one was an observation. It wasn't a rule, just an observation. That is—no, before that. My grades would have to keep at a certain level. I said, "That will be no problem. Don't worry about it." And the third thing was, "It's sure going to be interesting seeing all of these little pickaninnies around here."

MASON:

Oh, my god, how horrible! Oh, my god. All this took place in front of your sons?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. So I had—I got real lucky. My father-in-law [Ernest Craft] was an automobile mechanic, and he found a 1937 Dodge, which I bought for \$50. It was a rattletrap, but he was a mechanic, so I didn't really have to worry about it too much. A good mechanic. The only thing wrong with the car was the transmission had some of the teeth missing. And you probably don't know that much about—well, maybe you do. I shouldn't say that—

MASON:

Yeah, you're right about that. I'm sorry I don't. I wish I did.

PAJAUD:

But the teeth of the transmission, when they engage at a certain level, they enable the car to—you know, it pushes the car along. But some of the teeth were missing in my transmission, and every now and then they would miss. So I'm pressing on the gas, and I'm not going anywhere because the transmission

is not engaged. I had a great, long screwdriver he had given me, and the trans-mission was in the floor, like a little domed oven or something like that. Anyway, a little dome shape. I'd have to unscrew three screws to move this thing out of the way, to put the cover out of the way, to put the screwdriver in the transmission to push the keys and push the gears until they locked again. So after a while, I got slick. I just left the top off completely. [laughter] I didn't want to bother with that every two or three stops. I took the back seat out and made myself a studio in the back half of this Dodge. I'm working in the post office twelve hours a day, or twelve hours a night. At first, I was working twelve hours a night, then I went down to eight hours a night when I went to school. But that was six in the evening until two in the morning. I worked at the Terminal Annex, which is downtown, across from Olvera Street. I had these great big arc lights. The guys who supervised the parking lot always saved a spot for me under the brightest arc light, because they knew, when I came in, I had to get on my homework. I'd get out of school, say, three thirty, right on down to the post office, pull under—at that time, you know, if it was wintertime, it might be getting just dark, a little bit dark. I just pulled into my spot and started working on my assignments. At a quarter to six, I went up to the cafeteria, had a quick bite to eat, punched the clock at six ten; I punched the clock and went to work. I did that the entire time I was at Chouinard, three years.

MASON:

Oh, my god. You worked the same hours?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Three years. And I know I'd didn't make less than an A- in any of my classes the three years I was at Chouinard. But that was only—I just worked like hell. It has nothing to do with brains. It's that you just say, "Well, hey." I think I mentioned to you, the best thing anybody can tell me is I can't do something, and I'm gone. That's like putting supreme unleaded in my tank when you tell me I can't do it, you know! [laughter]

MASON:

Well, after your encounter with Nelbert Chouinard, how were the instructors that you had? Were they a little more sympathetic?

PAJAUD:

Oh, very good. All of them very good. I became very good friends with every damn one of them with whom I studied, and many with whom I did not study, who were just there. I think, being artists, they were—artists just tend to be a different kind of people. Artists, musicians, writers, all of these people. All they recognize is talent and quality work. They don't have to be bothered with the sociological BS of, you know, what color you are, what kind of language do you speak, how broken is your English. Can you put the stuff down on paper? That's all they're interested in. But they—no, very good. I remember some specifically: Bill Moore, who taught design; Watson Cross, who taught life drawing; Graham—Watson Cross was crippled then. Subsequently, I think, Watson—I know he's in a wheelchair now, because a number of us—his former students—put together a fund to buy him one of these mechanized deals. And there was Graham, who taught life drawing—well, just drawing, period. Who else? Harry Diamond taught design and illustration; Rex Brandt, the watercolorist. All of those people were just—you know, you saw them every day. They were names to conjure with back in New York and in certain areas out here, but these were just friends of ours. We'd sit down and talk with them about our problems with assignments or just life's problems in general. They were wonderful people. Mrs. Chouinard became wonderful after the initial shock.

MASON:

Really? She chilled out a little after she got to know you and your work?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. But it's a hell of a burden to carry when you are the first of anything in something. The same thing would happen if you were the first woman going into Chouinard and you recognized all the damn women to follow are depending on you to be successful and keep your nose clean and all this business. That's a position I don't envy. It does two things, however. It puts you under pressure, but it also forces you to perform. If you feel any responsibility for other people, you have to perform, because too many other people are depending on you, even though they themselves, at the time, don't know it. I mean, they might not have even been born at the time I started at Chouinard.

MASON:

So how did you feel about that? Did you feel resentful, sort of?

PAJAUD:

No, no. No, I'm not—at least I like to think I'm not—a small-minded individual. No, I never resented it. It was just another challenge that I had to overcome, that's all.

MASON:

So from the time you were there to the time you graduated, did any other blacks enter the day school? Do you remember?

PAJAUD:

I think one did. He transferred from night school to day school. I forget his name. But he wasn't very successful. I think that he had probably been beaten down so much that he couldn't deal with it.

MASON:

So at Chouinard you studied—you went there with the purpose to study to go and work with Charles Coiner. So did they have a special curriculum for people in—?

PAJAUD:

No, no.

MASON:

Everybody had the same curriculum?

PAJAUD:

You either decided you wanted to go into fine arts or commercial art, which had to graphics, design, and what have you. It could be anything from interior decoration to—in the commercial side—designing type, which is a whole, strange—strange kind of folks over there. I mean, I liked it, but—no, I don't mean strange. But theirs has to be so—the things they do are so delicate and have to be so precise. I just never had the inclination to do it. Mine would be a free-flowing kind of—but they wanted everything identical. I say, get a

typewriter, [laughter] But no, you had those two. You either went into the fine arts or you went into commercial and graphic arts. You could do everything in the commercial field from designing lettering—I mean, designing typography—to interior decoration, magazine illustration, actually designing ads, garment design, just anything that you could possibly think of related to commercial art. You could branch out into one of those. And then you had the fine arts, which had to do with painting, sculpture, ceramics, this kind of thing.

MASON:

Did people sort of intermix? Did students take—?

PAJAUD:

To a degree, to a degree. I did, because my background was fine arts, so I wanted to cheat a little bit. I had to get some fine arts in there. I took a painting elective almost every year that I was there—every semester, that is.

MASON:

Do you remember what kinds of things you painted in those classes? The kinds of things—subject matter that you were interested in?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Quite a bit. Quite a few, rather. I did a lot of glass, that is, bottles, and the translucent effect of light coming through three or four different colors of bottles, which can be quite an interesting thing. It will be like a—just imagine going to a bar and lifting every different color of bottle they have there—and they're all empty—and you put them under a light or in front of a light, in front of a window or something of that sort, and see the interplay of light through these various colors of bottles and how the colors of the bottles mix to make other strange colors. It looks almost like jewels that just sit there, transparent, translucent. It's just kind of lovely. That was one of our assignments. Another one was to do—all of us were really hellified workers. I mean, we worked hard. We didn't spend the kind of time that people spend today on paintings or any of that stuff. You were expected, maybe in three class sessions, to finish a painting.

MASON:

Wow, that's not very much time.

PAJAUD:

We had as also, "Here's an assignment. I need a painting. On each one, I want you to do your interpretation of the story of Jonah and the whale, period." You'd be absolutely amazed at the differences in how people looked at that whole business of Jonah and the whale. One person, I remember, settled on the ribs. Now, there is part of the story which indicates that's how Jonah got out, by tickling the ribs of the whale. That is one side of the story. But this guy had just a great big bunch of circular bones and a little bitty figure tickling his bones. [laughter] Nothing else. You didn't know if it was a whale or anything. You had another fellow, Robert Irwin, he became, subsequently, a world-famous man.

MASON:

Very famous, yes.

PAJAUD:

Bob Irwin did an abstract whale with no Jonah. He just wiped out Jonah and did the whale, indicating that, as far as he was concerned, once the whale swallowed Jonah, that was it! [laughter]

MASON:

[laughter] I see.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, yeah, there were some interesting things. I was kind of lucky when I was at Chouinard in that I went to Chouinard after the [Second World] War, when the people who were going to Chouinard were more serious about their careers, had already done some service time, they were going on the GI Bill. In fact, one great painter—she's still painting. I don't know what else she's doing now. But Ruth Osgood—I think she was in the Marine Corps. She did a tremendous series on Siamese cats and horses. It turned out she raised Siamese cats and horses! She had them on her place. I said, "Ruth, you're cheating, baby! That's not the right way to go about it!" [laughter]

MASON:

You were really in with a pretty interesting crowd. You mentioned Bob Irwin, and, let's see, John Altoon was there.

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

Noah Purifoy was there as well, wasn't he?

PAJAUD:

No, I didn't know Noah then. I met Noah much, much later. Who did I—? Oh, Kiroy Antoyen. I don't know if you know him.

MASON:

No, I don't.

PAJAUD:

Kiroy Antoyen. He did these beautiful, jewel-like grasshoppers. I have one of those at home. In fact, I have one of Ruth Osgood's Siamese cats at home. We had a habit of trading things back and forth.

MASON:

So you must have had student shows and things every—

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. At the end of every semester there was a student show.

MASON:

Was that something that was held on campus? Or did you try to—?

PAJAUD:

No, right on campus. Right on campus. That was when we were—you say campus and I have to smile. That was when we were right next to the park, you know, MacArthur Park. Well, on Seventh [Street] and Grand View [Street]. That was Chouinard. It subsequently became a women's institute or something. Then it was turned in to something else. But that was long before Chouinard moved out to Valencia—

MASON:

Yeah, when [Walt] Disney [Productions] bought it.

PAJAUD:

Became Walt Disney's factory.

MASON:

So you probably didn't have much time to socialize, obviously.

PAJAUD:

[laughter] You said that right!

MASON:

What about after you graduated? Did you still keep in contact with some of the students?

PAJAUD:

Some of them I did. Some of them I didn't. Actually, I divorced shortly after graduating, and everybody sort went his own way. I've run into them years later. In fact, one of the guys did a book on Chouinard. Some of the stuff I'm giving you is quoted. I'm trying to remember the name of that book. A *Dream*—?

MASON:

Yeah, [*Chouinard, an Art*] *Vision Betrayed* or something. His name is [Robert Perine].

PAJAUD:

Something, yeah. Did I give you that book?

MASON:

No, I found it in the library.

PAJAUD:

You've seen it, though. You see, I have been unfortunate enough to have—no. I've been fortunate enough to have had some wonderful women in my life.

However, I always seem to marry the wrong ones. Until the last one [Donlapy Wangcharoensuk Pajaud]! [laughter]

MASON:

Well, the one you married before [Harriette Craft Pajaud] seemed kind of understanding—you're picking up and moving from Chicago to—

PAJAUD:

Oh, well, that was at an age when—oh, no. When you're twenty-two or twenty-three years old, well, you do anything.

MASON:

What happened after you graduated from Chouinard?

PAJAUD:

I graduated from Chouinard and went to work—I was working in the post office, and then another young lady who was also working in the post office said to me, "You're crazy for coming here doing this every night when you've already finished in art. You need to go get yourself a job in your field."

MASON:

What happened to the Coiner offer?

PAJAUD:

Oh, well, when I came out of Chouinard, just as he said, I was another blueprint from Chouinard. You know, I was just like all the other people who came out of Chouinard. Nothing special. When I sent him my portfolio, he called me. He said, "Bill, I told you what was going to happen. You're good, but there's a whole bunch of good ones out there." But you know what he ended up doing? He ended up doing watercolor illustrations for *Esquire* magazine. The illustrations he did—he was very selective. He did illustrations of trout streams in Scotland. I mean, things that were really, hot damn, good watercolors, because he could paint. What he had wanted me to do when I was much younger is what he ended up doing when he retired from N.W. Ayer. In fact, he retired quite early so he could do that. I was sitting down at a gallery out in the [San Fernando] Valley one day, and I was looking at this magazine, and I said, "Coiner." And I looked again: "Charles T. Coiner." It was

an *Esquire* magazine. About twenty minutes later, he walked in the door. That's the last time I've seen him or even talked with him since then. But that's what he was doing.

MASON:

What year was that, when you were in this gallery? Do you remember?

PAJAUD:

Oh, that would have been back in '56, maybe. A few years after Chouinard. No, it was later than that.

MASON:

Oh, well. We can—

PAJAUD:

More and more, I relate things that transpired in my life to when I started at Golden State [Mutual Life Insurance Company]. That's the one date I specifically remember, except for my birthday. [laughter] I remember the day I started and the day I left. I started on May 1, 1957. This was after that. Yes, this was after that. And I left August 31, 1987. Right.

MASON:

Okay. All right. So you were saying you were at the post office.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. And so I said, "Well, I think I'll just do that." I got up one night, punched out, told them I was leaving, wouldn't be back, and they could send my check home. I mean, you know, that's nutty! Nutty! Nutty! I didn't go home and ask my wife. I had no wife then. So it was just a matter of "How am I going to support these kids? I've got to give them \$100 a month, each one of them?" Hell, I wasn't making any more than about \$3. 50 [an hour] at the post office. So I went to work—the first place I went, I got a job. I got a job as an art director with the county of Los Angeles without ever taking a civil service examination. They needed an art director at what is the [Los Angeles County] Air Pollution Control District down on Fourth [Street] and San Pedro [Street], I knocked on the door, and they needed some illustrations done right then.

Something was wrong with the artist, or they had to get this magazine or paper out, whatever it was.

MASON:

"Can you start today?" That kind of thing?

PAJAUD:

Yeah! So I did. And I had given—there was a woman here in town who had a small place up at Elsinore. Are you familiar with Lake Elsinore? Have you heard of that?

MASON:

No, I haven't.

PAJAUD:

Anyway, it's a little resort-like outfit out in the desert there. She had bought two small watercolors of mine, little bitty things. The person who was in charge of advertising and public relations at Golden State went up there to spend a week at this person's summer home, cabin, whatever you call it. When she came back, she called up this woman to find out who had done those watercolors that she had. The next day she called me at the county and asked me if I would be interested in changing jobs. And all this—the beautiful things that you could do for black people, you know, this black company. The upshot of it is, I took a \$50 a month cut in pay to take the job over here at Golden State. I started for \$500 a month. Oh, I was so happy, I didn't know what to do. Oh, my god, working with all these black people. Everywhere you looked, everybody was black. I said, "Oh, my god!"

## **1.6. TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO SEPTEMBER 7, 1989**

MASON:

So you were happy to be at Golden State.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah! My goodness! I looked around and here was this cafeteria. The building had been designed by Paul [R.] Williams, you know, and it was really in, I mean, A number one condition inside and out. Palm trees, and it had

patios up on the fifth floor outside the executive offices. Oh, boy! This is heaven! The neighborhood was different then, too. [laughter] It's coming back, but it was different then. I remember when they took me up to the—he was then the president. Took me up—

MASON:

I'm sorry, who was the then president?

PAJAUD:

Mr. Houston. Norman O. Houston. He's one of the founders and was president at the time. The public relations and advertising department reported directly to him. He saw my portfolio. The woman who hired me, Verna Hickman, she was telling him about me and my background and Xavier [University] and Chouinard, etc. He was a very pragmatic individual. He said, "Well, Mr. Pajaud, tell me," and he picked one drawing out of the portfolio, "how many of these can you do in one day?" I said, "Oh, my goodness." This was before the days of Xerox and this business. Now, don't forget, see, you couldn't—these were the old days. I think the fastest machine around was a multilith, if you've ever heard of one of those.

MASON:

Never heard of it.

PAJAUD:

Okay. Anyway, I said, "Well, you know, however many you need." "Verna," he said, "take that boy downstairs and put him to work right now." [laughter]

MASON:

[laughter] And you're quoting. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

So I met him, a wonderful guy. He turned into a very good friend, good boss, and everything else. At one time in my career I worked for Leonard Grimes. He and I went down to the art supply store, and he said, "Now, pick out the best drawing table you can find. We don't want anything cheap. We want you to be comfortable." Boy, that's like telling a kid, you know, "Here's the bakery shop. Just take what you want!" So I got it. Both of us are kind of sentimental, so we

signed it, put the date on it, put a big circle around it, and then put a cover on top of it so—it's still there. Every now and then I lift up the cover and see that and say, "Hmmm, May 1, 1957." [laughter]

MASON:

So they hired you to be director of public relations?

