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*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Constance  
Lebrun Crown and David Lebrun, 1974  
November 23

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## **Transcript**

### **Preface**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Constance Lebrun Crown and David Lebrun on November 23, 1974. The interview took place in Zuma Beach, California, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

A note accompanying the original transcript states that it was edited and retyped by the narrator in 1980. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

### **Interview**

[00:00:04.41]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. A conversation, interview with Constance Lebrun Crown, widow of painter Rico Lebrun, and Rico's adopted son, David Lebrun on November 23, 1974. Shall we say Zuma Beach?

[00:00:31.58]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:00:32.00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Zuma Beach, California. And we actually are sitting in the home that Rico had built—home and studio that Rico had built just before he died. And it's sad to note that he actually moved in, I believe, what, five—

[00:00:54.44]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Five weeks.

[00:00:54.90]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Just five weeks before his death in 1964. I'd like to do several things in this conversation. One, we could, I think, lay in a little bit of biographical background about Rico. Also, your relationship to him and the time frame we're talking about. Then also, we can discuss this interesting portfolio containing a number of photographs—and I'm really not the one who should describe the meaning of this as it relates to Rico's interests and possibly his work. But perhaps we can just get started by—perhaps, Constance, you can mention when you met Rico. You were married, I believe, in 1948. Just simply a little bit of

background on the relationship.

[00:02:07.69]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: When did we meet?

[00:02:11.82]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: When you met him—

[00:02:12.84]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I think—when was Pearl Harbor? '40—

[00:02:15.76]

DAVID LEBRUN: '41.

[00:02:16.78]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It's the year I was born.

[00:02:16.87]

STANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '41. Well, I guess we—it's the year you were born. I think we met in '42 here in Los Angeles.

[00:02:25.34]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:02:26.85]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And the circumstances were that my father, who was an architect, had designed the Baldwin Hills Village Housing Project in Los Angeles. And he had wanted to have a mural done for the administration building. And he had gone to Santa Barbara and had seen the work of someone whom—I don't know if you know this, David, whose name he thought was "Disegno" Lebrun, because he had seen a marvelous drawing up there, which is in the collection of the museum. And Rico had signed it, "Disegno (drawn by) "Lebrun."

[00:03:15.49]

And so father came to me and said, you know this man, Disegno Lebrun? I didn't know Rico's work. This was just about the time he was beginning to get his first national recognition. And it just started drawing me into this thing, and he asked me to go up to Santa Barbara and see this work and see what I thought about this whole idea And Serge and I went up, and through Donald Baer, and met Rico just where—

[00:03:50.92]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Was he teaching at Santa Barbara?

[00:03:52.85]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No. He wasn't—he wasn't teaching there. He was just making it as—on his own. I think this was—it was about—I'm confused on dates. I know he became an artist-in-residence at the museum, but I don't know whether it was at this time or at a later time when he came back. And subsequently, Serge and I moved up to Santa Barbara so we could be—I wanted to be working with Rico. And I studied with him for a while. And then he had to leave. He was absolutely destitute financially, and he was offered a job in Tulane—Tulane University. And he went down there.

[00:04:46.81]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you actually were his student? Of Rico's?

[00:04:49.27]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes. I began, yes. That's how I began. And then he was away for a long time. Came back. And we had sort of lost touch with him. And the next thing I knew was quite a number of years later, he got in touch with us, and it was after Elaine's death—she had she had taken her own life. She had leukemia.

[00:05:17.28]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:05:19.16]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And he contacted us, and we got in touch. And later, I was divorced, and he and I were married.

[00:05:26.26]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And did he—when he came back, did he settle in Santa Barbara—

[00:05:29.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Santa Barbara, yeah. And then we saw a lot of each other. And later—as I say, I was divorced, and he and I were married in '48.

[00:05:45.48]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then you lived—I must say, I'm not sure.

[00:05:49.28]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: All right—

[00:05:49.72]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —the moving around—

[00:05:50.89]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: All right, '48—

[00:05:51.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —living in Santa Barbara.

[00:05:52.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, we lived in Los Angeles, '48, '49—from '48 'til early—late in '52. And then we pulled up stakes and went down to Mexico from the end of '52 'til mid '54. Cinco de Mayo, we crossed the border. And then came back to Los Angeles and were here from '54 'til—you took off to school in '50—

[00:06:34.54]

DAVID LEBRUN: '58.

[00:06:35.27]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '58.

[00:06:36.44]

DAVID LEBRUN: '57. Went to boarding school.

[00:06:39.38]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did you haul young David along with you to Mexico?

[00:06:42.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh yes. [They laugh.] Very much so. As a matter of fact,

young David was really the reason for our coming back, because a year and a half, for a kid that age to be totally disconnected from the world in which he was really growing up just—it wasn't—it didn't make any sense. So we'd come back. And no, it was '58 that you must have gone off to school, wasn't it? Because we took off immediately—

[00:07:12.78]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yeah, '58.

[00:07:13.15]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —in '58—'58 and '59, we pulled up roots entirely from Los Angeles, and went on to New Haven. We spent one miserable year—shows up in the correspondence, I might say—at Yale. And he was Artist-in-Residence at Yale '58, '59. And we just kept going. And we were in—he was—when we left here, we knew it. He had the appointment as the Director of—the Artist-in-Residence at the American Academy in Rome. So we used that as a way of going back to Italy, which he had been very loath to do because —

[00:08:04.61]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: When did he first come over from Italy?

[00:08:06.65]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Give me the date. 1920—

[00:08:13.50]

DAVID LEBRUN: I don't know—

[00:08:13.74]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '24 or something like that. He was a young man.

[00:08:18.45]

DAVID LEBRUN: [Inaudible] Pittsburgh Stained Glass.

[00:08:20.49]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah—stained glass. Yeah, right.

[00:08:22.92]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

[00:08:23.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He was an employee of Pittsburgh Stained Glass.

[00:08:27.36]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then he came to Southern California—

[00:08:30.63]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Much later.

[00:08:31.87]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Early 1941, it must have been—

[00:08:34.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '30s.

[00:08:35.19]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: In the late—

[00:08:35.88]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '30s, yeah, yeah.

[00:08:37.42]

DAVID LEBRUN: At that point, he'd already been back to—

[00:08:39.33]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Once, yeah.

[00:08:40.95]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And so he hadn't really been back to Italy for—

[00:08:43.35]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He hadn't been back since 1933, I think.

[00:08:46.61]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:08:47.40]

DAVID LEBRUN: He went back on a Guggenheim, right?

[00:08:50.46]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No. He won a Guggenheim, and he refused to go back. He said everybody's taking Guggenheims to go to Europe. He said, "I've just gotten over here," and he took a Guggenheim to work on his own in New York. He didn't want to go back. He went back around that period—or in between Guggenheims I think he went back. I lost dates in there.

[00:09:17.12]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So at that point—I'm just trying to—

[00:09:19.78]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: In the late '50s, when we went back?

[00:09:21.91]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Right. I'm just trying to place him. In a way, he came over with—

[00:09:27.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: In the '20s—

[00:09:28.36]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: With the Pittsburgh—

[00:09:29.68]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Stained Glass.

[00:09:30.85]

DAVID LEBRUN: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. He was a stained glass consultant.

[00:09:33.00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Ah.

[00:09:33.28]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:09:34.03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then at least for a certain number of years, he was in New York and was—

[00:09:40.09]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:09:41.44]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I must say New York artist, but that's—

[00:09:43.51]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No, he was a commercial artist. He was a commercial artist.

[00:09:46.63]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he wasn't close to a fine [inaudible].

[00:09:48.52]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Not at all. No. It was—as a matter of fact, he won the Guggenheim twice, and it was in order to free himself from doing the commercial work that he'd applied for a Guggenheim. He didn't want to spend the time going back to Italy. I'm lost right now; I'd have to go back into the biographical stuff. He did go back, but I don't believe it was on a Guggenheim. He went back to Italy in the '30s—

[00:10:12.49]

DAVID LEBRUN: To study fresco.

[00:10:13.66]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And then he—well, he went back and—during that period, he went to Orvieto and he copied the Signorellis. Yeah.

[00:10:24.46]

DAVID LEBRUN: And that was when he came back from that work that he used a Guggenheim, right? I don't know if he got the Guggenheim for it, but he used the Guggenheim to support himself while he was doing the New York post office mural.

[00:10:34.63]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:10:36.07]

DAVID LEBRUN: Because I just read all that.

[00:10:37.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, right.

[00:10:38.68]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then that that appears—

[00:10:39.51]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, God.

[00:10:40.00]

DAVID LEBRUN: It was a letter to the postal authority saying, "Listen, I've been doing this work—"

[00:10:43.54]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, yes.

