A TEI Project

Interview of Marvin Harden

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 23, 1992

MASON

> I'm talking with Marvin Harden in his home [Inwardness Ranch] fifteen miles outside Cambria. The first question we always ask is, when and where were you born?

HARDEN

> Well, I'll answer that in part.

MASON

> Okay. [laughter]

HARDEN

> I was born in Austin, Texas. I've always had very strong feelings that age is irrelevant, so I never tell people when I was born. It keeps it more mysterious or something perhaps. I don't know.

MASON

> And who are your parents?

HARDEN

Ethel and Theodore Harden.

MASON

What's your mother's maiden name?

HARDEN

Sneed.

MASON

And who are your grandparents?

HARDEN

Savannah Patton Sneed and Albert Sneed. That's my mother's parents, of course. My father's parents I never knew. His father died when he was a youth, a baby, really. His mother, although she died after I was born, I was too young to remember. So I don't know them. In fact, I don't even know their names. It's a shame, isn't it? But I can't remember their names. *[Their names were Emma Jane Roland Harden and Saul Harden.]

MASON

Do you have any siblings?

HARDEN

I have two older sisters. One is deceased, died in an auto accident.

MASON

What year was that?

HARDEN

I think she died in 1966. She was only thirty-nine or something, I think. And she was the middle child. Both my sisters are much older than I am.

MASON

I see. What are their names?

HARDEN

My older sister is Lura, Lura [Harden] Miller. And my younger sister was Chester, Chester [Harden] Ruffin.

MASON

What did your parents do occupation-wise?

HARDEN

My mother, when she worked, was a domestic. And my father worked different jobs, but most of the time he worked in a bakery as a janitor. He didn't usually bake the bread; he worked as a janitor.

MASON

So your family pretty much comes from Texas? Or did they migrate into Texas?

HARDEN

My parents came from Texas. Early on I suppose some ancestors migrated. I have some very interesting kind of ancestry.

MASON

You might want to mention some.

HARDEN

Well, my extended family just had a huge reunion about a couple of years ago down in Memphis, Tennessee. And the significance of Memphis is that I think it was my great-grandfather [John Overton] was a slaveowner, and he was a friend and adviser to Andrew Jackson. He and Jackson and another man [James Winchester] founded Memphis, Tennessee. And his home, part of his farm, is still in existence and is a part of a state historical landmark [Traveler's Rest, Nashville, Tennessee].

MASON

Did he acknowledge the black side of his family?

HARDEN

I am not sure. When my black relatives were freed, they went to Texas to a place called, I think, Saint John's Colony, which is close to Austin. And I have

heard he gave them money and so forth. He was one of the kinder slaveowners, I suppose.

MASON

Just out of curiosity, Saint John's Colony, was that a special sort of religious sort of a colony?

HARDEN

No. Well, you know, Saint John's Colony and Saint Mary's Colony, these were little places, little communities out in the country. There were farms and little schoolhouses and one or two churches, and that was about it. It was just a farming community, not a city or town.

MASON

I see. Are there any artists in your family that you know of?

HARDEN

No. No, everybody else is normal. I'm the only one. The younger of my two sisters did have some drawing ability. I have two nephews [Allen Miller and Paris Earl], both now deceased, who as a hobby drew. But nobody really took it seriously except for me.

MASON

How did that come about, your interest in art?

HARDEN

To tell you the truth, I don't really know. I've just always been interested. I started drawing-- I can't even remember when I started drawing. I started drawing as a youth, as a little kid. I obviously got a lot of attention because of the talent. I used to do all the drawings in school that were necessary. Before the Christmas holiday, I would draw on the blackboard in pastels. And before Thanksgiving, I would draw Thanksgiving scenes and that kind of thing in all the homerooms. I got to get out of class and go around and do that stuff. So that was kind of nice. And I just drew on my own. I never did any painting until I got into college. I never went to museums when I was a kid. I didn't live in a place or a circumstance where that was--

MASON

So when did your parents actually move to California or to Los Angeles?

HARDEN

Well, my father moved here, moved to California, to Santa Monica, I think about 1940 to seek work, and my mother and I moved out the next year. So we lived in Santa Monica for a while. And for a short period of time, my mother and I went up to Washington, to Bremerton. That's a suburb of Seattle. Both my sisters were up there working in a defense plant or something. And then we came back down here after about a year and lived in Santa Monica for another year or two. Then I went back to Austin and I finished school in Austin. Then I moved out here, this time to Los Angeles, to where my father was living. After I came out, my mother came out, then my sisters came out, and eventually the whole family was back in Los Angeles.

MASON

So when would you say that you became aware of other artists, or of the possibility of having a career as an artist?

HARDEN

Well, you know, it's a funny thing. I was out here [in Los Angeles] and I was working, you know, a nine-to-five thing, or eight-to-five or whatever. I was out of school, and a couple of guys from my hometown [John Searcy and Walter Ellison] came out. They were guys I knew, but they were not really buddy-buddy with me. But I knew them. They said, "We're going to go over to LACC [Los Angeles City College] and go out for football. Why don't you come out?" I had played football for my high school and I was supposed to be an outstanding athlete. So I said, "Okay." So I went out to LACC and enrolled. I was a good student. I was an outstanding student in college, high school, elementary school, and junior high. I was an honor student. When I got to college I didn't know what to major in because I liked everything. So I just decided, out of naiveté, that I wanted to be an artist, because I wouldn't have to answer to anybody. I mean, I didn't know what I was talking about, of course, so I just decided kind of like on the spur of the moment. Art was just one of the several things that I really liked. I mean, if I had a whole bunch of

lives to live, I would probably change each time and be something different, because I do have a lot of interests.

MASON

Who were some of the instructors at L.A. City College that you remember?

HARDEN

Steve Pritko was my football head coach. There was a Professor Olsen--I don't remember his first name--a very nice man, very encouraging. He taught commercial courses like lettering. Of course, I didn't like lettering, but I liked him a lot. *[Mrs. Kopenhaver, with whom I studied two-dimensional design, I liked a lot.]

MASON

Why didn't you like lettering?

HARDEN

Well, I always had a penchant for fine art. I didn't particularly care for commercial art except maybe illustration. I thought perhaps I could be an illustrator because I liked the outdoors. I liked the country, I liked animals, and I liked to draw those things. I did when I was a kid. And I used to read Field and Stream and Odyssey and those kinds of magazines which are men's hunting, adventure story magazines. They were supposed to be true adventures and true hunting experiences and fishing, and all that stuff. They were illustrated, and I kind of wanted to do that, illustrate those kinds of stories in those kinds of magazines. So that was my first thought when I went to LACC. And then, after taking a few courses, it became rather clear to me that I didn't particularly want to do that. I wanted to be a fine artist instead. And of course, I was taking art history courses and for the first time being exposed to European and American art history.

MASON

Do you remember being attracted to a particular artist or style at the time?

HARDEN

Well, it's kind of strange. I mean, I didn't have any real strong attraction at first to anybody in particular. I'd liked El Greco because there was something very

sensitive I thought about these extremely elongated figures that he did. I don't particularly care for El Greco now, but I did then. And I became acquainted fairly early with John Constable, the English landscapist. I liked his work a great deal, especially the rough stuff-- not the really well finished pictures but his more painterly statements. I still like that stuff. He's not necessarily one of my favorites anymore, but I can still relate to him. And William Turner, also an English painter. At that time I was very limited; I didn't have a lot of information. I hadn't had a background really in museum art, and all this stuff that I was beginning to see in art history was new to me. That's one of the difficulties, I suppose, in growing up relatively poor and a minority in this country. You don't have the exposure that others might have. As a matter of fact, that's where I met Melvin Edwards. He was a schoolmate and classmate, and we also played football together.

MASON

So he was majoring in art at the time as well.

HARDEN

Yeah, yeah. We were really weird, you know? Two art majors playing football, that's unusual. [laughter] We're really real close. We've been close for almost forty years now. And the strange thing about us is that we're absolute opposites in everything: the way we look, where we live--he on the East Coast, me on the West Coast--he's in a big city, me in the country. He's big and robust--not to say, you know, getting a little fat, as it were--and I'm thin and lean and all of that. He was a lineman and I was a back, if you know what that means.

MASON

I actually don't.

HARDEN

I was the ball carrier. I was the person who carried the football.

MASON

So how did you two get together, then, being such opposites?

HARDEN

Well, you know, it just happened. I think we met each other-- In fact, I know we met each other on the football team and came to be friends, realized we were both art majors, would get together outside of school, buddy around, pal around, go play sandlot football together, just do things together. I had a car, he didn't. That's another difference in us and all that.

MASON

Yeah, in L.A. that makes a big difference.

HARDEN

So I used to go pick him up when we wanted to play football or something, and get him, and we'd go out to the park or wherever we were going to meet the other guys to play sandlot football. So it was a real great friendship. It still is, except it's obviously limited in terms of being long-distance now.

MASON

At a point where you began to be exposed to more art history, did you start to go out to the galleries and things--as many as there were in L.A. at the time-- and read magazines and things?

HARDEN

Yeah. Mainly--

MASON

Where would you go?

HARDEN

Well, I saw magazines and all of that stuff, but I really started getting familiar with the galleries about my junior year. By that time I was over at UCLA, and I was going to the Dwan Gallery, which was located in Westwood [Village] at the time. I'd go down there a lot. It was, I guess, right next door to Flax art store. So it was like I was always in the area, down in the Village. It's not a village anymore, right?

MASON

Yeah, it's changed a lot.

HARDEN

And I would go to Felix Landau, which was really an outstanding gallery at the time; and David Stuart [Galleries], which was a fine gallery at the time; and Ceeje Galleries. Ceeje actually became my first dealer before I was out of college. I was very fortunate to get a dealer before I was even out of graduate school.

MASON

So what was most impressive about the work in the galleries? Did you look at mostly New York art? Or did you look at some of the L.A. art? Or did you look at European art?

HARDEN

I looked at all of it. Yeah, I looked at all of it. I didn't get to see as much New York art in the flesh, so to speak, because it wasn't as readily available all the time. It was, but not all the time. But, of course, the local art--

MASON

I think at Irving Blum [Gallery] they had it.

HARDEN

Irving Blum, yeah. Irving Blum was also a dealer of mine later on. Yeah, I used to go to Irving Blum's gallery. He had a nice little space up on La Cienega that I really loved, and it just fit my work, because I'd always, for the most part, worked on a modest scale. It was really a neat, clean space, and I like that. But no, I saw a lot of stuff. And I obviously saw a lot of stuff in the course of looking at magazines and books and reading--since I worked in UCLA's Powell Library and later the [University] Research Library--and having art history courses and seminars and stuff like that. I became very enamored of nineteenth-century American art, George Inness and Ralph Blakelock and people like that. Especially Albert Pinkham Ryder, who I think if I had to choose one artist as my favorite it would be Albert Pinkham Ryder.

MASON

Why is that?

HARDEN

Well, I think we're kindred spirits. I mean, my work doesn't look anything like his. Thank goodness for that! Thank goodness in the sense that I'm not being that derivative. But he was a person who went his own way. He was a visual poet. He was a person who, in many respects, loved natural things. I just found his work very fascinating. You know, it's like you could tell that there was something very unique about the person. The work doesn't look like anybody else's work, really. It's just amazingly dense and beautiful and poetic. So I just kind of really discovered him in college and liked his work very much. And the love affair hasn't diminished. I still love his work.

MASON

So did you and Mel Edwards kind of initiate each other into sort of what was going on in the art community, as much as you were involved?

HARDEN

Yeah, to some extent. To some extent. Mel was a little more experienced than I was in the art field. I mean, we'd both done drawings and things as we grew up as little people, as kids and everything. But I think Mel had had art courses and things like that before. I'd never had any art courses until I was in college. He's a much more outgoing person than I am, too. I am a much more reserved person than he was after we got out of college, or even while we were still in college, even though I got a dealer quicker than he did. So things came to me, but it wasn't so much they came to me because I went out and got them. They came to me out of good fortune oftentimes. You know, somebody else would run interference for me and do something to introduce me to somebody, like my first dealer, Sheila Ross, who was a schoolmate of mine at UCLA. She graduated from graduate school a year or so before I did, and she was with Ceeje Galleries. She told Jerry [Jerome] and Cecil [Hedrick], the two fellows who ran Ceeje Galleries, about me. So they had her ask me to bring some stuff in, and I did. And they took me into the gallery. It was like, you know, really easy. I mean, it just kind of like happened. But it happened because of somebody else; it happened because of Sheila to a great measure.

MASON

Well, it also happened because you were doing excellent work, obviously.

HARDEN

Well, yeah, we'd like to think that, but, you know, modesty forbids me to say it that way. But anyway, I think I obviously had done enough that they were receptive to what I was doing.

MASON

So what kinds of things were you doing as a graduate student at UCLA?

HARDEN

I was doing a couple of different things, mostly things that were inspired by nature. Early on I was doing straight-out landscapes, but that was when I was like an undergraduate for the most part.

MASON

Now, these were drawings or prints?

HARDEN

They were both drawings and paintings, and occasionally--

MASON

Oils?

HARDEN

Oils. Always oils. And occasionally-- When I took printmaking I made some prints, but that was really not a major part of what I was doing; it only happened when I took a course. And I only took printmaking twice, so it didn't happen an awful lot. And then, as I got a little bit more sophisticated I guess, the work started changing, taking on some degree of abstraction, but still based in and born out of inspiration from landscapes, from natural information, natural sources. And I did some rather large paintings as a graduate student, almost none of which still exist. They all burned up in a fire at some point in time, later on, after I got out of school, after I became a professional. So I was doing drawings mostly and paintings. And that's what the dealers at Ceeje saw.

MASON

What year was that, that you went to Ceeje's?

HARDEN

I think I started to show at Ceeje in 1964.

MASON

Would you say that there was a dominant aesthetic at UCLA when you were there? How would you say you fit into that aesthetic or didn't fit in?

HARDEN

There was probably a dominant-- Yeah, I think there was a dominant aesthetic there, and I did not fit in. I never fit in. I've never fit in anywhere at any time in my whole life in anything. [laughter] As you can see, I tend to go off my own way. You can tell that by where I live and all of that, I suppose. At least I think you can draw conclusions. There were people-- It really was an amazing group at UCLA when I was there. There were about fifteen to twenty people who went to that school at the same time and who knew each other who managed to go on and have viable art careers, who are nationally known at the least.

MASON

Like for example?

HARDEN

Chas [Charles] Garabedian, who is older than all the rest of us. Chas was in that-- He was kind of like the leader of the dominant group, and they were doing work that, oh, I guess had a feeling of folk art and a naive kind of quality about it. And Pete [Peter] Alexander was at the other extreme vis-à-vis age. He was like one of the youngest of the people there. And there were Tony Berlant and Ben Sakoguchi and Vija Celmins. Vija Celmins and I are probably a lot closer to each other vis-à-vis our sensibility. And maybe Peter Alexander too; he has a fine sensibility too. People tend to see us as having some similarities in that kind of way, not necessarily in imagery. And Judy Chicago was there. Judy and I used to be really good buddies when she was in school. And Max Hendler, who turned out to be a rather formidable realist painter. I don't know what he's doing right now. Michael Todd was a sculptor that was a little older. In fact, he was a TA [teaching assistant]. He taught a printmaking class that I took at one point. Who else was there? Fidel Danieli, who is now deceased, who didn't do as much as an artist but did as an educator and critic

and writer. You know, he managed to do some good things. *[Among others were Lloyd Hamrol, Jerrold Burchman, Lance Richbourg, amd Judith von Euer.] And there are others that are not coming to mind right now. But there are a lot of them. That's a few who were there.

MASON

Okay. I just wanted to give an example of the kind of artists that were there.

HARDEN

It was a lucky time to come through there. I mean, the competition was stiff. It's really kind of interesting. Even though there was a dominant group, there were a lot of people who were all different from each other, especially now that we are mature and have been working for a long time.

MASON

So would you say that by the time you left graduate school you had pretty much formed your--?

HARDEN

Aesthetic direction?

MASON

Yeah. Or when you were at the Ceeje, did they say, "We like it, but," you know, "Put some red in" or something? [laughter]

HARDEN

I'm not the kind of person you can do that with, anyway. I would not accept it. With my sense of myself and personal integrity and stubbornness and everything else, I would never do that. And I think most people when they get to know me would not even approach me that way. But I've had a kind of growth pattern that has been very singular in that I have known what I wanted to do and what I'm interested in for a long time, and I have simply gotten better, I think, at doing it and come closer to the essence of getting to what I want to get to as I've gotten older and more experienced. My growth has been rather organic in that it's been like a plant that germinates and pokes its head through the soil and eventually flowers and fruits and [does] whatever it wants to do. But it's this long, slow process. That's kind of been my

development. It's been very slow, and it's been very kind of steady and all in the same direction more or less.