PAJAUD:

No. Oh, no, no, no. I was hired as an artist. No, it was only that classical education at Xavier which enabled me to move up, because, as I indicated to you, I'd had four years of English, I'd had philosophy, I'd had psychology, as well as all the art majors and the Romance languages thing.

MASON:

So the woman who hired you, Verna, was the director?

PAJAUD:

Verna Hickman, yeah. She was the director. I started as an art director. I did some layouts. The first thing I designed was a magazine for them.

MASON:

A magazine?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, we used to put out magazines for the employees every—

MASON:

You mean like an annual report?

PAJAUD:

No, it was more like a company publication for employees. Employee recognition. See, that's a big company. It doesn't look that way just standing on that corner, but at one time we had in excess of eight hundred people working for Golden State and then the families of all those people. So we had what is—what do you call it—the *Daily Bruin*?

MASON:

Yeah.

PAJAUD:

That's what you have at UCLA. Well, this was a monthly deal called—it had so many names over the years, I'll just reach out and grab one. One was called the *Golden Pen*; that lasted for a number of years. We had another one called *Hot Topics*, which had to do with home office topics. Home office meaning that building right there. Our job was to promote sales promotion to the agents and employee recognition for employees, design ads for newspapers and magazines, *Ebony*, *Jet*, whatever we were going to put it in the black press, the daily press, from time to time, radio commercials, buying radio time, buying television time. It was a very interesting job, very exciting. You were always on the edge. But it's where I like to be. I don't like to be safe somewhere way in the back somewhere where I have no impact on what goes on around me. I like to impact my environment.

MASON:

So the advertising was basically to—now, isn't Golden State still the only black insurance company in the Los Angeles area at that time?

PAJAUD:

We are the only home-based black insurance company. From time to time there have been others to come in and go, come in and go, come in and go. But we are still the only black life insurance company in Los Angeles.

MASON:

So you were basically advertising to try to attract blacks away from white insurance companies?

PAJAUD:

Well, even repeat business, you know, not necessarily just to get them away from whites. In fact, at one time whites would not insure blacks. That's a phenomenon which came later. You find that life insurance is not something that people are just dying to buy, except when they're dying. [laughter] We've had people come into the office and say, "Excuse me, my mother's sick in the hospital with cancer. We'd like to buy some health insurance." That kind of thing. [laughter]

MASON:

They don't understand. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

No. No, they really didn't. They really didn't.

MASON:

So what else did you do? How long did you remain the art director?

PAJAUD:

God. Now, you know that's one thing—many people can tell you when they changed from this position to that position to the other position. I couldn't tell you. I'd have to go and look at that biog[raphy] that they have of me up at the office and give it to you and say, "Hey, this is it." And whatever dates they have on there, "Why, that's it," because I've never paid any attention to that kind of business. I mean, it's available, but it's just not something that—well, you know, actually, I think, Karen, what I—my position has always been pretty much that art would be the thing for which I would be remembered. Now, whether it was my art, whether it was that art collection up there, or what, it was art. This business of whether you're the vice president or senior vice president or—that doesn't mean anything to me. Because I know, once you leave there, that's it. It's all over. So I've never been too concerned about it.

MASON:

But you were there a number of years—

PAJAUD:

Oh, I was there thirty years.

MASON:

Well, no, I mean as the art director.

PAJAUD:

Oh, I was the director for a few years. Then I was promoted to manager of public relations and advertising. Then I was made officer in charge of public relations and advertising. Then I was made—what else was I? Oh, I was the

officer of the directors. It was called director of public relations, advertising, sales promotion, and corporate secretary. And we finally decided, "Hey, that's too much even to put on a business card," so sales promotion was transferred out of my operation and I became director of public relations and advertising, dash, corporate secretary. Then, a year or so later, I was made vice president and all those other things still remained the same. And not too many years after that, I retired. I retired at sixty-two because I wanted to spend some time painting and traveling and doing some of the things I wanted to do, which I had been unable to do because of the job and young kids and all that business.

MASON:

But you didn't stop painting altogether while you were at Golden State.

PAJAUD:

Oh, no! No, indeed. No. I had one period of about five years when I did very little work, or I did what I call relaxation work. I was really not too serious about painting. It took me another two and a half to three years to get back in my groove. It was years later when I got the freedom to work every day at my art. Then I really started producing. Well, actually, the trip to Thailand in 1984 kicked me off into doing an awful lot of work and being serious about my work.

MASON:

So you went to Thailand to paint, you're saying?

PAJAUD:

Well, my wife [Donlapy Wangcharoensuk Pajaud], my two kids [Gayle and Anne Pajaud], and I, we went to visit the family and her father's grave and all that kind of business. It was just such a beautiful place to paint. They provided me with an air-conditioned studio and all the bourbon I could drink. They had somebody bringing me down lunch when I wanted it. Whatever, you know. I was sort of the prodigal son who had never left home, but I was still the prodigal son. [laughter]

MASON:

So you were painting pictures of the—

PAJAUD:

Of Thailand.

MASON:

And in watercolors still.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Primarily. See, watercolors are so easy to travel with. If you travel with oils, you've got all that icky junk and what have you. Watercolor, you can just stick it all in your shirt pocket and your pants pocket or in your jacket pocket. Except for the paper—even that, they make those little pads now that are nine by twelve [inches] and smaller, and they hold twenty-four sheets of paper, so you can just bang away. Oh, I'd like to show you that series, in fact. When we're there at the house, I'll try and remember the next time we get together.

MASON:

Okay. So what about exhibitions? Did you have any exhibitions of your work?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I had exhibitions. Again, to remember them all is really something. I guess one of the things I'm proudest of is I became president of the California Watercolor Society, which subsequently became the National Watercolor Society. And I'm—

MASON:

That was around, what, '82?

PAJAUD:

No, no, it was much earlier than that.

MASON:

Much earlier than that?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, it was in the seventies. Yeah, it was in the late seventies, probably. But I've been in the Watercolor Society for many, many years. I was first accepted

into the Watercolor Society in '53. I don't think it was any earlier than that. But I've been exhibited in the Whitney Museum [of American Art], in the Butler Institute [of American Art Museum], in San Francisco at the [M.H.] De Young [Memorial] Museum.

MASON:

When was the Whitney Museum?

PAJAUD:

I don't remember these things, honey. All that's in a biog[raphy] which I can give you. That I can give you. It's already documented, but it's not the things I remember at all.

MASON:

I mean, was it in the seventies, early seventies?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, probably in the early seventies. The [E.B.] Crocker Art Gallery—but don't make me—we're wasting tape, really, to try and remember all of these things, because I have it all, the year and everything, in most cases, right down on—at a time when I had a staff, I could get some of my work done through the staff, and they kept track of stuff for me.

MASON:

Yeah. I know it's hard to remember so many things. It's just that I was—it's interesting to try to gauge when these things were happening, because, of course you know, in the sixties with the whole black power movements and—

PAJAUD:

Well, you see, that was never a thing—in fact, it wasn't until after the [Watts] riots in 1965, was it?

MASON:

Yeah.

PAJAUD:

Okay. It wasn't till after the riots that I got even interested in doing any black work. I just did paintings. Except for one or two things I might have done of my father's funeral, or at least of a New Orleans jazz funeral, virtually everything I did was related either to the Old Testament or to just landscape or whatever. I didn't begin to even think about my blackness until the riots in '65, and until John Riddle, who is a friend of mine who now lives in Atlanta, he said, "Hey, let's go and do some of those burned-out buildings. So we piled in the back of his raggedy station wagon and went out there and did some burned-out buildings. I fell in love with many types I saw out there, many things I saw out there. I mean, "in love" meaning subject matter for me as an artist. That's really what I meant. I certainly don't enjoy looking at burned-out buildings.

MASON:

Well, no.

PAJAUD:

But until that time, you couldn't look at my work and tell that I was anything except I was a painter. I did a number of paintings of chickens. In fact, my first watercolor accepted as a member of the Watercolor Society was of three hens nesting, which—a little bitty thing. I think I still have it. But in other words, what I'm saying is that nobody said we won't take black artists or we will take black artists. The question just never came up because I didn't paint in subject matter that would indicate that I was any different than the other people who were sending things to exhibitions. In those days, you sent to exhibitions, competition exhibitions. These were not exhibitions where they want you because it's February and this is Black History Month. This is competition shows, which is the—that's the testing ground, as far as I'm concerned. The Huey Newton black fist and all that kind of stuff was never my cup of tea. It's too damned obvious. It becomes propaganda, as far as I'm concerned. It's not really—well, except it's propaganda art, which Kathe Kollwitz did, propaganda art. So did many others. But it's never been my forte.

MASON:

But even after you sent your works to these competitions, and then you personally showed up, there was still no problem?

PAJAUD:

No, no.

MASON:

It was just your work? Because you didn't do "protest art," quote, did you find that that was—? Well, I don't know how much a part you felt of the community of black artists that seemed to have started to build up around the mid-sixties.

PAJAUD:

Well, I didn't really feel a part of them, not because of the subject matter, but because my life had gone off in a whole new direction. See, you have to remember that I was a successful, quote, "successful"—I was a businessman first all day long, so I didn't have time for the luxuries of protest, and I never wanted to be a starving artist. I still like two or three drinks before dinner every night. My idea of luxury is not eating an apple and having a new woman or anything of that sort. I want the, quote, "good things in life," and I was willing to work for them. Now, I'm not putting any of these people down, but many of them really sacrificed like hell to get where they are today, and some of them got nowhere. And sacrificed all along. But it's never been—I'm not masochistic at all. I don't have a masochistic bone in my body. I don't like pain.

MASON:

So it wasn't a matter of—

PAJAUD:

No, it wasn't a matter of my not wanting to be around them or what have you, because I have been friendly with most of the artists I know, black and white. I've been friendly with all of them. I haven't had any problems with any of them, nor have they had any with me. In fact, some of those same people whose names now you conjure with are in the collection at Golden State because I put them in there. We started out at Golden State, when that collection was begun, with a committee. Oh, we had a—I think the committee might have been nine people. We had dinner and cocktails and what have you in the cafeteria up there and talk about the artists we would acquire.

MASON:

The committee was composed of—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, any number of people. I've forgotten.

MASON:

The president?

PAJAUD:

He was one. Now, he was the driving force. But after a few meetings and our not getting anywhere, I said to Mr. Houston, I said, "Mr. Houston, you know, I think we should disband this art committee because I can't make head nor tails of it." He said, "My boy, please, now listen. I want you to understand something." He said, "You don't disband committees. You are the chairman of the committee. You are the one who calls the meetings. Just stop calling meetings, that's all. You don't have to tell anybody."

MASON:

They can keep it on their resume. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

[laughter] Oh, god, he was a wonderful guy, wonderful guy. Yeah, you might look into—he's in the oral history files there at UCLA. You might take a look at his book. It should be a lot of fun.

MASON:

Okay, let's pause here for one minute. [tape recorder off] Okay, we're going to go back for a few minutes. I was just asking—you were saying that you were continuing painting, although there was a span where you weren't very serious, but—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, that was about five years or so.

MASON:

And you became affiliated with some Los Angeles galleries, and I was just wondering which?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Boy, right off the top of my head, I don't know how many of them I can remember. One was Joseph Massa. Imagine a black man working for that gallery, Massa! [laughter.]

MASON:

He was the owner?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Joseph Massa, that was his name. He was an Italian fellow. But there was Joseph Massa, and there was Ben [Benjamin] Horowitz, who has the Heritage Gallery. And then—I'm trying to think of the one in the [San Fernando] Valley. I don't remember.

MASON:

Let's see, you exhibited with Esther Robles.

PAJAUD:

Esther Robles, yeah, that was the gal. I was with her for quite a while. That was the period when I was doing all those cats. I told you about the Siamese cats stalking through the place. Esther Robles and the Gallery for American Art in Houston and the gallery in Boston-Harrison. No, Harris Brown. It's now the Liz Harris Gallery. She bought Brown out. Oh, Brockman. Brockman Gallery. I had two or three one-man shows at Brockman. Currently, I'm represented by Alitash Kebede. Have you run across that name?

MASON:

Yes, you gave me a—

PAJAUD:

Currently, I'm represented by her. And they do have some of my silkscreen prints at the museum at the May Company. The band, the band series. My father's band, you know, the funeral band thing.

MASON:

Yeah, it's the California—I get the two confused. No, that's the Museum of Afro-American Art in the May Company. The other one is the California Afro-American Museum.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, I think about Cal and Afro. [laughter] There have been others, but I swear to goodness, I don't remember them all.

MASON:

Oh, yeah. The other thing I meant to ask was that, during the sixties, the whole—I was wondering also if at Chouinard you were exposed to more art history in the abstract expressionist art, or pop art, or whatever else was going on in Los Angeles. The whole assemblage—

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. No. To begin with, mine was, except for one or two incidental electives—painting—most of my stuff had to do with commercial art. That stuff is strictly—that's fine art and way out there. That's not the kind of thing I would have gotten involved with in the commercial art field. I mean, commercial art studies.

MASON:

Okay. And you didn't really come across it in any other way? Say, someplace you might have been showing?

PAJAUD:

No. Largely, I'm really—as you ask me questions and I try to answer them, I'm realizing how strange I am. See, I've had exhibitions to open a one-man show, and I didn't show for the opening. And I seldom go to other people's exhibitions.

MASON:

Why do you—?

PAJAUD:

Well, I have two reasons. I don't want to be influenced, number one. That is probably the primary thing. I don't want to be influenced. But secondarily, I really don't have time to look at other people's work. I should be working or researching to work. Right now, I've got a whole other thing going which is related to now reading, really reading, the words of the Negro spirituals and

how they relate to the Old Testament, or how the Old Testament relates to them, whichever way you choose to look at it. And that's everything from "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" to "Over My Head I See Trouble in the Air" to "Moses and His Cushite Wife." You know, just all kinds of stuff. I just don't have any time; I don't have the time left. If I paint for another twenty years, I won't paint one-tenth of the things I want to paint before I die. I mean, if I remain strong, working virtually every day for the next twenty years or twenty-five years, I will not have done everything I want to do in paint. It's one of the reasons I do very little experimentation. I work with my medium. Watercolor, acrylics, pastels, boom. That's it. I draw, you know, brush drawings and that kind of stuff. But basically—you know, you came in this morning, and I'd already started work on that pastel head, and I was going to finish it before I left here to go home today. I won't now, but I will tomorrow.

MASON:

Sorry.

PAJAUD:

No, I mean, these things happen. Please, I'm not in any way finding fault with you for being, what, ten minutes late, fifteen minutes late. That's no big thing. Don't even think about that. But it's just that I just don't feel that I have the time to mess up. Going to parties or looking at other people's work or—if I read, I'm going to read something constructive, or it will be the kind of reading to escape, Nick Carter kind of reading, where I can take Nick Carter number twenty-three and Nick Carter number twenty-seven and run through them in about three hours and say, "Hey, boom, now I'm finished with that junk," and go back to my Old Testament or go back to the *Lift Every Voice and Sing* songbook which I have or some of the other material which I've saved over the years, I've acquired over the years. There's just so much that I need to do in this life, and I waited too damn late to get started. I mean, to really get serious about it.

MASON:

Right now you're talking about the Negro spirituals and the Old Testament. Do you have the idea first that you want to do a specific series or you want to do a specific subject matter?

PAJAUD:

That's an easy question for me, because I think in series form. One painting, I wish I could just do that. You know, just do one painting and say, "Oh, that would be a nice subject," paint it, put it aside. "Oh, that would be a nice subject." I can't do that. I don't work that way. Right now I'm working on two series. One, I'm doing the reading and research, and I've done an awful lot of reading and research on the spirituals, anyway, and the Old Testament. The other one I'm doing has to do with the third and fifth wards of Houston, Texas. And that's those three—I don't know if you've seen those paintings. Anyway, I'll show them to you on the way out. But I have three fairly good-sized acrylics. Every one of them has a barbecue in it. The barrel barbecues?

MASON:

No, I didn't see them.