[00:10:44.02]

DAVID LEBRUN: "—I'm just—on my Guggenheim money."

[00:10:46.87]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes. He was being—in that correspondence, he was—obviously there's some letters missing, but apparently he was being chastised for the length of time that he was taking to do the post office mural, which has since been destroyed.

[00:10:59.92]

DAVID LEBRUN: He was one of the only muralists—

[00:11:01.93]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Who really knew how to do fresco art.

[00:11:03.13]

DAVID LEBRUN: —who was actually doing it in fresco.

[00:11:04.11]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:11:04.84]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And he wasn't—he wasn't able to turn it out in two months. You see, it was—and there's some rather marvelous letters in there that—I don't know if they're his or they're—

[00:11:14.45]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What brought Rico to California? Was it a teaching job or did he come out in connection with—

[00:11:21.09]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He came out to see Channing and Katy Peake who were friends of his. Channing had worked with him on the post office mural and he had known them both. And he had a love of—really, a love affair with the whole Western notion. And they had a ranch up in the Santa Ynez Valley, and it was really to—that was his reason for coming out here.

[00:11:49.23]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Apparently it was more like Italy, obviously than New York, too.

[00:11:52.35]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, there was a real romance that went on with that Western notion that really never left. I mean, he learned to—he learned to ride, and rode beautifully. And that whole thing—and it got into his drawing and his way of life.

[00:12:09.75]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, Rico obviously was very important as a teacher. I know there are a number of people who are interested in him—not exclusively from that standpoint, but very much so. And I wonder what was sort of the sequence of his—or nature of his teaching here in this area?



[00:12:32.23]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Okay—

[00:12:32.95]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Institutional affiliations, but also you know, sort of private, perhaps.

[00:12:39.40]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Institutional affiliations. I think the very first this—is going to surprise you, was Walt Disney.

[00:12:51.04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really?

[00:12:51.67]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He came down, and that—I found that we have two books, two bound, big books. He came down to train guys at Disney on animation for the filming of *Bambi*. And there's a—yeah, and there's a—

[00:13:10.38]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That was a good job, One of my favorites.

[00:13:12.92]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And then—he was never very proud of these books, I might say. He sort of stashed them away. Then is picked up by Mrs. Chouinard and taught at Chouinard for a while, and was commuting. So this was before I knew him. He was commuting to—this would have been in the early '40s, commuting from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles. And then after we were—or just before the early years of our marriage, he was doing his really great teaching, which was at Jepson.

[00:13:53.00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Jepson.

[00:13:53.84]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And that's where he became really known throughout the area.

[00:13:58.28]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did Howard Warshaw—when and where did—

[00:14:02.18]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Did that start? Howard—both Howard Warshaw and Bill Brice were two much younger men who had sought Rico out and had taken work to, and both of them have various places written or spoken about this, their first meetings with him, which were pretty tremendous events in their lives. And they had sought him out, I believe both of them in Santa Barbara. And then they had become close when he moved down here, and they had become close—and it was very, very well-remembered.

When they—because they were both—they were close to each other. And they had gone together to the Jepson School to study with him. And Rico pulled the rug right from under their feet and said, "Study with me," not, "You're coming here to teach." And I remember, Bill was very shy at the time. And it was a real effort. He became a great teacher, Bill Brice, but Rico just threw them to the dogs and said, "You get in there and do it."

[00:15:15.83]

DAVID LEBRUN: Was Bill Toczynski also studying with him at Jepson?

[00:15:19.89]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I don't think actually that Bill Toczynski ever studied with him at Jepson. He studied with other people and he—

[00:15:27.24]

DAVID LEBRUN: Theresa?

[00:15:28.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Theresa did, yes.

[00:15:29.91]

DAVID LEBRUN: We have a whole set of lecture notes from Jepson, I believe, of either Bill or Theresa Toczynski. It's in the archive material. Those were from Jepson.

[00:15:43.35]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes.

[00:15:46.26]

DAVID LEBRUN: It's the best record that exists in what the classes were about, I think.

[00:15:50.22]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I've never looked at those either. I don't know. Yeah. Bill Toczynski's connection with Rico was on a much more personal thing. I mean, he came into the picture later and became very, very close at the San Vicente studio.

[00:16:08.70]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Where were you living in Los Angeles? I mean, obviously you weren't out here in the country.

[00:16:13.26]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No. We were—well, as I say, in the beginning we were at Baldwin Hills Village. We lived there until we went to Mexico. We were there from '48 until '52. Then went to Mexico, came back in '54, and lived in a funny little place on Barrington.

[00:16:35.60]

DAVID LEBRUN: From '54 until almost until—

[00:16:41.22]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '63.

[00:16:42.09]

DAVID LEBRUN: Until '63. The basic connection was a huge studio on San Vicente Boulevard.

[00:16:49.25]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:16:49.53]

DAVID LEBRUN: And Rico, not being a driver—he didn't have a driver's license, and—

[00:16:53.28]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He didn't have a car.

[00:16:54.66]

DAVID LEBRUN: He was always—we always—we moved several times, but we were always living within walking distance of that studio, which was, you know—

[00:17:01.85]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Vast, vast, as big as these.

[00:17:03.99]

DAVID LEBRUN: I do remember that being a 30-foot ceiling.

[00:17:05.73]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's—

[00:17:06.02]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Enormous.

[00:17:06.75]

DAVID LEBRUN: It's torn down now.

[00:17:07.86]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It's torn down.

[00:17:08.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Where would it have been? Like—

[00:17:10.47]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: San Vicente, over near the Veteran's Hospital. [Cross talk.]

[00:17:13.56]

DAVID LEBRUN: Half a block east of Barrington.

[00:17:15.75]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Right. Okay. Yeah. Well, actually, there was a building there that was next to the Hamburger Hamlet.

[00:17:22.35]

DAVID LEBRUN: That's the one.

[00:17:22.83]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's the one.

[00:17:23.55]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And the last tenant, I think, as a matter of fact—well, it came down only within the last three years—

[00:17:31.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:17:31.95]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But I think John Altoon was one artist that he was—

[00:17:35.59]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —who was in there.

[00:17:36.86]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I'm not sure if it was Altoon.

[00:17:38.10]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah.

[00:17:38.67]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I believe so.

[00:17:39.69]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah.

[00:17:40.14]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So obviously it carried on as an artist—

[00:17:43.99]

DAVID LEBRUN: Well, he had the entire upper area of that. And there were some smaller rooms which some other artists were using—

[00:17:51.24]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Using, right.

[00:17:52.35]

DAVID LEBRUN: And there people who were associated with him.

[00:17:57.54]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Students.

[00:17:58.14]

DAVID LEBRUN: Students, yeah.

[00:17:59.07]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And so it was almost like a school and—

[00:18:01.28]

DAVID LEBRUN: Not—

[00:18:01.92]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, it was a way—we had to rent the whole thing, so we sublet these rooms and there were four or five people that used them. And then he would have classes when he felt like it, or when they needed help or something.

[00:18:18.24]

DAVID LEBRUN: Among the tapes in the Archive, there is at least one which is described as a tape of with the girls in the studio from that period of the late '50s, and that's him having conversations with—

[00:18:36.21]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Edith.

[00:18:36.63]

DAVID LEBRUN: Edith Wiley and—

[00:18:38.07]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Theresa.

[00:18:38.73]

DAVID LEBRUN: Theresa Toczynski.

[00:18:41.82]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Phyllis Shapiro, and others.

[00:18:44.13]

DAVID LEBRUN: Right. So those kind of things would happen.

[00:18:46.35]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, now I appreciate that building more. I'm glad that I saw it. It takes on more of a historical—

[00:18:51.69]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, God.

[00:18:52.56]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

[00:18:53.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: So that was gone.

[00:18:54.36]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, it's—

[00:18:56.34]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —shocking thing. Well, to come back—something, we interrupted here. I got —Oh, '59, we went back to Italy.

[00:19:07.50]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

[00:19:08.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And we had—he had really been so terrified of the notion of returning to his family, and to Italy after the war and so on, and he just put it off and put it off. He didn't want to get too embroiled with his family. His mother was still living—a very, very old lady—and his brother and his sister was still there. And he knew the conditions would be bad.

[00:19:40.02]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:19:40.80]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And nothing really could be done to—it was a matter of always just putting your finger in the dike to help out, but it was pretty intolerable.

[00:19:50.91]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So most of his family, or perhaps all of his family was still in Italy.

[00:19:55.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: They were all there. Yeah. And—

[00:19:57.84]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Was it Rome or—

[00:19:59.61]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Naples, Naples. So we went back, and under the shoulder of the American Academy, knowing that his having a job there at least meant that we would be in Rome, and that we would not have to be in Naples, which he knew would just be more of a psychological burden than he could take. So what we did was we went to Capri, and had the family come over and spend the summer with us there, so we were close. And then took off and went to Rome so that he could work. And the—his plan of work there was to do the preliminary work for the Pomona Mural.

