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Oral history interview with John Saccaro and Terry St. John, 1974 April 30-November 18

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with with John Saccaro and Terry St. John on November 18, 1974. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

John Saccaro, Terry St. John and Paul Karlstrom have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Researchers should note that Paul Karlstrom also interviewed Saccaro on April 30, 1974. This transcript is not online but is available at Archives of American Art offices, and on microfilm reel 3199 through interlibrary loan.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now that we've got the tape recorder going, may as well get started. There are three of us here. John Saccaro and I did a tape for the Archives some months ago, discussed his own experience, some biographical background and so forth. It seems it would be advantageous to do another tape, and this time we have with us Terry St. John. Both of you have been involved in the San Francisco art scene for some years and have probably some shared experiences. I don't know how long you two have known one another.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, let me interject here that I've been here a long, long, long time. I'm a lot older than Terry, so I better start in by saying that. I entered the art industry (academic; S.F. Art Institute. Before that I was self-taught) in the end of 1951 or '52, I don't remember which it is, but you probably have all this stuff on the other tape anyway.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I believe it's '51, John.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. I don't remember when it was. I know it was when things were really peaking there as far as abstract....

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why did you enter the Art Institute?

JOHN SACCARO: I had the GI Bill, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was the only reason?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. Yeah, actually, I wanted to be a writer and I had been writing. I'd written short stories and I had gotten excellent results. I wrote one story for the Atlantic Monthly, and my God, they kept it for four months and they wrote me a beautiful letter. That's in the Archives; I sent them that letter. I almost made it to the very top--the Atlantic Monthly's a very important magazine, and I almost made it up to them with one leap. If that had happened, I probably never would have been a painter. But finally they decided it was too long and there was no way to cut it without damaging the story, according to the letter. But the editor did make sort of a prophetic sentence in the thing which I know by heart. He said, "You write with color and power. You are evidently unafraid of action and emotion"--which is reflected in all my pictures--"and we'd like to see more of your work." So I started writing a few more stories, but I guess I had to get a job at the time too, 'cause I think we had just moved into here, 60 Canyon. So I got a job with the parks. I went down and with my 50 points that you get as a veteran, I got a job at the Park Department, and I stayed with them for 18 months in the parks. I worked right over here at McLaren Park as a gardener. I worked in that Ida Coolbrith Park, Vallejo and Taylor Sts., which is nice. Most of the planting in Ida Coolbrith Park was done by me. I kind of like that because every once in a while I go up there and I say, "Look! These are plants and trees that I planted here." They're still there; they're thriving. That's a very steep park. I think it measures 176 steps from the top to the bottom, and they always had to have a young guy there because an old man couldn't manage the steps, let alone pull those heavy park hoses, you know. Well, anyway, there was a friend of mine that I'd made at the parks, and he had a name like that Jewish comedian that I can't think of, a famous after-dinner speaker.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Georgie Jessel?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, George Jessel. This guy's name was Carl Jessle, and he used to come up there all the time, and he used to tell me, "Gee, John, you're stupid; you're really foolish. You have four years of GI time coming and you're not using it at all. Why don't you take advantage of it?" So finally I decided to take advantage of it. I decided, instead of going to art school which I had gotten used to visiting the art school and I knew Clyfford Still and the rest of them up there. This was before I ever joined.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Starting in '47?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, late '40's and that time.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, you went there?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, I used to visit up there because I was a self-taught artist at that time. I used to like to hang around there. Then I listened to Carl Jessle and, instead of going there, my writing interests were so much stronger than my painting interests that I went out to San Francisco State College and I tried to get in there. You know, they had a big entrance examination. So they herded us all, about 300, into a big hall there, and they passed out those leaflets with all those IBM pencils that mark, and I was going along swell on the true and false and history and stuff like that. But, when we got to mathematics, one train leaves San Francisco going at 23 miles per hour at 4:22 in the morning and another leaves in New York, where will they be when they meet? All that stuff. Gee, when I took one look at that, I said, "Oh, the hell with this. I'll never get in here." So I walked out. I was feeling pretty bad about that. But then later on...but then I said, "What will I do now? I still have the GI Bill coming." I knew that I could...there were no entrance examinations at the Art Institute, California School of Fine Arts at that time, so I went up there. Sure, they enrolled me right away because they were anxious to build up their enrollment because all that GI Bill money was available and they wanted to get as many people as they could. So I enrolled up there. I had to go back on some occasion to see a professor who I'd talked to out at State, but I was interested in a writing career. I talked with Professor Forbes and I told him what happened in the examination and in the meantime I had gotten this letter, this terrific letter from the Atlantic Monthly. He took one look at it, and he said, "My God, John, why didn't you come with this to me? Even we, professors, don't get letters like this. You wouldn't have had to go through all that God damned tomfoolery there of examinations. I would have gotten you in just on the strength of this letter alone." I said, "Well, it's too late now, Arthur." That was his name, Arthur Foff (?). He committed suicide here about five years ago, I don't know why. Anyway, I said, "I'm enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute now and I'm going to go up there." He said okay and I went to the San Francisco art Institute. That's how i got enrolled up there. Then, if you want me to go on with this, I got in the San Francisco Art Institute and I had already been painting before a lot of the teachers themselves had been painting. Dave Park, for instance, I was painting before Dave Park was.

TERRY ST. JOHN: How old were you in 1951?

JOHN SACCARO: You have to figure it. I was born in 1913, so if you want to figure it...?

TERRY ST. JOHN: You were 38.

JOHN SACCARO: Is that what it was? Well, 38, that's what I was when I went there, then. And when I first got up there, most of the students were already into abstract expressionism, if not all of them. I had been a self-taught artist, but mostly in watercolor. I have a few oils that I did on my own, so I was really shy. Gee, I found a corner someplace and put the easel in front of me and barricaded myself and painted. I didn't know what the hell I was doing.

TERRY ST. JOHN: What class was this?

JOHN SACCARO: I think this was one of, could it have been Hassel Smith? No, it wasn't Hassel Smith. Uh, I don't know. It might have been Dave Park but I'm even doubtful about that.

TERRY ST. JOHN: About '51, if that was the time which you entered the Institute, there was, of course, a new director. Wasn't that about the time MacAgy left and...?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. I got there just about the time that MacAgy was going out.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Big change.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, and Earnest Mundt came in. But I remember MacAgy because when I began to find myself and get over my fear of teachers and students and everything else, I began to make a name pretty fast. In short, I became the white-haired boy up there of abstract expression. I was turning out paintings like crazy. And the kids were, you know, they come around and tell you themselves, the students, and MacAgy made it a point to come over and talk to me. Then I had lunch several times with him and Earnest Mundt right there at the school. They invited me to come over and talk with them. But then MacAgy, I think, was just helping Mundt out in the transition period, telling him how to administer the school, what to do, and what not to do and stuff like that. But at that moment was when the school was just ready to take off for its...it was peaking in abstract expressionism, to put it one way. Everybody was getting it, Madeline Diamond and Hassel Smith and, oh, Christ, there were so many, everybody, Bischoff and Dave Park. As I said in my speech, he was one that by that time he had already gone back because he couldn't do it. I know damned well that he couldn't do it because I told you in the other reel that he stood in back of me one morning and I was just--wham--taking off with a big horizontal

orange and somebody behind me said, "Christ, I wish I could do that." I turned around and it was Dave. So I know. And then I read subsequently that there isn't a single abstract expressionist painting of Dave Parks anywhere in the world. So I know damned well that...the story is that he burned them all. Well, the actual story that I believe is not that he burned them all but that he just didn't do any because he couldn't. And I told you about Jim Weeks, too, when I tried to get him to do an abstract painting in the studio when he shared the studio with me on Broadway. One morning--I was always after him--I said, "Why don't you try?" Because his paintings were very wooden, had a kind of a very wooden.... And I tried to help him to loosen up. I figured if he went into it for that, just to loosen up, it would do his painting good. So one morning he decided to try. He had a brand new canvas. I was working down at my end of the studio but we backed up--we used to back up, you know, how you do to see a picture, and we'd always make some crack, "We ought to have a signal here," stuff like that, so we wouldn't bump into each other. One morning, I was down at my easel painting and he was up at his, and I heard this great commotion, and I then heard a squeaking sound, or a whimpering, rather, not squeaking, sound. And it was poor Jim and he had messed up his whole God damned canvas and nothing was on, you know. I think he was on the point of tears which you can get that way. And he just backed up and he took a big rag and he washed the whole thing off and went back. I don't know whether he started to get a new canvas or whether he started in drawing on top of that later on. But he was another example of a guy who just could not make the change. And by the way, I've noticed in the last ten years or so, how many of us--including me and Lundy Sirgrist and Nathan Oliviera, Richard Diebenkorn, nobody that was really deeply involved with abstract expressionism--has really changed and made an important change or really as good a change, changed into something and made the new something as good as their original stuff. Nobody has. I saw that show of Nathan's and, my God, it was awful that you have over there in Oakland, those mannequin-like figures. Terrible stuff. And Lobdel, I don't know what the hell Lobdell's doing any more. But in New York, too. To just get away from home, here, I've seen that book of DeKooning whom I admired; I thought he was a beautiful guy and he was...a painter, I mean. So anyway, I saw that book that just came out of his, and I saw them in Time magazine some time before that, and they're awful. They are just plain...God, they're awful paintings. I think nobody tells them; everybody's afraid to tell this great man....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Which artist is this?