MASON

I want to talk about a few of your earlier works. This is called Black Dimensions in Contemporary American Art [by J. Edward Atkinson], and they have--

HARDEN

Well, I didn't even know that I was in there.

MASON

Oh, well, this is one of the nicest reproductions of your work. I mean, most of them--

HARDEN

Don't reproduce well.

MASON

But this one is. At least it's got some of the texture and the color.

HARDEN

Let me see it.

MASON

And it's called-- Could you read the title and the date?

HARDEN

It's perfectly logical and inevitable . That's 1967. It's pencil, it is 21 1/4 inches by 17 3/16 inches, in the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Leon O. Banks in Los Angeles, California. Yeah.

MASON

What kind of paper--? Did you have a friend make this paper?

HARDEN

I really don't remember this paper. I think just looking at the reproduction and trying to recall the piece, the paper was a very delicate kind of paper. It might

have even been rice paper. I'm not sure. I don't remember. And I've never seen this publication before.

MASON

Oh, well, everybody's in it from Lois Malou Jones to-- So they didn't even ask your permission? Well, I guess they had to ask the Banks's permission to reproduce this.

HARDEN

Probably not. No, I'm sure they didn't ask my permission. At this time--what is it?--in the sixties? See, I moved to Cold Comfort--that was the name of my little place near Chatsworth--in '68. And from '68 to somewhere about '78 I did only drawings. I didn't do any painting at all. The reason for that is that I moved to a very small house. I enlarged it immediately, but I didn't have a lot of storage space. So I could do drawings because you can just store them flat. When I first moved there, I just did them in my living room, and I stored them under my bed between cardboard. Very good in terms of--

MASON

Conservation.

HARDEN

[laughter] Yeah, right. So for a long time I didn't do any painting because I didn't have anyplace to do the painting or store the paintings. So when I started painting again it was really kind of scary.

MASON

When did you start painting again?

HARDEN

I started painting in about '78. I had a hiatus of about ten years without doing any painting at all. And it's kind of strange now because I don't do very many drawings anymore, not the kind of things that you would see like behind you over there.

MASON

You might as well name the series that you're working on right now.

HARDEN

The series that I'm working on?

MASON

Yeah. Then we can talk about them more in detail later.

HARDEN

I'm working on two series. I'm working on one series that are small things in gouache, very intimate little images. They are born out of something I did years ago in the early sixties. That series in the early sixties was called "melancholia," and these things are called--something different. [laughter] I don't know if I can remember the title. [laughter] The reason I said that is because the title is rather long. My titles have tended to get longer and longer because they tend to be bits of poetry that I make up.

MASON

So the work precedes the title.

HARDEN

The work precedes the title, yeah. And then I'm also working on a continuation of this series I've been doing a long time. They're in oils and other mixed media stuff. And that's called untitled image--in the gap of passage. Of course, each work in the series has its own number.

MASON

Okay. Well, I'm going to take you back to the sixties again and talk about your drawings. Now, you mentioned that this was rice paper in the perfectly logical--

HARDEN

I think it's rice paper. I can't remember, really.

MASON

So you've always had an interest in paper and textures and things like that. How did that--?

HARDEN

I have an interest in paper, but I'm not really a very technical person. And I'm not the kind of artist that has a real strong affinity for papers or different materials. I would go into an art store, open up the drawers, look at the paper, feel it, and buy it, and maybe not even pay any attention to the name of the stuff, you know. That's the way I tend to work. I'm not very technical.

MASON

Okay. How does the title relate to the piece? I mean, the titles are obviously very intriguing, and you kind of wonder what the philosophy is.

HARDEN

What's behind it.

MASON

Or is it Zen? Or it is Dada? [laughter]

HARDEN

I mean, it's more Zen than anything else, more Zen. I'm both influenced by Zen and also come to it naturally. In fact, I was very Zen before I knew what Zen was, before I had any knowledge of what it might be or any exposure to it. And the same is true of existentialism. I had an affinity for and a kind of philosophy that is akin to existentialism even before I was ever aware of it or heard the word. So my works tend to be philosophical in part, poetic in part, influenced by nature in part, symbolic in part. There are a lot of facets to it. And one of the things about the titles, I don't tend to explain the titles, because I want people to simply think about what they're looking at and what they're reading, and they don't have to come up with an answer. It's simply part of the involvement, an attempt on my part to stimulate thought. Oftentimes the titles are very cryptic. More often than not they're very cryptic. It's difficult to know exactly what the meaning happens to be or even to make the connection between what the title is saying vis-à-vis the words and their combination and what the image is. That particular work that you're looking at in that book, I don't even remember what I was thinking at the time. What year is that? 'Sixty-seven?

MASON

'Sixty-seven. Yeah, it's a long time to go back. Is this an abstract on the left side or--?

HARDEN

Yes. Oh, no, that's-- Let me see that.

MASON

It's hard to see.

HARDEN

It's so tiny, but that's a tree image.

MASON

Okay.

HARDEN

And the other thing's abstract. The other thing is totally abstract. The tree image and abstract image are a juxtaposition of a recognizable thing and a thing that is unrecognizable which gives it a kind of symbolist quality.

MASON

Is it symbolist?

HARDEN

Kind of a symbolist twist, I think.

MASON

And in Elsa Honig Fine's book [The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity] is a piece called little boys are very impressionable, also from '67. And is this a flower? Is this another tree image?

HARDEN

At that time, I think these-- Yeah, this is '67. So I was doing that in '67. You can see these things. I suppose-- I'm trying to remember where this thing-- Is this in the Museum of Modern Art, in their collection?

MASON

I don't know.

HARDEN

I'm not sure. Maybe it is, maybe it's not. I'm not sure.

MASON

And here now, in a fine and private place, now, that's--

HARDEN

That's in the Museum of Modern Art.

MASON

That's in the Museum of Modern Art. Now, that's all abstract imagery. There doesn't seem to be--

HARDEN

Yeah, that's all abstract.

MASON

So you were doing both all abstract and--

HARDEN

Yeah, you can see how that abstraction was born out of the early pieces. I mean, it was influenced by the early pieces, evolved.

MASON

And what would you like to say about the Topanga--? I guess you did a series of these.

HARDEN

Yes, it's a series titled "i celebrate topanga."

MASON

How many of those--?

HARDEN

That one is usually hanging at the end of the hallway, but it's on exhibition right now. How many did I do? I don't remember how many I did. I did quite a few. I mean, not a lot, like forty or something, but probably somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen, maybe. I'm not sure. When I was at UCLA I lived down in South Central L.A., and I wanted very much to live in Topanga Canyon. Judy Chicago and her husband at that time, Jerry Gerowitz-- who died in a car accident during that time--lived in Topanga, and I used to go there to visit them. Even before they moved there I used to go there a lot and draw and paint alone. And sometimes I would go with Mel, or Mel would go with me; I was doing the driving. And we would go with the intention of drawing, Mel and I, but we would end up, you know, having an adventure--you know, crawling over rocks and wandering down stream beds, hiking, and all that kind of nonsense, having a good time. I loved Topanga. So I started doing these pieces that were inspired by Topanga Canyon, and that's one of the pieces, hence the title.

MASON

That's not all of your work, of course, but I wanted to step a little bit to the side since you mentioned that you were living in South Central during this sort of turbulent period, and I was wondering what your relationship was to the things--

HARDEN

What period hasn't been turbulent in South Central? [laughter]

MASON

Well, I mean the Watts rebellion in '65. So I was wondering what was your relationship to that and, in fact, if you want to step back and talk about your relationship to the Civil Rights movement.

HARDEN

Well, let me say one thing in response to what you just said: I'm happy to hear you say "rebellion."

MASON

I've been educated.

HARDEN

I had a student yesterday, I had a critique painting class yesterday, and one of the students referred to the more recent uprising in Los Angeles as a riot, and I had to make a correction, because I really don't feel that it was a riot either time. [It was] of a people tired of someone else's boot on their neck, and that to me is rebellion, insurrection; it isn't a riot. I remember early in the sixties, I went on a few-- I never went down South to march or anything. I went on some marches in Southern California to protest segregated housing. I remember once we were on one down in Torrance, and a lot of the good citizens in Torrance, the residents there, just happened to be watering their lawns that day, standing out on their lawns with hoses to shoot water on us, of course, as we went by. Everybody kept their cool, and we went on about our business, but there were people out there with the swastikas on and calling people the names they tend to use, which is a very strong indication of their own self-hatred. I mean, it's quite obvious that people who have a problem with other people for such insignificant things as skin color have a real problem that they're trying to cope with. It's kind of interesting that the victims of kidnap and rape and enslavement, incarceration, are the ones who are hated. The victims, supposedly, are the ones who are supposed to be inferior. It seems to me that the criminal ought to be thought of as inferior and not the victim. What do you think about that? But anyway-- I think Mel Edwards might have been, on that occasion I just spoke about, along with us, too. But I don't know if I could have been-- Maybe I could have been a regular participant in marches, but I'm not sure, because I have a temper, and I'm not sure if I could control it. Maybe I'd be able to do it better now than I would have been able to do it then. I was much younger and, of course, not willing to take a whole lot of guff from anybody at the time. So maybe it's best that I didn't go down to the South someplace. I might not have survived.

MASON

Because you're quiet, and it's the quiet ones who have the really hot tempers. [laughter]

HARDEN

I'm quiet, but when I get mad, I explode. People think that I'm a hurricane that just came through, you know.

MASON

Where did you live in South Central?

HARDEN

I lived on a street called Beach Street, which is between-- Well, when I was at UCLA-- I'm trying to remember when I first started at UCLA.

MASON

Let me turn this over while you think.

HARDEN

Okay.

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO SEPTEMBER 23, 1992

MASON

So I asked you where you lived in South Central L.A.

HARDEN

Well, I'm trying to remember where I lived when I first went to UCLA. I might have been at 5214 McKinley Avenue, which is between Fifty-second Street and Fifty-second Place. McKinley Avenue is located between--not exactly between, but roughly between--two major streets, which would be Central [Avenue] and Avalon [Boulevard]. And then we moved down to Beach Street, which was between Ninety-fourth [Street] and Ninety-seventh [Street], something like that.

MASON

What time period were you living there?

HARDEN

I came back to L.A. from Austin in '52, and I lived at McKinley Avenue until I think '57 or '58, something like that. I'm not quite certain of the years, but somewhere in that rough period.

MASON

So you weren't there in the Watts happening?

HARDEN

I was living in Compton during the Watts uprising and-- But I was in the area, because I went over-- My father and mother still lived there. What year was that? Do you remember? I'm trying to remember if my mother was still alive. I don't think my mother was still alive.

MASON

The uprising?

HARDEN

Yeah.

MASON

That was '65.

HARDEN

No, my mother was deceased at that time. But my father was still living there, so I went over to see about my father. So I was there and saw all the fire and heard all the shots and people running around and the National Guard driving by, all that stuff.

MASON

What was your relationship to some of the organizations that came out of that period like the Compton Communicative Arts Academy and the Watts Towers Arts Center? Because I know you showed at the Watts [Summer] Festival in like '69. Did you participate in any of those activities?

HARDEN

Not really.

MASON

By that time you were teaching, right?

HARDEN

Right, by that time I was teaching. In fact, I started teaching in '63 while I was still in graduate school. No, I didn't have very much to do with most of the programs and organizations that began down in that area. I'm not sure why. Mostly because, I guess, I was teaching. I was busy, and I was exhibiting a lot, too, especially in those early days when I was young and energetic and ambitious and all of that stuff. I had a nephew that did participate in some of the programs. He was an aspiring actor, and he did get some work in a few television things and a few movies.

MASON

What was his name?

HARDEN

His name was Paris Earl. That was his real name, Paris Earl. He just died a couple of years ago. A fairly young man at the time that he died. But I remember him being in some things. It's kind of interesting, because he was so full of it, you know, as a young boy, as it were. It was kind of nice to see him so really enthralled about what he was doing and all of that stuff when he got involved in the stuff. I think that's really the beauty of having something for young people to do: to give them a sense of self and hope. It's really nice.

MASON

It seems at this point, around '69 or so-- Because I was just looking at that article by William Wilson on the Watts Festival that you participated in and Wilbur Haynie and some other people who slipped my mind. But it seems that by that time people like Mel Edwards and Daniel [LaRue] Johnson, they had moved from Los Angeles to New York--

HARDEN

What year is it now?

MASON

The show happened in '69.

HARDEN

Yeah.

MASON

And I remember him making-- He said you made this comment that--

HARDEN

Mel moved in '68 I remember. I think Danny Johnson moved before Mel did. Yeah?

MASON

Yeah. I don't know their reason for moving exactly, but one would have to surmise that it was kind of a lack of support and lack of appreciation and things like that.

HARDEN

Probably a lack of support, sure. Yeah, lack of support. That's it.

MASON

So what kept you here when everybody else was leaving? [laughter]

HARDEN

Well, New York is not my style. You know, I would never live in New York. They would have to offer me large sums of money to entice me to move to New York, and I probably wouldn't do it. I'm not a big city person. I don't particularly care for it. You know, I like going there when I'm visiting. It's the old cliché, "It's a nice place to visit--" But I really don't have any interest in that. I prefer a slower pace, and I also don't really believe in living anyplace where there are a lot of other artists in residence. I don't want to be around a lot of other artists. I like seeing them and talking to them, going to their homes and studios or palling around, but I don't want to live in a community of them. Because I think whatever little bit of individuality we might have can get lost when you have too many influences immediately on you, you know, around you all the time. I'm not interested in that.

MASON

Yeah, California or Los Angeles seems to be more or less ideal for that, because it seems that there are some people who either choose to be engaged with the kind of whole art historical game of influences and, you

know, who saw Willem de Kooning first and all this sort of stuff and other people who seem to go their own way and, you know, kind of keep that integrity and yet still gain some sense of satisfaction and recognition.

HARDEN

Yeah. That's one of the good things about Los Angeles. The geography lends itself to it, not to mention the traffic.

MASON

So you're saying because it's so huge--

HARDEN

It's so big, so difficult to get around in, and people are dispersed in every place. You know, you have people down in Watts, you have people in Santa Monica, and people in Pasadena, and then in the outlying areas, so to speak, like Long Beach or whatever, Orange County. You know, people are just all over the map, and it's a very big place, a huge place in terms of miles. And of course, with all the people and all the traffic, it's just a bear to try and move around in. So I've always tended to kind of go my own way and find myself a little niche way off someplace away from other artists. That's what I did before. I mean, I lived down in Compton; nobody else in the art business lived around me. And I lived above Chatsworth in the hills and nobody lived around me. I tend to be in places where people and dealers and curators and collectors don't come because I'm out of the way. I know I sacrifice a lot by doing that, but I gain so much more, I think. Because I think there are other facets to one's life. I mean, the art has to come from someplace. It doesn't come from a void; it comes from how you live your life. And I have this strange feeling that this is the only one I'm going to have, so I want to live it the way I want to live it.

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE SEPTEMBER 25, 1992

MASON

Today one of the first things that I wanted to do actually was to correct a really huge mistake I made yesterday about-- Let's see, I said that you showed at the Watts [Summer] Festival, which isn't true.

HARDEN

I didn't think I had, but I've shown at so many other places for so long I forget about things.

MASON

It happened so long ago you lose track. So what I was referring to was actually-- There's an article in the Los Angeles Times dated August 15, 1969, written by William Wilson. The title is "The Watts Festival Strives for an Afro-American Style," and actually it says-- He's talking about the Watts Festival, and he says, "There are a dozen competent professionals on view. There are also significant absences: artists like Ed Bereal, Marion Sampler, Marvin Harden, the gifted commercial artist Bill Brown, or Danny [Daniel LaRue] Johnson and Mel [Melvin] Edwards, who left Los Angeles in disgust." And then he says, "Maybe such gaps represent artists who have decided it's more important to find themselves as people than to identify with such a clearly socially tense event as this." So I have to apologize to you and to the dear reader for making such a faux pas.

HARDEN

Well, I thank you, because I was confused, you know. I never know, because sometimes things are exhibited even without my knowledge, so I didn't know whether my work had been there or not.

MASON

Okay. So you were an absence there. You mentioned that there was a big fire, and I wanted to ask you about that. What happened?