[00:20:50.46]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see.

[00:20:51.24]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And he had a vast studio, very, very tall studio so that he could do almost a scale—preparatory drawings for that.

[00:21:05.34]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And that was his main project when he was at the American Academy?

[00:21:07.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That was all he did there. It was a rough year—it was two rough years. Yale was—Yale was rough, and the American Academy was rough because of the psychological impact of returning to Italy. It was—that, again, appears in the letters. He was sick for the first time in his life there, and for the only time that I knew him, was unable to work.

[00:21:37.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hmm.

[00:21:39.17]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, he'd just absolutely ground to a halt. He could not—he couldn't put pen to paper. And—

[00:21:47.78]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hmm. This was in Rome—

[00:21:48.62]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: This was in Rome. I was scared to death, and he didn't know what was going on. And I realized, it—just this letter that I was reading today in which he really explains what was going on, and the terrible psychological impact of going back to this—of one thing, not having seen any of his family for all those years, and then going back to them in the condition they were in, to his country that had been ravaged by war and so on, and so—

[00:22:21.11]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did he have a strong—I gather that he must have had a very strong attachment or affection for Italy.

[00:22:30.21]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He—yeah, well, he did, he did. [Cross talk.] But it was—we were—this morning, there was a little thing in his own writing saying that—I'd forgotten just

how it's worded, but it's something about he feels more Spanish than Italian.

[00:22:47.06]

DAVID LEBRUN: More a child of Spain than Italy.

[00:22:48.80]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah.

[00:22:49.07]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really?

[00:22:52.46]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: There was a part of him that was just really so oriented to Goya, and to Greco, and to Spanish behavior. There was a part of Rico that was—there was a part of him that was very formal and very reserved, though he came out as a very tremendously warm and loving, and so on. God. There was also this other thing that understood the whole Spanish character.

[00:23:28.53]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did he ever live in Spain, or was it—

[00:23:30.26]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He was in Spain for a period—and it must have been just before the Civil War because he was trying to—at that time, he was trying to do—he tried to get permission to get in to do a copy of the "Burial of the Count of Orgaz," and he couldn't get into the church to do it. So I lost the year and I've lost the year of the beginning of the Civil War, but it was right at—

[00:23:55.90]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It was right at the time.

[00:23:57.04]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It was right at that time, '33, '34.

[00:24:02.35]

DAVID LEBRUN: But there's a certain tie there, with his spending time in Mexico and having friends like Paco Osina [ph] and the—

[00:24:10.41]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes.

[00:24:10.94]

DAVID LEBRUN: —Spaniards.

[00:24:11.65]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh yes, yeah. Yes. And this comes out again in the writing that we were showing you that was published, that the conversations—

[00:24:29.23]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, what about—I don't know if this will lead up a blind alley, but one thing that interests me, I know that Howard Warshaw—I can't remember exactly when he came to the Los Angeles area—I gather in the mid '40s or perhaps late '40s. But anyway, as Howard tells it, he came with letters of introduction to Eugene Berman and to Rico.

[00:24:58.87]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:25:00.52]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And I forget who wrote these letters, but a mutual friend—

[00:25:04.18]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:25:04.51]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —said, look up these two. And one of the interesting things about—

[00:25:07.81]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Probably Julian Levy, right?

[00:25:09.52]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes.

[00:25:09.79]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes. I would guess. Because Julian was—whom I never knew, was dealer for all of them.

[00:25:17.72]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see. Yeah. That's right, that's what, it was, but Warshaw came out a fairly young man, and one of the very interesting things, I think, about Warshaw was the way he, as a young man, moved in some very interesting circles and which—

[00:25:33.17]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:25:34.04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —were here at the time, including, well, Stravinsky, and—

[00:25:37.94]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:25:38.21]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think he knew Aldous Huxley. And then, of course, Berman and Rico. I was wondering if—I guess what I'm searching for is to get an idea if this was a broader community in which Rico was involved at all, socially or whatever.

[00:25:57.70]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, well he had known—I know—before we were married, he had seen a lot of Berman. And as I indicated to you, there was Channing referred to some kind of a break with Berman that I don't really—I wasn't there, I don't know what it was about. I know it was more than possible that such things could take place. At that same period—I think this was all in Santa Barbara, at the same period he knew Stravinsky. And—

[00:26:30.40]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: There really was this intellectual—

[00:26:32.08]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right. He didn't know Huxley then. He came—we met Huxley many years later. Never were close to him.



[00:26:41.29]

DAVID LEBRUN: Do you mind a little heat?

[00:26:42.04]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: What?

[00:26:42.33]

DAVID LEBRUN: Do you mind a little heat?

[00:26:43.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No. You can turn some heat on. Rico was very catholic—in not the religious, in the choice of friends. So that it was—it would be just as possible for him to be just as much with Stravinsky at one point as with students at another. And we just moved in and out of all kinds of groupings. There was no—Rico didn't belong to the intellectual group, per se. You know, it could be Johnny Canavier coming around for—in his funny little beat-up car where Rico's head would be sticking out of the window because there were so many holes in the roof of the car, and, you know, the next night going off to—

[00:28:09.05]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What about other artists based on your recollection of that period? Which artists—of course, we mentioned Howard Warshaw, Brice—did Rico have—I don't want to say an affinity for, but relationship with.

[00:28:28.91]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No, not really.

[00:28:29.99]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Pretty much alone?

[00:28:30.92]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Really pretty much a loner. In other words, he had connections. He belonged to something called Artist Equity, which was kind of an artist union thing. And through that, had connections with all the people that were operating in the community. He wasn't terribly interested in it, really.

[00:28:58.77]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:28:59.67]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I mean—

[00:29:00.13]

DAVID LEBRUN: He was so much against the mainstream. I would say that the other artists whom he associated with were mostly people who were followers of his.

[00:29:08.37]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

[00:29:09.48]

DAVID LEBRUN: Or people who were in, you know—

[00:29:11.59]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's—that's right, that's right. I'm trying hard to think of what artists he knew, and I come—I keep coming back to Billy and Howard and then to his

students, who became really devoted friends. And it was much more that—the main thing was that he had no desire at all to get—as years went on, to get into the New York mainstream. This, for him, was an idea of getting into a kind of situation that was like leeches, and he wanted no part of it, where people would go to each other's exhibits and steal from each other. And this whole unhealthy thing that was operative in New York in the '50s, certainly, just horrified him. And the whole notion of the New York artists who would come out here—I'm thinking of one specifically, his name for the moment escapes me, had come out, and he would have to "paint a show," quote-unquote, for his exhibition every fall. And that kind of thing was just horrifying to Rico. We had enough independence so that he could have a show when he wanted to have a show and when—

[00:30:43.11]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And he did exhibit in New York during the '50s?

[00:30:45.63]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He did, and I might say under protest. Most of the time the dealer would just be—

[00:30:53.04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That was with Seligman?

[00:30:54.21]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: With Seligman, yeah. And they're—considering the volume of work that he produced during those years, if you go back to the catalogs, there are very few shows with Seligman. And he was forever—you'll find that in the files, too—forever as telling Theresa Parker, who was his gal at Seligman, well, he just didn't have enough, he just didn't have enough, he just didn't have enough. In the meantime—

[00:31:19.37]

DAVID LEBRUN: Thousands of drawings. [Laughs.]

[00:31:20.32]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Thousands! And paintings just coming up. But no, nothing was ever quite right. And I suppose part of it was the thing of—oh, always felt he had to be better than he was. And—

[00:31:38.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And you view him then very much as a perfectionist, I gather, in terms of his work.

[00:31:45.37]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I don't—I don't like that word. Not a perfectionist. All I can say is—I always think of this in connection with Rico, "A man's dream should exceed his grasp, but what's a heaven for?" And that was—oh, it was always beyond. I think the only time that he ever felt that he—maybe the two had coincided, was finally when he did the Dante drawings, and he really was able to sing while he was doing them.

[00:32:12.91]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:32:13.93]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And he used to say, "Pablo can't beat me now." He really knew he was on his own, and just sailing. But that sense, I think, only came to him finally with the mural at Pomona.

[00:32:29.31]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:32:30.04]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He knew he was in his own stride and he was doing the thing that he could do and nobody else could touch.

[00:32:36.67]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he would do that as his masterpiece, I suppose, or the culmination?

[00:32:42.13]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, that and the Dante drawings, and each in their own way.

[00:32:47.71]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What about—I was thinking of other artists in the Los Angeles area. Did he have any connection at all with Stanton Macdonald-Wright? Did they know one another?