PAJAUD:

Virtually every house, no matter how small, in the city, in the black portion of the city of Houston, has that kind of barbecue. I mean, I call it the icon of the fifth ward. I've done an abstract one in watercolor, which is hanging at home right now. So those are four. I have at least two more of that series, and then it will be put aside for now, to come back to it when I've grown some more, even though it might sound crazy, somebody sixty-four years old talking about growing some more, but I intend to grow some more until the day I die. So with the Houston series, and now the gospel series, if you want to call it that, one is already in progress and the other one is about to come on stage, so to speak. In fact, it may have come on stage already with the big thing of my father's band which I show at a funeral downstairs. I don't know if you noticed—no, you couldn't have. It would have been behind you.

MASON:

I didn't see it, no.

PAJAUD:

I'll show you all that when we go down. But something is always coming on or going off the stage of my artwork. I know a lot of people who are very successful at what they do, and they just keep doing it over and over and over

again. I can't do that. Just because something sells doesn't mean a thing to me. I bought the right to feel that way by working at Golden State for thirty or thirty-one years. [laughter] So if I sell, fine. If I don't sell, fine. It really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because, thank god, I have been conservative. I saw myself retiring early. In fact, if I had done what my wife wanted me to do, I wouldn't retire until fifty-five. But I couldn't do that.

MASON:

You seem to have this remarkable drive inside you.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. I think a lot of it is trying to make up for things that I blew when I was younger. You know, when you're young you think life is going to just go on forever. "I'll never get old, I'll never get weak, my bones will never ache," you know. And suddenly you realize, "Hey, wait a minute! What was that pain?" [laughter] These things happen. Before you know it, you just get too tired to produce. Now, I have been able to make up for it, thank god, with what seems to be a strong constitution. [knocks on table] When I feel I can't go any further, I just jump into my tequila or jump into my brandy or gin or whatever and just work my way out of it, because I cannot allow myself the luxury of doing nothing. Sitting on my backside watching television? Uh uh. No, no, no, no. That is not productive enough for me, I'm sorry. [laughter] No way! No way! No way! Uh uh. Something has got to be happening. I must be making a contribution.

MASON:

Okay. Well, speaking of making a contribution, we haven't talked yet about your role in the Tutor/Art program that was held at Golden State.

PAJAUD:

Oh, no. We can get into that. Actually, do you want to start that now?

MASON:

Yeah, we can do—it's up to you. If you feel like you want to talk about that now, or we can take—

PAJAUD:

Oh, I can go ahead and we could start it. I know about when I'd want to cut it. So maybe give it another fifteen or twenty minutes. Is that good for you?

MASON:

Yeah, that's—

PAJAUD:

Are you comfortable?

MASON:

I'm fine.

PAJAUD:

Well, I know you're fine. I said, are you comfortable?

MASON:

Yeah, I'm comfortable. I might have to stop you when the tape is about to run out. I'll let you know.

PAJAUD:

When it runs out, we'll just cut it and pick it up right after that next time.

MASON:

Okay.

PAJAUD:

Right after the Watts riots, a fellow came to see me. His name was Bill Tara. He had been recommended to me by two black artists here in town, two wonderful artists, Brad and Archie Foster, both of whom are tremendous designers and what have you. Brad and Archie had suggested to Bill Tara that he come to see me at Golden State. Bill Tara was a very, very successful designer. He designed advertising and all kinds of other stuff for big gasoline companies like Chevron and Standard Oil [Company], you know, that kind of stuff. He worked on the Chevrolet account, did a tremendous number of very successful Chevrolet automobile ads. All of his adult life he had been a supporter of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], the Urban League, and all this kind of business. He was Jewish.

Extremely talented, extremely wonderful kind of individual. He had come to see me in the hope that I, together with the company, Golden State, could act as a bridge for the young people, young black people in the riot area, who might want to be interested in becoming commercial artists. He didn't know them, didn't know how to get to them, anything of that sort, except that he was ready to put together a curriculum, he was ready to put some money into it, he was ready to find teachers, faculty to teach these young people, but he had no place to go.

MASON:

Why did he have this interest? He was just a compassionate person?

PAJAUD:

He realized—

MASON:

We'll just pause for the phone. [tape recorder off] Okay.

PAJAUD:

He realized, with the riots, or they caused him to realize, that what he had been doing was simply doing penance money, you know. What was a couple hundred dollars to him or even \$500 to him in those days to give to the NAACP or to the Urban League? He wanted to have some direct, hands-on kind of thing, input, and to be supportive of young blacks who might want to go into his profession. It struck me as a wonderful idea. It struck my management as a wonderful idea. We had no problems with it whatsoever. So the classes started meeting in the classroom down here at Golden State. Now, this was a transition for these young people. They were coming from the heart of Watts with the goal being to go to the heart of mid-Wilshire [Boulevard]. That is just too big a jump to ask anybody without some kind of assistance or some kind of environmental changes taking place. So we started meeting at Golden State. How we got the people was very interesting. We actually had the cooperation of the L.A. city schools [Los Angeles Unified School District], and we started just in the riot area and gradually expanded, expanded, expanded, and it just kept growing. But we would go to a school, one of the administrators, school administrators, generally one in fine arts, or in the arts,

myself. Bill Tara, and another artist. I represented the management of Golden State. Bill Tara represented himself and the commercial art community. The administration people from down on the hill, they were there to simply say we want the cooperation of the teachers and the students and what have you with this program. And another artist would go along. Sometimes one person would be serving dual roles, sometimes we'd have another artist completely different. We'd go in, and there'd be a group of students. The teachers were, in most cases, dedicated enough that they had talked with the young people about it, what the potential was. Sometimes we'd have art teachers who would have these young people present, but all of the people did the same kind of little things that the art instructor of the school was doing. We didn't want that. We wanted open minds. We didn't want minds that said, "I've got to draw like Charles White to be successful" or "I've got to draw like Mr. Johnson for this to be successful" or Mr. Whoever. We found in many cases—not a lot, but in some cases—the students coming to us recommended by the teachers were not the ones we settled on. We asked them, "Who do you know in school, in your class, who is interested in art?" They always had some people, the students always had some people, and the students had no ax to grind one way or the other. Some of the brightest talents we got came from schools where the kids we got had never studied art. They were never thought good enough to be in the art department or to take an art class, except art appreciation. So the upshot of it is, we keep getting bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger. Finally, the program has expanded to eleven mid-city high schools. Well, talk about eleven high schools and the potential from each one of, let's just say four or five—although we never put a limit on the number we would take from any given school, the class kept getting bigger. People like Richard Wyatt [Jr.] from Compton, he heard about us, and he gravitated, and others began to gravitate, gravitate. So we had to move. Oh, god, where do we move these, most of them black, 50 percent of them looking like thugs, I mean, with the gang pants hanging down even when there were no gangs and all that business? But finally Bill convinced them, with a little help from me, but mostly from him, at Otis [Art Institute] on Wilshire—that was before it became Otis Art Institute of Parsons [School of Design] to accept Tutor/Art as part of their outreach program. So here we are every Saturday, every Saturday, nine in the morning till noon, cartoons or graphic design, whichever one you want. Cartoons or graphic design. And in the evening, cartoons or life

drawing. Evening, I mean, from one to four. You're talking about six hours of concentrated, really professional study every Saturday. However, we had one proviso. You had to have a sketchbook with you wherever you went, and you were expected to fill a sketchbook every week. The fact that you had no money to buy a sketchbook was not an excuse. If you didn't have the money to buy a sketchbook, you used the white pages of the telephone book. But it was that kind of—it was really, to a degree, the same kind of education in the art field that I had gotten at Chouinard, repeated. And Bill used to teach at Chouinard. Well, they were dealing with pros. The people that came out to do demonstrations or to talk to our students in the Tutor/Art program about careers in commercial art: a big designer, big movie designer—not Edith Head, but one like that, at that level, anyway, at the level of, say, Edith Head—[Paul] Conrad, who does the editorial cartoons for the *Los Angeles Times*; the Fifth Dimension, you know, the singing group. We introduced them to all kinds of stuff, telling them that there's something a lot better than getting hung up with some of that other crap that was out in their neighborhood. We had one assignment that just blew minds. You had to paint your closet, or draw your closet, and don't clean it up before you draw it, either. [laughter] But it was—oh, yeah. We influenced so many young people. They went on to so many things.

MASON:

It seems that you had definite expectations for these students to succeed, or to do the best that they could.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, a very, very good percentage succeeded. One became a sculptural cartoonist. He's actually making cartoon heads out of clay.

MASON:

Oh, claymation.

PAJAUD:

Okay, claymation, all right. That's the new word for it. Okay.

MASON:

That's what they call it.

PAJAUD:

Another became a medical illustrator for a hospital in Heidelberg, Germany. I know one who's teaching at a Christian college in Minnesota. Any number of them in the cartoon business. They were with Hanna Barbera [Productions]. I don't know what they're doing now. Some with [Walt] Disney [Productions]. Quite a few of them became those artists who do the trial things when they won't allow—

MASON:

Right. Courtroom sketch artists. Our tape is going to run out any minute now.

PAJAUD:

Well, anyway, that gives you a feel for what some of this stuff was.

### **1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 20, 1989**

MASON:

Today we're going to talk about the formation and the history of the art collection at Golden State [Mutual Life Insurance Company]. But before we do that, I just wanted to finish up with the Tutor/Art program that was sponsored by Golden State. You said the whole idea was Bill Tara's, and then he came to you. I was wondering how much influence, or how many changes, perhaps, did you or did Golden State add to the program that he had already outlined or set up?

PAJAUD:

Well, actually Bill hadn't set up the program yet. His primary concern was how he could make it possible for—. [tape recorder off]

MASON:

Okay, we were talking about Bill Tara's program, or non-program.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Well, Bill Tara actually had an idea, and that idea was to find a way to get black students from the riot area, who might have talent, into a program of some kind which would lead them into the advertising agency world of

Wilshire Boulevard, etc. As such, he didn't have a program, except that was his general concept, or his specific concept. When he approached me, we simply started talking about it as two artists would talk, his having been an art student and an art instructor and what have you, specifically in a design and graphic art world, and I having been a student and having been crazy about his work, I guess, since I first came to Los Angeles, or certainly after I first went to Chouinard [Art Institute]. The two of us just sort of had a discussion, and generally he packaged our discussion. And we roped in—roped is maybe a poor selection of words or phrases—but we got the administration of the schools, the high schools, the administration down on the hill [Los Angeles Unified School District] to cooperate. They had an art supervisor. In those days they had such an animal. They had a number of them, in fact, for various areas. So we got the art supervisor from the school administration downtown—

MASON:

I'm sorry, what would an art supervisor do?

PAJAUD:

Well, he would coordinate the art instruction and activities of the high schools in a given area. He would, so to speak, be the—not boss; that's not really a good term. Theoretically, these people all had much more experience in the art world than did the instructors who were teaching at the time. They were really supervising the instructors, supervising the student teaching in the art classes and what have you. Some of them did a tremendous job; others did not do nearly so well. We happened to hit upon one who was really, really good. And when he died, he was replaced by another one who was a good friend of mine, who I've always thought as good. And he has been good, is good.

MASON:

What is his name?

PAJAUD:

Al Porter. So what we did, Bill Tara, Al Porter, myself, we were the three who kind of started going around. Well, Al Porter came after. [Aylsworth] Kleihauer

was the first one, but he died. The three of us started going to high schools. The art supervisor working through the principals and the art teachers would arrange for us to come on a certain day. I looked at some portfolios of the students, portfolio meaning nothing any more sophisticated than samples of their work, in some cases, in other cases, why, really blown-out things, guys who had spent an awful lot of time doing art, anyway. And in some cases it was just some sketches in a history book by people who really had a tremendous amount of talent, who, for one reason or another, just had never gotten into art programs. There were some teachers who felt that the students had no talent if they didn't work exactly as they worked. There were others so weak in their own egos, I think, that they would spend most of the class time doing demonstrations for the students, so the students never got a chance to work.

MASON:

They would just "ooh" and "ahh."

PAJAUD:

They would just "ooh" and "ahh." Right, right. But there were some tremendously strong art instructors who did a tremendous job with their students. When the program first started, we went to, I think, Jordan High School, out on 103rd Street, or—yeah, I think that's 103rd Street. Anyway, Jordan High, and we went to—oh, where my oldest boy [William E. Pajaud III] used to swim—Fremont [High School], Fremont, and maybe one other high school. Because we were looking—the original thing was to go into the riot area. Well, that's impossible. This kind of geographic thing was out of the question because there was just so much interchange going on between all the schools. So we gradually began to expand it to include other schools. Early on, fairly early, we realized that it wasn't just blacks who had not had the opportunity to learn the things that these other guys were learning. The program expanded to include schools in the—well, I don't know what Mexican-Americans and Latinos, etc., want to be called these days, so I'm not trying to—I don't know what it is, but I'm going to use "Latino" in quotes and say we expanded it to schools that had a lot of Latino students in the student body. As we expanded, we also found a number of Asians in the student bodies at, for instance, Los Angeles High [School], Dorsey [High School], and

some of the others. Before you knew it, before we realized what was happening—we didn't really think about it—we had put together a group of people which over the months of the, probably the second year of our existence was probably the most democratic group that you could find, the most mixed up group that you could find anywhere in this city in any one project. They came from all kinds of economic levels. I know there was one kid who really couldn't afford to take the bus to come to Otis [Art Institute] there on Wilshire [Boulevard] near the park [MacArthur Park]. He was a very proud young man, though. While he couldn't afford the money to take the bus, he wanted to know if there was something he could do, like taking care of materials or cleaning up the room and all this kind of business, so he could earn a little change. So we got into that kind of thing. One or two of the kids—and I won't mention any names, obviously, I wouldn't remember them anyway. One or two of the kids got into problems with the law with marijuana, which at that time was a real heavy scene. That predates crack and all the stuff that's around now. We had a couple of pregnancies that we had to give some advice on. You know, we got to be sort of everything, because many of these kids came from homes with one parent, or no parent in some cases.

MASON:

Right at the beginning of the program, what were you bringing these kids to, exactly? It seems, from what I read in the article you gave me that was written up in *Communication Arts* magazine that was done in [October] '72, it was a really unusual art program. It wasn't like any other art program in the city.

PAJAUD:

No. Nor any that I've ever heard of anywhere. Although one of our dear friends, Elin Waite, I just heard from her, and she's doing something like this in Anaheim [California] right now. Not with the school system, though. I don't know who she's working through, but I intend to go out there and see what's happening. She was an art director with the Automobile Club [of Southern California] magazine for years and was quite helpful in getting us all kinds of stuff. The materials alone, much of the materials came from there, from Golden State, from the Art Directors Club of Southern California, from Bill Tara himself, personally. Well, I'm rambling. I think I've answered your question.

MASON:

Okay. So basically you and Bill Tara talked about your art experiences and what you liked and didn't like about them, and you set up—

PAJAUD:

What we thought could give the young people the fastest track to either accept that they wanted to be artists or didn't want to be artists. I'll give you an idea of some of the things we did. Everybody had sketchbooks; even the instructors had sketchbooks. You had to bring in a certain amount of sketchbook material every week when you came to class. Some young people, very ambitious, started coming in with sheets of paper that were thirty by forty [inches], and they had made a sketchbook out of these thirty by forty sheets of paper. You had to really flip through this great, big mural-type thing, you know. [laughter] Something else, though, that was—I was just thinking about that the other night. There was one other element in that group, that Tutor/Art program, that doesn't exist too much in other schools. Everybody who taught there was a practicing professional artist. Either designers, graphic designers, cartoonists, animators, watercolorists, oil painters. Graphic people like Charles White, the sculptor John Riddle; Marv [Marvin] Rubin, who is one of the great names locally—certainly, more than locally; two of the great names in advertising design, Brad and Archie Foster. All these people were professional artists. [Paul] Conrad for instance, the editorial cartoonist with the *Los Angeles Times*. Even when they didn't teach, we could get this level of people to the class to talk for an hour or forty-five minutes and then just throw it wide open. The kids could ask any question they wanted, including how much money they made in a year, or how much money they made for doing a particular job, this kind of business. These kids suddenly found out that, hey, these guys were just like them! The old hands found out these kids were just like them, too! [laughter] You know, in terms of ambition, in terms of ability, in terms of drive, and the whole bit. I mean, it was a learning experience for both the students, the instructors, and the guest speakers. Everybody learned something from it. It was a beautiful experience. Sometimes quite frustrating, but it was very, very beautiful.