JOHN SACCARO: Gee, they're awful, damn things. Even the sculpture. If you want to look at it as expressionistic sculpture, that's all right. Those women that he's making are all really rugged-looking things.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Did you see that show in Berkeley, must have been 1969 or '70, of the nudes? I thought they stunk.

JOHN SACCARO: Probably did. That late, they probably did.

TERRY ST. JOHN: It was like they were figurative.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, and the color was weak and pale, so it has nothing at all of the vitality of his early stuff.

PAUL KARLSTROM: John, let me just add something here. You've invoked the hallowed word, the name New York. I was very curious how aware you were of New York painting. There's this whole question of abstract expressionism in New York and San Francisco centering around the California School of Fine Arts. When you became a student there, how aware were you of the New York painting? Which figures did you know and how did you know them?

JOHN SACCARO: None. Absolutely not a damned one because I remember when I first went there I stuck to figurative stuff. I remember one particular painting which I thought well of and it was a painting that I'd done when I was still barricaded in a corner by myself, and it was a picture of things that were familiar with, sea gulls, because I used to go down to the bay a lot. It was a nice sea gull walking down the shore, you know. I didn't know anything about the New York school or anything about that. I had a vague idea that there were immense changes taking place in the art world, but I was kind of afraid at the time and it wasn't until after two or three months that I got in the school and was talking around with Jim Kelly and Bob Morris--he's become a very famous sculptor now and he was my particular pal, he and Jim and a few others there, some guy named Perry whose last name I can't remember, or first name I can't remember....

PAUL KARLSTROM: Bart?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah! Bart Perry, that's it, yeah. He was there at the time. And Wasserstein of the San Francisco Museum of Art, he was there. And another guy named Mark Goldhammer, he was a New Yorker studying out here. And then gradually, as we got to know each other, why they broadened my mind.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So the students would get together and talk about the New York paintings?

JOHN SACCARO: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And Clyfford Still was gone by...?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, well, I had met him before and I had consulted him and talked to him. But he was a very difficult guy. You'd probably get a half a sentence or an "Um" or a "Yeah," something like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he ever comment on your work?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I think once he did, yes, once because I had the painting out in the hall. He came by and I said something, "Would you say something about this?" And he said, well, I don't remember what he said, I really don't. He might have said, "There's nothing much to say" because there probably wasn't much to say at that time. But then there was a guy named Philip Palmer, too, and he was a very quiet guy and he was sort of like Still without the gruffness. This Palmer, I found out later on, he was an alcoholic and he was a particular friend of Madeline Diamond--I think she's written up in the book there, her name's different now.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Madeline Diamond Martin now?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right. She was an acolyte or disciple, whatever the word is, of Hassel Smith. He was very big up there at the time, and rightly so as far as that goes. Gee, I remember Madeline Diamond, after he left the school--he quit in sympathy or he was fired and the others quit because of him, I don't know how that was now. But Madeline Diamond I remember and another girl used to take a big canvas; God, Madeline Diamond is small and she used to have these six-foot or seven-foot canvases and she'd go lugging them out through the courtyard, laying them on top of her car, and she'd bring them all the way down to the waterfront where Jim Weeks ultimately had a studio, 9 Mission, and old Scandinavian...

TERRY ST. JOHN: At Embarcadero and Mission?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: That's a famous old studio.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right. And Hassel had got a studio there. So she lugged these things all the way down there and then she must have had to lug them all the way up those stairs in order for Hassel to give her a critique. So it was really kind of funny to...she would always, Jesus Christ, she was covered from head to foot usually, on her face and everything, with paint. We all were, but it used to be kind of funny to see this little girl dragging, with her long blond hair, dragging the thing there. She's more or less disappeared from the scene. I don't know, does she even paint any more?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, she's in New York. Her husband has a bookstore in New York, which the name of it escapes me.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, I wondered what ever happened to her.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Didn't her husband have the City Lights Bookstore?

JOHN SACCARO: No, that's Ferlingetti.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I thought before that--well, that's off the track. At the time that you were at the Institute, this happened I assume in the first year. How long did you go to the Art Institute?

JOHN SACCARO: I went three and a half years. I went from whenever it was....

TERRY ST. JOHN: You went to '54 or 5?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, right to '54. I think the middle of '54 is when I got out of there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: In that case, does that overlap with people such as David Simpson, Wally Hedrick?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure, they were all there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Okay, well this is interesting then, because after the so-to-speak heavies left...then what happened when the heavies left, you had Simpson and all these people. The whole thing must have changed around.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, it didn't change for me. In fact, I got a bite. By that time I was so into abstract expressionism that there was a new teacher there whose name was Dick Sears, and one morning he came in and he said that I had to do a life drawing which I didn't want to do. I wish I had, now, because I'd be a much better draftsman than I am. I think Florence Allen was in on that on that morning, yeah. So her reaction was kind

of interesting to this. So he said, "You're in my class, you've got to do a life drawing." And I said, "To hell with you. I do abstract expressionism because that's what I want to do and that's what I'm going to do." So that's what I did. So he turns around--it was near the end of the month anyway--and he gives me an "F" although I was the best painter in the school at the time. He gives me an "F" in drawing or painting or whatever it was. Well, later on he thought it over; he knew he was being chickenshit, and so he changed it. He gave me a "B" or something like that. But the interesting part of it, to go back to Florence Allen, it was a funny thing. Now, you would think that the model who was up there posing for us would say, "Well, look at this guy. He doesn't want to paint me or he doesn't want to draw me or anything. He'd rather do that than look at me." But the funny part, instead of that she took a liking to me for it, just the opposite of the reaction that you would have expected. And we've been really good friends ever since. But it was really strange that she took that reaction, I thought.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this? When was she...?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, this was after the big...after Dave Park and Hassel Smith and-- who was the other guy? Bischoff?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, the whole crew.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, well either three or four of them went out.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, God, there was Spohn, there...

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, Spohn, but that was before, yeah, that was before. Spohn went out before that. I only saw Spohn once or twice up there, that was all. He went out, and then of course these other three guys, and MacAgy himself, which we covered earlier, he left. He became the curator at the Legion, didn't he?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, no....

JOHN SACCARO: No, he went down to Texas.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He went down to Dallas. I don't know if it was that one, too, but he did go to Dallas.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. His wife went to the Legion of Honor, and she organized some real nice shows up there; she had a real nice program going. And then later on, Nympha Valvo continued her program of showing local artist at the DeYoung Museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Getting back to Florence Allen before we forget her completely, I know that you feel that she was a very important figure.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, she was not important creatively, but she's been around an awful lot. Her importance historically is that she has posed for almost, geeze, I guess every artist that you could think of. I don't mean an abstract expressionist generation, I mean before that. The people that were--(OVERTALKING)---Yeah, she's a lovely woman. You met her the other night, sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: We have a drawing, I think, in the museum collection; I don't know if it was in an exhibit, 39 or 40 or something like that.

JOHN SACCARO: Sure. That's what I say, her importance is...one is the fact that she is a very good model because of her figure and the way the poses she could take, and also that she had posed for just about anybody that you could mention. I mean, she probably posed for Sergeant Johnson--he was a mulatto, I think, so it's natural to assume that, and he did an awful lot of figure work. In fact that's all he ever did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's the original Bay Area figure?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, she's....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, one of them. Of course, the Bay Area has a whole...