[00:32:57.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I don't think they even knew each other.

[00:32:59.57]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Because they certainly knew of—

[00:33:01.55]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh yes, yeah. I don't believe that—I don't—to my recollection—I know I never met him. And Rico may have met him before we were married, but didn't—was not a thing that I'm even aware of.

[00:33:21.44]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think Macdonald-Wright taught at Jepson at one point. I'm not sure of that. But of course, it might not have been the same time.

[00:33:29.41]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No, it would not have been at the same time, I'm almost sure. It's funny, I can't—I know that the—reaching for a kind of community of—to find out if there was a community of people whose names are known. And Rico really preferred—you know, in many ways, he preferred people who weren't artists as friends, who—I mean, he was fed by—

[00:34:08.09]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: More as human beings, than other thing.

[00:34:08.66]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right, right.

[00:34:10.97]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Professions of his faith.

[00:34:17.40]

DAVID LEBRUN: What you were saying about the culmination of his work—I think even just before his death, he still felt that he had barely scratched the surface, and that it was so much more beyond it, in the conversations on Greco we had when he was bedridden within a few months before his death, which are on tape.

[00:34:37.30]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Right.

[00:34:38.58]

DAVID LEBRUN: He was still talking about it.

[00:34:41.05]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you yourself, you actually then recorded your own—

[00:34:46.42]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yeah. In one case, when he was out of the hospital. After one bout in the hospital, we had, over the space of a couple of weeks, conversations working toward—attempting to work toward a book.

[00:35:00.79]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:35:01.45]

DAVID LEBRUN: And that exists in transcript form.

[00:35:05.11]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's wonderful.

[00:35:06.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. It was a lovely thing. It was something—well, the feeling was I think that David, with all his interest, had never been around for most of Rico's lectures. So he knew him outside of the framework of "Rico the lecturer."

[00:35:26.82]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:35:27.55]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And so Rico and he undertook this thing of a dialogue of—that related to the things that meant most to—that had meant most to Rico in terms of Goya and Greco's work.

[00:35:45.29]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You say these conversations were really with the idea in mind of a book. Was this your idea? Something that you decided you wanted to—you felt should be done?

[00:35:57.84]

DAVID LEBRUN: It was his idea.

[00:35:58.62]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It was his idea? Okay.

[00:36:01.15]

DAVID LEBRUN: He became too ill to carry on with it.

[00:36:04.13]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see.

[00:36:09.30]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, that was—

[00:36:10.37]

DAVID LEBRUN: That exists in a coherent form.

[00:36:13.22]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's great. That's a remarkable collection. It just boggles my mind what you two have been able to—

[00:36:21.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, that whole thing was done when—after Rico knew that he was not going to live. He was told that it was just months, in the beginning of it. On the first of January in '64. And it was between then and April that he and David did this thing. So that—he knew that he was—that this was the legacy.

[00:36:50.08]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, it's—we're grateful that—

[00:36:56.88]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, exists.

[00:37:00.74]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Can you think of anything else that we might touch upon, within this context, and recollections and laying in a biographical framework? In terms of maybe when we've mentioned, relationships? Anything else that might occur to you that I wouldn't necessarily think at this point to ask?

[00:37:34.39]

DAVID LEBRUN: I think about the pattern, the life pattern as I remember it—

[00:37:40.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. Right.

[00:37:40.33]

DAVID LEBRUN: —which is where a lot of this written material comes from. The period—the long period in Los Angeles from, what, in the late '50s when we were living within walking distance of the studio in San Vicente. And he—this is the period that I remember most. He would get up in the morning at four or—

[00:38:06.73]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, before the sun was up.

[00:38:08.86]

DAVID LEBRUN: Long before the sun was up, and long before we were awake, and he would go in the kitchen, and make some coffee and sit down and do the writing, and that's when this huge mass of writing came out.

[00:38:18.79]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really?

[00:38:19.58]

DAVID LEBRUN: And setting out a lot of yellow paper, and start writing, and make coffee. And then he'd walk in the dark to the studio, and would usually be there for the first light. And there's some marvelous writing about that. There's one piece about being in the studio and watching the birth of light come in.

[00:38:38.86]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And this was—

[00:38:39.42]

DAVID LEBRUN: And then would start working. He would work a huge day until the light went. And Constance would be there usually in the studio working on photography or on business.

[00:38:56.33]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you joined him, but after the sun—

[00:38:58.67]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: After the sun had come up, yes, yeah. I don't know if you know something—maybe you—maybe you didn't ever know it. Did you know there was a period when Rico couldn't walk to the studio? And they never understood what it was.

[00:39:16.13]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: A physical—I mean, a physical problem or—

[00:39:19.46]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He just couldn't make it. He'd sometimes find he'd have to sit down on the edge of the curb, and he'd come home.

[00:39:26.66]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And when was this?

[00:39:28.37]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It was back in the '50s. And our doctor is very, very good friend and he worked—they never really understood it. It was a matter of—it was psychological, obviously, but he would feel as though he were going to pass out. And he'd come home, and he would come back to me for me to take him. And so I just—there was something in him that was so—what—appalled at what he still had to do. This was long before he was—long before he was taken ill. But—

[00:40:13.98]

DAVID LEBRUN: He just couldn't face going to the studio alone?

[00:40:15.15]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That he couldn't face it. Right. And he did—for a long time he didn't tell me what was going on. He would come back and—"I'm going to wait for you, and then we'd go down together in the car," or whatever.

[00:40:29.85]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well—hmm.

[00:40:31.55]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And then it began to worry him, and we went to the doctor, and saw him. They ran every kind of test in the book—I mean, you know—

[00:40:41.91]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And couldn't find any real physical reason?

[00:40:45.54]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He never really got at the root of it. And only once did it hit him when—I remember, it hit him once in New York in a very strange situation. And that was the only time other than—it manifested itself. Other than that one time, only between the

house and the studio. He couldn't make it. And so the burden of what he had to do just wore. Although that was what—he lived to do it, you know.

[00:41:23.96]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, you were—you obviously spent quite a bit of time in the studio.

[00:41:28.48]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I lived there.

[00:41:29.38]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Right. And what about his working method? Obviously you were able to observe him. Obviously he was devoted to drawing, draftsmanship.

[00:41:43.84]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: To describe Rico's working method is like describing the explosion of—what is it? Judas? Everything went on at once. It's why this studio was designed the way it is with a place to paint, another place to draw, and another place—

[00:42:02.35]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It's really three—it's three studios.

[00:42:04.36]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It's really four or five because this was designed as the room in which to paint.

[00:42:10.13]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see.

[00:42:10.31]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Then there was the little room that was designed so that he wouldn't do what he had always done, which was to walk over all of his drawings when he started to paint, because the drawings were just everywhere all over the floor. So we had a separate room designed for drawing. And then there was the area that—here, was designed for working in plaster, and another for working in waxes, and another for working in metal. And of course, the sculpture all came very late in his life, but as far as drawing and painting went, he worked on everything at once, and he worked on several huge paintings at once. And in photographs of the studio that exists, this is shown because he had had the work pinned up and collages going, and drawings going and paintings going all at the same time.

[00:43:08.33]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, he—much of his work is figurative, although there's some things that are very close to complete abstraction, although I don't know that he ever really went that route. I would think—

[00:43:24.64]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Not really. Not—

[00:43:26.14]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —always content, though, of some sort. But what I was going to ask, he seemed devoted to the figure [telephone ringing] and I assume that he worked from models maybe something like this.

[Cross talk.]

Well, let's hold it. [Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:43:47.89]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: When I first knew Rico in Santa Barbara, he used to—in the—whatever it was, '40s, early '40s, he worked constantly from a model. He had one model who was just devoted to him, Flora. And there are many, many Flora drawings in existence. And Flora would do anything. She'd wrap herself in bandages, and she had long hair, long gray hair down to here, and she was quite a chunky woman, middle-aged. Middle-aged to older woman.

[00:44:21.43]

And—well, this was typical of the kind of adoration that Rico received. I remember Flora telling me once in Santa Barbara that—this was during the war. And she said—I think she had been married and had a son, and lost the son, or something. And she said that she felt that what she was doing as posing for Rico, and making this all happen was her contribution—that she had lost the son who would have served in the war, and this was what she could do for the world, which really is quite extraordinary.

[00:45:09.43]

And after Flora, he never—he never worked with—then he came to Los Angeles, and then the whole crucifixion cycle started. He had begun it in Santa Barbara, but it really got going down here. And from then on, he would often go back and use a model, but he was never—he was never happy with the drawings, per se, that he did from the model, from that time on. In other words, whereas—including Flora—through the period of drawing from Flora, those drawings were it. From then on, when he used the model, it was okay. He used her—and he was usually miserable when he worked on them. And that—he would have to then go through a transformation process in his drawings. Those were just the stepping stones.