MASON:

What finally happened to the program? It moved to the Otis Art Institute—

PAJAUD:

Oh, well, that was early on. See, as the class began to grow on Saturdays, what little room we had at Golden State, you know, we just outgrew it. That's when Bill was able to get regular classrooms at Otis—two classrooms: one above the art gallery there, and the other in the regular art classroom down in the main building. Well, when we got that, why, a little more structure went into the class, so that we had people that were doing graphics and cartoons and basic animation kinds of things in one group, and we had another group which was into drawing and, subsequently, life drawing and all this kind of business. They were working from live models.

MASON:

Was it still independent from Otis?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. All they gave us was—

MASON:

Was space.

PAJAUD:

Space. We did not want anybody else involved in terms of—we did not want to be dependent on an institution which we thought would destroy the, quote, "integrity," as we saw it, end quote, of our program. Bill and I both had great fear of bureaucracy of any kind. We also felt, and I still feel, that it's awfully difficult in a bureaucracy to be creative. There are certain rules and regulations you follow in a bureaucracy. Things have to be done a certain way. People have to dress a certain way. They have to speak a certain way, you know. Our kids came from the best and the worst levels of society. I mean, they didn't come in acting like Little Lord Fauntleroy. I think maybe, at the end—not at the end, but early on, maybe after two or three, four or five years of complete assimilation, so to speak, of all these various ethnic groups—it got to the point where the kids themselves got mixed up. I remember once a black kid called a Chinese kid "nigger." [laughter] He said, "Nigger, shut up all that shit!" [laughter] It happened more than just in that one instance, you know. It happened any number of times. Everybody would just fall out laughing. Everybody would get the joke, finally, but it really wasn't a joke. He was quite

serious. He was, you know, talking at his street level, so to speak. And I think that was kind of one of those things that happened that really kind of—I don't know. It was a beautiful experience. That's all I can say. It was beautiful.

MASON:

Does it still exist today?

PAJAUD:

No. I'll tell you why it stopped existing. "Stopped existing," my god. Bill Tara got quite sick, and no matter how much help I gave Bill, Bill was still the core around which the entire thing operated. Bill died. After his death, a group of us, Dave Brain, Marv Rubin, John Mayuchi, and myself, got together and tried to keep this thing going. But, you see, all of us were working professionals. Bill had virtually given up his professional life completely to do this, and none of the rest of us were either willing or able to devote that kind of time to it. Bill would actually—another great part of the program—Bill would actually call up, on Thursday, those kids who had telephones, "Hey, don't forget your assignment. Looking forward to seeing you Saturday morning, on time," etc. "Having any problems?" "No, no, Mr. Tara, everything's fine." Or "No, Bill," because there was never anything formal. He was Bill, I was Bill, nobody called anybody mister. He would follow them up, call the schools and ask the schools how they were doing in class, anything he should talk with them about on Saturday, this kind of business. I mean, a real father, so to speak, to an awful lot of people of a lot of different ethnic backgrounds, social understandings, social levels, economic levels, everything else. That is a full-time dedication. That is not a part-time kind of thing. And then, all of a sudden, the quality of art coming out of Tutor/Art quite possibly caused its own downfall, in my mind. What I mean is this: The kids began to do work of such high quality that I started kicking myself in the behind saying, "Hey, don't you think you'd better start working again?" I mean, really working. That's when I went on a regimen. I worked full-time at Golden State, but I committed that I would put at least as much time in my studio as I put into Golden State every week.

MASON:

Burning the midnight oil there.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. And that's when, personally, my art began to kind of take off. Until that time, you know, I was kind of dilatanting around, just sort of playing with it. I'd use a sketchbook and a pen to meet young ladies and that kind of business, but I wasn't really into art, you know. Suddenly I said, "Good god, man, with all the knowledge you have, all the everything else you have, you don't have time for this bullshit." And I started working. When I started working, I didn't have nearly as much time for Tutor/Art, and I started saying to Marv, "Well, Marv, I won't be there Saturday." And one Saturday missed, it's easy to miss another one. And Marv had an assignment, I think, to come up in Japan. He had to go over there and do some work; he was over there for a month or so. Dave Brain had a big animation film he was working on. And suddenly things just started falling apart. So Marv and I got together with Dave Brain—I guess it was just the three of us then; we were the only three left—and we said, "Hey, let's stop BSing. We can't keep this thing going unless we're ready to give up the same kind of thing that Bill gave up." And I wasn't in a position to, because I had young children, and Brain had young children. Marv didn't have young children, but he had so many other responsibilities that he couldn't do it. So we just sort of agreed that we would disband. That's about what was behind the whole disbanding. The thing went on for almost, oh, more than twelve years. It wasn't a fly-by-night thing, you know. We do still see some tremendous results from young people who went through that class over the years.

MASON:

I was wondering, were you certified? Did you give out any kind of degree?

PAJAUD:

No, no.

MASON:

Or just recommendations?

PAJAUD:

No. That was one of the things we didn't want. The only thing we wanted to be sure of, the kids had to be of a certain—we hoped, anyway—level of maturity. The primary reason being that you were being exposed to an awful

lot of pretty, I wouldn't say way-out, but some pretty mature stuff. You don't take a kid, for instance, twelve or thirteen years old, and stand him in front of a nude model and let him work for three hours from a nude model.

MASON:

Probably wouldn't draw anything. Just sit there and stare.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Stare and go crazy and make everybody else go crazy. We had to put one young fellow out. I think he was about eighteen, but he couldn't deal with it. He couldn't deal with it. We broke the rule once and brought in a young person who was less than fifteen, but he was a young person who had so much talent that we just couldn't even dream of keeping him out of there. That's the muralist now, famous all over the country for his murals and his easel paintings, too, Richard Wyatt [Jr.], who came out of Compton. But Richard was an artist when he was ten years old. [laughter] He didn't need Tutor/Art. He would have made it anyway. I think we thought of feathering our cap. We knew we had a great one, so we wanted him, see! [laughter] And we met his dad, his dad and his mother. He came from a—his family was together; it was a solid kind of family. I don't mean wealthy, well-to-do or anything like that, but a very closely knit family. Richard has a sister; I don't know how many other kids there might be. But it was the kind of family which you say—at least I have said, when I was in the process of having children or causing children to be born or whatever, however you want to put that—I said, "Boy, now, that's what a family is supposed to be like. You know, that's what a family—." Dad was interested in what he was doing; Mom was interested; his sister was interested; he was interested in what the sister was doing. You know, it was just a real loving, gracious, kind of wonderful feel to it. So that was why. He was a youngster who—it didn't bother him a bit. He could look at a woman having a baby, and all he'd do is draw pictures. He wasn't even thinking about anything else! [laughter]

MASON:

So if you didn't have a degree or anything like that, a student came in, and they were finished when you thought they were ready to go out in the world—

PAJAUD:

We never, we never thought they were finished, because we never thought of ourselves as being finished. See, as I indicated, we began to learn early from them. Suddenly we're saying to ourselves, "Hey, damn! We've been working around this stuff all these years, and here this little pipsqueak is doing this now! What the hell is he going to be doing five years from now?" And some of them got burned out. I showed you that thing of the little Chinese girl in the *Smithsonian* [magazine]. Didn't I show you that?

MASON:

Yeah, I saw it.

PAJAUD:

You just pray that people like that don't get burned out, but sometimes they do. And some of them did. Some of them got burned out. Others went on to much bigger things.

MASON:

Okay. Well, is there anything else you want to add about Tutor/Art? Any advice for the future?

PAJAUD:

Oh, I guess I could talk about Tutor Arts for—

MASON:

Advice for the new program that's being set up?

PAJAUD:

Well, you mean that I was telling you about in Anaheim? Oh, I wouldn't presume to give Elin and them any advice, unless I'm asked to, of course, and I don't know their program well enough to even be able to do any kind of evaluation of it. But knowing her, it will be good, because she's a damn good instructor and a damn good artist. She and I went to Chouinard together. But my advice to young people who aspire to art is to first accept the fact that you're not going to get wealthy doing art. You'll get—. [laughter] You might make a million dollars in one month doing a rap tape, but you won't get it

painting pictures, believe me. [laughter] Because our society, American, the whole culture here in this country, is not one that looks upon art as being much of anything. Except for some few elitist kind of pockets of people around that—and even they are being led by the nose by so much promotion and that kind of business that—you can't tell me that some of the artists who get all these accolades and great sums of money—and pieces that they sell for great sums of money—what is so startling about a blowup of a Campbell soup can? I mean, what was that? Or to take an American flag and just paint an American flag. But these are people whose works now are selling for so many dollars it's obscene. It's actually obscene. But as I say, these are people who either the establishment—the, quote, "establishment," meaning the art and promotion people—have taken and decided, "Well, we're going to make this guy really—we're going to push this guy." And there are some black artists who have been lucky enough to get into that thing, or unlucky enough to get into it, in many cases, who have just turned to what I call artistic prostitution to make that kind of money and be a part of that whole movement. But in the history of the world, I think probably the life of an artist is something that is—it's got to be sort of private, and he has to not really concern himself too damn much with what people say about his work. If you can—the hardest thing in the world is to arrive at a concept or at a piece of work or a body of work that everybody likes. If everybody likes it, there's nothing to it. It's already been reduced to pabulum or decaffeinated coffee. You know, it has no juice in it left; there's nothing left in it. It's got to be the thing that is controversial. I don't mean anything as stupid as the thing this boy tried to do in New York recently of putting a Christ crucified in a thing of urine. You know, hey, that's—I don't call that artistic license or freedom of expression. I just call that a sick mind. I don't even think about things like that. But art just has to be something which can't be so readily accepted by everybody right now, or else it's really not too damn valuable. Or at least it won't stand the test of time, that's what I should say.

MASON:

At the same time, as an artist, you want someone to like your work.

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes! Oh, yes! No question. No question. On the other hand, if they don't, I don't give a damn, which is one of the things I earned by having worked at

Golden State all those years, and everywhere else I worked, so that I have retirement and Social Security and these things. It's why I've been such a tightwad in the last few years before I left Golden State. So I would be in a position that I didn't give a damn. If one morning I decide not to paint for a year, then I just don't paint for a year. I can't foresee that happening, but I would not suffer, nor would my family suffer, if I did that, because of the way I've made provision for this. Our automobiles are paid for, the house is paid for, you know, everything is paid for. We owe almost nothing to anybody, and we try to keep it that way to give us absolute freedom. We don't want to be—. "We" as a family, nor me as a person. I certainly don't want to be in a position of having to do things because, quote, "I need the money," or the family needs the money, or whatever.

MASON:

Do you think of yourself more as an artist who's had training in advertising and business, or more of a person who works in the commercial art—?

PAJAUD:

You mean fine arts?

MASON:

Yeah, do you think of yourself as—?

PAJAUD:

I think of myself as a fine artist. Oh, yeah. Because I became, quote, a "commercial artist" relatively late in my development. I had, let's see—I was married [to Harriette Craft Pajaud] with three children [William E., III, Ernest A., and Joseph Pajaud] before I got into Chouinard. Whereas I had been a fine artist, to some degree—I don't mean "fine" in terms of greatness; I mean fine as it relates to fine art—since I was seven years old. Because I still remember the first watercolor I did. I don't have it; I wish to god I did. It was a copy of the old blue windmill on the back of the Dutch Cleanser or whatever it was. All done in blue. [laughter]

MASON:

Do you think of yourself primarily as a watercolorist?

PAJAUD:

Primarily. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I do other things. I like to do other things from time to time. I've done bronzes. I've done some really good bronzes. I've done oils, acrylics, watercolors, pastels. I think of myself primarily as a watercolorist, and almost automatically what follows any watercolorist is the ability to use pastels. I've never been able to figure out why, the why of this thing, except the only thing that the two mediums have in common is that they're both done on paper. But virtually every watercolorist I know, his pastels are as good, possibly better, than his or her watercolors. Anybody who spends great amounts of time doing watercolors, you can just about bet that if they haven't done it, just ask them, "Please do a little chalk drawing for me, won't you?" And if they haven't worked in pastels, it will blow their own minds what they come up with. It's just something about those two mediums. They just sort of—they're almost interchangeable. It's like saying that good mathematicians make good musicians. And that's as true. I mean, that's a truism you don't even have to think about. Good musicians make good mathematicians if they put their minds to it. And I've seen that with my daughters [Gayle and Anne Pajaud]. One daughter [Gayle], basically, art, fashion, design, this kind of thing. Not interested worth a damn in piano or anything else as she was coming up. I have another one [Anne] who, right now, at fifteen, is into trig and all this stuff at her high school. Great musician. She just reads the notes and plays the notes with the same kind of perfection, almost, that's required for doing a mathematical equation. I've seen it happen so many times. I know very few people who play music who are not awfully good at math, or vice versa.

MASON:

Have you done any prints?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Yeah, I have some downstairs.

MASON:

What kind of prints have you done?

PAJAUD:

I have done lithographs. In fact, I'll put this on tape. I intend to give you a lithograph as a little—

MASON:

Oh, no. Maybe people will think that I'm influenced now.

PAJAUD:

[laughter] You didn't influence me in any way. You can delete that if you want to. I'm committed now, though. I've done lithographs: black and white lithographs, color lithographs, silkscreen prints.

MASON:

Now, the silkscreen is something that you did yourself? Or did you design the picture and give it to someone else to execute?

PAJAUD:

Well, I have different kinds. I have one that I did the whole works, except the actually putting paint on paper, which is a mechanical process, with a squeegee and that kind of business. I showed you that downstairs, didn't I?

MASON:

Which was that?

PAJAUD:

The silkscreen. I mean, the way of printing that way.

MASON:

No.

PAJAUD:

Oh, make a note of that. I want to be sure to show you that downstairs. Then, there's another way, where you design it, work out the colors and everything else, and turn it over to somebody else to do the actual cutting of the film which is going to be put on the screen. My hand is so heavy—my right hand really is quite heavy—and I just can't feather it. There are ways that they train people to cut silkscreen, but the trick is to cut the upper layer and not score the lower layer. See, there's an acetate film which is on a backing. Well, when

I cut, I tend to cut through the entire thing. You know, just, boom! But Wendell [Collins] is an expert at it. I mean, he can just about take a thousandth of an inch off of something and not disturb what's underneath. He cuts my screens for me. Now, that's kind of strange, because I actually design with cutouts. I don't draw my designs. I use cut-out pieces of paper. But again, I'm cutting through a solid. I'm not cutting all the way through. Then I paste it down, put it together, and then, boom, that's it. So now Wendell knows to go in and cut those same cuts that I have in mine.

MASON:

Where did you get your lithography prints?

PAJAUD:

They were done by a genius, actually. He was a fellow named Lynton Kistler. He was probably the greatest lithographer in this area from, oh, I'd say the thirties until he retired virtually a doddering old man in his eighties. He's still alive. He lives down in Laguna Hills, I think. But he printed for any number of really tremendous artists, myself not necessarily included, because I don't necessarily consider myself a great lithographer, by any means. Lithography is a thing that—it's a medium which has to be used, I think—you have to really have a slow, painstaking approach to lithography. My lithography tends to be much like my old watercolors, which were really lithograph sketches, almost, rather than true lithographs. Do you remember that big piece that's over my big TV at home? That big lithograph I told you was by John [Thomas] Biggers?

MASON:

Yeah.

PAJAUD:

Okay. Now, that has eight colors. John worked for almost two months on that thing. See, I'm not going to spend that much time on anything. It's just not my temperament. It's not in my nature to spend that much time with a single piece of work. So it just doesn't lend itself to my way of thinking.

MASON:

I suppose you have to start all over if something goes wrong. You can't—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, you do that. But there are ways, there are tricks to everything, how you can clean stuff up or take advantage of a happy accident, which is—being a water-colorist, I'm always looking for the happy accident, because this is really—this is the epitome of watercolor. Something goes wrong and you say, "Hey! I can use that!" and jump in there and use it before that thing dries. Then you say, "Oh, that's all right." It's the way new techniques, new approaches are developed, just by those happy accidents over a period of time.