HARDEN

Yeah, well, I think it was 1970 or thereabouts, September 1970. I lived above Chatsworth in the hills, a place I called Cold Comfort, a little ranch. A fire broke out far to the north of there and eventually swept through where I lived and the community below me and into Simi Valley and into Topanga Canyon and Malibu Canyon, all the way to the ocean. At the time it was the largest fire in the history of the state in terms of area covered. About a hundred houses in Chatsworth were destroyed and two of my neighbors lost their lives. One of my sisters, my older sister [Lura Harden Miller], lived a little bit down the road

and around the hill from me, and she lost everything. She and her kids got out just with the clothes on their backs in the car, and they had to drive through flames to do that. So anyway, it was quite an experience. I wasn't home when the fire started. I was driving from L.A., way down near Harbor City or someplace. I got into the [San Fernando] Valley and I decided to stop at a friend's house for lunch, and I could hear all the sirens and I'd been smelling the smoke and all this stuff. So after a while I got a little nervous and I said, "I'd better go home, because the horses might get nervous with all this smoke and stuff." I got on Devonshire [Street], and I'm going west on Devonshire, and the traffic gets heavy. What had happened was they had put down a roadblock, and they were turning people away from the area. So I went around the first roadblock, and then I got to another one, and I went around that one. I went through a service station and came out in back of them. I don't know why they didn't come and get me, but I went up the hill. There were a few scattered houses along the dirt road up near my place. As I went by, all these houses were on fire and the brush was on fire, and I was driving through fire on both sides. By this time I had a lump in my throat, scared to death about what's happening up on the hill. When I got to the top of the hill so I could see my place, I did indeed see flames. I mean, everything was burning. I thought it was my house, but it turned out to be the storage buildings. And these storage buildings--I had two of them--contained artwork and power tools, stuff like that. So I lost those buildings and all of the contents, and I lost my horse stalls and trees and fences and stuff. And it was kind of a strange thing. I used to get water from Sparkletts because my water came from a well and I didn't like the taste of it. And because I lived so far out of the way, the Sparkletts guy would drop off a lot of bottles at one time. He had just dropped off about fifteen to nineteen bottles--I can't recall the number now--five-gallon bottles of water. And this was in the days when they were glass bottles and they were heavy. Anyway, the fire burned the power lines and the power poles, so I couldn't get any water, you know. So I used the Sparkletts water to put the fires out around the house in the shrubbery and in the trees. I would pour the water into a pan and throw it up into the trees that were adjacent to the house. I ended up fighting the fire literally all afternoon long by myself. *[Later two friends, Barbara Moss and Vee Hunter, arrived and helped me.] And the surrounding area was devastated. Another interesting

thing happened. Two guys came up in a pickup truck while I was fighting the fire, and they asked me, "Do you want us to take these horses out for you?"

MASON

Were they neighbors or--?

HARDEN

No, they must have been neighbors somewhere in the community, but they were not people I knew. They were not people immediately anywhere near me. So I said, "Yes!" Because I'm desperately fighting fires, and I want the horses to be safe. They gathered up the horses, they took the horses and led the horses down the hill, and I went on about my business. The next day I woke up-- Well, I didn't really wake up because I had no sleep. Everything was devastated. It was burned as far as you could see. Everything was burned. And it dawned on me that I didn't know who these people were, and I didn't know where the horses had been taken. I looked for the horses for about two or three days. My friend [Vee Hunter] and I had been looking for the horses, and I was all upset, and we stopped at the market, the market that we normally shopped at. I stayed in the car in the parking lot and she went inside. And the checker said, "Well, how did you make out in the fire?" And she said, "Well, Marvin's horses were taken down to rescue, but we can't find them." So there was a young lady in the line behind her, and she said, "Well, was one of them an Appaloosa and the other one white and another one chestnut?" She said, "Yeah." She said, "Well, I think I know where they are." Just on a fluke I found the horses.

MASON

Oh, boy.

HARDEN

So anyway, I lost a lot of work.

MASON

Had they intended to steal the horses?

HARDEN

No, no, they just took them down.

MASON

Yeah, but you didn't know--

HARDEN

But when they got them down there-- There were all kinds of gathering centers at high schools and ranches and various other places where horses were taken. There were a lot of different locations, and I happened not to have gotten to the right location yet, because I really didn't know where the locations were. I was just going from one place to another place as I heard about locations. So they were not up to any mischief. Anyway, I got my horses back, and I lost a lot of stuff--all of my student work from UCLA days and practically all of my professional work. The few pictures I had in the house, of course, were spared because I saved the house. I was preparing at that time for a one-person exhibition at the Whitney Museum [of American Art] in New York. And when I first arrived home during this fire, I went in to get the stuff out, the work, but a couple of my friends [Hunter and Moss] had picked up the body of work that was supposed to go to the Whitney, so that was already saved.

MASON

About how many pieces was that?

HARDEN

I imagine it was probably like somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen or so pieces. It was a relatively small exhibition, if I remember--fifteen or twenty, I'm not sure. So when I got home, I went in and got a couple of pairs of pants, some shirts, jacket, shoes. I put them in the car and I turned the car around so I could head out of there, and then I started fighting the fire. And it was really like I was the only person in the world, because nobody was up there but me. There were no firefighters, no helicopters, no airplanes, no nothing, because I lived in such an isolated place. They were out fighting the fires where the houses were adjacent to each other in the suburban areas, which is the thing they should have been doing. But anyway, that was a very hairy experience. I went through that fire, lost a lot of stuff, and I went through another fire years later at the same location. But on this occasion I didn't lose anything except a ton of hay.

MASON

Were you still storing your works at your house? Or had you started to store them elsewhere?

HARDEN

No, everything was still at my house.

MASON

But it was just that your house wasn't touched?

HARDEN

Yeah, the house wasn't touched. And this time I had help from some firefighters. One truck came up, and there were four guys to this unit. They were very calm and very cool and very professional. And when they got there, I was on the roof, watering down the roof. One of them said, "Come off the roof. When the fire comes through it will be real hot, and it will just cook you." So I got off the roof. I'd been on the roof at the other fire too. And the other fire, the winds were blowing so fast--it was like gusts of eighty, eighty-five miles per hour. I had to lie down on the roof to keep from being blown off of the thing. But I got off of the roof the second time, and the guys told me, "Look, when it gets here, we only have the water that's on the truck." And they had a small unit. "When the fire gets here, we will put out the fires as they break out right around the house. If it gets too hot, we'll all run into the house and stay in the house and hopefully it will go by us." And, I mean, I was more frightened that time than I was when I was by myself, because nobody was telling me all this stuff before. The funny thing about it is-- The first fire, I hadn't lived there very long. I had built an addition to the house, and it was a huge living room, bigger than this one, which is a pretty huge living room, and a studio, and I wasn't about to let all that commitment and all that work and money go down the drain, which was stupid. You know, I realized it after the fact. But, you know, it's just something you do. But the second fire, when the guy told me all this stuff, I started thinking, "Wait a minute. This is kind of scary." And when the flames come, they are scary, because they're two and three stories high, and they're making a lot of noise, and it's like they're just twisting and turning and doing everything. It's really frightening. It makes you realize just how insignificant you are.

MASON

Kind of like the feeling you get when you're in the middle of an earthquake, I guess.

HARDEN

Yeah, right.

MASON

Just kind of a helplessness.

HARDEN

When nature strikes, you're no match for it, that's for sure.

MASON

I was wondering, of the works that we've looked at, that we've pointed out in the books, and then there are some earlier works from the sixties and-- Yeah, this catalog that you gave me, Marvin Harden Paintings and Drawings, 1961-1981, these are the works that are-- Let's see. Well, you have one from '62 called freshet and '63 called coon. These are oils on canvas. So these are things that were sent away and were saved or--?

HARDEN

Yeah, these were things-- Most of the pieces in the show--not most, but a lot of the pieces in the show--were pieces that were owned by somebody else. I didn't own them, so they were not in any danger. And coon was sold almost immediately after I had painted it, so freshet is the only one of those paintings, for the most part, that I still owned. And some of the drawings were drawings that had-- I think some of those drawings had been in the Whitney show.

MASON

Had you made slides of your work?

HARDEN

I have made some slides I think of freshet--

MASON

I mean that don't exist anymore.

HARDEN

Yeah, I think I did. But a lot of them I didn't have any slides of because I'm not very good at keeping records. It's just so time-consuming and everything; I don't do a good job. But coon and freshet belonged to a series that I started when I was in graduate school, and they tended to be relatively large paintings. Those particular two were not very enormous. They're large, but they're not real large. But some of them were really kind of big paintings, in the neighborhood of, I'd say, eight or seven feet tall and whatever number of feet wide. And most of those burned up. The thing that's interesting--oh, not interesting but sad--to me is that some of the series that I had done earlier in my career were almost entirely wiped out. That series was one of them. And I did a series of things with a fly image, paintings, and all but one was burned, because I owned them all except for one that had been sold. And all that I owned, of course, were destroyed.

MASON

So when this happened, did you decide that you were going to make more or less a fresh start? Or did you try to kind of maybe recapture some of the things that you were thinking about earlier?

HARDEN

Well, what happened is I had already continued with-- This is at the time that I had mentioned earlier that I took a hiatus from painting. I did nothing but drawings because I didn't have facilities for painting. I didn't have storage space for paintings, and I didn't have real adequate studio space. So with those limitations I stuck to working on paper. And since I'd been able, through the good efforts of some friends of mine, to save a number of drawings that were going to the Whitney, I just kind of continued on in that direction after the fire. And, of course, after some time, normally the pieces kind of evolve into something else. But I didn't have any special different direction after the fire. I just kind of kept along with what I was doing.

MASON

Okay. Because yesterday, off tape, I asked you about this grid structure that one sees in some of your drawings, and it doesn't seem to appear until after '70, but maybe you started that before '70. So I was wondering if you could talk about how that came about and how that works in your drawings.

HARDEN

Well, actually, I probably didn't do any grids before whenever they started cropping up in the seventies. I mean, I really wouldn't even know when they started except in very general terms, because I haven't really paid any attention to them. But it really was just a very innocent concern for varying the context in which the image sat or floated. Sometimes I would do one thing and sometimes I would do another. And it turned out that on some occasions I chose to utilize the grid. It wasn't any kind of big theoretical involvement or anything. It's just a matter of doing something on one occasion and something different on another occasion.

MASON

I'm looking at two works that were in the Geneva show [8 Artistes Afro-Américains at Rath Museum]. One is called past, present, and future-- Well, you should read it and then read the date.

HARDEN

Okay. It's a piece from 1970. It's titled past, present, and future are not, as is commonly supposed, stretched out to inaccessible distances . And this is one work with the grid. And in this case, again for reasons of variety and nothing any more involved than that, the cow image sits in the border and not inside of the border.

MASON

Do you want to say anything about the cow and the horse and the animal imagery?

HARDEN

Well, I'll tell you how I arrived at them. First of all, as we talked about yesterday, I've always been interested in animals and nature of all kinds. It just so happened when I lived on the fringe of Compton, just before North Long Beach, the street south of me was the last street for some distance. After that,

it was just a large, large, large expanse of land. You know, great distances. They reminded me of Rembrandt or other Dutch painters' work where you'd see these big flat areas and then some little house sitting in the middle of something-- some large fields or something, you know. That's the way this place was: huge, huge cornfields or barley or whatever they were growing--I don't know what this stuff was--and way out, say some great distance, I'm not sure how far, there would be this little homestead, and then beyond that a great distance until you got to Artesia Boulevard. But anyway, that area had dairy farms, and I used to, when I was still a student, go by these dairy farms and just kind of like park my car and get out and stand around and watch these cows. They would be standing in the corrals, and I'd watch them, and I never really did anything about it. Later I started sketching them. And then I stopped, and I didn't do anything with the subject. I didn't get serious about it. And then several years later--I don't know how long at this point in time, I can't recall--I did my first cow image in a painting. And I loved the painting. It was one that was destroyed by the fire. It was a little painting, and it had this wonderful little cow image. And it was from that that I began to do the cow things. And then, after I moved to Cold Comfort, which is out in the Valley, San Fernando Valley-- I'd always wanted horses ever since I was a little boy, and I'd always wanted to live on a ranch in the country. So I bought this place. It was relatively small; it was only about close to an acre with an immense, unpopulated natural area around it. I mean, it was out in the middle of no place. So the first thing I did was to go out and buy some horses. I didn't know how to ride horses, and I didn't know anything about horses. So I went out and bought these horses, and the first one or two horses I bought, I didn't even have a place to put them. In other words, I had the land but I didn't have anything to keep them in. I didn't have a corral. So I bought these horses, and then I got some of my nephews [Allen Miller, Gregg Miller, Keith Miller, and Ted Miller] together and my friends and everything, all the people I could get my hands on, and we started putting up this corral. I'd never built a fence or anything in my life. So I got the horses, and then, of course, as a result of having the horses handy, I got to the point where I would every once in a while choose to work with their image.

MASON

Okay. I guess you usually do either cows or horses, and I guess you might think, "Well, there are other domestic animals, cats and dogs and things like that." When you think--

HARDEN

I've done cats.

MASON

Oh, have you? Because when you think of cows and horses, of all the domestic animals, it seems to a city person like me that they're sort of the least active, the most passive. You know, sometimes you look at a dog or a cat and you say, "Oh, they're probably bored or whatever." But cows just kind of sit there. [laughter] I mean, they're fun to watch, but--

HARDEN

That's part of the reason for doing them, though.

MASON

Yeah, they're easier to sketch because they don't move around. [laughter]

HARDEN

No, that's not the reason, "because they're easier to sketch." Because there are methods you can devise to get them through sketching or whatever you want to use, or use your photography or whatever. It's the docility. I mean, the fact that all the cows are really dairy cows. There were never any beef cattle. I never drew beef cattle; they were always dairy cows. And there was a reason for that in my mind. You know, to my way of thinking, I was using those for a purpose. I don't talk about what my reasons are because I don't really want to fix in the viewer's mind what he or she should see, but there is my own personal iconography involved in this. My own personal feelings about symbolism and philosophy and all of that stuff, that goes into the choices I make. So there are reasons for the choices. One of the reasons would be that I'm interested in certain kinds of creatures. Horses and cattle have an obvious ranch connotation about them, and I'm interested in ranch life and all of that. So I'll share that with an audience, but the other stuff--

MASON

Well, there's also a quote in the [Elsa Honig] Fine book [The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity]--and I always like to give an artist a chance to respond to published things, because usually the answer is, "Oh, I never said that." [laughter]

HARDEN

I probably didn't, whatever it is.

MASON

Yeah. But in the Fine book--I'm looking for it now--I guess she wrote to you or spoke with you, and you mentioned something about the cow as being symbolic of a kind of helplessness. It had to do with your sister's death, and it had to do with kind of the helplessness of humans-- I can't find it. But do you remember saying anything like that?

HARDEN

Vaguely. I think I have an idea that this is about a picture that the Whitney owns?

MASON

Yeah.

HARDEN

Okay. I had some comments-- That was the only time I'd ever made comments about meaning, and I regretted it after making them, because I didn't realize that people were going to have access to this material right away.

MASON

Oh, yeah. I can't find it. Do you want me to read it to you? Or not necessarily?

HARDEN

You can if you want to.

MASON

Okay. I'll have to pause.

HARDEN

I don't know how accurate it is, but I did make comments. And if you have them, I'd like to see them just to see what I said.

MASON

Actually, I don't have the article with me--I mean the Xerox from the book with me. Okay. So we were talking about animal imagery and how you arrived at that. Well, I guess we can talk more about your exhibitions next. We've already talked about your getting a dealer before you got out of graduate school and getting connected with the Ceeje Galleries. I just wanted to know more about that. How did they treat you? And how did you feel about the way they handled your work? And when did you begin to sell things? And did you sell a lot of things through them or not? That kind of thing.

HARDEN

Well, first of all, I'll be forever grateful to Jerry [Jerome] and Cecil [Hedrick]. I have a lot of respect for them. Number one, they took in this very inexperienced person. They had a tendency to take relatively new talent, but they had some people who were more established, also. But a lot of dealers won't, obviously, deal with young, emerging talent. And I can understand that. But what I really respect about that gallery was that before it was ever really common, and it's not that common now, that they had minority members in that gallery. They had me, a black person, they had Ben Sakoguchi, a Japanese American--born American of Japanese heritage, I'd rather put it--and some fellows with Mexican heritage. They had women. So they had the whole bit. And, of course, they had white males.

MASON

That's standard.

HARDEN

They had everybody. They didn't discriminate, and that's very unusual even now, and this was back in the early sixties. I did sell work. They sold work for me. The prices, as they should have been, were very low. I mean, there was no way I would even suppose to have any large prices on those pieces. The work didn't command that because of my relative youth and all of that. They did sell

work. They treated me fine for the most part. Every once in a while, one or two times, Jerry rubbed me a little wrong and we had a few things to say.

MASON

Was this personality or aesthetic issues?