JOHN SACCARO: Lot of them.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...tradition of tremendous models.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But I was thinking of the movement at the school, the Bay Area Figurative School, if she posed, for instance for Diebenkorn and must have...?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, she must have.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I assume for most of them at one point or another.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, absolutely. And back--Gratago, Piazzoni, Lee Randolph who used to be the former director there, and a lot of the names of the previous teachers.

TERRY ST. JOHN: She's still working?

JOHN SACCARO: Yes, she is.

TERRY ST. JOHN: At Arts and Crafts, as a model.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. She told me the other night at that show where we all missed each other, yeah, that's right. So she probably has, Jesus, she has a lifetime of a wealth of recollections and that's why I think you ought to get in touch with her. And if we can slide from her, now, into Madam Labaudt, now, there's another one. She's a very nice woman, and her husband, Mr. Labaudt, he was one of Marie's teachers and he's a well-known artist around this area.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I gather that that gallery, too, was very important historically, that it's been around for a long time.

JOHN SACCARO: Absolutely. She showed Diebenkorn and I think Oliviera and all kind of important artists.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Hassel Smith, Lobdell.

JOHN SACCARO: And I have, myself, have the list, but she has one too.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But she was especially important during, before 1950 and I guess shortly after that because how many serious galleries were there at that time?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, there were none. There were about three. She mentioned it the other night, remember, when we were at Machesney's show; she mentioned that it was her gallery and the one at the city of Paris which is now being torn down, the Rotunda Gallery. And then there were two others which I can't think of their names although I know them but I can't remember their names. They were on Sutter Street or Polk or one of those.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But, you know, like the art scene now....

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, now, my God, there're a thousand galleries. It's almost like New York here now.

TERRY ST. JOHN: And all going broke.

JOHN SACCARO: And all going broke, I suppose, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's what galleries are supposed to do.

JOHN SACCARO: But anyway, see, to get back to Mrs. Labaudt, she's important because, first of all, her own gallery and the people she exhibited, the people she gave shows to and her husband. And also in those days they had what they used to call the Parillia, the dance, and that's great. I went to one or two.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's that?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Artist Ball.

JOHN SACCARO: It was the artists' ball. One of the names was the Parillia.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Was it after World War II that they had that?

JOHN SACCARO: I don't know; I can't remember.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I know they had them before.

JOHN SACCARO: Before, but I don't remember if they ever had it after. It seems to me there was a period there where they were sort of resurrecting it. But they never did. But anyway, that was great; that was really something. Her husband, Mr. Labaudt....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Did the costumes.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. He was a costume designer, see, and he designed an awful lot of the costumes and she has all the records of this. She has all the photographs; she has all kinds of stuff. She is a gold mine. Plus her

own reminiscences, people she's known because she's know to the entire art world. You could tape her for 24 hours and still have stuff to go.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I have a note to call her.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: You'll spend a great afternoon.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure, before it's too late, because she's getting pretty old.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, this is side-tracking a tiny bit, but if you want to spend a tremendous afternoon, go to the Beach Chalet with Madam Labaudt, and I think they open up at 4 where you can get a drink and look at the murals that Lucien Labaudt did there. She can really...she'll sit there and she'll identify all the figures for you. We have slides at the museum of this...

JOHN SACCARO: Take your tape recorder out there, and my God....

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...draw a diagram and she'll...nobody has done this, and when she dies...

JOHN SACCARO: That's it.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...it's gone.

JOHN SACCARO: Somebody should do this before it's too late.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. Because we have the slides but nobody's had the time to do the diagramming of who's who and all. That's important.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me put your minds at rest, I plan to do this. Terry, let me ask you a few questions. I don't know much about your background; I know that you're an artist as well as a museum person. How long...when did you emerge on the scene? Are you a San Franciscan? What was your training?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, my background, it's sort of like a lot of artists and somewhat like John described, I started off, I was going to Berkeley in the '50's and majoring in Sociology and dropped out of Business Administration. One very good friend of mine was going to Arts and Crafts, Henry Brannen. That was at the time the Diebenkorn was making the switch over to figurative painting. We'd been high school friends and all of a sudden I saw this guy coming on with this strange, sort of gooky, gunky oil canvases with a figure emerging. I was initially hostile towards it but pretty soon there was something there that was fascinating. So I started dropping in at Arts and Crafts and meeting some of the guys who were studying with Diebenkorn, and some girls staying with Diebenkorn. I initially got interested in painting that way. Henry would do criticism of my work. Actually, after Weeks went to the Institute, I went over to the Art Institute and studied a semester of Weeks.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You never really enrolled at Arts and Crafts?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, I did eventually. Then for a while I went and painted in Stockton with a group of very fine painters, one of whom got killed in an automobile crash named Jack Farley. It was a firehouse group which was quite a group in Stockton that lasted for a couple of years. Farley's now organizing country and western music or something in that time. Then I went back to Arts and Crafts and got a degree. Already I was about 28 when I went back there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this that you got the degree then?

TERRY ST. JOHN: '64 through '66 and I got an MFA through them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You can?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. But the thing was that I was, I think a lot of painters are, just very aware of my own, immediate, visual concerns. So then I taught at the state college for a couple years in Louisiana and came back here...

JOHN SACCARO: Louisiana? What part of Louisiana?

TERRY ST. JOHN: (OVERTALKING) Rustin, in Rustin.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, because I was there during the War, you know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: New Orleans's a lot different than....

JOHN SACCARO: No, no, I was up near Opaloosa. Do you know where Opaloosa is?

TERRY ST. JOHN: No, I don't.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, Alexandria?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, it's close to Alexandria.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, Monroe, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Monroe? My wife was born in Monroe.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I always liked Monroe very much.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Actually, she was born in Darnal.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Seems like a metropolis compared to Rustin. Monroe was a half an hour away. You'd make the booze run and everything else.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you then came back after that teaching experience, came back to the Bay Area. Did you teach or did you go to work?

TERRY ST. JOHN: No, no, immediately when I came back, I applied for a job at the Oakland museum 'cause my mother'd sent this thing I think was in the Tribune describing the new museum and I believe Brown was in charge at that time. There was something there that sort of...you know, always when I was going to graduate school, I'd pump the instructors, "What was Clyfford Still like?" I didn't know anything about my visual heritage. Here I was doing paintings of Telegraph Avenue and all this stuff and I felt like I was the first artist doing this. Then I had this vague notion about museums and California art. I got the job as an associate curator at the museum and immediately started going to the Archives and reading and meeting people like John. Pretty soon, filling in the tremendous gaps.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When did you two meet, exactly, and how did you meet? JOHN SACARRO: Jesus, I don't remember.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, we met through Jeannie Hale.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, that's right, Jeannie Hale.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Jean was a fantastic person who volunteered at the museum. As soon as I got to the museum, she made arrangements for me to meet certain artists. She'd been a very active volunteer for a number of years at the museum and in person. Very seldom do you find a volunteer like this because, though I might not agree with her taste or paintings and stuff, she's a volunteer that's qualified as a curator, really.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. She was a very nice woman, too. I liked Jean.

TERRY ST. JOHN: So she kept telling me about people like Faralla, Saccaro, Seigrist, all these people, and she set up appointments. I mean, I did these things on my own, but she got things going a lot. Jean was very helpful and very interested in the artists for no other reason that she liked art and artists.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, she was a real dan--is she still over there?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, but she's not so active in doing this sort of thing.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, I'm going to phone her some day and ask her to come on out.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But that's how I met John.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this? The late '60's, I guess?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, this must have been 1970, yeah.

JOHN SACCARO: I guess so. I really don't....

TERRY ST. JOHN: I started working in '69 and would have been that first year. About 1970.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Here's a question that occurs to me: You are a pretty younger generation art student than John. I don't know if you can generalize, but at least from your own experience, how aware were you and perhaps your peers, art students at that time of some of the older artists in San Francisco? This tradition...?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, we were aware but...

PAUL KARLSTROM: What were you interested in?

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...but as an artist at the time that was very just aware of my own particular thing....