### **1.8. TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 20, 1989**

MASON:

We started talking about printmaking.

PAJAUD:

Oh, you had asked me where I learned printmaking.

MASON:

Yeah, where you had learned printmaking, or if you'd learned it at Chouinard [Art Institute].

PAJAUD:

Or if I'd learned it at Chouinard. Right. No, I didn't learn that kind of thing at Chouinard. I learned—well, you've got to understand that theoretically, because of my college education, I knew general principles of these things, although I had never done them. But doing the first lithographs that I did, I did them with a guy named Lynton Kistler," and everything I've done with lithographs I learned from him. The printmaking, in terms of silkscreen prints, I really have learned just since I retired and have been working right here in the firehouse with Wendell [Collins]. I learned right here with Wendell in what he calls the Thursday night group. That's sort of a name for the place. I still call it Firehouse Number 18, myself. That's the name that's on the front door. In many ways I am indebted to Wendell—Wendell Collins. I'm indebted to him because I wanted to go somewhere as soon as I retired, without taking any rest, and start working. When Wendell found this out, he was able to provide

me with a space for me to come and work and what have you. Others have come and gone, one or two others, because I think they come here with some illusions. See, Wendell is an expert screenmaker, printer, etc., but Wendell doesn't exist to produce your work, unless you have something that you can bring to the shop. Many people think, when they first hear about the shop and Wendell's professionalism, that they're going to go down there and start turning out all this fine work, and nobody thinks about saying to Wendell, "Well, look, here's a few hundred dollars I'd like to put into the shop." You know, they use—we all use, when we're here—the lights, the whatever. And when they find that Wendell is not willing to produce their work, then they tend to go off somewhere else. I've had to tell one or two of them, I've had to say to them, "Hey, you know, I pay a nominal amount for rent here. I think you should do the same thing. You can't use everything every day and then just pack up your stuff and go home."

MASON:

Who are some of the other artists—?

PAJAUD:

No, no. I won't mention those names.

MASON:

Well, not the ones who didn't work out, but who are some of—? Are these just friends of Wendell's that—? How do people learn about the shop? Do they—?

PAJAUD:

Well, they learn about it from Wendell, from me, from people in the neighborhood who know something about art or whatever. They say, "Well, why don't you go down—?"

MASON:

Just word of mouth, then.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. It's not—no advertising kind of thing or promotion or anything of that kind. It's just that the word gets around. The black art community is relatively

small. I mean, there may be numbers, but virtually everybody knows everybody else in the black art community. So it kind of bounces all over the place from Altadena to Compton to Santa Monica to everywhere that black artists work.

MASON:

How did you meet Wendell?

PAJAUD:

Oh, that goes back many, many years. This is not a new relationship. Well, the newness of the relationship is only related to the fact that I see him every day now, or virtually every day. Wendell and I worked in the necktie business at about the same time—not in the same shop, but about the same time. I knew him also as a cartoonist for one of the black newspapers here in town. I think it was the [*California*] *Eagle*. I don't even remember, it goes so far back.

MASON:

The other question I asked was about what influence Chouinard actually had on your style that you painted in.

PAJAUD:

Oh, and you also asked me about [Charles T.] Coiner.

MASON:

Yeah, after all. Coiner said he was disappointed with how you came out, and I was wondering how you—

PAJAUD:

No, he wasn't disappointed. I was disappointed because he was so right in what he had said in the beginning. His words to me were almost verbatim, "Bill, when you go to Chouinard, after being there three years you'll come out being like all of the other products of Chouinard." It took me a long time to understand what he was saying, but really what he was saying was, as a watercolorist, as primarily a watercolorist, I had a spontaneity about my work which is virtually impossible to keep once you get into an environment such as Chouinard which is structured to—you're dealing with type, for instance, which is so many picas to an inch and so many points to an inch. You're

dealing in almost absolutes. You know, you can't say, "Well, I know that there are seventy-two points to an inch, but I need seventy-three, so I'm just going to stretch it a little bit." You can't do that, see. It's an absolute. But my watercolors were never absolute. And it's taken me a number of years to get away from the absolutism, so to speak, that I acquired at Chouinard. It looks ever so professional. It looks ever so nice to people who are ignorant of really what this thing is all about, this whole business of fine art. I don't put him down—at one time he was a hero of mine—but I look upon the artist I'm about to mention now as just an illustrator, and that's Andrew Wyeth. An Andrew Wyeth exhibition opened up at the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] here on Wilshire Boulevard, and it's standing room only for blocks and blocks and blocks, even when you have invitations and tickets and everything else. He is the "art hero," the "watercolorist of all time," which is a crock. Excuse me, it's a bunch of stuff.

MASON:

What is it that you find lacking in his work?

PAJAUD:

He has no soul. He has no feeling whatsoever. It's beautifully rendered. If you don't know, you put Andrew Wyeth watercolor up against a—and I'm talking about his watercolors of the last twenty years. I'm not talking about his old watercolors, because in the beginning he was a name to conjure with. His quality was something to conjure with. I think the greatest piece of work he's ever done was a watercolor which hangs in the Chicago Art Institute. It's called *The Coot Hunter*. It's a watercolor of a hunter. Obviously the water's in the background. There's a boat on the beach, his boat, and he's walking to his boat with a brace of ducks which he has just shot. Magnificent. In fact, I think he should have stopped painting right then. It really was what they call, in the art world, a tour de force. It was a tour de force. But you put his watercolors now, or the last twenty, thirty years, up against really quality watercolorists, like John Singer Sargent, or Winslow Homer, or even Romare Bearden, before he went into collages and paste-ups and glue pots and photographs and all that stuff. I mean, these were the great watercolorists. Not even John Marin, who is considered by many in the art world to be the great watercolorist. I don't see it that way. I mentioned the three great watercolorists that I knew of

this country: Homer, Sargent, Bearden. After them, you've got to go across the water to England and get into the Constables and some of those people. Even Cezanne. Some of his small watercolors had a great deal of magnificence. But—hey, how did we get off on all those folks?

MASON:

Oh, well, we're not off the track or anything. After all, art historians always want to know what artists, other artists—

PAJAUD:

—think about artists?

MASON:

Yeah.

PAJAUD:

What an artist thinks about other artists?

MASON:

When you were in Chicago, is that when you really started to look at Wyeth's work?

PAJAUD:

Yeah. My first real introduction to him was at the Chicago Art Institute, and then, after that, I started following everything I could on him. In fact, at one time, I set out to be—I was going to be the most knowledgeable person about watercolorists in the entire world. You know, stupid, stupid, stupid. I've had all kinds of stupid dreams.

MASON:

That's not stupid.

PAJAUD:

At one time, I was going to be the best black artist in the whole world. And then, another time, I was going to be the best watercolorist in the whole world. And I suddenly realized there weren't that many black people doing

watercolors, so, you know, the whole thing is just a farce! [laughter] Anything to keep you driving. I don't care what it is.

MASON:

Where would you be without your dreams, after all? Nobody starts out, "Well, I'm just going to be a mediocre painter, and I'm never going to go anywhere."

PAJAUD:

It might be smarter if they did! [laughter]

MASON:

Where would they ever get?

PAJAUD:

It might be smarter if some of us had said, "Hey, I'm just going to be so good and no better. No better!" So good and no better. Yes, indeedy.

MASON:

Well, I just want to ask you one last question about the way you work here at the studio. Do all of you ever get together and work? I mean, do you think of yourself as a community with Wendell and Nathaniel [Bustion] here? Or do you just kind of come in here and work and do your thing?

PAJAUD:

Well, we bounce ideas off each other, and we ask for certain kinds of criticism from each other—art criticism, generally. In many ways it's looked upon as a community. For instance, any of us running into a new book related to art, to Egyptology, to blacks, to Africa, to black music, some of the black revolutionary voices like [Louis] Farrakhan, like [Chiekh Anta] Diop, like the young fellow who is so brilliant and many people are trying to put down. The young fellow who did—Ivan Van Sertima. This kind of thing, we constantly—ideas just kind of foment here with a lot of energy, some of it sometimes quite negative. For instance, I just finished reading that—god, I can't even think of a word which describes that puddle of filth which Jim Brown wrote called *Out of Bounds*, which now is getting all the play. It's a sickening—god—oh, boy. It's a sickening book, though. And it's the kind of book that—you know, I know that

these guys buy books when they see something that they think is interesting. But, hey, save your money, fellows. It ain't nothing.

MASON:

Because he's appearing at the B. Dalton [Booksellers] bookstore in Westwood.

PAJAUD:

Oh, I'm not at all surprised he's appearing at B. Dalton. He'll probably end up at Waldenbooks, too, and might even go on a talk show thing about his book.

MASON:

I haven't read the book, so I don't know—

PAJAUD:

Well, don't waste your time, and certainly don't waste your money. Turn that off.

MASON:

Okay. [tape recorder off] Okay, I heard a few off-the-record comments.

PAJAUD:

Yeah! We had to—. [laughter] Okay, now, where are we? Oh, we were talking about the community sense of the place. We have no structure except that Wendell lives here. This is his home, the upstairs. Downstairs belongs to everybody, meaning we're quite comfortable doing anything with what's down there, moving paper around, moving a press around, moving this around, bringing in stuff, and that kind of thing. But we try to keep this portion of the place inviolate, in that it is his private place. We are not dependent upon each other, but it gives us—at least it gives those of us who don't live here a place to come and know that other people are interested in the same kinds of things that we are interested in. And so develops a certain spirit of camaraderie, etc. I guess one good thing is we all like to cook, also. And we all like to eat, also. [laughter] You've seen Nathaniel, so you know that he likes to eat. But that's about the size of it. There's nothing else involved. I could—any of us, except Wendell, who lives here, could very easily just pick up our tent, so to speak, and not steal away but go away. The shop doesn't depend upon us in any way. Wendell is the core around which everything sort of works.

MASON:

Well, you said before that you—one last question before we get into the Golden State collection. Maybe it's a big question, but that normally you keep to yourself in order to not be influenced by others. I was wondering if you feel that your style and your philosophy of art was formed somewhere, and then you've developed that into the present. I mean, where do you feel that your philosophy of art was formed, basically? That you figured that you would paint in a certain style and that you would deal with certain themes?

PAJAUD:

I don't think that the—boy, that is a big question. I don't think, though, that I was ever influenced in style or anything else by other artists—. [tape recorder off]

MASON:

Okay, it's back on.

PAJAUD:

Okey dokey. I think, if I have had any outside influence on my work, it has been more in the nature of what I choose to paint rather than how I paint it. I know of no watercolorists who paint watercolors like me. I don't say that with any pride or anything else. I just don't know of any who paint like I do. I'm a very bravura kind of painter, which means that I brave. I do things without even considering the consequences. And I'm in a fortunate enough position that if I blow a few pieces of paper, I just tear them up and start all over again. The influences on my work, about what I paint and what I want to say about the world, I think come primarily from a Catholic background, a music background, and a black background. So you end up with a religious influence; a music influence, and the—specifically, the music influence tends to be the rhythm with which I paint watercolors. It tends even to be the subject matter as it relates to the New Orleans funeral, to funerals in general. For instance, I feel no sadness with death. Almost everybody I know who has died is far better off dead than they were in the last few years of their lives. I can't think of anyone I know, dead, who isn't better off dead than he or she was when they were alive. So death for me has never been—the dying process is painful; I'm not talking about that. But death is something that I accept with absolute

understanding. And I'm including that of my own and people very close to me. I think there are far worse things that can happen, for instance, to a young person than to be killed. I would much rather see one of my children immediately dead from a traumatic automobile accident or anything else than to see him get hooked up with crack or any of the other things that are available in this society. I don't know how this is making sense to you, Karen. As an extension of what I feel, music has caused me to come to some of this decision, or this kind of feeling. The Catholic religion, and religious things in general, have tended to also cause me to have this kind of feeling. Unlike many Catholics, I am very familiar with the Old Testament, love it. I think it's the most exciting series of books that's ever been done by mankind. The story of, for instance, Moses and his Cushite wife. People look at me and say, "What are you talking about? Moses and his Cushite wife?" Well, Moses and his African wife, then. If you don't know what a Cushite is, then—you know. Joshua at Jericho? David and his harp? I mean, you go on and on and on into the Old Testament, and there are so many gorgeous, beautiful stories. Just the—oh, god. Anyway, those two things have been an influence. And the other influence I mentioned, but I forgot now what word I used.

MASON:

Well, you said it comes from your Catholic background, music, and being in the black community.

PAJAUD:

Okay, and being black. So it means that my antenna is always out to new information about blackness. Particularly, I find it necessary in my thinking, and trying to cause others to think that way, of the beauty of black womanhood. I'm not talking about this beauty which dictates that you need fifty thousand braids and all these beads and that kind of junk, but the beauty that's come from the people who have virtually kept the black community on course since the time of slavery.

MASON:

I notice in a lot of your paintings there's a figure of a woman standing in a doorway.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, yeah. Protecting, protecting her family behind her from all that crud that's out there in the community. She is the goddess. She is the guardian of the temple, so to speak. That's why that piece that I showed you sometime back of those three old women, two sitting down and one standing in the doorway in the porch watching the garden, stick to chase away the birds or whatever, that's what they are. Guardians of the garden. You could call them goddesses of the garden. It would be the same thing. The fact that there was a black—well, the fact that there was a female Pharaoh, for instance. Almost nobody knows about that. And that she was black, nobody will accept. But that is the history of Egypt.

MASON:

So when you read the Old Testament, you feel you're reading about a part of black history?

PAJAUD:

No, I feel I'm reading about humanity, and the inhumanity of humanity in many instances, but—no. No, except for—well, there are references, of course, to blacks in the Old Testament. Obviously, there would have to be. But much of that reading is coming now as a result of my reading people like Swallow di Lubick, who—well, Swallow is a—gosh, if we get started on that, we'll talk from now until tomorrow night. But there are Egyptologists and people who've done historical writings on Egypt: Van Sertima is one, Diop is another. The fact that much of modern medicine is right but of Egypt. Who is the great man of medicine, the great Greek man of medicine?

MASON:

Hippocrates.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, he learned it right at the feet of African people. African people taught him what he took to Greece. And then the world took it from him because they wouldn't take it from black people. Some of the catacombs, for instance, in Ethiopia, they're so beautiful that, you know, the Western white man says, "Uh uh! Black people didn't do that!" Uh uh. You're talking about carving a church in the negative. In other words, you have your cathedral built from

nothing with material you bring from outside and put together. You know how the Ethiopians built their churches? They dug them into and under the mountains. When you looked at the outside, you saw nothing but mountain. So they actually tunneled and built a church from inside the mountain. And magnificent sculpture, magnificent paintings, church decorations that—well, I'm sure, I know in fact, that da Vinci was a genius, Michelangelo was a genius, but some unnamed Africans were equally genius. Some of the things which they have done—all of which is the kind of thing that you just don't find. You've got to go look for that stuff. Nobody's going to put it out there for you to see. And there's such a lack of spirituality in much of the Western world that the whole concentration is one of money. Money, gold, things that I can adorn myself with to make other people look at me and say, [gasps] "Isn't he great. Isn't she beautiful." And underneath she's a sick, decaying, rotten-tooth, but laden with gold and all this business, because that's success to so many people. And the poor thing about so much of this kind of stuff is it permeates other groups who traditionally have not had the same value sets. Because the media, you know, makes everybody a hero—everybody the media decides it wants to be a hero. Now, Zsa Zsa Gabor. Who gives a damn that this woman has had a traffic ticket from driving with a license that's two years old or whatever, with an open bottle in her car? What is that?

MASON:

Well, unfortunately, a lot of people care.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, but what is it in the long run to the good of society? What does it really mean?