HARDEN

I think it was mostly personality; it was never aesthetics. In fact, I don't even think it was personality. I remember once that I had some work in the gallery, and I think it was relatively recent work that I'd taken over, and Jerry thought that the prices were higher than they should be. I think that prices were about $150 for the biggest and most expensive pieces.

MASON

Were they paintings or drawings?

HARDEN

These particular things were drawings, I think. They were $150. As a matter of fact, I still have some. Like the thing you saw of the "[i celebrate] topanga" series. Those things. People would like to have those now, and they would have to pay a hell of a lot more than $150 for them. [laughter] But anyway, it was that kind of thing. And we had this little discussion on the phone that was very short, because I said, "Well, Jerry, I'll be out to pick up the work." And he said, "Wait a minute." He called Cecil to the phone, "Come talk to Marvin." And Cecil kind of smoothed things over and everything went fine from there. But I think that's about the only time I remember anything of any negative involvement with those guys. Cecil was never any problem, and Jerry was rarely any problem. They were good guys, and I liked them a lot, and I still do. I think Jerry's deceased now; I'm very sure I've heard that. I wanted to contact Cecil, because they were good friends and roommates forever, but I didn't know how to contact him anymore.

MASON

Do you remember the first piece you sold?

HARDEN

I really don't. I really don't remember. I remember the first show I was in there. I think it was the first show. There might have been another group show with a relatively large number of people in the show that I was first in, but I'm not sure. But I remember two schoolmates of mine--Joan Maffei and Lance Richbourg, two talented people--and I were going to have a show there, a three-person show. We were all from UCLA. Anyway, we were going to have the show, and somehow it was determined that we should-- Ceeje had a storefront situation where there was a glass window, and they had built a partition inside of the glass at a distance of a few feet so you couldn't see directly into the space. They would put the artists' names on this panel, so to speak. So it was determined that we were going to do a combined work of art on this panel. So we were in there drawing one night, the three of us simultaneously drawing on this panel. We all had a part of the thing. My part was to do the landscape element and--

MASON

Who designed it?

HARDEN

We were just making this thing up. [laughter]

MASON

Oh, as you went along. Okay. [laughter]

HARDEN

I think we were just making this up as we went. And Lance drew dogs, and they were really snarling, incredible things. This guy's got a lot of facility. I can't remember what Joan was doing. We were doing this thing, and some guy was walking by walking his dog--so I hear, I mean, this is the story--and saw us doing this, went back home, put the dog away, picked up his camera, came back and took a photo of us. Now, I know he took the photo because after it was developed and printed he gave the photo to Ceeje Galleries. And this was the story that was given along with the photo. So I have a copy of the photo someplace. That's how it's supposed to have happened. It was kind of interesting that somebody was curious about what we were doing and documented it.

MASON

I wonder if it was another artist.

HARDEN

It could have been, but I don't even think he was. I just think it was somebody who kind of lived in the neighborhood somewhere and probably was very familiar with the gallery scene, because La Cienega [Boulevard] in those days was the hub of L.A. art. They had the Monday night walk and everything. It was great. I loved it. You know, you'd go to a show, and you'd see everybody, and who you didn't see at that particular show, when you walked out to go down the street to another gallery, you bumped into people, and you saw the people in the next gallery, and it just went on and on. It was really very, very good.

MASON

Yeah, it was really exciting. Well, let's see, you had shows at Ceeje in '64, '66, '67, and then you also did the touring exhibit with the State Department [Prints by American Negro Artists]. That was the Ruth [G.] Waddy print exhibition that you got to do. I guess you're also in the exhibition catalog for that, then, that she did with [T. V.] Roelof-Lanner. You don't know?

HARDEN

That might be, but I don't know about it.

MASON

That was the first time you had shown outside of the United States.

HARDEN

Yes, it was.

MASON

Did that have any effect? Or did you have any particular opinion about that?

HARDEN

Well, I was happy to do it, you know, to be a part of it. As you say, I think it was indeed the first time I had shown outside of the U.S., and, of course, it

was an honor to be able to do that. And the itinerary for that show was quite extensive, as I remember. So it was nice to know that the pieces were moving around and being seen by a relatively wide audience, a very wide audience, I assume. You know, nothing significant happened, I guess, as a result of it that I know of, except it's another thing that you put on your résumé, on your exhibition list. Obviously it helps to legitimize the fact that you are working as a professional person and people are allowing you or helping you to get exposure. So other than that, I don't really know any other significance.

MASON

Okay. And then in '71 you had a show, you said a one-person show, at the Whitney, and that was the same year you participated in the show that went to Geneva. That was the 8 Artistes Afro-Américains.

HARDEN

That was a bad experience for me.

MASON

Oh, tell me about that. What happened?

HARDEN

Well, I forget the guy's name.

MASON

Henri Ghent.

HARDEN

Henri Ghent. Well, Henri had-- And I never met Henri; I think I spoke to him once on the phone. But Henri had contacted me either by phone or by letter, I can't recall now, but he wanted the pieces-- I had framed the pieces myself, and I had done it in a kind of unusual way. He wanted to take the pieces out of the frames to ship because of the cost, and I didn't want that to happen because I didn't want the pieces to be handled that much. And I'd had a bad experience, too, with the State Department thing. The piece came back, and it was all tattered and worn and everything where people had handled it.

MASON

And they didn't pay for it or anything like that?

HARDEN

No. So I didn't want that to happen again. So Henri told me, "Okay." I mean, everything was fine. So it turned out that the pieces went, and he did exactly what he said he wouldn't do. He took the things out of the frames, shipped them over there, and they came back, and the frames-- They were not the usual frames. I mean, the works were sandwiched in between two pieces of Plexiglas, and they had special little nuts and bolts that had been chromed and special hooks to hang the work. So anyway, the stuff came back, and parts of the frames were missing. So I knew that he'd taken these things loose. I think I wrote him a letter, and he wrote me one back, and it was really nasty. And he made some stupid statement about we could compare careers after about X amount of time.

MASON

Compare whose careers?

HARDEN

His and mine.

MASON

He's not an artist.

HARDEN

I don't know what he does.

MASON

He's more of a curator.

HARDEN

Yeah. I know. But he was upset with me, and he wanted to compare-- He wanted to let me know that I wasn't anything that would compare.

MASON

Oh, I get it.

HARDEN

And in years to come we would compare his career with mine. And I wrote back or said back--I don't know if we were on the phone or through the mail--that "One man's success is another man's prostitution." [laughter] So I never met this guy, but he was a real jerk as far as I'm concerned.

MASON

You know what he was doing? He was actually a curator for the Brooklyn Museum, or one section of the Brooklyn Museum [the Community Gallery]. But what he's doing today I have no idea.

HARDEN

I haven't even heard of him since then. So apparently I'm not impressed by his career.

MASON

Yeah. So did you have any feeling about having a show in Geneva?

HARDEN

Oh, I was very happy. You know, I was very happy. Like any opportunity-- I mean, there are a lot of worthy people making pictures. Some of them are extremely talented, and some of them are really real artists. I'm making a distinction here, you know. Somebody can have facility but not be much of an artist in my judgment. It is not simply that one can do the work that allows one to gain some measure of success. There's a lot of other stuff involved; no one has a career by virtue of his or her own efforts alone. There are a lot of other people who play a part in one's career. These are people who decide, for whatever reasons, that they want you to be a part of something, that they want to give you an exhibition or to curate your piece in conjunction with other people's work. So I was very happy to participate. I just didn't like the fact that the man took my concerns so lightly and treated me, as people often do treat artists, as if they're not very important. They like the work, they want to use the work, but the artist that made the work has no real significance. You know, "I can do what I want with your work. You're lucky to even have this opportunity, so don't bug me." I don't particularly care for that kind of

attitude. I don't treat people like that; I don't want to be treated like that. And I really don't think that anybody's really all that important.

MASON

Okay. Not that we're going to go year by year, but there are just some things that struck me that I wanted to talk about. In '72 you had solo exhibitions that apparently were at Irving Blum [Gallery], Los Angeles Harbor College, and the Brand Library Art Center. So did that originate at Irving Blum or at the Brand Library?

HARDEN

It wasn't all the same show.

MASON

Oh, I see.

HARDEN

The Brand show was one curated by Bob [Robert] Smith, and it was really in essence a mini-retrospective. It had retrospective aspects to it. The Blum show was recent work. I can't recall what the Harbor was. I guess the Harbor was just kind of a mix of works. I mean, I can't really recall what I had in that show.

MASON

Okay. I was wondering if you could say more about-- Well, both Robert Smith and-- Well, first Irving Blum, because he's such a figure, you know. [laughter]

HARDEN

Irving Blum was quite a-- Well, you know, he has a lot of prestige, and he had a lot of prestige then.

MASON

So how did that show come about? Did he come and talk to you and pick the work itself? Or did you--?

HARDEN

No, I picked the work. I don't think I've ever had a dealer pick the work. James Corcoran came to my studio once when I was going to have the show with

him. He looked at what I was going to show, but he didn't make any kind of curatorial judgments about it. The kind of interesting thing-- I had the show at the Whitney, and the same show came back and it was shown at Eugenia Butler [Galleries]. Eugenia Butler was very good for me and to me at the time. I really appreciated her support. I didn't sell a lot of work through that gallery because I wasn't with it that long. She went out of business. Otherwise, I probably would have stayed a while. But she did sell some work. And Blum came to my opening; I remember seeing him there. And he was looking at the work. One of my colleagues who was at the opening, Tom [S.] Fricano, printmaker, said-- Anyway, Eugenia Butler went out of business, so I was looking for a dealer. I was trying to decide what I was going to do, and Fricano said, "Maybe you should talk to Irving Blum, because he was really looking at your work as if he was interested, that he liked it." So I decided, "It won't hurt anything." So I went over to Irving Blum's. Now, I knew Irving was like big-time. So I went over with some trepidation, and I talked to Irving. In fact, I called to make an appointment.

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HARDEN

So anyway, I called Irving. I don't think he was there when I called, and I left my name and everything. And sure enough, he called me back. I didn't think he was going to call back because in this business, some people, you know-- Especially if they have some standing, they don't want be bothered, and sometimes they think that they're so important that everybody else is beneath them or something. So anyway, he called back, and I told him who I was, and I said something akin to, "I know the name isn't a household name, but I need a gallery. Eugenia Butler is going out of business, and I'd like to know if you'd like to see my work." And he said, "Sure, come on over." So I brought the work over and he looked at it. And he said something like, "I'm going to be showing--" Let me see, now, who it is. Frank Stella-- Oh, God.

MASON

He showed [Andy] Warhol, he showed--

HARDEN

Who's the guy that does the flat color, like, say, yellow and then black. It's like rolled on or something, and it's absolutely flat.

MASON

Well, there's [Mark] Rothko.

HARDEN

No, no. No modulation at all. Just flat stuff. Very well known, but I'm having a thing here, I can't think of his name. Oh, God. This guy-- Who did that?

MASON

John McLaughlin?

HARDEN

No, that's not the guy. It's a New York guy [Ellsworth Kelly].

MASON

Well, anyway, we'll think of him later.

HARDEN

I hate to have this block. But anyway-- This guy is very famous, on the same par with Stella. So he said, "I'm going to be showing Frank Stella at such and such a time and this other person at such and such a time, and I'm going to sandwich you right in between them. So how do you like that?" And I said, "That's great." You know, it was a very quick and easy, painless kind of process. And, you know, he was very nice, because I didn't have the stature that most of the artists that he showed had. In fact, I think at the time I was only one of two L.A. artists that he showed. He showed almost all New York artists. Craig Kauffman was the other guy that he was showing at the time that was an L.A. guy.

MASON

Did you sell anything from that show?

HARDEN

Yeah. As a matter of fact, someone contacted me for someone else, as this person's agent--both parties were relatively well known locally--and said that

the party who wanted to buy, the collector, wanted to buy five pictures. And I said, "Well, go see Irving." And they said, "Well, they would rather buy them from you." Well, obviously--

MASON

The dealer's cut. [laughter]

HARDEN

And I said, "Well, I don't do business that way. You go see Irving or don't bother." So I thought that was the end of that, because, you know, I've cut this off, and I didn't expect them to buy anything. So anyway, the guy did go and buy, I think, two or three. I can't remember. Not the five, but either two or three pieces from Irving. And I was very happy, because it's an outstanding collection from what I understand. I haven't seen it. And it was nice to be a part of that. So it's another little feather.

MASON

Did you make contacts in that case? Different New York connections or other people?

HARDEN

Through Irving?

MASON

Yeah, through that gallery.

HARDEN

Well, the only thing Irving ever did that I really didn't like was that Irving-- There was a dealer in New York who wrote me a letter. He saw the Whitney show. I think his name is Ivan Karp. Ivan had I think two spaces in New York, and it's my understanding that he showed a lot of artists. He had a lot, just a large number, big stable, much more than most dealers, and he had this kind of thing that was described to me as kind of a supermarket approach. And my work, being what it is, on the subtle side, I didn't think it was a good idea for me to be in that kind of context. But he wrote me this nice letter and asked me if I had representation in New York, and if not, would I be interested? He liked the work. I didn't have representation in New York, so I wrote him back

that I would consider it. Well, I don't know if I wrote him back right away and said I would consider it or not, but eventually I talked to people. I think that's what I did. I talked to people who knew something about the New York scene and asked them about this dealer and the situation, and they told me about it. One of the people I talked to was Irving, because he was my L.A. dealer. I said, "What do you think about this?" And he said, "Don't do it." He said, "I'm real good friends with the [Leo] Castelli [Gallery]. And when I go back to New York sometime, I'll take some of the work with me. You've got some drawings, and they're easily transportable. I'll take some drawings back, and I'll show them to [Leo] Castelli, and he'll handle the work." He never came through. He never did that. Irving never did that. So that is something--

MASON

Are you sure he never took the work?

HARDEN

I'm sure he never took the work. I'm sure he never took the work. To give him the benefit of the doubt, Irving also closed his gallery here and moved back to New York. So it might have been because of that difficult period that he just forgot about me or didn't have time or energy to get around to it. But he also didn't take me to New York. In his own gallery he didn't take anybody. He took Kauffman from L.A. At least that's what he said he was going to do, because he was very nice about it. He called me up and invited me over to lunch one day, and we had lunch, and he told me that he was going to be closing the gallery here and moving back to New York and opening up a gallery there, and he wasn't going to take but one artist from the stable, which was Kauffman. So he was very manly and nice about it, which I appreciated. And I like Irving because, you know, given the circumstances, he didn't have to be bothered with me. You know, he didn't need me. So that was very nice of him. So I don't have anything really negative to say about him. I think he's one of the better dealers I've ever had in terms of--not simply prestige, because that goes without saying--but just in terms of being a person, in terms of how he treated me.

MASON

Okay. What about your show at the Brand Library? That was when it was being curated by Robert--

HARDEN

By Robert Smith.

MASON

How did you meet him?

HARDEN

Well, Robert went to UCLA when I went to UCLA. He was in design and I was in fine arts. And he was married, I think, even-- Well, I know he was married back in the days when we were still in school. His wife then was named Barbara [Smith]. Barbara's since deceased. She was in an airplane accident that everybody heard about. I'm sure you heard about it. Do you recall an accident near Hawaii over the ocean where a door flew off the plane and people were sucked out? I think eight people were sucked out of the plane.

MASON

No. Well, remember I came to Los Angeles in '87, so maybe it wasn't nationally known.

HARDEN

Yeah. But anyway, she was one of the people. She and her then husband [Tony Fallon], her second husband, were sucked out of that plane. Anyway, Barbara was a big fan of mine. She loved my work, and Bob liked my work. I assume he did. He always said he did, and he's always been supportive. So we've known each other all of that time, and I understand that Bob was supportive when I applied for a job out at Cal[ifornia] State [University] Northridge. That's what was told to me later by somebody other than Bob, so I assume it's the truth. So Bob has always been supportive of me. And we've always been friendly toward each other, friends really. We don't see each other much anymore because he works different days and different locations on the campus. So he put that show together, and it turned out that again-- Although he curated the show, technically speaking--I mean, it was his thing to put together--I chose the work. I mean, I just brought the work over and made the decisions. We put it together, and it got a real good response. There was

another person showing in another part of the institution--you know, another one-man show. William Wilson reviewed both shows and had a nice, sensitive review of the show. And I should say something about Wilson.

MASON

Okay. Yeah.

HARDEN

Because no one has supported me as long and as strong as William Wilson has. His support, I think, has been absolutely first-rate, and I'm not too sure what my career would have been without his help, really.

MASON

Just reviewing the shows?

HARDEN

Just the reviews? Not just the reviews. But he also, I think, was the person who nominated me for the AVA [II] award.