JOHN SACCARO: I think we all are that way, yeah.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I don't know that much about abstract expressionism. Still was somebody that you respected. You don't know anything in great depth. A few annuals you'd see paintings. When I got to the museum, I felt there was a tremendous responsibility not just to take things on that level but really try to understand them at a greater depth. That's the first time that I really went into things in grater depth. Like, I knew Lobdell's paintings quite well before I worked at the museum and studied them, but I didn't know that much about John's paintings at the time or a number of other artists. So the museum was a great opportunity to really study art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what I'm really getting at is to try to determine if there was a sense of continuity in terms of artistic community or if we really did have...(OVERTALKING)

TERRY ST. JOHN: There is a continuity which I discovered later. I mean, I discovered later that whatever I'd learned here was very connected to what had happened at the School of Fine Arts from '45 to '60 because these things all have roots and there is a continuity. But I think one of the things that most artists don't, a lot of them don't sense this continuity.

JOHN SACCARO: You're sticking to your own little world.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. You don't realize this little world of yours is built on another world that was past.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: And what James Weeks, who was my most influential teacher, he was influenced by that whole thing over there, and a lot of his ideas that I thought were quite unique and just James Weeksism, as I started to get the larger picture, you have to understand the whole thing and James Weeks goes back to like Diego Rivera in the childhood in the '30's.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. You know....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Each monumental figure....

JOHN SACCARO: He made a very big impression on me, Jim Weeks, when I didn't even know him. I just had entered the school and they were giving individual shows--you probably have those brochures they published, Jim Kelly and all of that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, we have an number of them.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. And they gave a show for Jim Weeks, and boy, he had a hell of a show. The paintings hadn't turned wooden yet, you know, and a lot of it was to do with dead soldiers, it seems to me, or soldiers laying in the show or something like that. I don't remember. but I remember I thought, "Gee, what a terrific painter this guy Jim Weeks is." And then later on, of course, he came to work in the studio with me and by that time he had tightened up so much or over-refined, which is always a danger that you don't even know; it happens to most artists and writers and poets. His stuff had gotten wooden and lost all flavor. The last show he had was not bad. I was invited. It was at the San Francisco Museum of Art...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, '66.

JOHN SACCARO: ...and it was all acrylic. It wasn't a bad show at all, that one. He had gotten rid of some of the....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Happy to say in Boston he's doing well.

JOHN SACCARO: Is he? That's good. I'm glad to hear it. Is that where he still is?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Doing his best paintings ever.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I knew him when he was down at UCLA. He taught there for a year.

JOHN SACCARO: He followed me.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Did you study with him?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no. I was in graduate school in Art History then, but I met him and he would bring his students up to the print room where I was working, to show them Matisse drawings and so forth. Very, very nice guy. (END OF SIDE A) (BEGIN SIDE B)

PAUL KARLSTROM: What occurs to me, I don't want to belabor this point in particular, but it's very interesting to me to record some sort of feeling in the Bay Area, especially among students and artists, for art in general or styles and moods during different periods. We sort of jumped, really, from the '50's when John was studying to the '60's when you were studying. I was wondering if you could pinpoint some of the heroes, art figures...?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, I can mention the heroes in the late '50's and early '60's as I was concerned at the time. Naturally it was Jim Weeks because I was a figurative painter. Weeks, Diebenkorn was a hero...

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, oh, absolutely.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...other people that...I remember at one point Bruce McGaw was rather important figure painter....

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. TERRY St. JOHN: He's still a very good figure painter.

JOHN SACCARO: His piece is superior as far as...I don't know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He hasn't, really. He works hard but the time sort of...you know, he's worked to the surface as much. Oh, Bischoff, of course, and the whole figure thing. I had a very narrow outlook. Then, other than that, I liked Rothko and I liked all those...all the figure painters. We really didn't look to New York for very much because we didn't think there was any good figure painting coming out of New York. So we looked to European painting, turn-of-the-century, post-impressionism, Matisse, stuff like that. So that was the stuff we studied. I mean, our immediate people here and...

PAUL KARLSTROM: It sounds to me as if you were in a certain group, one aspect of the overall art community, because obviously in the '60's there were other....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, well, this is the late '50's, primarily.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Even in the late '50's there were some very different types of things going on.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, sure. (LOTS OF OVERTALKING)

PAUL KARLSTROM: The whole funk group, Wally Hedrick, Bruce Connor was....

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: We were aware of all that, we just rejected it. We were just art students and, there's another Bruce Connor. Well, you know, it was that way. Like Mel Henderson, one of my very good friends--not the same one that's the sculptor who teaches at S.F. State, another one--he was very good and he did these assemblage construction things. He was good. He showed the Spatsa Gallery and he was picked up by the...he was in a catalogue and he's in Modern Art and he was supposed to be really a comer, you know. Here was a talent. Then in Stockton, he got killed one night, he was age twenty-seven, in the fog. He just walked out and we had one of these tully fog things and a car hit him and he's dead. Well, all this is going on in Stockton and Farley was extremely talented and that was...and we weren't that interested in Bruce Connor's stuff. It's no surprise because these people were very good artists and it was all around me. It's funny, when you're in the middle of a lot of good art, you don't...like people close to a Still; they probably didn't look up to him that much at the time. He was just another person who was doing something.

JOHN SACCARO: You couldn't with Still very much anyway. His personality rejected any looking up to, you know. You might have admired him from a distance, but he was a very difficult man to talk to so you wouldn't put him on....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, when you're around these people, like Schumaker would say about Lobdell, he wouldn't go across the street to hear him talk. Well, there's a guy that went to school with him and knows him. And somehow, the familiarity, you're not thinking in art historical terms.

JOHN SACCARO: Just personal terms.

TERRY ST. JOHN: And this whole thing of funk, like I remember that name being thrown about since the '50's, and all of a sudden, Selts comes up with a cow and becomes an international movement.

JOHN SACCARO: And speaking of funk art and you mentioned a minute ago Wally Hedrick, now there's a guy that

funk art or pop art or whatever you want to call it, this guy should be recognized as a pioneer in that stuff because I remember some of the sculpture that he did. He had one that I saw in the San Francisco Museum and it was a sunflower and the sunflower.. (OVERTALKING)--yeah, and you cranked it and it followed the sun; it turned around. That was great. And then he had a (OVERTALKING) pyramid....

PAUL KARLSTROM: He's getting much more recognition.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He was very overlooked.

JOHN SACCARO: Sure he was, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think it's going to change.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He was a very fine artist and probably....

PAUL KARLSTROM: He's becoming something of an old master in a minor way.

TERRY ST. JOHN: In the late '50's, you couldn't predict. Like I can remember in about 1959 or '60, the joke going around the art school in the city was, "A garage man had hauled away Hedrick's paintings and said, 'I don't know what art is.'" We'd all laugh like mad, you know, 'cause most of us weren't sympathetic towards Wally Hedrick's art at that time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you say, Terry, that the museum.... Again, I'm asking for generalizations, but I gather from what you say that certainly a significant segment of art students in the late '50's, early '60's, were much more into the Bay Area figurative tradition, figurative painting, and much less interested in funk developments than perhaps Peter Selz's catalogue or even national attention....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, at least the tiny group that I went around with. I always think of the Bay Area as a very fragmented art scene. You've got pockets here and pockets there, and there isn't any bar that everyone goes to.

JOHN SACCARO: There was before, Terry, before abstract expressionism, which was the first really cohesive movement, you know. Before that, there used to be the Vesuvio, a cafe up there. More than that, even, was the Black Cat because I remember back in 1939 when the government put up the buildings for the World's Fair on Treasure Island, the place to hang out at night was the Black Cat. That was a notorious hangout even then for gays and...they didn't call them gays, they were just fruit, you know. But they all hung out there....

TERRY ST. JOHN: That finally became in the '60's a gay bar.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, it went downhill. But during the two years that the World's Fair was on in 1939 and '40, I believe they were, that was a real hangout for the artists. Luke Gibney and all kind of artists.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Was that connected with the Monkey Block (Montgomery Block) and all that?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right. The Monkey Block was just across the street.

TERRY ST. JOHN: That's something we don't have now, like...

JOHN SACCARO: That's right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...when I go to New York and you stay, say, by Clay Spohn's studio, and there you are in the Bowery. Well, here are all these artists, famous and not so famous, all around, in a central area on the Island. Here we don't have that.