MASON:

It just sells newspapers.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Yeah, that's all. Oh, boy. So I don't know. There's a certain—I am not the world's most sanctimonious Catholic, black Catholic, or anything else. I have a firm belief in god's existence and in the ultimate that we will be rewarded, quite possibly chastised at times, but I happen to think that we can be

chastised right here without sometimes knowing it, for some of the things we've done or haven't done. I just have a sense that I am one with my creator. And maybe he is god the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Maybe he is that trinity. Or maybe that same creator is of a trinity much older than the knowledge of that trinity. But I believe that there is great good, and there should be great good in the world. And I think garbage should be, well, really, removed. I feel the same way about some people in society as I do about a horse with a broken leg. You shoot them. And it sounds brutal. But when you see what's happening with young people today and how they're being influenced by people to do things which are destructive to themselves, to society, to the world, the people who are teaching this need to be destroyed. Or at the very least, we need to be very supportive of people like Albert Schweitzer and Mother Theresa and people like that, who are actually doing something. But you have these—the poachers, for instance, who are killing some of the most beautiful people that exist who are trying to protect the wildlife of Africa. *Gorillas in the Mist* being one example, the latest one being the fellow who was killed most recently. I don't know, Karen. Sometimes I get so frustrated. And you ask me if I drink brandy sometimes to keep going. Yeah, sometimes it's also to obliterate things which have come to my attention or come to my mind as it relates to all this stuff that we're talking about, all that I'm talking about.

## **1.9. TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 29, 1989**

MASON:

Today we're going to talk about the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company Afro-American Art Collection. Could you just tell us how the collection began?

PAJAUD:

Well, let's give it a try. When I first went to work at Golden State in 1957, I went to work there as an art director. I doubt, at that time, if I'd ever heard the phrase public relations, but that was the department which I was assigned to. My initial job was to design advertising, periodicals, and to do the artwork required to get these things published. At that time there were three very great pieces of art in Golden State. They were not thought of as a collection,

however. They were more or less historical in nature. One piece was a piece of sculpture by Richmond Barthe. It was of the founder of Golden State—whose name was William H. Nickerson, Jr.—and it was in the lobby of the company home office at Adams [Boulevard] and Western [Avenue]. The other two pieces were murals of contributions of blacks to the State of California. They covered a period from somewhere in the 1600s or 1500s through the year 1947. I can be very specific about that, because it was the year we started construction on the then new home office building. We've occupied it now for, gosh, forty years. In fact, shortly they'll be holding a little celebration there commemorating their forty-year history on that corner. Two murals were done, one by a fellow named Charles Alston—better known as Spinky—and Hale Woodruff, both of whom were deans of the black art movement many years ago.

MASON:

Do you know who—? I was trying to find out more about who decided to have those murals commissioned and who decided to get Richmond Barthe to do the portrait. I was wondering if you—

PAJAUD:

I don't know that. I would guess the only person—of the only three people who might know it, one is quite sick, another one is Mr. Beavers—well, one is Verna Hickman, who brought me to work at Golden State. She's ill right now in the hospital. Another is George A. Beavers, Jr., one of the cofounders of Golden State, who himself is in a rest home now and I think is almost completely blind. I see him from time to time. He might remember. I don't know that, though. It's documented someplace, I know, but the where—as so often happens in a business organization, a burgeoning business organization which is constantly growing and what have you, quite often documentation is sort of left to whoever is there at the time. If they didn't document it or document it with any kind of systematic approach to the documentation, we don't know. The minute books of the organization could carry that information, but I wouldn't be able to give it to you just off the top of my head. I've taken all that time to say nothing to you.

MASON:

Well, no. That's fine.

PAJAUD:

So I was there for a while, and things just—sort of like Topsy, "Things just grewed," as they say. From being the art director, I went into staff assistant in public relations and advertising, subsequently manager, etc., etc., etc. Well, after I'd been there just a few years—oh, four to five years at the very most—a black woman artist in Los Angeles died, and—

MASON:

What was her name?

PAJAUD:

Her name was Beulah Woodard. And incidentally, I should make another comment on those murals in that Miriam Matthews is the one that did the research for the murals. Miriam is a retired librarian. She's still alive. In fact, she's part of UCLA's Oral History Program herself, so you may find some references to the murals in her material. I don't know. So anyway, after I'd been there a few years, this Beulah Woodard, who had been a friend of mine—not a very close friend, just a friend of mine, fellow artist, and what have you—died. In dying, she left quite a few pieces of sculpture and all kinds of stuff: paintings, sculpture, masks. She worked in many, many different media. And some of her pieces were available. I mean, available for virtually nothing. Miriam Matthews, who had become a friend of mine over the years, or we had become friends over the years, had a number of her pieces and also had the entree to obtain others from many different sources. I know we found one, one of her finest pieces—I think Miriam and I found it together, if I remember correctly—in a garage, all dusty and dirty and what have you. The people there apparently didn't have any respect for it. In fact, very few people had respect for the art of black artists in those days, at least around here. There were some few enlightened people like Miriam Matthews and others, very few, who did have this kind of respect and realized what was being done. So all of this leads up to a recommendation, which I subsequently made, to acquire some of these pieces, as many as we could, to begin a collection at Golden State.

MASON:

What year was this, about? The early sixties?

PAJAUD:

Oh, this was early sixties, because, by the time we'd actually started the collection. It was 1965. So all of this would have to have taken place three to five years prior to 1965. I don't know exactly when, at this point.

MASON:

That's okay.

PAJAUD:

So I made this recommendation, and a number of people felt that the whole thing was an ego trip of mine, because I, myself, was an artist; this is what I was trying to do, you know, put myself down in perpetuity, so to speak, and blah, blah, blah. And this was an insurance company, this was not a community social service organization. Well, the upshot—oh, and—no, no, no. Wait a minute, wait a minute. Before I get that far, now, those statements were sort of rationalizations at the time. The primary stumbling block was that the legal people thought that it would put too much of a burden on the company to get into this woman's estate and to begin acquiring pieces for the collection. They thought that it would cause some legal problems for the company. Plus the other rationalizations, which I gave you. The upshot of it is that I put my hands on as many pieces as I could and I took them to my house. And I told Miss Matthews that we were unable to do anything at that time and so forth, so she held onto the pieces she had. The pieces I could put my hands on, I took home, as I said. I cleaned them up and kept them there for a while, all wrapped in blankets, etc. So along about '60—I may be wrong by a year on this thing—but along about '63, I think it was, one of the biggest black life insurance companies in the country started building a magnificent home office building with—and they had—you know, at least on the surface—the wherewithall to do virtually anything they wanted with that building. So I remember that 1965, we would have been—Golden State would have been—forty years old. In some convoluted way, in my fishpond mind, I put together the possibility that North Carolina Mutual [Life Insurance Company] would start a collection before Golden State, and yet we had the core of a collection right here with the three pieces I've mentioned earlier, as well as some of the

pieces which I had obtained, and what Miriam Matthews would allow us to have on extended loan. I said, "Hey, I'm going to make that same recommendation again," but this time I'm going to introduce the fact that North Carolina Mutual had the resources to do what we wanted to do, and quite possibly—at that time, this was just a little ways before the Watts riots. There were riots all over the country, and people were beginning to be very, very interested in black imagery, whatever. There were some naive souls who had no idea that there were black artists. You know, "Blacks don't paint pictures. They dance and sing, and they play football and basketball, " you know. Whatever. So that was the recommendation that I made, that for our fortieth anniversary we would establish the Golden State Mutual Afro-American Art Collection. I think, if I remember correctly, we had approximately thirteen pieces, including the two murals and the Barthe bust of Mr. Nickerson. That's about the size of it. But it was to start it, to actually install it, to say, "We recognize this as part of the entity of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company." I recommended one thing further—and I think this is really the thing which sort of made the entire recommendation palatable—and it was to the effect that, in connection with the installation of the art collection, as small as it was, that we also have a wall of honor. We were in the fortunate position of having two of our three founders still alive and still active with the company at that time. So it was recommended that the wall of honor include portraits of Mr. Norman O. Houston and Mr. George A. Beavers, Jr., and that they flank the founder, Mr. William Nickerson. That met with approval in principle, as they say, until such time as I was able to work out the budget for it. I didn't intend to go through all the work of working out budgets and logistics and all that business without some kind of commitment that at least people were entertaining the idea. So I called Hughie Lee-Smith, who is a very well known black portrait painter, but he does many other things. He has quite a reputation back East, primarily, although now, you know, people know about black artists from all over now. But then it was a new thing. I sent Hughie Lee some photographs of Mr. Beavers and Mr. Houston, just describing the general color, flavor, kind of people they were, this, that, and the other.

MASON:

How did you choose him over anyone else?

PAJAUD:

Because I knew he was literal enough to do the kind of job which needed to be done at that level of the company's education, so to speak, in the field of art. He's a very slick—very good, very accomplished—very slick painter. So we agreed that he would work from the photographs, but the paintings would be finished out here in Los Angeles, so that he could correct, add, subtract, whatever. There was one thing that I had to caution him against—at least I thought I had to caution him against—and that was Mr. Beavers. He has—he had—an eye which was either damaged or destroyed in an accident.

MASON:

When he was young?

PAJAUD:

When he was quite young. And I had to tell him Mr. Beavers was not ashamed of it, so, you know, don't try to make both of his eyes look identical and what have you. Just paint what you see. And Hughie Lee said, "Oh, my god. That's wonderful!" You know, very seldom do people tell an artist, "Hey, paint what you see, or what you think you see."

MASON:

Paint over the wrinkles!

PAJAUD:

And so, anyway, the recommendation was approved, after I worked out some finances with Hughie Lee, and he started to work. Two or three months later, he called saying that he was ready to come out. So we put him up, and he told us what his needs were. He wanted a one-bedroom suite where he could turn the living room into a studio and comfortably leave it that way, you know, until he got finished with these commissions. So we put him up in one of the hotels downtown, and Mr. Beavers went down one day and he worked with Mr. Beavers. Mr. Houston went down another day and he worked with Mr. Houston. And this went on for just a few days. But Hughie is an accomplished painter. He's not somebody struggling to get a likeness or anything of that sort. So he finished the paintings, we had them framed, and they—together with the few other pieces we had—were put on exhibit in the lobby of the

home office building. There was one other thing involved, and that is we had no cases, no places to display anything. So I had a contact at Weber Showcase—which is no longer in existence, I'm sure—and the guy at Weber, the owner/designer and myself, the two of us, got together and designed the teakwood cases, which you now see in the lobby there. That's where we displayed our first art. Those cases were made to show the art which is in them today. There have been some changes over the years. We've taken some of the pieces out and put them in other places, because now the collection has gone from the three which I found, when I got there, which were not really considered part of a collection of any kind, to now in excess of two hundred pieces. I don't know the exact number. It's all computerized. At least, it has been computerized. It's a constant battle to keep this thing under control with me being the responsible party and yet not being there every day. You know, it's kind of a weird situation, but there's still a number of people there who know that I am supposed to be the curator and everything else in connection with the collection. If anything begins to go awry, somebody will pick up the phone and call me here at the studio or call me at home and say, "Hey, you'd better take a look at the third floor tomorrow," or the second floor, or whatever. "What are you talking about?" "Well, I mean, you know what I'm talking about." [laughter] I go over and I kind of square things away without too much fanfare, because it's—you can be very—you know, an outsider—even though you've been there for thirty years or whatever it was, when you come in now you're an outsider. You're not one of the people working every day, you know. There's some little bit of, "Hey, do I have to do what this guy says?" You know, "What about this and so-and-so and so-and-so?" I've always been kind of a hale-fellow-well-met kind of person, but every now and then I have to act like a dog—I'm sure it's what they call me sometimes—and call in the power structure and say, "Hey, so-and-so and so-and-so." Then, "Oh! You mean that's what he wanted?" So things get kind of squared away without any problem. Go ahead. You wanted to ask a question?

MASON:

Now, after you got the original fourteen pieces, did you want to stop there, or—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no. No, no, no, no.

MASON:

Okay, so you had the idea—

PAJAUD:

It was never my intent. In fact, if we had gone as far as I intended, that collection would have been more than a—oh, gosh, that brings up another very interesting aspect of the story. It wasn't too long after that when we started outgrowing that building. And there were some recommendations afoot. In fact, some architectural sketches had been done to take that building and extend it north on Western Avenue with underground parking, so that the building would have become, well, twice as big as it is now? Seventy-five percent larger? I don't know; I'm not that good at math. So I said, "Hey, boy, oh boy! Then we could have the collection, and I have all of these contacts down in New Orleans with all these jazz musicians and their families. Danny Barker and, I mean, just all those people down there." I said, "We could have a black library of music." You know, it began to just go on and on and on, see. That's when somebody looked around and said, "Hey, fellow, we're in the life insurance business. Where are you going?" You know, which is—. [laughter]

MASON:

You wanted to be a university.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, that's right! I wanted to be the L.A. County Museum for Black Art, you know. Music, culture—in fact, what did I—? I'd even come up with a title for that thing. What was it? Because I had—you know, artists are crazy anyway, and I had just gone way, way out in left field. But anyway, common sense prevailed, and my creativity didn't get too stifled. But for a few days I was, "Grr—grr—grr—grr." One of those things, you know. But I saw the wisdom of it. What the heck? We didn't have the money to have a staff, you know. Because I had even designed booths where young people could come in and listen to Louis Armstrong. I mean, songs that you've never heard of. Duke Ellington wrote a very, very popular song before I was born, and I was born in '25. Duke Ellington wrote a song called "Tishamingo Blues." I even had an

original—not an original—but I even had copies of that. Right now, I can actually, with 78s only—they've all been destroyed now, but they've all been taped, reel-to-reel. I could actually play music, black music for you—and I mean good, high-level black music for you—for forty-eight hours without stopping if the tapes could be all connected and just run. In fact, a friend of mine is going to convert some of those tapes to cassettes for us so we can really enjoy them.

MASON:

So instead of having Muzak in the elevator, maybe you could have—

PAJAUD:

No, no. I'm talking about for my use. I'm not talking about for Golden State. [laughter] No, they'll always have Muzak or [sings rapid, staccato, syncopated phrase], whatever that foolishness it is that that boy [Michael] Jackson, Prince, and all those lovely people do. [laughter] I don't know what that is. So anyway, that's—all of that was stymied, and rightfully so. I mean, I don't have any hangup about it. It would have made a hell of an installation, though. It really could have been. And I think you mentioned university. I think it was somewhat patterned along the lines of the research portion of the library at Xavier University, in that, you know, you walked in and at your disposal were manuscripts from the Middle Ages that had been done by the monks there in the monasteries, and kind of—as the comics call it—sort of a throw-away kind of thing. The line. They call it a throw-away line, you know, one that really doesn't expect a lot, but suddenly, boom, it's out there, and everybody just falls out. Remington bronzes, I mean, original Remington bronzes. Classical stuff. Virtually nothing in the way of black art, because most of this stuff came from Mother Katharine Drexel, who founded Xavier and founded the Sisters of Blessed Sacrament. That's Drexel of the money, Philadelphia Drexel, mainline money, really mainline money, who decided that what she would do with her portion of the millions, the estate, would be to build schools for the education of blacks and native Americans. And she did. She built a number of them. I think all of them are still in existence, even some of the smaller ones that she built up in the far west. So now we have this collection. It gets to be some real, kind of sneaky stuff now, because you've got to figure out how you're going to acquire stuff. I mean, you know, people don't just come up and say—in fact, I

have never had anyone come to me and say, "Golden State may have this. That was a good piece." It was always an artist who wanted to be represented in the Golden State Mutual Afro-American Art Collection, and he puts that on his dossier and it looks, you know, "Hey!" Because we were the only corporate collector of art for a number of years, west of Chicago, certainly. In fact, the first one to really break that, I think, was Johnny [John] Johnson, when he built his new home office building, I mean, built the new *Ebony* building, the Johnson Publishing Company building. He acquired, en masse, a whole bunch of stuff from all kinds of strange places. And several highlights, in terms of quality, many low spots in terms of quality. His thing was really put together, I think, a little too quickly. Not enough thought went into it, nor were the people who were doing the selecting the kind of people who would have any empathy at all for black art.

MASON:

So they just did it mostly for their image?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, they were more or less a group of interior decorator-types. You know, those kind of people who get all involved with—All that [expression] kind of stuff.

MASON:

You can't see that on the tape, but anyway—. [laughter]

PAJAUD:

Well, I think I got it across to you, anyway, whatever you choose to do with it.