MASON

You should say what the AVA award is.

HARDEN

The AVA is the Awards in the Visual Arts. It was an institution, an organization I should say, located, I think, in Charlotte, North Carolina. They gave ten awards nationwide every year based on a division of the country into geographic areas, and one award per area per year was given. This fellowship grant was not one the artist could apply for. One had to be nominated for it. The AVA received the nominations, and they had a committee of peers evaluate the nominees, and a selection was made for each of these geographic areas. Whoever happened to get it, say in Southern California, was the only person in Southern California getting it. It was a large amount of money, and it was all tax-free, which made it just simply glorious. I happened to get the AVA within days, I think, certainly within weeks of when I got the [John Simon] Guggenheim [Memorial Foundation Fellowship]. So I was rolling in capital there for a while. [laughter] But anyway, Wilson was the person that nominated me for that, and he has been very supportive of my work.

MASON

Okay. I guess that was a question that was going to come up eventually. But, you know, one of the criticisms that I hear from a lot of people, a lot of artists in Southern California, is that-- On the one hand it's great to be in Southern California because you can just do what you want and people leave you alone. On the other hand, some people complain that for the younger artists or for the less well known and not bicoastal artists, there isn't any support. There isn't any critical support. There's no critical dialogue. There's no kind of institutional support. So they like being left alone up to a point, but that's one thing that some people feel is kind of absent: this whole support from critics and historical attention and that kind of thing.

HARDEN

Well, that's all legitimate and justified in great measure. It isn't absolutely true, as nothing probably is, or I would imagine rarely is anything absolutely true. Los Angeles and Southern California is definitely not New York in terms of the kind of support system. The museum system, the curatorial support from the institutions and the collectors, most of them are star-struck by New York in my judgment. This is one man's opinion. No science behind this.

MASON

Well, you're not alone in that opinion.

HARDEN

In order to validate themselves, the curators and collectors especially--I don't think the critics so much--but the curators and the collectors and directors of spaces and all of that, I think to validate themselves they go with what has already gotten the stamp of approval. And the people, the major hotshots, big-name, superstar artists, are in New York for the most part. So L.A. sees itself as secondary, and it is secondary because it sees itself as secondary. But it isn't secondary in terms of quality, I don't think. I think there's a lot of good work being done in Los Angeles, a lot of bad work being done in Los Angeles, a lot of good work in New York, and a lot of bad work in New York. But I think that what is unique about L.A. vis-à-vis New York and other places is what we talked about yesterday: the fact that it's a very large city, a very complicated city vis-à-vis transportation, very problematic trying to get around. And it

isolates artists and others in great measure and thereby allows the artist to develop in his or her own direction for the most part. Obviously there are influences impinging on everybody, art influences and other things that are not about art but do influence and affect the art. So you don't have, as they do in New York, this tight community that looks at each other and argues with each other and all of that stuff. Now, there's a certain energy and dynamic about that that I think is good. But at the same time, it also tends to breed a certain kind of kinship, kind of like inbreeding with people, that I don't think is ultimately necessarily the best for the artist. And let me qualify this by saying that I'm a strong advocate of individualism, and I don't think you get that much in a situation like New York as much as you would in a situation like L.A. It doesn't mean it happens in L.A. all the time. It doesn't mean it doesn't happen in New York some of the time. Anyway, I would concur with these people, young artists and others. But then I would also say that young artists, emerging artists, would-be artists, are going to have a tough time no matter where they are. That's the nature of the beast. They can't really legitimately, no one can really legitimately, complain about that. All careers are difficult to get going and to maintain. That's just the nature of it. Whether that career is in painting or in stock car racing, you know, that's just the nature of it. You just have to be yourself. I tend to not like the business of art. I tend to want to be off to myself, and I've been able to maintain some viability doing that. It's very risky to do it that way. But you have to have the courage of your convictions and remember you've got this life, and you have to determine what's the most important thing for you to do as far as you're concerned. So if someone gave me a choice and said to me, "Come to New York and live and work, and you will be miserable, but your career will soar," I would not go to New York. If they said to me, "Stay out here in the middle of the countryside where you are now and you will be happy in all respects, except your career will not move," I would make this choice. I would stay here. So I'm not much of a careerist. But I don't think that you have to be a careerist to be an artist. They're two different things.

MASON

But let's see, aside from teaching-- Let's see, first you taught at UCLA in the [University] Extension, and then you taught-- Did you teach at Harbor College

for a while? And then you ended up at Northridge for a while. But for the most part-- I'm sorry, go ahead.

HARDEN

I was just going to say, yeah, you're right. My first encounter with teaching in a sense was that I was offered this TA-ship at UCLA. I didn't accept it for reasons I won't go into; I was angry at someone. I was given instead an opportunity to teach in extension, and I accepted it. I had never really anticipated for a long time that I would teach. But then, when I got ready to go to graduate school, I realized that I didn't have any way of making a living. So I started working on a teaching credential at the same time I worked on-- Correction. I started working on a teaching credential first, and I got it. And then after I got it I decided I didn't want to teach in high school or junior high. So I went on to pursue a master's [degree]. In the process, I was given the opportunity, mainly by Jan Stussy, who happened to have been my thesis committee chairperson and one of the principal teachers I worked with-- He and William Brice were the two principal teachers I worked with. Both he and Brice were excellent teachers, incredible teachers. You don't get many really good teachers in art. And there's a feeling by most people, including art teachers, that one can't teach it. The people who are going to be artists are going to be artists no matter what, and the people who are not going to be are not going to be no matter what you do with them. But these two guys were really outstanding teachers. I'm not sure. Brice might still be teaching. Stussy just died about a year or so ago. When I first started teaching, I'm naturally a shy person, and I was scared to death. The first night I taught--I was teaching a night class at extension--I went by the room. I didn't go into the room--

MASON

Hoping that nobody would be there. [laughter]

HARDEN

I looked into the room, and it was chock-full of people. They were sitting on the counters and standing along the walls, and I was really scared to death. I mean, I was prepared as best as I reasonably could have been, but I was scared, because I wasn't really used to being the focus of all eyes and all of that. So I walked by the room about three or four times, and I ended up going

back into another room that was empty to try to compose myself and get ready for these people. But apparently, from what I've been told by others, I have the capacity to mask very well my nervousness. So I went in, and I was very cool on the outside, so they tell me, but I was very nervous on the inside. I went in and did my job, and I've been doing it ever since. That was my first time teaching. And I'm forever grateful to Jan Stussy and other faculty for supporting me.

MASON

So I guess you might have incorporated that philosophy then that it is possible to teach everybody to draw to some degree.

HARDEN

Well, not necessarily. I'm not sure I'd go that far. Stussy would probably say that. I could hear him saying that, but I'm not sure about that. I see students, say, in a beginning drawing class that have absolutely no aptitude, none. And I don't see how one can do anything with that person. It is possible on the outside, maybe, to do something if that person has no aptitude yet has great persistence and a great willingness to learn; one might be able to do something with them. One won't necessarily make them draw like a Rembrandt or an Ingres or somebody, but you can perhaps get them to do whatever it is they do with enough intensity that the sheer strength of the work is born out of its crudeness or its intensity or whatever. You can make something happen that way. But the person has to have something going for himself or herself for that to be possible. But I have had the good fortune of having a lot of success in teaching in terms of what my students accomplish in the classroom and after they get out of school. I think teaching is a very fundamental and noble profession. And I don't say that because I'm a teacher. It sounds a little self-serving, and to a degree it is. But I say that because, other than being a parent, I think it's the next most fundamental thing, probably, or one of the most fundamental things, to do. Everybody goes through some teacher at some point in time, whether you end up being a fireman or a truck driver or a physician or another teacher or a football player. Whatever you end up being in this life, you had a teacher's hands all over you somewhere along the line to help shape you. So that's what I mean by that, that it's a very noble profession. It's a giving profession, and it's one that touches a lot of

people. In my job at Cal State Northridge, I initiated, in my department, the program of teaching assistants, graduate teaching assistants.

MASON

What year was that?

HARDEN

I initiated the program somewhere around 1983. And I have up to this point selected all the TA's. I make the recommendations to the department chair, and I teach them, I supervise them. I teach the TA's to teach. I'm very proud to have created the program and to work with these young people to help them learn to teach. So I have a great commitment to teaching. I like teaching. I get very tired of it sometimes. If you don't have good students, it's just a real tough, difficult, frustrating job. And I have to drive a great distance to get there. It takes me four hours just to get to work. Four hours one way. But I like it, you know. I'm getting a little old for it now. I'm thinking about how many more years I can do this, especially with the drive involved, the commuting. The commuting is really tearing me up. I also taught at [Los Angeles] Harbor [College]. That was the second place I worked. I taught adult education, a University High School program that was evening classes, where people wanted to get out of the house to do something--

MASON

Like me, for example. [laughter]

HARDEN

And that wasn't like real teaching. You know, you go in there, and it's kind of like you do a little teaching, and it's mostly social.

MASON

It's recreation.

HARDEN

It's recreation. I hated that. Because you can't be effective. The only thing you can do is be diplomatic and be-- You know, let them enjoy themselves and hopefully try to enjoy yourself. I taught at Harbor College, and I loved teaching at Harbor College because they respected me and they left me alone. You

know, I walked in, I did my job, they didn't bother me, they didn't try to tell me what to do or anything. And I'm the kind of person that I'm very responsible, and I've always been that way, and I don't want anybody telling me anything. All I want to know is what am I supposed to do and I'll get the job done. That's my attitude about it. I also taught at Santa Monica City College for a while. And then I got the job at Northridge, and I've been there for, I guess this is about the twenty-seventh year, something like that.

MASON

Yeah. You started in '68, according to this [Harden's résumé].

HARDEN

Actually, I started in '67 part-time. You probably don't have that down there.

MASON

No.

HARDEN

Because I started part-time in '67. And then I started full-time in '68. That's why it reads "from '68."

MASON

Well, all that was to say that although-- Well, I was wondering if you were able to-- To what extent were you able to support yourself just through making art? For example, buying this ranch and buying the other ranch? Obviously a teacher's salary wouldn't cover that.

HARDEN

A teacher's salary is not really good, is it?

MASON

That will pay your taxes probably, but--

HARDEN

Well, actually I've never been able to support myself just through art. First of all, I've never been much of a businessperson. I'm not a hustler. I don't go out and meet a lot of people and make friends and-- I'm not going to say what I

started to say. But I don't go out and touch a lot of bases with dealers and collectors and curators and all the other things that you have to do. If you're going to be a real successful artist in terms of exposure and money, you've got to make it a job. You've got to go out there, and you've got to see people, and you've got to make all the openings and the parties and keep your contacts. I don't do that, and I never really have. I did it better when I was younger than I do now, but I really never liked it and I was never really comfortable with it. And the older I got, the more set in my ways I got, and then, quite frankly, I really haven't had to do it unless I really wanted to get to superstar status, and I don't really care to be that way. I don't know if I would really like to be a superstar. I mean, I think it would bring responsibilities that I don't particularly really want. And I'm very private, and I don't really want a lot of people nosing into my affairs. So this kind of suits me well, you know what I mean? *[At any rate, I don't believe a black man can become an art superstar in this country at this time.] So to answer your question, I have never been able to support myself just on making art. You never know when the money is coming in. You never know when you're going to have a sale. And to help explain to you what I think is behind the question to some extent, how I've been able to survive and do the kind of things I've done, financial things, I'm very frugal. I will spend money on anything I like, anything I want, but I don't necessarily want a lot of things. I mean, I dress the way I am now dressed all the time. People think it's very funny because they've never seen me in anything else.

MASON

You're in jeans and Reeboks and a blue workshirt.

HARDEN

That's right. And there is some philosophy behind that that has to do with economics and also has to do with simply philosophy. You know, I think clothes are to hide one's nakedness and to protect one from getting scratched up by the brush or something, but beyond that I don't really want to gain any prestige or any kind of status from what I wear. I mean, I'm not going to go out and buy some fancy Italian shoes, because I don't need that. And I'm the same way about cars or anything. I don't need a fancy car, and I don't need to wash it, because that's nonfunctional to me. In fact, it's nonfunctional period, because it's a waste of water. So I'm that kind of person. I remember when I

first decided that I was indeed going to make the effort to buy a ranch. I'd always wanted one since I was a child. But when I started making the effort, I was still in graduate school. And I didn't make any money. I was teaching part-time, and I was working part-time in the library over at the school, at UCLA, but I would save five dollars a week. Or was it a month? It might have been a month--it probably was a month--with the intention that I was going to keep on saving money until I got enough money to make a down payment on a ranch, on some property. And I stopped going to movies, and I stopped doing anything that cost money. I've never smoked in my life. I've never even smoked a cigarette. I've never drunk a beer. I don't do drugs. I've never done that.

MASON

And you're also thin. [laughter] Just kidding.

HARDEN

Yeah, and I don't eat a lot! So I've never had a lot of habits that cost one a lot of money. And if I went out with a girl or a woman on a date or something, I'd just as soon go out in the country, sit on a rock, and watch the sunset and eat apples and cheese or something. So that's the kind of thing I like to do, and that's the kind of thing I did, and I was able to save money to do the kinds of things I want to do with the money. And when I got enough money, I bought one place, and I bought it real cheap. I almost didn't buy it, because it was like--I didn't like it, you know? Actually, it's really funny, because I tell people--and it's the truth--that I paid more for each of those vans down there singly than I paid for the piece of property I had, the Cold Comfort property I had, which was about an acre of land and a house on it. So I paid more for each of these vans than I did for that property. And when I sold Cold Comfort, I made a big profit. I made a lot of money. So that helped. And I've been fortunate enough to get grants and things, and that helped. So one of my strengths has always been that I'm a very focused person, and when I determine I want to do something, my eyes never leave the target. I just keep going after it. And I have the capacity for long-range planning. I don't care if I'm not going to be able to do it until fifteen years later; I just keep going at it. It's like a man in the desert looking at the horizon and continuing to walk because he knows there's a stream out there someplace. So that's the kind of person I am.

MASON

Okay. Well, that's very interesting. Okay, well, I wanted to get back to some of the other exhibitions. There are so many. There was one in '77 called Private Images: Photographs by Painters [at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art]. Did you do photography at one point?

HARDEN

Not really. I mean, I've taken photographs, but I'm not a photographer. As a matter of fact, I'm a lousy photographer. I mean--

MASON

But you're in the show at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art].

HARDEN

Not the imagery. Not the imagery. I mean, I can point a camera probably with anybody, practically, because I'm an image maker, as I see myself. I mean, that's the way my work is. So I'm good at looking. At least I think I am. [laughter] Far be it from me to make the determination. But I'm interested in finding imagery, and, of course, that's what a lot of photographers do. So I can do that part. The lousy part is that I'm not mechanical, and I forget settings, and I forget to do different things with the camera. The camera mystifies me. But this show was about-- I don't know what it was about.

MASON

This was in 1977.

HARDEN

The curator was Stephanie Barron. She wasn't asking for photographs from photographers, she was asking for photographs from painters. You know, it was like painters that maybe took a photograph now and again for whatever reasons. And that's what it came out to be.

MASON

Oh, I see. What do you use photographs for? Just for your enjoyment or study?

HARDEN

For enjoyment, yeah. You can do it for anything. You can do it for enjoyment.

MASON

No, I mean, do you use it for studies? Do you have a specific purpose?

HARDEN

I have in the past. I don't do it all the time. Yeah. Sometimes I do. Sometimes I have and sometimes I haven't.

MASON

Okay. And then another one was in 1980, Dialects: The Artists, at Franklin Furnace in New York City. Now, somebody mentioned Franklin Furnace. Was that like an alternative space?

HARDEN

I think so. I never saw the space.

MASON

Okay. I didn't know if you had any comments that you wanted to make about Franklin Furnace.

HARDEN

Not really, because I don't know anything about that space. That was another strange experience, though.

MASON

In terms of the way they treated you?

HARDEN

Yes, the way they treated-- The guy who curated the show [Horace Brockington], they were supposed to pay the cost of shipping. I had the stuff shipped, and some time later I got the bill from the shipper here in Los Angeles stating that they'd never been paid by these people that were supposed to pay it back on the East Coast. So I paid the bill, and I got in touch with this guy, and he said, "There's been some kind of mistake," blah, blah, blah, and this, that, and the other. So he said he would send me the money, and he was very apologetic and very nice. And he never did, you know. So it's

just one of those things where there are these little things that happen that are irritants in the business. I'm one of those people that doesn't even particularly want a dealer in some other town because it's so difficult.

MASON

Transportation costs.