JOHN SACCARO: No. You used to have it there in the Monkey Block and the Black Cat and also, thirdly, the Vesuvio. But if you wanted to find an artist, that's where you went. At night when we'd come home from the world's Fair, working on the big federal murals and whatever anybody was work on; at night they'd all gather there, that's right, and talked and drank and....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Where would you meet now? There's just the Pillary, a few places.

JOHN SACCARO: I don't know. I don't know where you'd meet now. For a long time, you met artists at an opening, at a gallery or the San Francisco Museum of Art at the Annual, you know. They don't have the annuals; they haven't had those now for fifteen years, I guess.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would say then that there was really more communication, more of a sense of artistic community, artist community in, say, the '30's, '40's, maybe '50's than now?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, it was more of a social thing and there was less competitiveness. There wasn't this urge to make it big and all this.

TERRY ST. JOHN: That's an awful thing now.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, yeah. You just went there just to socialize, to drink and shoot the breeze and there would be... tenors would come down from the San Francisco Opera and they would sing. I remember hearing one guy, I thought the walls were going to fall down. I don't know what that fellow's name was but I never heard a tenor that close before in my life. Somebody was playing the piano, and this was in the Black Cat, and this guy took off and Holy Christ, it was unbelievable.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Was Henri Lenoir running the show there?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I think he hung around at that time because he's been around for years and years.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, he was organized in the.... (OVERTALKING)

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, well everybody. The framers that used to do your picture frames, they hung around there and everybody, you know. Matthew Barnes, he used to hang out there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: This is something that I don't know much about other than talking to people like John because really, as far as I can remember, it's been a very splintered art scene.

JOHN SACCARO: It has been. Well, now I don't know what the hell's happened to it now. Mainly, it might be, mainly...that show we went to the other night where I just missed you, Terry, Machesney's show, that's the first show that I've been to in, oh, God, in a hell of a long time. And I haven't been to the San Francisco Museum of Art for, I would say, for fifteen years now.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, in my opinion, the best openings in the Bay Area are at the Capricorn Asunder Gallery, the San Francisco Art Commission, because they have this nice feeling and Ruth Cravat comes and John Saccaro comes; all people come together.

JOHN SACCARO: That's nice. I didn't even know it was such a nice gallery, you know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Beautiful gallery. But it attracts people from the '20's and '30's, John Langly Howard, (OVERTALKING)

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's another guy you don't hear ever any more.

TERRY ST. JOHN:

JOHN SACCARO: Right, yeah, Well, I hope they keep it going.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Another thing that interests me, we're talking about a sense of artistic community or lack of it in the San Francisco Bay Area. Another thing that comes up periodically when I talk with people is something of an insular quality in the Bay Area art scene. I was wondering if either of you had any observations on that. In other words, a lack of awareness or perhaps a lack of interest in developments elsewhere?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I'll take off first if you don't mind. As far as...the only other interests that seem to pervade San Francisco really far back was the Mexican influence, Orozco, Rivera, Sequieros, those guys. But aside from that, I can't think of any other...I mean if you mean influence from Paris or New York, there may have been of Paris but there certainly wasn't any New York influence in those days, do you think?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, starting...first of all, before 1900, California artists were too much influenced by European Artists, and very much so. They went to Munich and went to Paris, and a lot of them were very well trained and good students, but they weren't inspired.

JOHN SACCARO: They were technicians.

TERRY ST. JOHN: There were some very good ones and some that were good artists. So this kept going until about 1915 and then you had the Panama-Pacific Exhibition and that changed things around. Then pretty soon the question was debated here whether to be California artists, whether to be American artists or whether to be European artists. So most of the art you see in the 20's and '30's was a bastardized form of European art still but struggling to....

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's true throughout the country.

JOHN SACCARO: Didn't Ashcan School and then the magic realism school, didn't they all have some influence?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Here? Yeah. Ashcan via Sloan, John Sloan. So anyway, this happens until some regional art is really breaking through and breaking away such as Society of Six, I don't know whether you saw that show?

JOHN SACCARO: No, I didn't see the show; I couldn't make it. I think I was sick at that time or something. But you did send me the catalogue.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But they were good. In fact, Lasalle Damguyelles is having a show at Charlie Campbell's gallery or I'm not sure where; it's going to be a one-man show at the Legion or there. These artists did art that can stand on its own, looks as good today as when it was done. One reason they were so good, although they studied European Art, they thought they were California artists. They painted the landscape directly; they weren't intimidated and they were very humble in their approach. They didn't even have great ambitions but they did beautiful little paintings. It was fresh, it was good. So you did have artists like this, Clay Spohn and various artists.

JOHN SACCARO: How about Xavier Martinez?

TERRY ST. JOHN: He was a very good artist.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, I'll say. TERRY ST JOHN: He had more talent, I think, than what he actually accomplished.

JOHN SACCARO: What about a little later, though? I was thinking more in terms of....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Okay, I'm working up to this. So all of a sudden in 1945, what happens? You have the end of World War II. You've got people like John who came back from a war with the GI Bill, you have an art school, you have a traditional art scene that has always respected art and the school was on its downers. They get a first-rate person like MacAgy and this first-rate person happened to coincide with people like Clyfford Still, one of the most brilliant artists in the 20th century. Then all of a sudden you have what is already a very good art scene which has been provincial and probably too isolated, and all of a sudden in 1945, all this comes together and you've really got something. Then what do you have after that? Well, then you've got a bunch of good artists working in an area that is still sort of insular.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. Never has been really and truly recognized.

TERRY ST. JOHN: So you have really good artists there now. Okay. Now, how isolated are the artists and how do they ignore New York or the latest developments? Well, recently, I think you have young artists that are here that are very aware of what's being done in Paris or Berlin or New York and they're very much on top of things....

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure. You have instant communication now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Through Art Forum and Art International.

JOHN SACCARO: Sure, sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, through traveling. These people like Melchard, like Harold Zeeman, this is the Bay Area, you organize Documents at Five, it's all very interrelated.

JOHN SACCARO: Kassel? Kassel, Germany? Well, I was there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: The last one, Documents at Five was the last one, I forgot, I think it was in Kassel.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, the only reason I mention it 'cause that's my last stop, that's as far as my company went up, Kassel, Germany, completely bombed out at the time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So I gather, then, that you feel that it's much, the Bay Area scene, is much less insular than it was in the past.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, I think much, much less.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And largely through travel, largely through the art publications.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, sure. Media.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the problems--and I think both of you have something to say about this--what about the problems until very recently and maybe it's still a problem, exhibitions, in getting attention?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, you have a number of name artists in the Bay Area that exhibit regularly in New York. The

only reason they're considered California artists is because they live here.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, yeah.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Diebenkorn is the most famous example of all of them, but you have Olievera, you have Sam Ridge and you have Bruce Beasly, you can go on and on and on and on, and Mel Bromus. This, without commenting on the merits of the work; they exhibit New York.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, and they've been reviewed in the big....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Bischoff, even Bischoff in Berkeley, there's another example. You never see the work here; you see it in New York.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, I agree with you. I'm sort of playing devil's advocate here trying to get opinions out. Another thing that interests me. In my work I deal with the entire West Coast--at least in theory--and I'm located here in San Francisco learning a lot about the Bay Area. One of the things that strikes me is perhaps the communication between the artists here and, say, in New York or maybe Europe, but especially New York. I think we have to worry less about Paris than New York, no question about it. But one of the things that strikes me as most interesting and something that I'm trying to document and determine is what kind of relationship is there within California--you've been talking about California art and I guess that you're talking mainly about the Bay Area art?

TERRY ST. JOHN: The Bay Area art. Then there's LA which is like New York.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm serious about this, too. Do you see any kind of exchange or meaningful relationship between these two centers?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, yeah. John knows an awful lot about the LA-San Francisco....

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, well, they were a sort of separate entity down there. They have such an enormously rich population with the movies and rubber and oil and gasoline that it became a place in its own right like New York because of that. There's so much money and these film stars and all the rest of them. They started selling down there very good and, where there's a market, there's going to be artists and galleries, you know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: That's a high-powered scene.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, you're damn right it is, Jesus Christ!

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you see any exchange in terms of ideas, of styles?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh yes, very much so because there's so many artists that either moved back and forth and, in terms of exhibits, a lot of LA artists exhibit here and exhibit at the Oakland Museum.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure. And the Hanson Fuller Gallery, sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: So there's very close contact between the two areas, even though I think they're quite separate.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this is interesting because this also would give the lie to the popular myth of the Bay Area as a very contained, insular art scene.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, it is contained.