[00:46:22.27]

And I remember, the extreme was once when he hired a model to come and she got there, and it wasn't that he didn't like her, it was just that the whole thing of working from a model was so difficult, and it was—there was such a thing from working from her, to doing the thing he wanted to do—there was such a big jump. I remember, he quietly went in the office, wrote a check, paid her for a full day's work, and sent her away. He just couldn't do it.

[00:46:55.94]

DAVID LEBRUN: I think the same thing applied to working from the landscape.

[00:46:59.09]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, he couldn't—well, he never could work from the landscape.

[00:47:01.88]

DAVID LEBRUN: Well, he would attempt it or he—

[00:47:03.53]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Dreadful—

[00:47:03.86]

DAVID LEBRUN: —going through the drawings, the things that he would do would not be anything that would satisfy him.

[00:47:09.11]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he really didn't—

[00:47:10.34]

DAVID LEBRUN: It was transmuted, through—I think there's something he says about that in the notes on drawing in the book, of having to filter down through consciousness, and then re-emerge.



[00:47:20.54]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. Yeah.

[00:47:21.50]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he really isn't an artist who worked well from nature. That he was more interested in getting at something else, although I don't want to—

[00:47:32.72]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: He always—his—the seminal thing, the germinal, whatever you want to call it, the thing that started it, all had to do with what he looked at, but it went through many, many transformations and germinations and processes.

[00:47:53.03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But what I'm getting at, he would—it seems to me that the work would evidence this, that he started with a concept, with an idea, and then would use the model or the elements from nature—

[00:48:08.39]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:48:09.32]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —kind of as tools to express the idea. It was much more of a conceptual thing rather than—

[00:48:16.55]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I'd say—

[00:48:17.18]

DAVID LEBRUN: It wasn't—it wasn't conceptual. I think he would do things—

[00:48:20.09]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Or emotional.

[00:48:20.24]

DAVID LEBRUN: —that seemed needed. He would go to Goya, or to a landscape, or to a model, and struggle with those things. And then later, those things would have had a chance to filter through and would come out through the hand at a much later time.

[00:48:37.47]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But they really were vehicles—truly vehicles of expression rather than an entirely—another type of art, and the more traditional figurative type of art where you basically are representing with certain interpretation, but fairly close to nature. Does this fit in?

[00:48:56.64]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I would say so. Yeah.

[00:48:58.46]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I mean, it was the expression of emotion or an idea, a theme—a statement about something that interested him.

[00:49:05.93]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. But for instance, somebody could look at the collage here of the Mexican meat stall. Okay, they might say this was a total abstraction. In no way

is it a total abstraction. This started from very specific objects of the Mexican campesino gal with her braids and butterfly ties in her hair, and the table with the brazier underneath it, and the head of the animal on the—

[00:49:47.13]

DAVID LEBRUN: It's being carved.

[00:49:48.42]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's being carved. And the dog underneath the table and so on. And the umbrella forms. The Coburn lantern shining up. These are things which one person looking at it might in no way be able to read this at a first, second, or even tenth look. To me it's as much that as the actual scene, but it's been a digesting and a regrouping of those initial forms.

[00:50:38.50]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, in a way, it seems to be certainly dependent to a certain extent on Cubist innovations. [Telephone rings.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:50:50.71]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: When you asked about the Cubist thing, I think that the whole—the whole development in Mexico was very much related to the Cubist thing from the point of view of seeing objects from presenting them maybe from many sides, or simultaneously or from under—

[00:51:19.33]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:51:20.80]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Not going exactly the way the Cubists went, but that pervasive notion that you didn't necessarily have to see everything in a picture from the same point of view, and you might be looking at part of it from on top or underneath—

[00:51:36.97]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So it's sort of looking back to Cézanne, then, that same lineage.

[00:51:40.27]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. And so, you know, you're coming out with the head larger maybe in relation to the umbrella thing, or seen in a different way from that in which if you were just standing stationary in the street, and you saw that scene, you would never see it all just that way because you're—as he's giving it to you, you're down at the bottom and you're up at the top—

[00:52:10.50]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: At the same time.

[00:52:10.85]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: At the same time.

[00:52:12.07]

DAVID LEBRUN: Well, that's where collage became very important, because he would work with cut-out forms that were the face seen from the side, or different units of the form—

[00:52:22.87]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Simultaneously.

[00:52:23.75]

DAVID LEBRUN: And would play with those, and move them around, and—

[00:52:29.42]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: This leads into, Paul, and some of the things that I have here, which—

[00:52:34.69]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, why don't we take a look at that. Maybe first of all, for the benefit of the tape recorder, which can't see, describe what we're looking at. This is the portfolio that I mentioned earlier with a number of photographs, and maybe you can—

[00:52:50.95]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well—

[00:52:51.19]

DAVID LEBRUN: —scraps from magazines and—

[00:52:52.69]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: This is the—small as it is, it's the total collection of things that Rico had saved, cut out of magazines, of photographs that he had asked people to take in different places. They were kind of his—well, in a sense, they could be thought of as kind of in place of models in a way. They were the objects that he wanted to think about or look at.

[00:53:35.29]

As I told you earlier, in many, many instances of these things, the actual saving of them was enough. He never referred back to them again. And others he had them out with him constantly wherever we went. For instance, he had mistreated the "Guernica" to such an extent that we had to have it mounted because it was just—it was being stepped on and pinned, and so on. We had to have it mounted on a board.

[00:54:12.69]

These are sort of "class A." I don't know if David's ever seen these. This group of things relate to some work that he'd had done on his own drawings of certain things of the crucifixion, and he suddenly had this notion of changing them after they were done. So he had things taken at an angle. Instead of shooting a drawing straight on, he wanted to see what would happen, and he had the photographer shoot it like that so it became—it's the beginning of—in a way, of collage-type of thinking because—

[00:54:53.60]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, what's happened is the camera's produced distortions.

[00:54:57.38]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right, that's right.

[00:54:58.92]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It's creating distortions.

[00:54:59.12]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: So he was—so he was making his own model out of his own painting for something later on.

[00:55:07.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Right. That's fascinating.

[00:55:08.06]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And in the same way—well, in another way. So here, a photograph that was taken of something—I don't know what he was going to do with this, but—

[00:55:17.06]

DAVID LEBRUN: These are details of centurions from the crucifixion. They were photographs from his paintings.

[00:55:23.39]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And see, this is the sleeping soldier cut-out. God knows, maybe he was going to do a reassembling of that later on. One of these is rather fascinating, because it showed—

[00:55:45.01]

DAVID LEBRUN: This one, he's using the negative—

[00:55:47.98]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes. I see.

[00:55:48.61]

DAVID LEBRUN: —as a point of reference.

[00:55:49.60]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right, right.

[00:55:51.04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, again, it's a different type of distortion. It's interesting that that seems to be what is interesting him here with these particular photos. Did you do photography for him, Constance?

[00:56:00.97]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Not then, not at that time. This is a great one, because this, in a sense, is like the beginning things of his sculpture. He was working—this is of objects that he had around him at the time that he was doing the carapace creatures of the crucifixion, and the soldiers and so on. And he had the objects of egg crates, and what else is in there? It's some—he had had some guy make him this thing, which was an armor object. It was as though he was making his first moves into sculpture, though he never assembled them in any kind of totality.

[00:56:48.95]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What prompted his interest in sculpture? I was surprised the first—the other time I was over here.

[00:56:55.22]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well—

[00:56:55.46]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and realized that—

[00:56:56.47]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I think he had had it. He had started some things back at this period. He had worked with gourds—and I think there's some photographs even in stuff that may be in here of cutting up gourds and making them into helmeted heads and then putting plaster on them. And that was back in 19—around 1950.

[00:57:24.69]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:57:25.37]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Then he gave it up. Then his relationship with Leonard Baskin, who was a sculptor and an enormous admirer—

[00:57:34.61]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, that's interesting.

[00:57:34.91]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —and Lenny was just always in conversations on—always—saying, you know, "That's the way you should go."

[00:57:42.60]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's an interesting connection that I didn't realize. Did Baskin ever—

[00:57:45.26]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. And I always felt that it funny. His drawing finally just came to a point where it could no longer be contained in two dimensions. It was as though it had to reach out into the third dimension.

[00:58:04.71]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And of course, sculpture is a natural evolution from this type of simultaneous vision.

[00:58:10.07]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:58:10.64]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: A thing where you try to present different points of view. What about Baskin? Did he ever come out and visit—

[00:58:17.66]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, I have a—he didn't come out to visit him. We were together a lot in New Haven. That was one of the great things in New Haven. And I have, really, a marvelous file of letters—

[00:58:30.53]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Great.