HARDEN

You know, you don't get your money sometimes. And when it's time to return the art that hasn't been sold, they're very reluctant to return it, because they don't want to fork up the cost of shipping the stuff. This is not true of all dealers. This is just true of some dealers. And I've had the problem before. So you get to the point where you get a little gun-shy. You really don't want to do it.

MASON

Okay. I don't know if you want to look at this [Harden's résumé], but if some things come to mind, just the exhibitions, either solo or group exhibitions--

HARDEN

Well, I'll just say something about one that I see right off the top that I just was in, and I think you saw it, Drawings as Poems. The reason I want to mention it is because of the person who curated the show. Again, that's a person that's been very, very supportive of me. She's a good friend of mine.

MASON

You probably want to--

HARDEN

Josine--

MASON

Yeah. Josine Ianco-Starrels. And this was in 1992 at the Armory Center for the Arts [in Pasadena, California].

HARDEN

Right. Josine is a very articulate, intelligent, sensitive person. She's one of the best people in the Southern California community. One of the things that I respect most about her is that she doesn't care what color you are or what your gender is and all of that stuff. Too many people feel that one's work is not truly able to be validated if one is not the right shade or something. And she's not one of those people. She's helped a large number of artists out and been very supportive. I'm one of those people. So I'm very proud to say that she's a good friend.

MASON

How did you meet her?

HARDEN

Well, a mutual friend, Connor Everts, a good friend of mine who's an artist, was-- I can't remember whether he introduced me vis-à-vis my work or he simply introduced me. I think she was putting together a show, Fourth Annual California Print Exhibition and Young Talent in Graphics, and Connor told her about me. Connor and I went over there once, to where she was working. This was at the old Lytton Center of the Visual Arts. It's no longer in existence. She was the curator there. He introduced me to her--that was in about 1967 or '68 or something--and we've been real good friends ever since.

MASON

Okay. Actually, in terms of your exhibitions, I wanted to ask you about--and I guess this is kind of an inevitable question, or maybe not, but anyway--the black art shows in the sixties and the seventies. You participated in some all-black things like the Geneva show and the Festival in Black in 1977, where you're in a show with Maren Hassinger and maybe Raymond Saunders. But Houston Conwill wrote up a review of it. Here it is. Here Oliver Nowlin, Maren Hassinger, John Outterbridge, Betye Saar--

HARDEN

Where's the show?

MASON

This was Otis Art Institute Gallery, and that was held in conjunction with the MacArthur Park "Festival in Black."

HARDEN

Was this in February?

MASON

Yes. No. Well, this is dated August.

HARDEN

[laughter] I laugh because I hear from people in February [Black History Month], you know. And I've come to the point where I turn almost everybody down in February because I don't want to be bothered with that nonsense. I mean, where are they the rest of the year is what I want to know. Well, my feeling about that is I've had some very mixed feelings and strong feelings. I've participated in some of those, but not a lot, and my-- I'm trying to figure out the word to say. My method, as it were, or--It's not a method. My decision, that's what I'm trying to say. My decision has come to evolve into being one that I will participate in an all-black show when I feel it's very meaningful in some way, like Martin Luther King [Jr.] being honored or something, or if there are a number of other black artists participating that I respect and I want to be seen in their company to be supportive of them. And let me just say this--I don't know if it's fair to say--but more often than not, a lot of these shows that are all women or all black or all Chicano, the qualification to be in the show all too often is to be black or to be Chicano or to be a woman or whatever it is, and oftentimes, quite frankly, the quality of the work is not there or is uneven. So if I think that there's a Mel Edwards or a Raymond Saunders and people like that that I respect as artists going to be in the show, I might participate in that show if asked. My feeling about that is that an artist is an artist whether he or she is black or white or polka-dot or striped or whatever, and that these all-women shows and all-black shows and all of this and all of that are really kind of a sad commentary on our society in general and on the art scene in particular. I really think that these things should be abandoned. And I don't really have a lot of sympathy for this country to continue to be segregated in everything it does--you know, from Sunday mornings in churches to art exhibitions to graveyards to everything, I think that's absurd. So anyway, I would like to see us get away from that. And when I say "us," I'm talking about the society. I'm not talking about black people, I'm talking about all people. And the people who can bring it about are really not black people, because

black people don't control the power structure. It's white people that can make the change, because they're in positions of power at institutions like museums and universities and whatever. Black artists should not be relegated to segregated shows. And I said the words "black artists," but I can say Filipino artists or any kind of artists should not be relegated to segregated shows. One should just have shows based on some kind of particular theme or, you know, quality, whatever.

MASON

Like the drawings, Drawings as Poems.

HARDEN

Right. Right. You go out and you choose artists that fit whatever it is that you're looking for, and it shouldn't matter whether it's a woman or a man or a black or Chicano or Japanese or whatever.

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MASON

So do you feel that the [all-black] show served a purpose at one time? Say, to expose artists who might not have been exposed or to kind of expand the dialogue on what's meaningful aesthetically? Or not really?

HARDEN

Well, I think it's arguable that even at this moment it still serves a purpose, and I say that even though I am in disagreement with it. The purpose being that black artists and other minority artists and to some extent women--women have a lot easier time of it now--still don't have the same degree of access by far, not the same degree of recognition by far. But I think as long as black artists are willing to go along with the program, to have black shows, we will always be relegated into these segregated, second-class-citizenship kind of situations. As long as white America says, "Well, you have an opportunity to show in these black shows, and you have an opportunity to be in black institutions, then we don't really have to open our doors to you." And that's what's going to always happen. It's going to always happen! You know, I would stake the ranch on it. So I see that ultimately it's not to our advantage as black

people, and it's not to our advantage as a nation as a whole for this kind of segregated mentality to exist among black people and white people. And unfortunately it's a two-sided street. A lot of people in the black community will feel that if you don't participate in every black show that comes along, and if you don't do imagery that is recognizably something that has come to be associated with a black person executing it, then you're not fully black. Now, that's another form of prejudice and stupidity in my judgment.

MASON

Did you feel a lot of pressure back then?

HARDEN

I don't feel any pressure.

MASON

No, I mean back during the height of the Black Power movement.

HARDEN

No. No.

MASON

You didn't feel that kind of pressure at all?

HARDEN

No. No, because, Karen, quite frankly, I'm the kind of person that goes his own way, and I really don't care what other people think. I never have.

MASON

But I was just wondering if there were things out there, and you had to make an effort--

HARDEN

No. Well, I shouldn't say "no" categorically. I have felt a certain amount of pressure vis-à-vis the black shows, because in theory I don't agree with it. But I also feel that I have a responsibility to black people, especially young black people, to be exposed to them. For instance, from my work, one can't tell I am black or green. You have to see the person and say, "Yeah, this guy did that

work" before you know that there's a connection of blackness to it, because my work doesn't deal with that. It deals with the fact that I'm an individual person; I just happen to be black. And all people, whether they are black or whatever, share a lot of things in common. They have a need to breathe oxygen for one thing, and they have hopes and dreams and desires and anxieties and all of that. So there is no necessity that a woman should do curtains in her imagery or talk about vulvas or whatever. She should have the freedom to do anything she wants to do. That's true for a white male or a black male or an Asian woman or whatever.

MASON

You mentioned that you were friends with Judy Chicago, and I was wondering if you had big arguments. [laughter]

HARDEN

Yeah, we had some arguments--really discussions. Yes, we did! You know, Judy came to my house one night for dinner--this is when I lived above Chatsworth. I haven't seen Judy in years and years and years. I don't even know where she is. I think she's in New Mexico someplace. But anyway, she came to my house for dinner, and she and Miriam Schapiro had started Womanhouse, this school for women--

MASON

Yeah, they started off in Venice and then moved down to--

HARDEN

And we would talk about that, and I would adamantly disagree with her. I said, "Look, for instance--" And I'm just recalling this. I don't know what I said. I'm not quoting myself. "Young ladies, women, girls, whatever you say, have to live in this society with people of another gender. So education--" Her point was that women should be educated separately, not only in her school, the one she opened, but just in general. That men and women should be educated separately in separate institutions. And I disagreed with that. I said, "Look, we've got to live in the same world. We're going to be rubbing shoulders with each other and all of that. It doesn't make any sense, because the very purpose of education, the very purpose of it, is to help enable one to function

in society. It seems to me if you take the male part of the species and place them over here and the female over there that we're not really preparing them adequately to deal with each other." Just like the situation with black and white in this country. I mean, white people don't know anything about black people. I mean, the stereotypes that you and I see are really what they believe we are. That's not what we are, but they don't know that. And the reason they don't know that is because of segregation. And even when we have been in the same place at the same time, they've rarely bothered, they've really never bothered to get to know us. And I'm saying this in general. That doesn't mean every white person falls into that category. But anyway, yeah, we had the big discussion, and we went round and round with it, and I was never going to change her mind. She probably still thinks the same way today. And I obviously think the same way today as I did then. But I enjoy a good discussion. I mean, I like talking about politics and social issues and stuff, football or whatever it is. I mean, I like being able to test myself, my thoughts, and my ability to articulate my thoughts to other people. And I like hearing their points of view, and I like being able to punch holes in them if I can. It's fun to me.

MASON

Yeah. Yeah. It seems like in America when you argue with somebody there's always this big stress like you always have to convince the other person they're not right. Whereas Europeans, they'll argue, and they're like, "I'm a different person, so I have a different opinion, and you're different, and so we can be different and--"

HARDEN

And still be friends.

MASON

Yeah. So that's interesting.

HARDEN

Yeah, I don't think we-- We never lost any friendship or anything. It just happens that her life has taken her a different direction vis-à-vis where she lives. That's happened to almost all of my friends. Even though many of them

from UCLA days are still in Los Angeles, I don't get to see them. I'm busy working and doing my thing, and they're busy working and doing their thing, and you really don't have time to try to see each other. And that's unfortunate.

MASON

Okay. Well, I have plenty of other questions that I can ask you. Either we can take a break now, if you're tired, or we can just keep going.

HARDEN

We can just keep going.

MASON

Okay. [tape recorder off] Let's see, we were talking about the black art shows, the segregated art shows, whether that has any purpose or serves any purpose today, and then your argument with Judy Chicago. Let's see. I know yesterday you were saying that you didn't really participate in any of the activities that were going on in Watts or Compton or anything like that. But this is a question that will bring us to LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art]. Did you have any opinion at all about those spaces being sort of artist-run spaces?

HARDEN

Which spaces?

MASON

Like the Watts Towers Arts Center. You know, it was run by artists, [Noah] Purifoy and [Curtis] Tann and [John] Outterbridge. And the Compton Communicative Arts Academy was run by John Outterbridge. And then there were some galleries--Gallery 32 with Suzanne Jackson.

HARDEN

I've never even heard of that gallery.

MASON

Oh, really? Yeah, it was only up for a year. I was wondering if you had any thoughts about that at all, not just in terms of their being black spaces, but

spaces that were run by artists, which I guess were pretty unique. Or maybe I'm mistaken.

HARDEN

I don't have any real strong thoughts about it because I don't have any familiarity with them. I didn't know those particular galleries. In fact, I didn't even know about those spaces you talked about, other than the Watts Towers situation. As far as artist spaces, or spaces run by artists that are co-ops-- I mean, the artists themselves as a group run the space. I think that's fine. I wouldn't want to be a part of it. And the reason I wouldn't want to be a part of it is because if you're an artist and you're doing work and you have a space that you are paying the rent on and putting your own work up, paying some fees to do that, it's kind of like writing poetry or a novel or something and publishing it yourself. It's kind of like the validation isn't there. Do you know what I mean by that? I mean, it's somebody else-- I mean, it's like you can't get somebody else to do it because, for whatever reason, you can't get them to believe in you. So there is a sense that you're not coming up to the mark or something. Now, that part I have trouble with. And there are a lot of co-ops, and there always have been, I would imagine, at least for a long time. But I would rather do my work and hang it in my house and look at it in the studio or whatever and give it to friends and relatives and whatever I was going to do than exhibit if I had to pay for the exhibit in essence. I wouldn't do that because somehow it seems to me that there's something unbecoming about it. I mean, that's just for me now. I don't say that somebody else shouldn't do that; they should do whatever they want to do. It's not hurting anybody. But that's my feeling. And as far as some of the other spaces are concerned, I wasn't familiar with them. I mean, it's like I'm not familiar with a lot of things that go on in the art community, be it black or white, because I don't make it a point to get around.

MASON

Okay. I want to ask you about LAICA, but it would be terrible if I didn't ask you this question: Did you know Charles White?

HARDEN

I spoke to Charles White on the phone, but I have never met Charles. Yeah. My friend Mel [Melvin Edwards] knew Charles personally. I knew who Charles was, obviously, and he knew who I was, but we never met. But we've had the pleasure-- I think he was at the point where he was fading in terms of his health when I got to speak with him.

MASON

Okay. Just out of curiosity.

HARDEN

Well, Charles is obviously one of those people that needs to have another thing said about him, and that is that because of his accomplishments and the fact that he was older, he had gone before, he was obviously a pioneer for Mel and myself and other people like us. He'd gone before, and everybody that goes before kind of helps the people that come after. So he had that difficulty and that honor.

MASON

Okay. How did you get involved with the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art?

HARDEN

Very simple. Bob [Robert] Smith and I had known each other for a very long time prior to that coming up. Obviously Bob Smith was the real founding father of that institution. He needed help, I suppose, and wanted help, and he called on people that he knew and I suppose had some confidence in or whatever, and I happened to be one of those people. It's just that simple. It's like the reason I got involved with LAICA is because I knew the guy and was around him. We worked in the same place. I stayed in his home at one point when he was on vacation, house-sat for him.

MASON

So you were involved in the initial planning stages, I suppose, or the vision of what the institution would be and who it would serve.

HARDEN

I was involved from the very first meeting, yeah.

MASON

I've read in an oral history that they did it with people like [Fidel] Danieli and Debra Burchett and, of course, Bob Smith. I was just wondering if you could give your opinion about what was going on. It just seems like kind of an amazing thing. There are all these people, really talented, who came together, had all these different ideas. And I can't imagine how things were sorted out, because it came out of the closing of the Pasadena [Art] Museum, and people were saying, "Well, we're going to do it right this time."

HARDEN

Well, there was a need. Everybody, I guess, Bob Smith initially, and then the people he gathered around, realized the obvious: there was a need for some additional support, some institution that was going to be supportive of the arts and artists and generate some interest in Los Angeles. Los Angeles is a strange place. It's always had, at least as far back as I know personally, a thriving community of artists. I mean, it's like the ground floor had already been there all the time, and people were generating this art and stuff, and much of it was world-class stuff. But the rest of it hadn't been there. So there was this obvious need, and we got all these people, talented people, bright people, some collectors and some artists--

MASON

Yeah, Marcia Weisman was involved.

HARDEN

Yeah, Marcia was involved.

MASON

Miriam Schapiro.

HARDEN

Miriam and her then husband, Paul Brach. I said "then"; they might still be married. I don't even know if they're still alive; I haven't seen them in years. Gifford and Joann [Kocher] Phillips, the collectors.

MASON

So a lot who were involved in Pasadena just kind of transferred over.

HARDEN

Yes, transferred over. It was indeed amazing. And a lot of people-- When we started having these little meetings with, you know, eight to fifteen or whatever number-- I think the first meeting, there weren't many of us there. And then the next meeting at Gifford and Joann Phillips's home, there was a larger group that included people like Gary Lloyd. Peter Plagens was there then, and Joni Gordon, Monte Gordon, Monte and Betty Factor, people like that. So in addition to the other people that you named, they were there. So eventually we started opening up the meeting to anybody and everybody who'd come. You know, we had a big meeting at Jerrold Burchman's studio where we invited all the community, everybody who wanted to come and talk about this and voice their opinions and their desires in all of this. And we got a lot of negative stuff.

MASON

When you say "community," do you mean Pasadena?

HARDEN

No, I meant just the art community. The art community in Southern California, whether they were coming from Pasadena or downtown L.A., wherever they were coming from, it didn't matter. Just, you know, this was in the air. "We're doing this thing, so come and support it and share your ideas with us" and all that kind of stuff. Well, there was a lot of negative-- I felt there was some negative stuff. Because first of all, a lot of heavy- weight kind of people in the community, a lot of heavy-weight artists, for instance, didn't bother to show up. You know, they weren't very supportive, because they didn't think that this was going anywhere. And then a lot of other people didn't think it was going to go anywhere, and they were very kind of stand-offish and/or a little bit negative about it.

MASON

Why was that?