JOHN SACCARO: It is, yeah.

TERRY ST. JOHN: That's a strength, in a way. I think one of the strengths is, being a bit chauvinistic, I think New York needs a counter balance like that; like if we ate everything that went on in New York, it'd be a piss-poor national art scene.

JOHN SACCARO: It sure would.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I think one of the strengths here is that there're a lot of artists who say that the galleries aren't worth a damn, not that they aren't good people and try hard. You can have a high-power gallery and have a show and not sell very well.

JOHN SACCARO: I've said this for years. That's why I...in the second issue of Evergreen Review there, one of the

critics, Dore Aston, I think it was her, she mentioned me as one of the three most interesting artists in the area and in the context of being underground artists. And I always treasured that remark because it's true that I've had two gallery shows in all my life. That's all. I've always avoided the galleries because I always mistrusted them. And I still do. And from the last show that I had, I have every reason to continue to mistrust them. Ruth, what's her name? Bronstein, yeah, she gave me the show; that was for the little X-ray things. They weren't much but she gave me the show. Then her mother got sick and I had spent a year's work doing those damn things and then her mother got sick when the show was due to open and she had to leave to go to Milwaukee or Minneapolis, the May Clinic, or wherever she was going, and from there she went to New York. So she left some black guy in charge who was an actor here in town for a while, and he was supposed to send out 2000 flyers and he didn't send out a God-damned one. Instead of that, he gave me a roll of stamps and said that maybe I could use these. He didn't say that he wasn't going to send out the things, he just gave me the stamps as if he was giving me something extra. She went to New York. The flyers never were sent out; she never even saw my show. By the time she got back, the show was already over with and down. So that confirmed me on it. What the hell is the point if the galleries are going to do this? They don't leave anybody responsible--just confirmed my long-time suspicions. And also with the Bolles Gallery. The Bolles Gallery did nothing for me. They sold a few paintings--I don't even know if they sold three in the four years I was there, and they lost two. When I called them on it, I said, "You must have insurance on it." And they said, "Oh, yes, yes, we have insurance." "Well all right, then, pay me for my paintings." At that time, my paintings were not phenomenal and they aren't even now, but I wanted to be paid for them, whether it was $300 or $400. My paintings were valuable to me. One was called Fountains, Parks and Earth, something like that; I don't know what the hell it was. The other, I don't even remember the title. I never saw those paintings again and the Bolles Gallery, which had insurance, never did pay me for the damn thing. Hollis, that used to have the Hollis Gallery, he went to battle with John Bolles on my behalf. It didn't do any good. They had a fight over the telephone 'cause I was right there, but Bolles refused to make any payments. And I read, when I used to read the art magazines which I don't do any more, Christ, it was always full of it. My God, the artists were always raving about a...God damn New York art galleries and what cheaters they were and look at the recent example here of Greenberg who painted the David Smith sculpture, you know. Jesus Christ, even the critics are in on the deal now. (END OF SIDE ONE) (BEGIN SIDE TWO)

PAUL KARLSTROM: John Saccaro and Terry St. John, side two. So why don't we pick up more or less...

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, the galleries you want?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, well, I thought it would be interesting to et a little candid....

JOHN SACCARO: Well, you know the very other night there at the Machesney's show, Mrs. Lebaudt started right in on the galleries right off the bat and she goes back far. She's the one who would really probably know....

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, but she's not here, so I have to depend upon you and Terry to....

JOHN SACCARO: There really was no force here. I mean, the museum didn't exist until I don't know what year.

TERRY ST. JOHN: '35.

JOHN SACCARO: That's when it came on? Because before that, Morley had it up on the Marine Auditorium or someplace.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, in '35 the San Francisco Museum of Art came.

JOHN SACCARO: That was when she had it up there by herself. She organized it, you know; she started it. Then they built the Opera buildings there and she got the top floor there. That became a force, but before that, I don't think there was anything that you could say was an intellectual or an artistic or aesthetic force in San Francisco. I don't know of any unless you want to count the Legion of Honor and the DeYoung Museum which I certainly wouldn't.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, going back to the PPIE, there...

JOHN SACCARO: Well, there was that, yeah.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...that and then continuing exhibitions at the....

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's a PPIE?

JOHN SACCARO: Panama-Pacific International Exhibition.

TERRY ST. JOHN: And that was a big thing and that continued for a few years afterwards. Then there were pretty good exhibitions occasionally either at museums or galleries. But after '45....

JOHN SACCARO: That's when things started to gel.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, that's when things started to gel.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, they started before actually, too, because the reason I remember is because my first show at the San Francisco Museum of Art coincided with the opening--as I told you on the other tape--of Guernica, Picasso's big picture. So that was 1939. That was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Art and I remember it. The reason I remember it is because there were about 5,000 people milling around there, and not one people of those went to see my lousy old water color show. And that's how I remember it, that it was 1939, well before the...I think it was September, as a matter of fact.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I remember in the '50's there were various galleries like the Spatsa....

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, that was whatsisname? The Greek kid?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Dimitri Grachis, which was a tiny hole in the wall and it had this very beautiful feeling to it. Manuel Neri and all the local hotshots would show there. It seemed like scouts would come around and somehow they'd get a little big for his gallery and move on to other places. And Batman opened and Mission, et cetera. And these are very fine....

JOHN SACCARO: But that little gallery was really going for...really good for a while there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, those were good....

JOHN SACCARO: And the Six Gallery and then East-West Gallery that Mrs. Gechtoff had right across the street from the Six, those were good shows. There was a real fine atmosphere there in those days.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Then all of a sudden in the '50's or '60's, this whole thing exploded and there're a lot of galleries all around.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, there must be a hundred galleries in San Francisco now.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, if we got out a phone book, I'm sure there would be a hundred or two hundred.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think as a point of information, this fellow Hoover published recently a guide to San Francisco art galleries. I believe it was 80-some that were listed.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, I've seen that book.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Is there only 80? I'd be surprised.

PAUL KARLSTROM: 80-some. I don't know what his criteria was for choosing.

JOHN SACCARO: That's a lot. For San Francisco, that's a lot.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But of course, it's not just San Francisco, it's the major Bay Area.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, one thing that struck me; I went to Taos, New Mexico, about three or four years ago, and they have a population of 3,000 and they probably do as much in actual sales and everything as San Francisco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do they do? A tourist business, I guess?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, they have about two or three serious galleries.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that would be a kind of a place for Pat Cucaro to go down to.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. But there was also Clay Spohn and other people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He's probably the only major one down there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, there are a couple others.

JOHN SACCARO: Georgia O'Keeffe isn't near that area, is she?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, she participated in a show there. Well, I don't know; it seems to me that this area and galleries, like some of them do fairly well. Like you'll get a Roy DeForest show will sell out, you get a Wiley show that will sell out, you get this and that. And you get other major artists that'll have a show. And they won't sell a damn thing coming out of it. Like Patrick Humble; I think his sales are off at Gump's.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, Patrick Humble, I don't know the guy, but I've seen a lot of his exhibitions 'cause they have them frequently. It's almost a regular thing there. It's almost the same thing all the time, so it seems to me the last time I ever saw it.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. Well, what I'm getting at, though, you get some artists who will sell out but lately it seems like the market's way off. For example, the Wanger Gallery, I think that's going to close down, considering closing down.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That hasn't even been open that long, has it?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, it's been there--yeah, he was open when the Olly Gallery was there. Remember the Olly Gallery right across the street? The Olly Gallery's been closed about six years at least now, and the Wanger Gallery was opened even before the Olly Gallery, I think, so....

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let me ask you this, then. We agree there's a phenomenal increase in the number of galleries, even since I've been here a year and a half.

JOHN SACCARO: That's certain.

PAUL KARLSTROM: New galleries have opened up, a few have closed. A lot more--and maybe this is a phenomenon of, say, of the late '50's. And then there was something about a pulling back around 1969. I know that in LA a lot of galleries closed, The market went down. And there seemed to be a big upsurge. But I think the interesting thing to speculate on would be what does this mean? Does this mean that a secure, viable market has been created here in your opinion? I think Terry would probably be a little closer to that certainly than I would.