[00:58:31.40]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —of Lenny's to Rico, which you'll keep for a while. Enormous admiration. He just adored Rico.

[00:58:42.58]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:58:43.15]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Just adored him.

[00:58:44.59]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I gather it was a mutual—

[00:58:45.82]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes, yes. And the—oh yes. It was really a beautiful relationship. And of course, they did the "Encantadas," which you probably know. They did those together. And he—it was a very funny relationship, because in so many ways, they were alike; in many, many ways, they were different. One of the main differences was that Lenny was a creature of the night, and Rico was a creature of light.

[00:59:16.03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It's amazing they ever got together. [Laughs.]

[00:59:17.56]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, what happened was that when Rico had finished his stint at New Haven and I stayed on and closed the apartment, he went up to Northampton and stayed with Baskin. And he drew on the wood for the drawings, which Lenny later carved for the "Encantadas."

[00:59:38.56]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:59:39.25]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And they started out—they discussed this thing about their time schedule. And each was going to respect the other's. And what they ended up doing was to stay up 24 hours, because neither one could tear himself away from what the other was doing, and they were absolutely exhausted when they were through.

[00:59:56.15]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Let's—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_crown74\_3278\_m]

[00:00:04.97]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: An interview with Constance Lebrun Crown and David Lebrun, side two.

[00:00:15.89]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Uh, I just—I had these little—

[00:00:18.66]

DAVID LEBRUN: These are three-by-five Polaroids.

[00:00:20.09]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, of things of the crucifixion. And this photograph of the cross reminded me of something that—I don't know whether this is written anywhere—that when Rico was working on the crucifixion, he had done this tremendous—he had taken three years to do it. Dr. Valentiner kept asking him to have a show, asking him to have a show, and he said he was never ready, never ready. And so finally, the year 1950 came, and he was ready.

[00:00:51.50]

And the show was to open on December 1. And about approximately six weeks before that, he went down to the county museum, the old county museum, to look at the space, and sort of figure out how much—how many walls there were. It was an enormous space. It was three huge rooms. And he asked Dr. Valentiner what was going to happen at the end of the long room. And Valentiner said, well, they were just going to close that off, because it went off into the paleontology section or something.

[00:01:30.79]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: A lot of bones—

[00:01:31.42]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And Rico looked at it. And he said they were going to put up a false wall there. And he said, "Well, how would you like to have me do a painting for it?" "Fine," said the good doctor. "Fine, fine." So Rico went home, came home. And in those last six weeks—I think it was six weeks—he painted the triptych of the crucifixion, which was 16 feet high. It was the—the center section of it was four panels—three or four panels. I've forgotten. It's 12 or 16 feet high.

[00:02:10.41]

Now in this studio, you could not—it was not big enough for the whole—it was not high enough for the whole central section, which meant actually that he had to work on the floor when he wanted to see what the whole assemblage—because it was one, two, three, four, five, six—it was either seven or ten panels put together. I've forgotten now.

[00:02:37.43]

DAVID LEBRUN: These are four-by-eight panels.

[00:02:39.29]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Four—yeah. I don't know, don't remember the overall height. But anyway, the point was that he could not see the whole thing assembled. So what he did would be to lay it out on the floor. That isn't even of the triptych. It just reminded me of the problem. He would lay them out on the floor. And then he climbed up onto a balcony that we had for storage, and he had two assistants working for him. And he would cut out pieces of collage—this is where he started on collage—and he would then tell them where to move them, and then come running down from this thing and going, "No, no, no. All right. Now move it over to the left. Now move it over to the right." And this is the way he assembled the damn thing. Then he would paint in the areas, because it wasn't—that was not left in collage.

[00:03:26.12]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What year that?

[00:03:27.13]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That was 1950.

[00:03:28.50]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: '50.

[00:03:29.84]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: But he—that was his initial love affair with the use of cut-out form as being a way of arriving at an image. In actuality, he ended up painting all of that into the—onto the triptych. But later, it was the next step that, when we went down to Mexico right afterwards, that—or it was two years, finally, that we went down there and lived, two years later. But he really picked up his affair with collage, and carried it to a point where he was doing everything in collage, and just pinning things together, and leaving me with the job of figuring out what to do about them, because he would just walk away from them. And I mean, you can't just walk away from them. You can't leave them just pinned together and—

[00:04:24.16]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What about the—

[00:04:25.72]

DAVID LEBRUN: Wasn't the ultimate extension of that thing, of—

[00:04:29.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Moving things around.

[00:04:29.98]

DAVID LEBRUN: —moving things around was in the Pomona mural—

[00:04:33.94]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:04:34.30]

DAVID LEBRUN: —where you're dealing with something 40 feet high. He originally did a— it's, correct me if I'm wrong, but my memory of it is he did a version of it in the tall-ceilinged room in the studio in Rome, which he had photographed, and had that blown up to the scale of the final wall. Isn't that right?

[00:04:55.18]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Or he had—I don't know whether he worked with photographs or the actual things. But anyway, right.

[00:05:00.28]

DAVID LEBRUN: Didn't he have huge, huge blow ups, which he would—

[00:05:02.90]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: A photo-mural type.

[00:05:03.76]

DAVID LEBRUN: Photo-mural, which he then pinned to the wall and started cutting up. And that's what he began with on the wall was moving around the huge photograph—

[00:05:12.30]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Photograph shapes. Yeah.

[00:05:13.33]

DAVID LEBRUN: —shapes. Of his original, of which we are looking right there at one of the lunette sections of these original—

[00:05:21.21]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Things in Rome.

[00:05:21.82]

DAVID LEBRUN: —wall in Rome. The actual lunette in—

[00:05:25.12]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Fifteen—

[00:05:26.44]

DAVID LEBRUN: —twice that wide.

[00:05:28.21]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Or more than that.

[00:05:29.29]

DAVID LEBRUN: So the photo blow ups of that, and of the rest of the sections of the smaller



version of the mural done in Rome, were actually blown up photographically, and then pinned to the—or fastened to the wall, and then cut up and moved, and gradually replaced with paint. And there's a series of photographs somewhere of that process.

[00:05:48.07]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah.

[00:05:48.73]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So he made adjustments, then, inset too, really.

[00:05:52.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:05:52.87]

DAVID LEBRUN: Oh, the whole thing changed ultimately. It completely evolved.

[00:05:55.53]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And then, when he found something that was satisfactory, he'd actually lay that in and paint—

[00:06:01.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Paint it, right. Right.

[00:06:02.28]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and fix it that way.

[00:06:03.41]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah.

[00:06:05.34]

DAVID LEBRUN: There's a series of shots of the evolution of that from the pinning up on the wall.

[00:06:09.87]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes, terrible photographs, because I took them.

[00:06:12.24]

DAVID LEBRUN: I took them, I think. [They laugh.]

[00:06:14.79]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, I don't know. They're terrible photographs. I was afraid I was— [They laugh.] I'm afraid I—

[00:06:18.75]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't know why you're fighting over that.

[00:06:20.22]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Because they're very bad. And, well, it was very interesting, because the one element that—you know the Pomona mural.

[00:06:30.87]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've seen it.

[00:06:31.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: The one element that he hadn't coped with when he was doing it in Rome was the impact of light that came in through that huge arch. And his studio in Rome was high enough so that it came to the base of the actual painted section of the mural, but it did not encompass 15 feet, or whatever, 20 feet of arch, through which western California sun was going to come. Well, that's quite an element.

[00:07:02.71]

And what happened was, when we got to Pomona, and he put these things on the wall, they became tiny, because suddenly they were put, blood brother and sister, to an element that had not been thought about. And then he—so he had to start changing everything. Everything was too minute in concept. They all had to now compete with a huge element of just light that came through the arch.

[00:07:36.40]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What about his relationship—I would think an obvious relationship—to the Mexican mural painters? Was this part of the attraction of Mexico, and going down there? Did he know any of them? Like those who actually came then, obviously who were up here, came to California.

[00:07:55.66]

DAVID LEBRUN: It was only Orozco that he felt an affinity.

[00:07:57.94]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah, that's right. Orozco was someone he adored.

[00:08:03.38]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Monumental forms.

[00:08:04.36]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. Siqueiros he did not really admire.

[00:08:08.49]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Rivera?

[00:08:09.31]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Rivera. Siqueiros he admired, yes. That's not right. He did admire him. Rivera, he had really no use for. And—

[00:08:17.14]

DAVID LEBRUN: [Inaudible] Tamayo.

[00:08:18.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well. Tamayo he knew. Yes. And it was not—it was not tremendous cordiality there, I would say. Or rather, interrupted cordiality. God.