HARDEN

I think it's because people like to jump on a bandwagon that's going someplace, and I think they didn't think that it was going to go anywhere. And "You can't do this, and you can't do that," because there are a lot of naysayers in the world. So obviously what was interesting--it wasn't that interesting--but the obvious thing that happened was that it did get off the ground, and it did become a growing concern, a thriving situation. And then a lot of these people who didn't want to be bothered at first obviously wanted to have shows. So I think that, you know, it's always that kind of human nature that's a little bit frustrating and difficult to have to deal with.

MASON

So do you think people kind of felt burned by Pasadena? Or did they feel like the money wasn't there? Or did they feel like there were too many different personalities involved?

HARDEN

There might have been some people who felt all of those different things. I really don't know, as a matter of fact. But the money I suppose was tough to get. I don't really know the money end, because I had nothing to do with that part of it. But the money was a big worry, and I guess the money always was a worry during the whole existence of LAICA. The money was a worry, a problem.

MASON

Then they started to get CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] money in the seventies.

HARDEN

It started getting a little smoother, and they started getting more things. The problem with LAICA from my perspective is that it started out with one premise and it ended up doing something mostly different than that, and a lot of people started falling away, including yours truly.

MASON

Could you articulate that more?

HARDEN

Well, it was kind of akin to what we were talking about a little while ago. This community has an inferiority complex to New York, and Europe too, for that matter, but mainly New York. So there wasn't then and isn't now that much of a support system for the arts and artists here. And the idea was to create an institution that was all-encompassing as far as the visual arts were concerned that focused principally on Southern California art or California art--I think it was California art, but I could be wrong--and it was to be supportive of the artists here, because we didn't have that much support here, and we certainly weren't getting any support from New York. You don't go from California and make a big splash in New York necessarily, but you can reasonably go from New York and come to Los Angeles and make a big splash. People see you differently here if you come from New York. If you're here, they don't see you the same. So anyway, that was the original focus. And then the focus became more New York and international. And again, the same thing that everybody does to Southern California artists is to assume because you're in my backyard you must not be very good. You know, I mean, the very good people are in New York or in Germany or someplace.

MASON

[laughter] What a twisted logic. So "If you leave town, we could show you."

HARDEN

Right. It's my opinion that the people in positions of power, that is, the curators and so forth, have insecurities. They're not willing to put their own keesters on the line, so to speak. They're waiting to revalidate something that's already been validated. And the biggest validation comes from New York, you know. So I think that began to happen to LAICA. That's my opinion, and I will stand by that. I don't attempt to say that it's the absolute gospel; it's just my opinion. When I saw that happening, I decided it wasn't worth my-- I mean, I don't particularly care to get in my car and drive all over town, anyway. So when that started happening, that just kind of made me feel like I didn't particularly want to go over here.

MASON

That's when it was at Robertson [Boulevard]. At first it was at Century City.

HARDEN

That's when it was at Robertson. At Century City it was really cooking, in my judgment. I mean, it was exciting, it was new, it was a great place, because there was sort of a-- You know, it was a big space and a big area with a kind of a different feeling about it. And obviously a part of that feeling was the fact that it was new. But you'd go there, and the thing would be crowded. I mean, it would be sweaty bodies everywhere. It could be cold outside, but it would be hot in there, because there were so many people, and it was really kind of jumping pretty good. Then it went over to Robertson, and it was a lot quieter most of the time it seemed. I guess it wasn't that quiet during an opening, of course, when everything jumps a little bit. But there was a different feeling there. The ceilings sometimes were very low. It just didn't have the same feeling.

MASON

Was it smaller? Was it a smaller exhibitions feeling?

HARDEN

Yeah. I think it was smaller. But it was pretty big, though; it wasn't that small. I don't even know if I'm right that it was smaller. But it felt smaller, because the ceiling was low in some parts of it. So it was a little claustrophobic as far as an art space was concerned in some parts, not all the parts. In some areas the gallery spaces were pretty decent. But it's just that it got to this point where I felt like--in all due respect to my friend Bob--he got caught up in the sense of maybe feeling more important if he got people from New York or from someplace else to show, or maybe it was the exhibitions committee and not Bob. And I thought it was betrayal myself. So I wasn't too happy about that. But in all due respect to him, LAICA never would have happened without Bob and Tobi [Smith], his wife. I don't know how much, which influenced the other the most, but I'm assuming Bob was the driving force behind it. But Tobi obviously--

MASON

Yeah. Tobi did more of the business management stuff. But was she on the board, too? Or not?

HARDEN

I think she was on the board. I'm not sure. I think they both were on the board. But what I'm really making reference to here is that I think the dream came through Bob principally. I think it was his initiative, I would imagine. And then again, you know, I want to emphasize I'm imagining this. I don't know what they said in their pillow talk or whatever. I don't know what went on between them. But it was a singular accomplishment, I think, and Bob and Tobi deserve most of the credit.

MASON

What about the criticism that some of the shows--? You talked about some of the earlier shows, and one of the shows I remember is the assemblage show [Collage and Assemblage]. Some people felt that it was a little too all-inclusive; it was a little too democratic.

HARDEN

Well, you know, it was very democratic, and it was very all-inclusive. You could hardly pry another thing in there with a shoehorn. But I think that was part of its charm. I understand the criticism; I don't agree with the criticism, because I think they missed one point. I have to say the "I think" now, and that is because of the kind of art it was, the assemblage stuff, you know, the found-object, junk kind of stuff. Because of what it was and because of what the space was tending to be--democratic--I thought it was perfect. I think it was a good wedding, a good marriage. First of all, you went in there and there was just tons of stuff all over the place, which added to the kind of found-object, junk kind of aesthetic. It made it a very different show, you know. Like when you do a painting or a piece of sculpture or whatever, that's the artwork. But when you put that stuff all together, that tends to be another art entity in and of itself once it's all together, as opposed to individual pieces. So you had this one big entity that had the aesthetic and feeling of assemblage, I thought. I thought it was wonderful; I thought it was good. That was, I think, the second show that we ever did.

MASON

Yeah, the first show was actually the Nine Senior Southern California Painters.

HARDEN

And I thought that was very appropriate. I don't want to be self-serving. I served on the committee that made those judgments.

MASON

Now, you were on the exhibitions committee from '73 to '74.

HARDEN

Yeah. But I thought--I did then and I still do-- that that senior citizens show, so to speak-- I don't mean senior citizens, but they were senior citizens. They were people who had been around a long time. You know, Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg and Hans Burkhardt and a number of others. They were indeed senior citizens vis-à-vis other junior-flip artists type of people, and they'd been around, they'd paid a lot of dues. They had been the energy and the sustaining power in the L.A. art world in part long before we got on the scene, and it was all well, good, and appropriate in my judgment that they would be given the respect of having the inaugural show be theirs. It seems to be very appropriate for this young, upstart institution to call upon these people, give them exposure-- Because you remember--you weren't here then--but a lot of these people were no longer getting a lot of exposure in L.A. and Southern California.

MASON

You were saying that Hans Burkhardt was teaching at [California State University] Northridge at that time.

HARDEN

Yeah, Hans Burkhardt was teaching at Northridge at that time. And, you know, it was a good opportunity for a lot of younger people, including myself, to even see their work again or for the first time. Some of those people, I was seeing the work for the first time; some, I was seeing it again. But it was good to see that work, and it was just a matter of being respectful, I think. I mean, I'm one for giving people their due, especially if they've been around a while and maybe didn't receive as much as they should. And then, too, you know, another good thing I thought about that show, people couldn't argue about it too much. You know, there's always these jealousies and things that occur in the art field--I guess in any field. And, you know, if you have one show with--

You make this choice or that choice, then somebody is going to be left out, a lot of people are going to be left out. So a lot of these contemporary young people, or middle-aged or whatever they were, didn't have the opportunity to be envious of each other, because that inaugural show was set aside for these older people. We could all agree that, "Yes, this is a reasonable show." It didn't have to be the first one, but it was a reasonable selection for the first show. And there were just so many of these people around, so I suppose most of them, if not all, were able to be in that show. So that was good.

MASON

Did you go to the opening and meet them all?

HARDEN

Yes, I met them. I met them. I met Feitelson and Lundeberg, and I of course knew Hans Burkhardt, and I met--who else?--Lee Krasne and somebody. Who else was in that show?

MASON

Yeah, I'd have to count them all.

HARDEN

I met them, and it was nice to meet them. It was an honor.

MASON

Okay. Did you feel that artists' concerns were adequately dealt with?

HARDEN

At the LAICA?

MASON

In terms of hanging their work or--

HARDEN

Oh, I would imagine so. I really don't have a lot of firsthand information, because I never talked to any artists about it. But I think that Bob and all of us were very interested in and sympathetic to the artist getting the best possible kind of treatment. I think even at one point we were entertaining--I don't

know if it was ever followed through on--giving stipends to artists for showing their work, because that's not a practice. It never has been anywhere I've ever known.

MASON

Okay. Well, the last couple of questions that I wanted to ask are about your moving up here near Cambria and maybe something about some of your collectors, if you'd like to say anything about that. I mean, your work has been collected by-- We've already mentioned Dr. Leon O. Banks. Did he approach you? Or did he go to a show?

HARDEN

I really don't recall. You know, I really don't know. Vaguely, I think he might have bought it from me, but I'm not really certain that he didn't get it from a dealer. I really don't know. And if he did, I don't even know what dealer he would have bought it from. Probably Ceeje [Galleries], I suppose.

MASON

Yeah, I don't know. I didn't know if he bought work himself or if he went through a dealer or he has his own kind of consultant.

HARDEN

Yeah, I don't know.

MASON

Let's see. Babs Altoon I guess is John Altoon's--

HARDEN

Widow.

MASON

Richard and Jan Baum, Hans Burkhardt, James and Eugenia Butler, Robert Doty, Mel Edwards. Let's see. Gifford and Joann Phillips, Bob and Tobi Smith, Joyce Treiman, and Edwin Janss are some of the people who have collected your work. I don't know if you have anything that you wanted to say about them.

HARDEN

I'm flattered they wanted to have the work and very happy to be in those collections.

MASON

Okay. Who were some of your earlier--?

HARDEN

Earlier what?

MASON

Oh, you know, Connor Everts also collected your work.

HARDEN

Yeah. Connor has my work mostly because of us being friends who exchanged work or something probably. Yeah.

MASON

Yeah. I guess we were really talking about who was kind of buying your work really early on that you recall.

HARDEN

Well, there were people whose names I have in a file someplace, and they may or may not be well known. I first started selling work out of my graduate M.A. [master of arts] show. People bought work out of the show, which surprised me. I had no inkling that anybody was going to buy anything. I didn't even think about it. In fact, I framed some things in ways that didn't make any sense. I mean, it made sense to me then because I was poor and I was getting this thing [exhibition] together in a hurry, and I didn't know what I was doing anyway. And I had two-sided tape holding drawings and all kinds of nonsense. So I feel really bad about that now. But I was an ignorant child, as it were. Anyway, people bought things out of that show. I know a young couple, Manny Silverman, who now has a gallery--

MASON

This isn't part of the Baum Silverman?

HARDEN

No. Manny has a gallery on La Cienega [Boulevard] now [Manny Silverman Art Gallery]. He used to be the owner of Art Services, he and his wife [Jackie Silverman]. We met in school. In fact, I met them, I think, doing my master's show. It turned out that Manny's wife Jackie's parents bought a piece for themselves and one for Jackie and Manny. I remember I had things in the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art] rental gallery, and I'd go to my mailbox, which was on the street in front of the house, like the country mailboxes, and I'd be down to my last fifty cents or dollar or quarter or whatever, not even have gas money to go to school. I'd go to this box, and almost inevitably there'd be a letter there from the rental gallery at the County Museum. Somebody had either bought a piece or rented a piece, and I'd have a small check. Sometimes it would be fifteen dollars or twenty-five or fifty or some small amount of money, but it was great for a graduate student who didn't have anything. I didn't have to worry about groceries so much because some girlfriend or someone would not let me starve, you know. But I had to get to school and to work, and I worked on campus. So anyway, I was getting encouragement early on with small sales here and there.

MASON

Okay. You told me the whole story about how you found this property [Inwardness Ranch].

HARDEN

About this place?

MASON

But you can tell me again.

HARDEN

Say it for posterity?

MASON

Say it for posterity.

HARDEN

Well, it is very interesting. I told you earlier that I've always been interested in the country and the country life. I'd never lived in the country as a kid, but I lived in a place in Austin [Texas]--and also up in Bremerton, Washington, when I was there for a short period of time--that had a lot of spaces that were yet unsullied by buildings and stuff. So I was able to do a lot of running around, have my little adventures in streambeds and rivers and this and that. So I was looking for land. I determined early on that I didn't want to buy a piece of property that had a house on it. I wanted to do the whole thing myself. I was looking and roaming about, going to places like Utah and Oregon and had in mind to go to a lot of other states to see what was available. I came through this area going up to Northern California with the intent to see what was along the way. I came through here, and we saw this area--myself and a friend--and I liked it.

MASON

About what year was this?

HARDEN

This was-- I bought the property in '78, so this had to be some time prior to that. I looked for property for five years. When I found this area, I started subscribing to newspapers from the small communities around here--Atascadero, Cambria, Paso Robles--to get some idea of what prices were and what was available, and when I saw something that seemed like it was within my reach or something that sounded interesting, I'd get on the highway on the weekends, and I'd burn rubber and come up here. This went on for a while. And one day we were up here looking, myself and two friends. We were driving down this dirt road out here, which is about a mile from here, from where we now sit. We stopped in front of a gate. We'd just happened to stop there; there was no particular reason other than the view. We were looking out over this view, seeing the ridges and the peaks and the rolling hills and the ocean in the distance shining in the sunlight, and I said with exclamation, "This is the kind of place I want!" You know, a place with a view like this. And I said something like, "Why don't these people get up off some of this land?" You know, [I was] acting up, carrying on. So we sat there and admired the view and went on about our way. A couple of days later, one of these friends [Vee Hunter] saw an ad in the Los Angeles Times. It was a two- or three-line ad, and

it said there was this certain amount of acreage for sale up off of Cypress Mountain Road. That's the name of that dirt road. So she called, got the man who was selling the property, and asked where it was, and he told her. And she said, "Well, is the view really incredible and look kind of like you're coming in low in an airplane, like you can see over the land?" And he said, "Well, I never thought of it, but yeah." So she made an appointment for us to see it that Saturday. This was a Friday. So we came up the next day, Saturday, saw this place, and I bought it that day, paid cash for it. Sometime before that, I had found a piece of property in this general area, but farther to the south.

MASON

So that would have been higher up or--? Does it go higher up when you go south?

HARDEN

Not necessarily. It was up in the hills, like this place is, but it didn't have an ocean view like this place does. And I had given a deposit. This had been months before. I'd given a deposit to this guy with the proviso that he prove water on the property. So he had to drill some test holes to prove that there was water, and he never proved water, so I got my deposit back, and I didn't buy it, and I was really heartbroken. And then I found this place, which is better than that one. I knew there was a spring on it. A spring is water oozing out of the hillside. So I bought it just knowing that there was a spring and that's all, not even knowing how good the spring was. I just bought it, and I said, "Look, there's got to be something in this. I was just sitting in front of this property the other day, so there's got to be-- There's something. It's providence that I have this." So I just took a shot at it.

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MASON

We're back on now.

HARDEN

But anyway, I bought this thing on a flyer, hoping that I could find water, because if you can't find water, there's nothing to do with it except to come

up here and sit down and have a picnic. So I bought it, kept it for nine years, would come up here on the weekends and sit around and stay overnight, say, stay the weekend and sleep in the van and all that kind of stuff and roam around and just kind of enjoy it. And then something really significant happened: My father [Theodore Harden] died. My mother [Ethel Sneed Harden] had died years and years before, and when my father passed away I decided that all of this--you know, rushing about doing career things--was not that important, that I had to go ahead and fulfill my dream of living in the country if I was going to do it, because I had no guarantee as to how long I was going to be here. Nobody does. So I decided to go ahead and build on this property. I designed the house with input from my friends and came up and decided where the house was going to be and where the studio was going to be and the orientation, which way they would face. I designed the house strictly to accommodate the trees that are here so I wouldn't have to cut the trees down. That's why the house is configured as it is. I decided where to put everything, where to put my tower with the water tank on top of it and the orchard and other stuff. It's like doing a big art piece, but a very big and very expensive art piece. I have about sixty acres here.

MASON

And then we're standing on mahogany floors and--What else do you have? Fir and--

HARDEN

Fir, mahogany. I have--

MASON

Is that pine, the doors?

HARDEN

No, the doors are not pine; the doors are cedar. I made the doors. I made that door and the door to the pantry you can't see. I made the front door. I guess you saw the other door beyond, the red door. So I made four doors. The other doors, like the French doors, I didn't make. But everything you see, every doorknob, every faucet, every type of wood, everything in the house is my determination. I did all the shopping to see everything.