JOHN SACCARO: And I would, too, because I don't go to all those galleries anyway.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well....

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's a hard one to answer.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah. There isn't a very good market here, no matter how you cut it.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. There never has been.

TERRY ST. JOHN: There isn't a good market...

JOHN SACCARO: You know, one of the reasons is....

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...in fact, do you have a Society of Six catalogue here? There's a column in there which still I think's pretty pertinent to the art scene. (PAGES TURNING) How about this one? This from the Society of Six catalogue and it's a quote that I made from Tollerton: "For its size, San Francisco is the richest city in the United States. It has plenty of people who could spend money on art, who would spent money on art if an example were set for them. Where's the man who will set the example? Well, is that Hunk Anderson or whatever, whether Hunk Anderson, who will be the patron of art, who will give his money for art, have the ability to influence others so that they, too, will give their money for Art? But our rich people here stick to the old idea that art is (461) that it is none of their serious concern. The result is that San Francisco is the worst city in the United States for selling. Art dealers throughout the country know that. New York knows it especially."

JOHN SACCARO: Sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But the fact remains that there is in San Francisco a lot of talk about art and that, when you get down to brass tacks, San Francisco is not there. That was quoted, I think, in 1919.

JOHN SACCARO: And it hasn't changed. But one of the reasons why, Terry, is that there's not a bigger market here. You have a relatively small city, as big cities go, right? Okay. And you have a few wealthy...it's not like Los Angeles where you have rubber and oil and movies and all the rest of that God damn milieu of wealth around there. Okay. So you have rich families here that made their money a long time ago, and these rich families, how many of them, maybe 12 or 15? Okay. They are called upon to provide money for the opera and the concert and the orchestra and every God damn thing, the museums, you know. And not to speak of charities and all the rest of it. They've got a constant drain on them and I can see where they'd say, "Well, to hell with this God damn art, you know, I'm going to give to the Opera and that's it." So you cut the balls out of the purchasing scene right there, so that's why you can't...and the other people, for all that San Francisco's a vaunted cultural city, they just don't give a damn. Look at the Italians in this city, there's an awful tremendous number of 'em, right? And they've all made a lot of money and what the hell do they do? They buy apartment houses down at the Marina. They don't support art. The Jews at least have got a lot of money, too. They buy. I really can say that for the

Jews, they go out, they're interested in cultural things, boy, they'll go out and spend it. But not the Italians and not the other ethnic groups, either.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Still, that doesn't answer the question. If this is the case, if there's no substantial change from 1919 in that quote that you read, Terry, how come this tremendous explosion of galleries in San Francisco?

TERRY ST. JOHN: I don't know why because, like the Triangle Gallery with Jack van Heile...what's he paying for that space? He must be paying a thousand a month, at least, or two thousand. What's his big seller there?

JOHN SACCARO: I don't know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Seever's one of his big sellers.

JOHN SACCARO: How about Kishi?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Seevers only sold three paintings last year. How's he doing it?

PAUL KARLSTROM: In other words, what we have is a whole series of cultivated tax write-offs.

JOHN SACCARO: Must be, must be. Yeah, like Mason Wells, in the case of Mason Wells. If he's still supporting the Quay Gallery, then I'm sure that he's writing it off as a tax loss because it can't be selling that much.

TERRY ST. JOHN: None of them are unless you're getting into, say, Gump's where you can have Brian Wilson, maybe, that sells fifty thousand a year. But I mean, that's atypical and it's largely hack art.

JOHN SACCARO: Then you have...how about this Sawyer, Dr. William Sawyer?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, Sawyer, he's sort of a social butterfly. He doesn't have any interest in his gallery; he doesn't sell that well and he doesn't do a very good job of it.

JOHN SACCARO: He must put his own money and then take it as a tax write-off, right?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I would assume. I mean, that's what I assume; that's what people say, but I don't know. But, for example, I know an artist that had a show there, he had PR shots taken for the papers and the whole thing. Sawyer didn't do this. They got him the shots, they didn't mail them off, they didn't have a press release, anything. What a way to run a gallery.

JOHN SACCARO: That's standard for San Francisco.

TERRY ST. JOHN: And if he had of done, it wouldn't have made any difference anyway.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's the way it goes, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So when it comes back down to the quotes, "plight of the artist" is what I suppose I'm really trying to get at. What I'm really trying to get at is institutional support historically for the artist here. For instance, the Labaudt Gallery you cite as an example where, although she certainly isn't making money right now, I gather that for some time it's been providing space and exposure for local artists of interest.

JOHN SACCARO: For a long time she has been showing garbage. I mean, she's been showing Sunday painters and amateurs and stuff like that. But that doesn't cut any ice. What's important about her is the past, the people she did support when there was no big art establishment as there is now. At least the galleries are here; whether they're going broke or not is beside the point. She was one of the three or four galleries in San Francisco and she knew the people and that's why she's important.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What other galleries would you cite within the same context?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I can't remember their names, but there were two more. There was Paul (564), Paul Elders, but that didn't count; that was a bookstore with the old boy bookstore. That was down on Post Street, I guess.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What time frame are we talking about?

TERRY ST. JOHN: That goes back to the '20's.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. But that was a bookstore that showed paintings. You had a little space for paintings. But they weren't really an art gallery. But there was a gallery and I can't bring the God damn...Beaux Art? Was it the Beaux Art?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, that was a gallery.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, Beaux Art, that was with...in the City of Paris store.

JOHN SACCARO: That was one of them, and then there was another one.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Beatrice Judd Ryan was the Beaux Art and then she later went to Rotunda.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. So then there was one more besides that; that was the most important. Let me see if I can find that damn....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, there's an early East-West Gallery.

JOHN SACCARO: It might be in this book here. This is where the letter was where what's-her-name mentions my being one of the interesting underground painters here. Dore Ashton, yeah, that's who it was. Have you ever seen this, either one of you? Evergreen Review Number 2 is when this thing first started.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, would you agree that the Jim Newman and the Dilexi Gallery performed an important function in the '60's?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, yeah, they were great. Yeah, I think a lot of these galleries have been....

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, but that was later on. That was not the time period you were talking about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, we've been jumping around a little bit.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But no, Neuman's Gallery was great.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure, and the Six and the East-West, and they all had a....

TERRY ST. JOHN: The Mission Gallery. A lot of these other galleries we've been talking about, the thing is they don't get much out of it in terms of actual sales. The artists don't get much out of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. I think this is the important thing to get at.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I'm not knocking the gallery people 'cause a lot of artists are bitter at the gallery people.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, they are everywhere, in Chicago and New York.

TERRY ST. JOHN: They can't, they don't get a God damn thing out of it, so there's no reason being bitter towards the gallery people 'cause really it's like kindergarten compared to New York. They really don't screw the artists 'cause nobody gets much out of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At least Dilexi, there was some form of mature or more or less sophisticated emotion involved in connection with... some of Newman's artists, for instance, were shown in Europe under the auspices of the Dilexi gallery. I don't think that any of...when you talk about the '60's, historically, the interesting galleries....

TERRY ST. JOHN: You didn't have the connections.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, but what was it but a space? There were pictures that went out according to Wally Hedrick and nobody came in to see the show.

JOHN SACCARO: No, once the opening was over, that was it. The opening night was the thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: (OVERTALKING)...not a commercial gallery in the sense that we're talking about.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, that's right. Some of these other galleries have these connections, yeah.

JOHN SACCARO: The opening night was the big thing in San Francisco. The opening night and all the artists, mainly artists, went out there and those few people that were into socialites or whatever they were, they went out. And then after that, you could go out there during a weekday and there would be nobody in the gallery. Nobody gave a damn. And the show would run out and somebody else...there'd be another opening and you'd see the same faces there again and that would be it. Listen, before I forget, did you guys happen to know who's on the cover of...I get the Paris Review...(WALKS AWAY FROM MICROPHONE(636)) have for years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who's on the cover?

JOHN SACCARO: A local artist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Deborah Remington?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right. She made the cover of the Paris Review. Pretty good going for her. I guess her gallery managed it, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She's a New York artist now.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: (643) too far off at the Berkeley Museum.

JOHN SACCARO: The last time I saw Deborah was at the quay Gallery, the old gallery, about ten years ago and I said to somebody, I don't know who it was, I said, "Geez, she's really doing well in New York, isn't she?" And they laughed and said, "Ah, go on. She's living out of a garbage can down on the barge." I said that there's some jealousy, you know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I don't like her paintings.