[00:08:34.39]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But certainly there are similar concerns in terms of working on the monumental scale and all.

[00:08:40.81]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. But I think he really felt that Rivera was a postcard artist blown up. Orozco, just undying admiration for him.

[00:08:51.25]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did he ever know him?

[00:08:52.75]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No, Orozco died before he went down there.

[00:08:55.24]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right.

[00:08:58.17]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No. I think the appeal of Mexico was that it was something related to Southern Italy, and without the impediment of family connections. But visually, this was a country of terror, and of poverty, and of beauty, and of struggle, and all the things that he had known, as compared to the United States, where these things are—they exist, but they're covered up and they're hidden. You don't find fathers carrying their dead children on their hair—on their heads, taking them to the graveyard, drunk, and with—covered with paper flowers. I mean, this is something—and this went by our house every few days, going right by the street. We were on the way to the local graveyard.

[00:09:54.78]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think that leads us to something that is very—that expresses itself in these photographs in the portfolio, some of the pictures we were looking at earlier, for—

[00:10:05.68]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Of death.

[00:10:06.16]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Of death and so forth.

[00:10:07.57]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No, I think—yeah.

[00:10:09.20]

DAVID LEBRUN: You spoke earlier of his being a catholic artist, not religiously, but in relation to friendships. And I was almost going to—

[00:10:16.57]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Interject.

[00:10:16.90]

DAVID LEBRUN: —interject that he was also a Catholic artist in—spiritually. He hated the Catholic Church in the hierarchy. But he was very close to the notion of redemption through suffering. And—

[00:10:31.33]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:10:32.17]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes.

[00:10:32.80]

DAVID LEBRUN: —that was the central notion, the notion of pulling beauty out of the Buchenwald cart, that through that death and through that suffering, bringing that through to Revelation.

[00:10:50.25]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right. And—right.

[00:10:51.73]

DAVID LEBRUN: And that's why he was able to go to Mexico, into a land of poverty, and where everything is raw to the bone, and find beauty there that he couldn't find in—

[00:11:01.80]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, there's—yeah. There's some horrible photographs in here. And obviously they meant something to him.

[00:11:06.87]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes, and this is one of the ones that he had up all the time. Do you know—

[00:11:10.65]

DAVID LEBRUN: I remember that now.

[00:11:11.61]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It's China. It was one of the most appalling—

[00:11:15.42]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Dead children spread on what appears to be a—

[00:11:17.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Steps.

[00:11:18.87]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Steps or a staircase outside.

[00:11:21.09]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And it was as though he never could leave this kind of thing. It was just—Oh, you know—"Guernica" is—someone else has been dealing with this, the horror transmuted again, of—the—oh, boy, it's just it's hard to know where to start, because —

[00:12:00.05]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, it would be interesting if we could run into a few that might really be revealing in terms of his interest. Obviously, all of them reflect his interest in—

[00:12:13.11]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Okay, de Santos.

[00:12:14.14]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: De Santos, yeah.

[00:12:17.02]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: You know—This I remember he had before I knew him. And he was fascinated by that whole development in the Southwest. There are the things of—in Mexico of the—not Guadalajara. Where the mummies are.

[00:12:45.25]

DAVID LEBRUN: There's a lot of things in here that—you were talking about the stretching and distortion of the figure, the way he had his own things photographed. I think that you get something like that, has to do with that, the stretching and distortion through water, the figure swimming underwater.

[00:13:02.65]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:13:03.16]

DAVID LEBRUN: And then there's other things somewhere in there that are streaked photographs—

[00:13:06.58]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, the ones I have put in the kitchen. Right, right.

[00:13:12.91]

I'm sort of quickly trying to—okay, here you go again. That's the Buchenwald cart.

[00:13:27.08]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, my God. Yeah.

[00:13:32.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: This is another—a whole—another thing not on the death bit, but the—that's the Doukhobor women who burn their clothes in protest of something. And he did a whole series of paintings which have been destroyed, which he destroyed because he finally wasn't—wasn't in any way satisfied with them. But the Doukhobor women.

[00:14:06.51]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: There's obviously a commitment to humanity in all forms, and the suffering, especially. I mean, it seems obvious to me that he was involved—

[00:14:20.48]

DAVID LEBRUN: That's the one I was—

[00:14:21.44]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What's this? It looks like—

[00:14:23.51]

DAVID LEBRUN: This is—what? A woman working in the rice field.

[00:14:25.97]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Rice field.

[00:14:26.42]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. Covered with mud.

[00:14:28.61]

DAVID LEBRUN: Another just distortion, or the extremity applied to the figure, here covered with mud. There's another one of the figures being hosed by the police—

[00:14:42.67]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I can't find that. I don't know where it's gone.

[00:14:44.33]

DAVID LEBRUN: —in Birmingham, when they were spraying the marchers with fire hoses.

[00:14:51.08]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And that was the beginning of his "Hosed Figure," which is a

sculpture.

[00:14:54.41]

DAVID LEBRUN: A sculpture. Figure with the hair pouring down like that.

[00:14:57.89]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, to put a very simple question, why do you suppose the attraction to this type of theme? Is it a social consciousness we're talking about? A concern for humanity?

[00:15:13.34]

DAVID LEBRUN: I think it's a concern for—

[00:15:15.56]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It certainly isn't a formal—It's an aesthetic thing.

[00:15:17.91]

DAVID LEBRUN: It's a concern for truth. There's some letters that he wrote to a painter. It was something very late, where he was writing to somebody who was doing drawings for models of people who were sort of very—

[00:15:31.68]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Gus?

[00:15:32.04]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yeah, Gus—of very well fleshed out. And he was telling him to draw the thin and the emaciated.

[00:15:42.30]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yes.

[00:15:42.84]

DAVID LEBRUN: And because there this structure and the truth is revealed, right, what's really going on inside the— It wasn't basically humanistic or, you know, or social. It wasn't social protest. It was the same way in which you would find an X-ray revealing, was—in which you're testing an aircraft part, and the way in which you test it is to put it under stress. And you find the truth about it by putting it under stress.

[00:16:20.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Nice. Yes.

[00:16:21.86]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes, that's well said. Of course, that doesn't account for the other things where he would wrap up the figure and—or like assuming he did something from—oh, I don't know if he did or not—that figure in the rice paddy, where it's dirt and mud, clothing and mud on the human figure that completely disguises this internal structure that we're talking about.

[00:16:50.94]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. Okay—

[00:16:51.06]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So there's another interest obviously going on there.

[00:16:54.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: The bound figure here is sort of related to that rice paddy figure. And yet this was also—this bound thing reappeared over and over again in drawings. It's as though that is—as another kind of—had another kind of revelation to him. That was in the—

[00:17:19.56]

DAVID LEBRUN: There is a notion of the body as a husk or a containing shell that he was getting to by these metaphors of the tortoise, the centurions in armor—

[00:17:32.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right.

[00:17:33.12]

DAVID LEBRUN: —the figure posed or contained in mud, some of the sculptures where it would be the body encased within—what's the memorial to Caiazzo, or—yeah. It's the—

[00:17:47.70]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Cloak.

[00:17:48.09]

DAVID LEBRUN: —the cloak, or the skin or whatever, and—

[00:17:51.03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's really a nice piece. [Cross talk.] What is that? What's that called? Does it have—

[00:17:54.61]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: "Memorial to Caiazzo." Caiazzo was a town in Italy where the Germans went and asked the Italians which way the enemy went, and the Italians said they went that way. So the Germans went, and they shot the men that they were chasing, and it turned out to be their own men.

[00:18:12.27]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, that's wonderful.

[00:18:13.05]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: So they came back and they shot all the people in Caiazzo.

[00:18:15.46]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, that's not wonderful.

[00:18:17.58]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: So this was—he did a painting of this back in the '50s, and then this thing had lived with him. And Croce did a poem on them.

[00:18:27.44]

DAVID LEBRUN: The drawing from the '50s has the poem written across it.

[00:18:30.18]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. And then the Titelmans have the painting of that. And then, years later, when he came to sculpture, the notion was still there.

[00:18:39.57]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I really—the connection to Goya is becoming more and more clear to

me now.

[00:18:45.78]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[00:18:47.52]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No question about it. Yeah. It makes the—

[00:18:50.96]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: The attraction to the things that are generally considered awful and horrible, and his feeling of how much life there is, and how much real beauty there is in that kind of thing.

[00:19:06.04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So you think it represents an affirmation of humanity, even into—

[00:19:13.44]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: No question. No question at all. I mean, I am confused, because I don't think I understand the mechanism of the human mind enough to really follow this whole thing. But that is an affirmation, that there's no question that his involvement with pain, and with suffering, and with torture was something of the spirit can conquer that, was what he was about.