MASON

How long did it take you to build?

HARDEN

It took a long time. What happened is, that wing of the house where the bedrooms and the bathroom happen to be, and the solarium, I had a guy build that. I did some of the work, like with staining and stuff like that, but I had a contractor build that part. When I sold my house near Chatsworth I had to move into an apartment for a year while that wing was being built. And then the plan was that I would move up here, live in that part of the house and then have the rest of the house built. Then I had the studio built and had this part of the house built. I did a lot of the work myself, but I had the structure built by other people. I did staining and some painting of interior walls and some sundry this and that, like putting in steps and that kind of stuff.

MASON

And then you also have some, what looks like to me, some antiques.

HARDEN

They are antiques. This table we're sitting at is almost four hundred years old, and these chairs are almost four hundred years old. They're English. This is an English harvest table.

MASON

I see. Where did you get these?

HARDEN

I got both at the same antique place in Los Angeles, on La Cienega [Boulevard], as a matter of fact, in the same space that the David Stuart Galleries used to be. I used to show at David Stuart. When he moved his operation across the street and a little bit down the street, the space he occupied previously was taken over by an antique dealer, and I got these there. That's an antique high chair that my friend used as a baby, and her mother used and her sister used and her grandmother used and her great-grandmother used and brought over from Ireland. All of them used it. We like to think it's still in good shape because they were all girls.

MASON

[laughter] Well, there is some caning in it. I guess that had to be maintained. But otherwise, yeah, it looks really sturdy.

HARDEN

So most of the furniture in the house is antique except for things like the couch and the refrigerator. Even the stove is an old stove, if you can see the cook stove. It's about 1900. But I like antiques, obviously, because I like things that have some character, you know, some history. You were asking about the floors. There are some floors that are Mexican tile, and then there are floors in the bedroom that are cedar. Now, cedar is not hard enough, really, to be floor material, but since it's in the bedroom-- I mean, I wanted the cedar. I wanted the warmth of it and the knots and all of that.

MASON

So you walk barefoot, I guess.

HARDEN

No, you can walk with your shoes. I mean, if you don't have high-heeled shoes or something, spike-heeled shoes, you know, regular shoes with regular heels, it wouldn't harm the floors. But spike heels would do it.

MASON

I lied. I actually have a couple more questions that I haven't asked. [laughter] One is, do you travel? Have you been out of the country? Or not really?

HARDEN

I've only been out of the country once in my life, and that was to Mexico. I don't like to fly. I had the opportunity on different occasions to go to Puerto Rico, China, Japan, Paris, and Nigeria. And in all instances these were all expenses paid. But I don't like to fly. I have flown, but I don't like flying. I decided in 1971, when I came back home from my Whitney [Museum of American Art] show in New York, that I would never fly again. And I have kept my word. So I do go places that I can drive. This summer I had a four-thousand-mile trip in the western part of the United States. Well, I went through Nevada--I wasn't going to it--to Utah, spent some time there.

MASON

Beautiful landscape.

HARDEN

Spent some time, a little time, in Idaho, both in southern Idaho and northern Idaho, spent a lot of time in Wyoming. I went through Montana, Washington.

MASON

Did you do any sketching up there?

HARDEN

No, no. As a matter of fact, I normally don't. I normally don't. I sometimes go places, and I come back and I might do some drawings from memory, just the kind of impressions I have. They don't look like they're from memory because I usually make them look pretty firm. But I went through Washington and Oregon, and I came back down through the northern part of California. So it was a long trip. I camped out. I took my van conversion.

MASON

That's the way I'd like to camp. I don't think I could sleep on the ground or anything like that. [laughter]

HARDEN

Yeah, right. So the camping was really easy. You know, you just drive and find a place. I went to some national parks and saw a lot of wild animals and a lot of beautiful countryside. I like that kind of thing. I can drive all day long if I'm in the country, and I don't have a lot of traffic and seeing beautiful countryside--farming and wild mountains or whatever, forests-- So I like doing that. I'll tell you a real funny story. This might not have any meaning for people who hear this years from now. But we were coming down through Northern California, two friends [Vee Hunter and Sui Ping Yeung] and myself. I guess we were in or just outside of Eureka, a little town up there, an interesting little town, and the traffic was going pretty slow. And this car pulls up on the left, and there's a woman driving the car, and there are two young girls, about twelve or thirteen or something, in the back seat. And the one nearest to me leaned out the window and said, "Pardon me, sir. Do you have

any Grey Poupon?" [laughter] And I said, "As a matter of fact, I do." And before I got it out of my mouth, this friend of mine put it in my hand and I stuck it out the window, and they cracked up. They were totally surprised that somebody would actually have this stuff.

MASON

Yeah, like the commercial.

HARDEN

Yeah, it's the television commercial.

MASON

That's cute.

HARDEN

They were falling over the seats. "Oh, no!" And it was really-- That was the comedic highlight of the whole trip. These little girls, they were really pretty little girls, and they just couldn't believe it, that this guy actually had some of this stuff. [laughter]

MASON

Sort of like, "Do you have Prince Albert in a can?" "Yes, here he is!"

HARDEN

Right. I imagine they will be remembering that for a long time and telling people, "You wouldn't believe it. He actually had it!" I saw moose. I'd never seen moose in the wild before, and I saw some real close up, and buffalo and elk and a bald eagle and a lot of different wildlife. I didn't see any bears, and I wanted to see some bears.

MASON

Well, you said you have bears around here.

HARDEN

Yeah, but I've never seen one. I still haven't seen one in the wild, and I keep wanting to see one in the wild--but with an appropriate and reasonable amount of distance between us. I've seen almost every other large creature

that's found in North America. I think there are only two large animals in North America that I have not seen in the wild, and that's the mountain goat and bears-- any kind of bear. Everything else I've seen.

MASON

Because you said around here-- In addition to the usual deer and rabbit, you were trying to show me a wild turkey the other day.

HARDEN

Yeah, I was trying to get your attention to see a wild turkey that was right along the side of the road about to go down an embankment. We have a lot of wild turkeys up here and golden eagles--

MASON

You said there were cougars--

HARDEN

Cougars, wildcats--which is a bobcat--skunks, raccoons, opossums, wild ducks, various owls, various hawks, various falcons, the American kestrel, which is a small hawk. You said bighorn sheep, didn't you?

MASON

No, I didn't.

HARDEN

Well, bighorn sheep, wild hogs, boars, sows, and whatever. And, of course, a myriad of birds and snakes. Just about any kind of wildlife you can think of. Foxes. I forgot to say foxes and coyotes.

MASON

There's a huge spider. Do you have tarantulas around here? Oh, I almost ran over one the other day. It was about as big as a turtle or something. It was huge. [laughter] Of course, I didn't get out of the car to look at it.

HARDEN

It's a funny thing. This is about the time of the year, in the fall, when they start migrating, and you see them going across the road. You'll drive down this road, say Santa Rosa Creek Road, the paved road you drove up from--

MASON

Yeah, that's where I saw it.

HARDEN

You might be driving down that road at a certain time of the year, and you'll see one after another. You might end up seeing fifteen or so. And the same is true of a little lizard-like creature called the newt. It's a dark red, darker than a brick red, and for some reason they do some migrating or something. One day I was driving on a road not far from here, and I saw hundreds, maybe thousands of them in the road. They were all turned the same direction, just lying in the road. When I first started seeing them, I would stop the car and pick them up and get them out of the road, because somebody might come along and smash them. And then it got to be so many of them, I couldn't do it, you know. I just started trying to weave my way through them. There were just hundreds of them. It was incredible.

MASON

And you used to raise horses here as well.

HARDEN

I used to raise horses. I raised horses for twenty-five years. I love horses. They're a lot of trouble, a lot of expense, but I like them. I like to ride, I like to just look at them, I like to listen to them eat, you know. But when my last horse died, I didn't have enough time to continue with horses, and I was also spending a lot of money on this place. I just put that road in that you and I came up the other day.

MASON

You did that?

HARDEN

Well, I didn't do it personally, but I had it done. You have to have it bulldozed. And I want to build a barn, because I have a couple of tractors and a pickup

truck and a couple of vans and things like that I want to get out of the weather, plus I need storage space. I don't have enough storage space for paintings. So hopefully I'll get that done. But everything costs a fortune so, you know, I'll get it done when I get a chance to get it done.

MASON

The other thing is you mentioned that you have some works of other artists here in the house. Whose works do you buy?

HARDEN

Well, I don't buy anybody's work because I can't afford to buy art. I mean, I buy things that I like, but I'm not a collector of art. I have Mel Edwards's work, Judy Chicago's, and Vija Celmins's. I have other people's work from UCLA: Jerry [Jerrold] Burchman, Bert Cohen, Alan Simon, Richard Matthews, Rauol De Sota, Lance Richbourg, Art Levine, and Ben Sakoguchi. I also have Connor Everts, David Trowbridge, and Shiro Ikegawa. Most of the people's works I have are friends. I didn't buy the work; we traded. When I moved up here, I didn't have anything on the walls for a long, long time, because I was enamored of the white walls. I didn't want anything up. I liked the cleanness. I like clean spaces; you can probably tell that. So I liked these clean spaces and clean walls, and I didn't want anything up. Then, because I was spending so much time working on the ranch, I wasn't really doing a lot of studio work for several years. So in order to get in touch with my own work again, I put up my own work. I started to get a little nervous, that I was not-- I kind of felt like I'd never make pictures again. I felt like, "God, I could just as easily retire and just take care of my apple trees and plum trees and whatever and do that kind of thing." Because there's a-- It's very seductive. The land is very seductive, you know. You get out there, and it's a nice, warm day, and there's a gentle breeze blowing, and the vultures are circling overhead, the hawks are circling overhead, and they're calling, and you kind of think, "Boy, this is great. I can do this forever. I don't ever have to do anything else." I go out and cut the grass with my tractor, and I'm puttering along, and the blue jays are coming down to get the grasshoppers that are being exposed in the short grass, and I start feeling like, "Hey, this farm life is not bad. I could do this, this ranch life." So it was getting to be very seductive. So I just had to put up some work and start remembering who I was.

MASON

And then what was the catalyst for doing more artwork?

HARDEN

Well, the ranch chores got fewer. I mean, the building process sort of tapered off. I mean, I still have things to do, but now they're not happening every day. When you're building a place from the ground up-- When I bought this land, there was nothing here. It wasn't even fenced. I had the fencing put in, the roads put in, there was nothing here. So when you do something of that magnitude, you're busy all the time. One thing has to be done in order for another thing to start, and you have these deadlines. I mean, it's like you've got to do this, you've got to get it done before it starts raining so you can get this other thing done, whatever it is. So when all of that ceased to be so hectic and time- and energy-consuming, then I could get back into the studio. When I walked into my studio in those early times when I first started getting back to working, I didn't even know where anything was, because I had just moved up here more or less. I'd get in the middle of the floor, and I'd stand there, and I wouldn't know, "Well, where is this thing that I wanted?" I wouldn't even know where to start looking. And then, of course, when I started doing the work, I didn't like what I was doing, because I didn't seem to have my head into it. And the whole idea of making work was kind of scary. See, the good thing about it when you start out and you're young and you're making work, you don't know anything, you don't have any-- There's no reputation at stake, and you're just kind of enjoying yourself. You're just doing it. And when you get to a point where people have certain expectations of you, and you of yourself, then it gets to be sort of like you just can't do anything-- I mean, you can do anything you want to, but before you let it go out of the studio, you have to make it satisfy yourself to a certain extent. At least that's the way I feel about it. It got to the point where I just felt like, "I don't know what I'm doing anymore. This is strange." But I got over that. You get over that after you keep on working for a while.

MASON

That's how you did it? You just kept on--?

HARDEN

Yeah, you just keep going.

MASON

Did you destroy a lot of things?

HARDEN

Oh, yeah. Yes, I destroyed things. I just destroyed a whole bunch of paintings that I did years ago before I moved up here. I looked at them again, and I said, "These things are awful." You know, I just destroyed them.

MASON

Okay. This is sincerely the last question. You told me some things about the way you work off tape, and you say a little bit about it in one of the catalogs, but I was asking you whether you took courses in Zen or studied Zen, and you were saying not really but-- And then I asked you if you meditated, and you said to work on a piece is meditation. So I was just wondering if you could say a little more on that.

HARDEN

Well, yeah. I've never formally studied any Zen or anything. I've read. I'm an avid reader, and I read a lot of different kinds of things because I'm interested in a lot of different things. I love history and I love poetry and I love philosophy. I read a lot about that. I read a lot about nature, natural things.

MASON

Could you just name one or two? You said philosophy. I think there's a book on existentialism over there.

HARDEN

Yeah, yeah. I read a lot of that. I read existentialism. I've read things by Kierkegaard and Sartre, Nietzsche, and whomever. I like reading nonfiction. I don't particularly care for-- It's not that I don't like fiction, but I don't seem to have the time for it, because if I pick up a book, the first thing I will go to is nonfiction. So I do a lot of reading. Usually my day will go like-- During the summer or the days that I'm home, when I'm not teaching, I will go in the studio first thing in the morning after I get through with, you know, brushing my teeth and washing my face and all that kind of stuff. I go down to the

studio. I don't eat breakfast, so I'm down there real early. I'll work in the studio until around noon, and I'll eat my lunch and sometimes that will be about ten or fifteen minutes. Then I will work some more, and I'll stop at about two o'clock generally. Then I will usually read until four thirty, five [o'clock], something, and maybe do some exercise, and then turn on the national news. I like the national news better because it's about politics and things other than somebody getting murdered or something, you know. But reading is generally a part of my normal day. Even when I'm at school teaching, I read during my lunch hour. And I read in the mornings if I don't have anything else to do. I get to work real early. My first class starts at eight, but I usually get to work by six thirty. I sometimes have gotten there at five in the morning.

MASON

Well, you want to beat the traffic, I guess.

HARDEN

Well, that's not the reason, because I stay with a friend when I'm down there, and I'm not really-- I'm close enough that I don't have to worry about the traffic. I just like to get up early because I want to ease into the day. I don't like to get to work just before class because it's kind of jarring to me. You know, I like to get there, take care of paperwork that might be on my desk. I might review my thoughts about what I'm doing in each class if that's necessary, and then, if I have time before class starts, I will simply pull out a book. I never go anyplace without books. My cars all have a book stored in them. My office at school obviously has books, my studio has books, my home has books. I always have books. If I go someplace where I have to wait around, if I'm waiting at the market for somebody to come out or if I go to the doctor, I always have a book handy so I can use that time. And I was always like that. I loved reading when I was a kid, and I still do. It's kind of like my adventure. But anyway, I forgot your question kind of.

MASON

Well, it's just that-- I asked you about meditation.

HARDEN

Oh, the process of doing the work. Yeah, my feeling about it is the work itself is a meditation for me, whether I'm painting or drawing. At one time, when I did the cow and horse images, it was really meditative in terms of the process. It was a very ritualistic kind of process, and I had to even-- I don't know if I had to, but I did. I would have a kind of pattern of breathing to coincide with the mark making, because it was better to control the mark. I was into making what essentially were personal mandalas, you know, little pieces that had some aspect of ritualism for me in making them.

MASON

Would you work on more than one thing at a time?

HARDEN

I have done both. I still do both. Sometimes I will work on one thing at a time, and other times I will work on two things at a time. More often than not, I will work on-- If I'm involved with oil painting--there have been times in my life when I was not involved in painting at all--but if I'm involved in oil painting, I will work on an oil painting, and I will work on a drawing or a gouache or something at the same time, because it works out that while the oil painting is drying for some time, then I'm doing this other thing over at my drawing board. So that is my method in terms of that. I have never had a studio where I could work on a lot of things even if I wanted to, and I probably wouldn't want to. But I've never had a studio that would accommodate that space-wise.

MASON

Well, unless there's anything that you want to add about what art means to you or anything like that, then we can stop now. Whatever you want to add.

HARDEN

I just think art, obviously, means a lot of different things to me. It's interesting to me. It's fascinating to be a part of the continuum of art. It's nice to have had some exposure, be a small part of one's nation's culture. It is, more than anything else I guess, a way of life. It's a part of my life, something I've always done, even when I had no intentions or idea that anybody could make a career out of it. It's something that I would do whether anybody ever showed the stuff or ever paid any money for it or had given me any fellowships for it or

anything else; I would still do it. It's just something I always did. It's a part of my makeup. And I think that to be an artist is not simply to make pictures; it's an attitude, it's a process, it's an activity, it's a lot of things.

MASON

Okay. Unless there's anything else?

HARDEN

That's it.

MASON

Thank you very much.

HARDEN

You're very welcome.