MASON:

So the money that you used to—.

PAJAUD:

So No. See, I still don't have any money.

MASON:

Oh.

PAJAUD:

Now! Now comes the money. I said, "Well, wait a minute. There's more than one way to skin a cat. You've got to really start thinking creatively." I said, "You can always swap with another artist for a piece for the collection, and then you give it to the collection." I said, "Or you're on the lookout for some artists with a name, and the people don't realize what they have, or they're just trying to unload a bunch of stuff." Case in point: Henry Ossawa Tanner. Henry Ossawa Tanner was dead. His son had authenticated a great body of work that was still in Europe, was sent to Grand Central Galleries in New York for disposal—sale or whatever. I got a note from someone—from the gallery, maybe—telling me about this Tanner exhibition and these things that were for sale. I happened to be going to New York for another purpose for the company, so I talked with the chairman of the board—was he chairman of the board then? No, he was president then—Norman O. Houston, and he agreed. He was really a real top-drawer fellow. Everything he touched, he wanted to be just *creme de la creme*. You know, the finest. So we discussed it, and he allowed me to take—if I remember correctly—hold on a second. Yeah, it was up to \$1,500 to buy Tanners. Well, I mean, this is—you know, in this day and age, you say, "With \$1,500 you're gonna buy Tanners?" Tanner's been dead so many years. But, you know, out of not brilliance, just absolute ignorance, I went into Grand Central, and there was a set of sketches, oil sketches, of Tanner's done on canvas, which—the top price on any one was, I think, \$375. And got the whole set for under the \$1,500 which I—

MASON:

[laughter] That's sure wild.

PAJAUD:

And instead of saying, you know, "Buy one or two, I said, "No, what I'll do is buy—." I think it was five. "I'll buy five, and then we'll keep the best one for the collection at Golden State, I'll sell the others at a profit, and that will give me more money to buy other work." So Charles White—the artist Charles White—he bought one piece to give his wife. Mr. Houston bought one piece for himself. I don't remember where the other—anyway, we were left with one. We have the *Seated Arab*, one of the most beautiful small things I think Tanner's ever done, or did ever do. So that was kind of one way of adding to

the collection without spending, you know, a lot of money. Another thing that was a tradition at Golden State—I found it when I went there, although it had fallen on hard times—to produce a calendar, as all life insurance companies at that time did. The only difference was they had always used photographs. And I said, "Hey, you know—I did two or three—my first two or three calendars were photographs. Maybe more than that. Then suddenly I said, "Oh, my god. I could get Charles White to do a calendar for us. And what I'll do, I'll ask Charles to allow me to reproduce anything he has in return for my buying one of his pieces." And, you know, he went ape. He thought it was tremendous. The idea that a black company wanted to use a piece of his work, or some pieces of his work, on a calendar. So the piece that I got from that year's calendar, from Charles, was a piece which is now—well, I'd hate to put a price on it, because it's the great big *General Moses*, the Harriet Tubman piece, with her sitting on the rocks. That piece, then, cost us \$1,200.

MASON:

What do you think it would cost today?

PAJAUD:

I wouldn't—I wouldn't even—no, you'd have to think at least in terms of—I would say \$15,000 to \$20,000, and I think that might be a conservative estimate. Because Charlie's no longer with us. He won't be doing any more.

MASON:

That's true.

PAJAUD:

And that was a piece which, I think, was the culmination of all of the Harriet Tubman—

MASON:

Oh, we'll have to pause for the phone here. [tape recorder off] Okay, we're back on.

PAJAUD:

I think when all of that—virtually everything connected with the collection, it's been a question of—not a question—but it's been a result of luck and, I think,

my having no time to be bothered with BS kind of artists. I don't want to sit down with an artist for hours and hours and have him tell me how great the next painting he's going to do is going to be. There's one thing I learned from Mr. Norman O. Houston many, many years ago. He said, "Son, never tell anybody what you're going to do. By the time you tell them, you've wasted all the creative energy you had trying to describe to them what you want to do when you should have been doing it. Then they see it done." And that's sort of the way I feel about artists who will paint, you know, the person who will write a book one day, or the person who's writing a book, and what they're talking about, really, is that there's something in their head which is spinning, but they're not doing any work at all. And—oh, but I'm digressing. I'm getting way off the point. So—oh. Luck. And I happen to believe that luck plays a very important part in all of our lives, both good and bad luck. But I have a reputation as a decent person, that I treat artists decently, as I would want to be treated by another artist. As a result, they are more than happy to cooperate when I have a need. Let's also face it, I've had enough psychology courses and what have you to understand how to indicate to an artist that he is going to be a member of a very tight fraternity of black artists who are represented in the Golden State Mutual Afro-American Art Collection. When I further put out the fact that, in those days, we were printing 75,000 smaller calendars and 25,000 large ones, and, in fact, many of the artists have been astounded over the years to go and find their paintings somewhere—like Charlie, Charlie White went to get his shoes shined in Altadena, or Pasadena, there, where he lived—he lived in Altadena before he died—and there was a shoeshine stand, and this great, big Golden State Mutual calendar was right there in the background. So there was Charlie having his shoes shined with his painting in the background and the shoeshine man talking about how glad he was to have this beautiful calendar. And then Charlie told him, "Yeah, well, I did it. You know, I'm Charles White." That made for a lot of conversation. So these kinds of things happened. And over the years, finally, we got to the point when I was given the magnificent sum of \$5,000 a year to buy art.

MASON:

Now, where did that money come from?

PAJAUD:

Oh, the company.

MASON:

No, I mean, which budget?

PAJAUD:

The general expense fund. It just became part of my budget.

MASON:

Part of the advertising—

PAJAUD:

Public relations budget.

MASON:

—and public relations budget.

PAJAUD:

So we started acquiring, on a pretty regular basis, two or three pieces a year sometimes. Some years we only collected one, or—no. I don't think we ever got that tight. But we did not always spend the \$5,000, number one, because I had a way of paying for things on time. I have two pieces in the collection. "I" meaning—by that, I shouldn't—well, the hell with it. There are two pieces in the collection which I remember we paid for over a period of three years: the big John [Thomas] Biggers piece, *Market Women, Ghana*, and another one by a young Caribbean artist named—oh, gosh. I started to say Fletcher Christian, but that's not the name. Oh, it will come to me.

MASON:

We'll get it later.

PAJAUD:

Anyway—and he, too, I think I paid him in two installments. That's a drawing which, you remember, you saw in Ivan Houston's office. Very highly detailed—

MASON:

Oh, okay.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, yeah. That was one of those. Yeah.

MASON:

So did you basically visit artists—? Did you choose people you already knew? Or did you go and visit their studio and pick out some things? Or go to galleries?

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. I pretty much selected—it's kind of weird. I don't know how I can really describe it. See, it started out—a committee was supposed to help me do all this. I think I mentioned that to you once before, but I don't know if you have it on tape. Anyway, I'll capsule it real fast here. A committee was supposed to be doing this. After a while I said, "Well, Mr. Houston, I can't deal with this committee and I can't get anything done." I said, "Why don't we just disband this committee?" And he said, "Pajaud"—and I still remember the tone of his voice—he says, "Pajaud, you don't want to do that." He says, "Don't disband the committee. You're the chairman. Just don't call any more meetings, that's all." Which is the wise way of doing something like that, you know. After a while, there had been no meetings, and most people just tend to—

MASON:

They forget about it.

PAJAUD:

—forget it. They forget all about it. So then I was given the responsibility of me, myself, and I selecting everything. But then, about art I've always been kind of strong. I'm weak in a lot of other ways, but about art I'm relatively convinced that I know what I'm doing. See, the company is represented in a number of states. Periodically, on public relations and advertising business, or other kinds of business, I would have to go to these various cities where we had offices. In going around, you always kept your eyes wide open for somebody in that area who might be a potential artist for inclusion in the collection. I haven't always hit it right. One guy that I—ooooh! I won't mention

his name, but he is not in the collection. Because every now and then you find a—hit that thing.

MASON:

Oh, we'll pause for a minute. [tape recorder off] Okay, we're on now.

PAJAUD:

Where were we?

MASON:

Well, you were talking about how Golden State had different offices and—

PAJAUD:

Oh. So as I went around, you know, I constantly looked for artists who I could reasonably include in the collection. Then I also had some other great help, because Charles White, who traveled doing workshops and speeches and what have you, he went to New York. In going to New York, he was visiting Romare Bearden. I asked Charlie if he would see if he could get his hands on a Bearden piece for me, and Bearden did an original and then destroyed the block. It's the only one in existence.

### **1.10. TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO SEPTEMBER 29, 1989**

MASON:

Okay, we were talking about Charles White going to New York and visiting Romare Bearden.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. He got a beautiful one-color print. But it's gorgeous. It's almost silver. It's a beautiful print of Romy's. It's the only one in existence, and I don't know whether it should be called, really, a print or what. Another of Biggers's, after I'd made contact with him down in Houston—he was teaching at Texas Southern [University], head of the art department there, and any number of his students had been through his system and had become quite proficient painters. One of them—I really treasure his work—is a guy named Harvey Johnson. When I first bought a piece of Harvey's for the collection, it was a black and white drawing, *Conté Crayon*, I think, if I remember correctly. Yeah,

it was *Conté Crayon*. Subsequently, however, I have been able to get a really fine painting of his for inclusion in the collection. The names of artists in the collection really—Richard Wyatt [Jr.], who is one of the Tutor Arts [Program] people that I mentioned to you in our last meeting, I think.

MASON:

Maybe I can just give you the list that you gave me, and you can go through and—

PAJAUD:

Ah, very good. Yeah. That will be fine.

MASON:

Talk about whichever artists and whichever pieces ring a bell. I see that you try to collect a lot of different media.

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

And you even have some contemporary African pieces.

PAJAUD:

Right.

MASON:

Which is really unusual, because, of course, people don't think that contemporary African art really exists.

PAJAUD:

Oh, boy. There's some magnificent stuff being done.

MASON:

And Caribbean—

PAJAUD:

This guy right here, Momodu Cessay. Magnificent artist! Another one is Skunder, the Ethiopian. Skunder Bogasian. Magnificent artist, too. I think if there is a basic thread running through the collection, it is that what I attempted to do with the collection was to almost develop a buffet table on which there would be fish, fowl, etc., all kinds of things, and everybody would find something on that table which would take care of his or her appetite. It would have been foolish—I think it would have been foolish—to go modern all the way. I think it would have been even more foolish, on my part, to have tried to go pretty-pretty all the way, which is what so many people look upon art as—this is the role of art, you know, to be pretty. That is not necessarily the role of art, as I see it. I think art is a thing which should make a comment about the human condition. I don't necessarily think it should be a black fist upraised talking about black power when you have no power whatsoever, except in the pockets of a few individuals, you know, among blacks in this country. I'm not talking about rabble-rousing art. I think it makes some commentary on the human condition, but I'm not talking about propaganda which instigates any great movements, political or social movements of any kind. I happen to think that some of the most magnificent art that's ever been done in this country was done by blacks who never considered themselves artists. I'm talking about the quiltmakers of the South, Southeast. Talking about the basketweavers of the Carolinas. You know, art is just so many things that it's virtually impossible to say—

MASON:

When you say something to appeal to everyone, were you thinking mainly of—?

PAJAUD:

No, no. Not everyone. Something should be there which everyone—no. Everyone should find something.

MASON:

Right. That's what I meant.

PAJAUD:

That's what I want to say, really. Everybody's not going to like it, but somebody should like it. That was my concern. In looking at the least common denominator, I assumed that they would be more pleased with things they were used to seeing in magazines or in other places, and I knew there were others who were knowledgeable about art and art movements to wonder, "Why don't you have something of this person?" Now, there were times when the something of that person had such a high ticket value that I couldn't touch it. No, I've been offered some magnificent pieces of work over the years of Palmer Hayden, of Jake [Jacob] Lawrence, although, before I retired, I did manage to get his entire collection of his series on migration [*The Legend of John Brown*].

MASON:

Oh, really?

PAJAUD:

Yeah, twenty-three pieces in that portfolio, but it's never shown. It's in the vault upstairs. And until security can be guaranteed, I don't intend to show it. That's just too precious a commodity, and it's too transportable in a great, big building, where—I question sometimes whether or not we have the security we need for the collection as it exists, much less taking out some of those smaller, easily transportable things.

MASON:

Okay. So when you were talking about that somebody who it would appeal to, were you thinking of the employees, or did you—?

PAJAUD:

Employees, primarily. Primarily, always, it's been employees.

MASON:

Okay. When the collection started, did you think that you wanted it to be open to the public? Or did that come later?

PAJAUD:

Initially, and this was in the days before, what is that, Proposition 13 or whatever it is? Anyway, before the school system got crushed by lack of funds

and all of that business, we had regular tours of the collection. In fact, we had tour guides with uniforms. I think there were seven, if I remember correctly.

MASON:

They were especially tour guides? Or were they employees?

PAJAUD:

No, no, no. They were employees who had been trained over a brief period of time. And only if they ran into a really buzz saw of a mind, knowing a lot about art or what have you—I didn't even get involved with it. It was operated through the personnel department after we did the training. But the buses would come and unload, and some magnificent stories come to mind as a result. I think the most magnificent one, I don't know whether or not I should put it on tape. I'll think about that for a second. But we would actually have busloads of kids who would come. Some of those kids had never ridden on an elevator. No, I mean, if you come from certain parts of the city, why would you get on an elevator? There's no building in the area more than one story tall.

MASON:

That's true. I didn't think about that.

PAJAUD:

And we had a little program. We'd greet them in the auditorium, and the tour guides would take them on in groups of about twelve to fifteen, I think. No more than that. And there were some high spots on the tour, not all of it the art collection, incidentally. The computer was a very high-profile thing on the agenda. Those kids, when they saw it, you know, somebody really had to explain what the hell this thing did. And we had this meeting or little discussion or whatever, a speech, if you want to call it that. And the guys would split them up and take them around. One guide would start in the basement and another would start on the fifth floor and they'd go, you know—the ones on top would go down, the ones on the bottom would go up, floor by floor. A number of—oh, I remember that we had gotten so involved with one school that we adopted the school and the school turned around and adopted us and did a mural for us. That's Twenty-fourth Street School right

over here, right around the corner from the building. After the tour we'd meet—at least the tour guides would meet—in the cafeteria, and they knew—you know, young people had soft drinks and whatever you give to young kids. And it was a ball. You know, we got letters from the teachers and letters from the kids, oh, beautiful thank you notes from kids in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh [grades], on up through junior high. I don't think we ever had a group come in, at least under those circumstances, from any of the high schools. But we did have a few junior high schools. But most of them were young kids, some of whom became artists. I don't know how—qualitatively, I don't know how well they've done. But I know that a number of them became interested in art and started drawing and what have you.

MASON:

How did you let the schools know about the collection? Did you send out—?

PAJAUD:

Well, you see, they knew about the Tutor/Art program. The Tutor/Art and the collection, all these things got to be just one, big cultural snowball, if you will, because we got to the point, really, where we were spending more money on the art collection and promoting it than we were spending on promoting the company and its business. And that's when—. [laughter] "Hold on!" That's when we had to stop doing all those catalogs and what have you that we had done in the past. We also were not blessed, because our print shop was virtually wiped out. At one time we could do our own color printing. We had a big Webendorfer downstairs in the basement there, and we could do a lot of our own stuff. But I think the most exciting thing—and we've got to cut the tape on this one; I'll tell it to you, and then maybe we can figure out a way to clean it up.

MASON:

Okay. Let's pause. [tape recorder off]

PAJAUD:

There are all kinds of artists in this art collection, and a lot of them are here as a result of the calendar. We used them on the calendar. We used pieces of theirs on the calendar, so in return we purchased the piece for the collection.

As I look at it, such was the case with Charles White, although I think we have a bunch of Charlie's. One, two, three, four, five, six—six Charles Whites. Two of his son, Ian [White]. But anyway, Charles White was the first artist we used on the calendar. Then there was Kofi [H.] Bailey. That's how we got Kofi. That's how we got the first John Biggers. That's how we got the Brierre, the Haitian piece. I think you've seen that before. So a lot of pieces came as a result of the calendar, or came from having used the work of the artists on the calendar, in return for which we then purchased the piece.