[00:19:51.29]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Do you agree with that, David?

[00:19:52.34]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yeah. The easy pitfall, which a lot of people have come to when writing about him, is that to say, well, he's talking about man's inhumanity to man. It's a work of social protest, or whatever, which is—that's not the way to go to understand it. He—You have to understand it in terms of trying to come to an understanding of truth through pain, and with an underlying faith in humanity, yes.

[00:20:27.65]

But what did he say about Goya? If Goya had wanted to save lives, he would have gone to work in a soup kitchen. That isn't what he's about when he's making the "Disasters of War." He's not trying to make a political statement, or to influence the political events. He's seeing that as something in which he can find truth. And this, as a theoretical scientist doesn't try to understand physics for the practical uses that can be made out of it. He's after truth. And out of that truth, a man progresses.

[00:21:09.88]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

[00:21:10.09]

DAVID LEBRUN: But that's not what the guy is thinking of when he tries to understand the nature of the universe, or the way this works.

[00:21:16.48]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: They say art is investigation.

[00:21:18.55]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, okay, just looking at these things, I'm sure you've never seen these, David. And it's strangely—although they are slaughterhouse photographs, they were not done at the time he did—these are photographs taken much, much after he did his slaughterhouse drawings. Rico went and worked in a slaughterhouse—



[00:21:43.03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

[00:21:43.39]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —drew in a slaughterhouse up in Santa Barbara. And actually, he ended up paying the guys to shoot the animals. He gave them the money to buy the bullets, and loaned them his guns so that—because he couldn't stand what they were doing. But he wanted to draw—you're frozen, aren't you?

[00:22:03.32]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yes. That heater doesn't work.

[00:22:05.11]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, well, it should. Just knock it out one more.

[00:22:08.65]

DAVID LEBRUN: Doesn't come on at all. Unless you turn on this thing over here, which is—cold air comes out.

[00:22:14.74]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right. The only thing I can think of is that it's on the—no, it couldn't be. Is nothing happening?

[00:22:21.73]

DAVID LEBRUN: No.

[00:22:22.76]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: I don't know what's wrong.

[00:22:26.99]

He did a whole series of things when he was working in this—when he drew in the slaughterhouse. And then, when we were in Mexico, he had somebody take these photographs of creatures being butchered and so on. And what was the remark you just made? That art was a investigation—yeah. And to him, these could make some people sick, with the vision of animals being cut up. This was a miracle to him of what it revealed of the—of the structure, like, of the creatures.

[00:23:16.69]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He reminds me of Soutine. I'm not trying to say—

[00:23:19.43]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. Right, right. And here, these are a whole series of things, which I'm very, very fascinated by because of their relation to the whole Mexican imagery. These were photographs that Franz took.

[00:23:50.54]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, that's interesting. He cut out a doorway or something on one, and there's another photo behind it.

[00:23:56.28]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:23:56.93]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't know if it's a different—

[00:23:58.04]

DAVID LEBRUN: And these other photographs—

[Cross talk.]

[00:23:59.37]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Well, yeah, and he would work like that. He'd take one, and—

[00:24:03.17]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So, made a window for juxtaposing the—

[00:24:05.45]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And if you knew the paintings that came out of these, these are very, very much related to these images. Yeah, right. Right.

[00:24:19.79]

DAVID LEBRUN: That's the beginning.

[00:24:21.14]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. And he made his own doorway.

[00:24:27.93]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's remarkable.

[00:24:29.64]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: And David, [inaudible]—let's keep those—the whole papier-maché world of Mexico was one that he loved. And he did drawings of these things—some paintings, some drawings.

[00:24:54.07]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I noticed, and I guess in the bedroom, there's a piece with, I assume, it's Mexican, with the little figures, papier-maché.

[00:25:01.42]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's plastic.

[00:25:02.23]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Plaster.

[00:25:02.56]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's plaster, yeah.

[00:25:03.79]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But still the same type of thing, it seems.

[00:25:16.70]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Again, more things of the animals and photographs of the walls in Mexico, the cobblestones, the things in the market. These were all the things that were his food down there, were his, really, his sustenance.

[00:25:48.23]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And once again, the years we're talking about for Mexico is two years?

[00:25:52.36]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: '52 to '54. The end of '52 to the middle of '54. Then there's a whole group of things here that are—these were taken at different times by friends up here, of things to do with farm machinery, which always fascinated him. I think there was a quality of the machinery that was of—certain of the things particularly that were almost prehensile, that were, like, huge, hands—

[00:26:28.93]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Huge hands, claws, this type of thing.

[00:26:31.47]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Right. And many of the photographs that he saved of those things were related to that aspect.

[00:26:39.65]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It seems to me that, although I made that comment earlier, that Rico really didn't work from nature. He incorporated the elements, but he was expressing something else. Nevertheless, it's obvious from this portfolio that he was very interested in different elements from nature, whether it be the figure in all sorts of situations, and then objects, machinery as well, architecture, details of architecture. So you have basically, no question about it, a figurative artist. One thing that naturally occurs to me, how did he feel about non-objective painting?

[00:27:26.19]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Okay—

[00:27:26.58]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: How did he feel about, for instance, Abstract Expressionism, which—

[00:27:31.89]

DAVID LEBRUN: In the Archives, this had to be well covered.

[00:27:35.37]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: It's well-covered, yeah.

[00:27:37.11]

DAVID LEBRUN: Scathingly covered.

[00:27:38.70]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Yeah. But then, on the other hand, don't forget that Rico would come out. Baskin, for instance, would just, [loud sigh] with a sigh, take them down, just nothing left of them at, all. And then Rico would turn around. He would defend them.

[00:27:57.09]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What did he think of people like—

[00:27:59.15]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Pollock and de Kooning and so on? He had great admiration, really. One part of—I don't know. I really can't answer that, because there is—as you say, some of it, you're thinking of the one with the drawing that I'm giving you. I would say there was a great deal of ambivalence. He recognized that they had a great deal to offer, I think. This is very personal. I really think he did.

[00:28:29.21]

And I really think that he was reaching towards a—when we went to Mexico, and he was doing the collages and so on, he was trying to get away from where he had been with the crucifixion. And he was allowing some of what the whole—this, don't forget, the early '50s,

what the Abstract Expressionists were with, he was letting some of that seep through, not buying it hook, line, and sinker. And I think he was—I would say he was very ambivalent. As soon as somebody attacked it, he would defend it. On the other hand, he could go after it and attack it scathingly.

[00:29:12.04]

DAVID LEBRUN: The people who were at the opposite pole from him were the people who were into design.

[00:29:16.20]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: That's right.

[00:29:17.17]

DAVID LEBRUN: You know, the white circle on white, or—Albers was at the opposite extreme from him.

[00:29:21.69]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:21.78]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You mean the Geometric Abstractionists?

[00:29:23.50]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:23.94]

DAVID LEBRUN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was—

[00:29:26.58]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I can see how he wouldn't have—

[00:29:28.74]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: But even—now this is interesting. Even with Albers, which was that whole—Albers was at Yale—had been in charge at Yale before Rico went there, and was still there, and he didn't know it, as a sort of father figure, and still doing some teaching when Rico went. Rico had anticipated going to this man, and sitting at his feet for what he had to offer, which was color. And he found that he was in the presence of a Germanic guy who would give no quarter, and who was out to kill him, Rico, and would simply come in and undermine his—everything he stood for with his students. It nearly broke the Yale stint—because he was—

[00:30:25.35]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's interesting.

[00:30:25.89]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Albers was—felt threatened, apparently. And he would come out with, "We don't paint like that here," you see, to his students, who were just being—they were being exposed to Rico for one year, and they were, I guess, pretty—most of them were really pretty well thrown by all this, because they were being thrown to the wolves, in a sense. And Rico was trying to give them something for the one year that he was there.

[00:30:54.81]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's an interesting confrontation.

[00:30:56.71]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: Oh, yeah. But the interesting—the most interesting part was that he had truly wanted to go, with the respect of a somewhat younger man who admired an aspect of Albers. He felt that Albers was a great colorist. He had no use for the final thing of not coping with nature in any way. But he would have been willing to be, really, you know, a student of his in a way, of going to learn from him, something that he could give.

[00:31:36.80]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. Well, that is interesting.

[00:31:37.04]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: But it was it was in no way going to happen, because Albers wasn't even going to give him the—I never met Albers. We were that far apart.

[00:31:47.72]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Estranged.

[00:31:47.81]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: We were—yeah, really, really a bad, bad situation.

[00:31:52.10]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Listen, I'm going to have to—

[00:31:54.32]

CONSTANCE LEBRUN CROWN: —scoot.

[00:31:55.31]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —conclude—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]