MASON:

Okay. Well, then, I guess the next thing we should talk about is how you displayed the art, because Dale [Treleven] and I are both really impressed with how the pieces are out where everybody can see them. I mean, you could have everything in a vault, and you could have everything in—

PAJAUD:

Yeah, but it would not serve the original purpose for which the collection was conceived, or around which the collection was conceived. What we have always wanted to do, and we have done it, not only with the art collection, but with many other of our business things—we want it to be the repository, so to speak, for those good things that we know to be good about our people. The art collection is just one facet of that entire philosophy. We have, in addition to the art collection, something else I found there, which very few people now even know about, except the old-timers who are retired or maybe still there from years ago. We have a tremendous Afro-American collection of books and papers. The Titus Alexander Library, in fact, was donated to Golden State by Titus Alexander himself before his death, or in his will after his death, I don't know which. I found it there. At one time we actually had a full-time library which was open all day. The person who was the librarian doubled in brass; she did other things. But you could go and check out books and—

MASON:

What kind of books were these? On black history?

PAJAUD:

Oh, black history, yeah. Like, what was the name of the first black newspaper in California? It was the *Elevator*, by the way. Pamphlets on Biddy Mason, how she got here, how she won her freedom, how, at one time, she owned just blocks of downtown Los Angeles. Books on black artists, black musicians.

MASON:

So you say the collection is still at Golden State? This library?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed.

MASON:

But it's not being used?

PAJAUD:

No, it's not being used. It's under lock and key. No, it's not being used. See, there are some things that are so valuable, Karen, that you almost dare not put them out, not because anybody might steal them, but because today there's just a concept among people—and I'm not only talking about black people, I mean people in general—that virtually everything is expendable except they themselves and whatever they are concerned with. The concept of history and respecting history and things of that kind—now everybody feels that the civil rights started with Martin Luther King [Jr.]. All the people before him, you know, Carter G. Woodson, [W.E.B.] Du Bois, all those people, you know. They don't know a thing about them. There's Martin Luther King, and then, if they don't go back that far, they go to [Louis] Farrakhan, and suddenly, you know, this is it. All the other stuff that went on is just ignored, unknown by them, ignored by people, or whatever. And until such time as this thing can be put into the hands of people who will know what to do with it, how to deal with it—UCLA right now has a five-drawer filing cabinet filled with material, archival material, related to Golden State. It's there because we looked up one day and found that some bright young fellow, who was concerned with profit and loss, was about to sell all this stuff for paper.

MASON:

For scrap paper, you mean.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Then there was a time that I went downstairs and found that the Titus Alexander collection was about to be thrown out, too.

MASON:

Just as trash?

PAJAUD:

Yeah.

MASON:

That's really sad.

PAJAUD:

And that, I fear, unless—this is something that Ivan [J.] Houston and I wrestle with almost constantly: What are we going to do with that art collection? Because when I'm gone and he's gone, who's going to take care of it? Who's going to make sure that it doesn't just come down off the wall? At least there are people now who know, if they get ready to paint, somebody's supposed to call me. I come and supervise the movement of paintings from that wall or walls, those walls, which they're going to paint, and arrange for them to be stored and then replaced. I know of one painting job that took place over there that affected two paintings. One, incidentally, which is one that I pretty much gave to a—it's not part of the collection, really, but it is now. But she [Amanda Lockett] wanted some sunflowers, so I did this great big thing of sunflowers sitting on a table. Hanging next to it was another small triangular painting. And they painted walls, but you know where they put the paintings when they were painting the walls? On top of a desk.

MASON:

On top of a desk.

PAJAUD:

And the splatter from the rollers—yeah. So, as I say, this thing is probably—I think I spend more time worrying about what's going to happen to that collection than I do any other inanimate thing in my life.

MASON:

What about some of the employees who are trained to give tours? Would it be possible to—?

PAJAUD:

Gone.

MASON:

They're all gone?

PAJAUD:

Gone. All gone.

MASON:

What you're saying is that there are no plans to hire someone just to take care of the collection?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no. There never was that. That was never a plan. No. The company's just not in a financial position to have one person do this as his or her job. It was always—see, actually, the company's been very lucky. The company's been very lucky in many respects. I talked about the calendar and the fact that, for years, photographs were used. Well, photographs were used because we had a guy who was working in planning and public relations who was a damn good photographer, Leonard Grimes. Leonard's photographs were the ones that we used for the calendar. I think the most miserable calendar the company ever published was the one they published for the year 1957, which was the year I went there. It was a card, not much larger than this, maybe nine by twelve [inches], and it had a big black bear up here, and some other business, and "Golden State," and then the months, with no art, no anything. That was done by an advertising agency. It wasn't done by anybody in the company. It was a disaster. I think I threw away 40,000 my first week there. Nobody wanted them. Grimes really was helpful in those early days when I first started over there, in terms of how to get things done and how not to get things done in the company. He and I worked quite closely over the years until he left and went to work in Sacramento. He was one of Brown's, [Edmund G.] Jerry Brown

[Jr.]—not the old man, but the young fellow. He was in charge of special services for the state of California. Until he left, then, he and I really had what I thought was an equal in terms of taste and quality levels and, you know, all this kind of business. I subsequently found one or two others, but you don't find a lot of folks like that in a life insurance company. I don't mean black, I mean any life insurance company. The whole nature of that business is anti people with taste or whatever.

MASON:

It has that reputation, life insurance\*

PAJAUD:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MASON:

Like accounting or something.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, right. But anyway, as I say, the company was lucky, has been lucky over the years. They had Grimes, they had me, they had other people who worked in data processing who had virtually grown up in the company, dedicated people, people who just did everything they could to make Golden State work, with no personal thought of gain of any kind, you know. In fact, there was a time in Golden State's history when employees worked overtime, three, four, five hours overtime at night, and Mr. Nickerson would go out and get them all a plate of barbeque, and that was the pay for overtime.

MASON:

They used to?

PAJAUD:

Huh?

MASON:

You said, "They used to."

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah.

MASON:

Not any more?

PAJAUD:

Oh, no. You'd never get that today. No, no. The whole nature of our society today is, "What's in it for me?" You know, I mean, there's no attempt made to go the extra mile and say, "Well, I think I'll just do—." I don't mean that nobody does it. I'm sure the whole society would fall apart if nobody did it. Somebody's doing it, but not in the aggregate, as it used to be. At one time, everybody looked at their jobs that way. But then, at one time, blacks—particularly blacks—couldn't go anywhere but Golden State if they wanted to wear a collar and tie and, you know, do a businessman-businesswoman thing. But then came fair employment practices and all that business, and then the other folks wanted them. The IBMs and the this,, that, and the other, you know. So what was a captive labor market was dispersed so that it was spread all over society. And we were one of the strongest advocates for fair practices, Golden State was. So anyway, now we're at the collection, still, or back to the collection. I was guessing at how many pieces were in the collection earlier.

MASON:

It says there.

PAJAUD:

But I think I could count—I'm not even counting the stuff that's in the district offices all over the place. Oh, there's not a number here. Yes, there is: 218. And that doesn't include some of the pieces which are in other offices around the Los Angeles area, and also up in Oakland, California.

MASON:

Okay, I notice that some of them are owned by you.

PAJAUD:

Yeah, those have to be all—all that has to be updated.

MASON:

Okay. So they're not—

PAJAUD:

This is a very interesting story about the collection. This young fellow—

MASON:

Okay, Terry Collins.

PAJAUD:

His name is Terry Collins. His mother was P'lla Mills. P'lla, too, died under somewhat the same circumstances as Beulah Woodard, meaning, you know, a lot of work was available. Nobody particularly wanted it. Terry didn't want it, didn't have the space for it, and wasn't, at that time, too interested. So I said to Terry, "Look. Why don't you let us have the work, your mother's work? I'll sign a contract indicating that we will give you all the publicity and everything else, that these pieces are on permanent loan from you. And at any time, you can, with"—I think it was six months notice "we'll be more than happy to return them all to you." Terry calls me—he lives up north, in San Francisco—every now and then—I think he had some problems, but I don't know. But every now and then, now, he calls very rationally and everything else, and he wants to know how things are going. When I say "every now and then," I mean eighteen months, a year goes by, I don't hear from him. So one time he called, and I just knew he was—in fact, he had every intention of taking those pieces back. So I invited him down to see them. He came down, he saw them, and he saw his name—on every label for the piece was his name, so and so and so and so. He said, "You know. Bill, I'll tell you something." He said, "People have been trying to tell me what a fool I was," so and so and so and so, "I would never have taken this kind of care of these pieces. So you just keep them. Now, if you're ever not going to be around, you let me know. But as long as you're around, they're going to stay here." But you're talking about what amounts to—oh, god, I'm just eyeballing it. Five, six—you're talking about maybe seventeen pieces of sculpture, tapestry. And that's the kind of luck, you know. Just the fact I was known as a black artist, I was known to work for Golden State. He didn't have anyplace to put these paintings, sculpture, and what have you, and so he called and said, "Hey," and I said, "Yeah." And boy, I don't think the lawyers ever got a chance to look at that

contract. [laughter] I don't trust lawyers, I'm sorry. So anyhow, it's there. And if ever he wants it, why, it's right there waiting for him.

MASON:

Now, what do the employees, overall, think of the collection? I know you told me before, when you were giving me a tour, that sometimes you would place something and someone wouldn't like it, and you would take it down.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Well, to begin with, the whole business of an art collection was kind of strange to a lot of people. Usually I say that employees are ahead of management in some things, but this time management was ahead of employees, because they accepted it long before—In fact, we had one fellow [Edgar J. Johnson] who didn't accept the idea of an art collection. Still alive. One of our former presidents. Richard Wyatt did a portrait of him to go on the wall of honor. Very interesting. He never saw the wisdom of an art collection. He thought the whole thing was a grand waste of time and everything else. The Studio Museum in Harlem, however, decided to honor us at their big banquet one year. Always trying to win friends and influence people, I suggested that Mr. Johnson go to collect the award. When he came back from that trip, he came down to see me. "My god! Do you know they think you're a genius back there in New York?" I said, "What? What are you talking about?" I knew what he was talking about. He said, "My, I have never been so impressed with anything!" Because what they did, I had provided them with a slide show of the collection, selected pieces. I think I did about forty. Naturally, I picked out the best. He said he sat there in that audience and he said, "I just glowed." I said, "My god, that's wonderful." [laughter] So I said, "Well, the last battle has been won." Because early on in my career with Golden State, Norman O. Houston started buying paintings, first with my recommendation, and then on his own. Mr. Beavers bought one, two, three—he bought three of my paintings, two for his office and one for his home. He bought a big Charles White etching. You know, everybody started doing something except this one man, who went to New York and came back so impressed. Very, very sweet guy, but, as I say, he couldn't see the—he couldn't make that jump between business and the art collection. UCLA graduate, by the way.

MASON:

Don't say that. [laughter] Okay.

PAJAUD:

Yeah. Yeah, he finished at UCLA. I think he was in the same class as Ralph [J.] Bunche.

MASON:

What about the regular employees? Do you think they—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, that's what I was about to say. The regular employees had, in the beginning, much the same impression as that young man, the story which I told you off the tape—not nearly so colorfully done, but they really—when they found out that they were going to be able to see this art all the time, that it wasn't going into the executive offices on the fifth floor to stay there, or that it wasn't going, you know, into the lobby only, but they would have some around them, too, it was just a magnificent experience. They enjoyed it tremendously. Many of those people are now gone. And the new people—well, you already know what I think about new people.

MASON:

Do people ask you questions about it? Or do they just—?

PAJAUD:

Oh, yeah. Periodically someone will ask me questions. Periodically someone will ask me if they can come over here and see what I'm doing over here, because they know I'm over here working. The general reception was quite good on the part of employees. Never as strong as it was on the part of the public, though. No, the public, that great, quote, "unwashed" public of young grammar school, junior high school kids, the artists, the art instructors, the administrative people downtown, all of these people, they were absolutely in ecstasy, because there was no place anybody could go and see black art in those days. I mean, there was no such thing as your saying, "Well, I'll direct myself to the museum." There wasn't any. Apart from the May Company museum [Museum of Afro-American Art], there wasn't any, and almost no

galleries that showed black art. They never even thought about black art. I think I might have been the first black on La Cienega [Boulevard]; Charles White would have been the second one, when he got here; and then Leon Leonard—others have come since, I'm sure, but I'm not into the gallery scene anymore, locally. I don't pay any attention to it. I just do my work and paint my pictures and do my watercolors and that's it. That's about the size of it.

MASON:

Okay, well, we've just got a few minutes left on the tape, and the last question I wanted to ask you, and then you can add anything you want to afterwards, is it seems that, for black artists, the sense, as you've been saying, they really lack a lot of support in the community. Support by individuals who know about art—that it seems that corporations have come in and sort of taken over the role of, say, art patrons for black artists for the most part. I was just wondering how you felt.

PAJAUD:

Oh, I don't know that—I don't know if that's completely true. I know at one time that was true, but more and more people are getting into the business of collecting art. I was quite surprised. I had a show in Boston in '85, I think it was. A very successful show. Of course, those people are—the woman who handled that show, Liz Harris, is one of the great female entrepreneurs of the world, as far as I'm concerned. She's in the same style as the *Market Women, Ghana* and pieces like that. But I was just quite surprised that in Boston virtually 80 percent of my stuff was sold to blacks who had almost no history of collecting art, and being paid for with time payments, credit cards, all kinds of business. I'd say most of these people in those days—well, that's just three, four years ago. I'd say most of those people were in that, oh, \$25,000 to, say, \$35,000, \$40,000 a year family incomes. More and more people who are not, quote, "big collectors," are beginning to buy art. I don't mean that an artist can live on what they buy. You know that. No way! But there is more movement in that direction among blacks. I don't ever hold much hope for most of the black doctors and lawyers and the BMW boys and the Mercedes boys and all those folks. They're stretched too thin with their own stuff right now, unless they really, really, really have it made. I don't even think about them in terms of a potential market. In fact, I don't even think about a market.

I just paint pictures, and then I hand them to somebody else and she does something with them and the next thing I know I get a check. That's all I'm—you know. My involvement has to be just producing the work. And more and more black artists are feeling that way. That's why a lot of us have—or did have—until I retired, I had an eight-to-five job. And so many others have the same kind of situation. Richard Wyatt, as successful as he's been, he still has got to do his music to keep the art going. He's a hell of an artist, well, both visual and sound. Keyboards. Keyboards like a genius. He has a great big keyboard sitting right in the middle of his studio there at home. And he works with people like Quincy Jones and Aretha [Franklin] and folks like that, so he's not a slouch. And he's written for some of the new groups. He also has done a lot of work—sound engineering work—with the old New Edition, when they first came out, the New Edition. But he's got to do all that to keep meat on the table and keep canvas on the easel and take care of his kids and his family responsibilities. His wife works, but, hey, that's—virtually everybody's working. I mean, most of us who have done anything have had to have two people doing it.

MASON:

So you don't think it will really ever change? That there will someday be a—

PAJAUD:

Oh, no, I don't think you'll ever have that great a revolution here, because art is not that important in the Western world.

MASON:

Well, America especially.

PAJAUD:

Well—okay, yeah. I guess—the United States of America. I should say that, because it's very important in Mexico. So I shouldn't really say in the Western world. But an artist is never going to have the support in this country, unless he's a freak. You know, the Andy Warhols and the people who paint tomato cans and American flags—Jasper Johnses and folks like that. Sure, sure. But those are some of the few who have been selected by the establishment to be, quote, "great." It's all a matter of the establishment's selecting you to be

great. Nothing to do with the quality of your work or anything else. I think only history can really determine who is great. I think the perspective of looking at an artist who is still alive and assuming that he's, you know, "the greatest artist since—" is crazy. Even the saint, Picasso, that nobody will say anything bad about, that monkey copied so much of that stuff from the African sculpture that was coming into Europe from the Congo and all the other places in Africa. That's all they did. They painted African sculpture, and suddenly they were "geniuses." Oh, well.

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