JOHN SACCARO: I don't either. They're too sharp; they always struck me so God damned sharp-edged and dangerous. They're dangerous to look at, her paintings, her early ones.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I just found them boring.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ooh. What about the museums and the other support from institutions?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, first of all, well, I feel confused by this question 'cause there have been a lot of really supportive people around in both museums and galleries. Like for example, Ninfa...

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, she was great.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...and McCann Morley. I think a lot of the museums've tried pretty hard. I think one thing I ran into working at the Oakland Museum is the uptight attitude that the museums develop once they get to a certain level of recognition. If you aren't St. Francis then they look twice about investing money in a catalog and a show. Like A Period of Exploration was particularly frustrating to me. Mary Machesney, who's been around that book and everything for almost ten years and finally's given up all hope in it. And the show's scheduled for, I think, 1971, and it's been cancelled. What...you were involved.

JOHN SACCARO: I know. Gee, I was frustrated along with you because I was waiting for the damn thing to come out and every once in a while Terry would call me up and say, "Well, it's been cancelled. I'm sorry, but it's been cancelled again, John, or put off for a while."

TERRY ST. JOHN: It didn't score goody points, you know, because at that time there were other projects where money was spent and all. It was uncertain whether it was a good thing to do and the people who had power, I guess, namely George and other people.... And finally I kept pushing it along and other things clicked, like Albright who's a good friend of mine wrote a series of articles supporting this sort of effort and putting pressure on them. It was really a thing that Albright did a hell of a lot towards this. There were about two or three Chronicle articles and stuff alluding that this would be a good thing to do or this artist, there should be a review of this period or something. And then finally the show happened. Really, by the time these shows happened, I was completely drained of all energy and enthusiasm 'cause I'd spent four years of hassle.

JOHN SACCARO: In fact, we were working on a basis like that where it's on one day and off the next. They got to you and you lose your enthusiasm and pretty soon you're saying, "Well, to hell with it." That's too bad when that steps in.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But in this case, we supported a pretty good effort... (END OF SIDE B) (BEGIN SIDE C)

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...at the media's hand.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, I think it was a great one. I think it was a fine one. I think it was one of the most valuable things that could have happened, at least for that particular period.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, San Francisco had a crack at it already in the '60's and they didn't do it. But I find in a lot of cases that with the museums, they have a chance for a lot of good shows, why don't they take the show? Why don't they do it? I don't know. I think a lot of it goes back to legitimizing art, like, say, if artists here were well known like Sam Francis in New York, I think it would be done. Then I think it goes back, why don't we have our

own periodicals published in San Francisco or publish books on the series?

JOHN SACCARO: Once again, it's a matter of money. It comes down to a matter of money all the time. There just isn't that money or that interest.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, of course Art Forum did start here, but it moved back East. It left and went to LA and then went back to New York, where everything comes home to roost in New York.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Why couldn't we keep Art Forum here?

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know, I just don't.

JOHN SACCARO: Because...I'll tell you why...because what's-his-name's wife didn't like San Francisco. Philip Lieder's wife didn't like San Francisco.

TERRY ST. JOHN: It's that simple?

JOHN SACCARO: That was a big part of it, anyway, because I knew for sure because I was real pals with Philip. I told you and I told Paul....

TERRY ST. JOHN: If she had a liked San Francisco, it could have stayed here?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I mean, the Art Forum wasn't making it here and why stay here when Los Angeles is a much better scene? This is his wife speaking. So they went there and then she got dissatisfied there, too. By that time, long before they went there, John Coplans had entered the picture and he was actually the one who put Art Forum on its feet. He's the one who told Philip, "Do this and do that and do the other." Or suggest it is a better word. And Philip went along with it because John was a much more active-minded guy than Philip was although Philip was far from being behind the door. But John was much better. Having been a painter himself, he knew more about the art, the art world. So that's.... Anyway, he went down to Los Angeles and there was a great deal much more money down there in Los Angeles to tap and the magazine prospered down there. Then finally they decided that New York is the big place to go so that's where they went.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, and then Leider left.

JOHN SACCARO: Leider left. I guess he got tired of seeing artists. I don't know what the hell has happened to Philip Leider any more. I haven't heard from him for years now.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know he's in the Bay Area; he's in Berkeley.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He came from Berkeley originally.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, he was within a month or two of getting his what-do-you-call-it? Lawyer's certificate or whatever, his license. And he threw it up.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But anyway, getting back to the thing, legitimizing art, that's a problem in this area. Like, what's the difference between a Jack Jefferson and a well-known New York distractionist? Well, nobody knows of Jefferson. They don't know as much about Jefferson as they know about you. Here's a major abstract painter, nobody knows about him. Well, whatever. If he were in New York, the right place at the right time, he'd be legitimized.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, sure. Same thing applies to me, too.

TERRY ST. JOHN: You, a whole bunch of people. So that's part of the problem. Like this Period of Exploration publication, well, one good thing about that was here it is in print, at least. As you mentioned about Plagens, the book will come out and that's a start. That's a problem because, in a way, a lot of people here will go to New York, I imagine, and buy paintings when they won't buy them here. They're going to lay out $4,000 on somebody that hasn't been legitimized?

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. If you go to New York and you see a local name there, you think "Oh, this guy must have made it."

TERRY ST. JOHN: And the same as New Yorkers went to Europe, or California people did, and they buy, you know.

JOHN SACCARO: Can you imagine--take Jackson Pollock. Okay. Now, can you imagine Jackson Pollock ever having made it so big that Australia bought one of his paintings for $5,000,000 or whatever it was, the other day? If he had been a San Francisco artist....

TERRY ST. JOHN: No way.

JOHN SACCARO: No sir, boy. Not a God damn....

TERRY ST. JOHN: What about James Budd Dixon? Top price? You can get a painting of his for $600.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah. Gee.

TERRY ST. JOHN: If somebody in New York picked him up, blew him up, his paintings'd go for $40,000.

JOHN SACCARO: Certainly. And mine, too. All of us. All the people that you mentioned. It's just having been at the right spot at the right moment and having...in his case, Jackson's--having Peggy Guggenheim come in there and being brought there by Jackson Pollock's wife to look at these paintings, and Peggy Guggenheim's got millions of dollars and she said, "Okay, I'll take about 16 of these," or whatever she said. And she did and that turned the spotlight on him because she's a big collector and everybody said, "Ooh, if Peggy Guggenheim buys these paintings, why he must be a master." So bingo, that was it! Then they hurried up and legitimized his dribbles. Jackson Pollock has no...I know he was a damn good painter, you only have to go to San Francisco Museum of Art and see that painting, The Guardians of the Secret, you know he's a damn good painter. Right. But at the same time when you see those chickenshit dribbles as they used to call them, geez, those leave me cold. And to me, the great contribution of Jackson Pollock is that he completed Kandinsky's revolution. Kandinsky turned the picture upside down, and then he stopped and then along came Jackson Pollock 20 years later or however long it was, and he threw the picture right on the ground and pissed on it and stamped on it and walked on it, and that completed the revolution. From there on, it could go nowhere but up once again. That's Jackson Pollock's real contribution, not his God damn drip paintings. Christ!

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, part of the problem, it seems to me, is not just the lack of galleries or their lack of effectiveness here and the lack of support, collectors, patrons, this nature, but I think Terry's absolutely right that without...you have to make it legitimate, an artist and his work, to make him successful. It has to be plugged into the mainstream of art history. There's a lack of intelligent critical support in this area.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, exactly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We have no Rosenberg, no Greenberg, nobody like that.

TERRY ST. JOHN: The only person that I know of that's tuned in at all is Tom Albright. He's very supportive. Here's a very over-worked newspaperman, and what can you do when you have to turn out articles day after day, and he's writing a monthly article and like that. He's pretty tuned in. I don't always agree with what he writes, but a lot of times, like, I think on the Sam Francis show, I agreed with that article he wrote. He bombed the show completely. And I agreed with that because here was this huge PR buildup about Sam Francis like everybody should say the master's in Oakland. I thought it was a piss-poor show, for the most part.

JOHN SACCARO: I can imagine. I didn't see it, but I can imagine.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Except for the early things which I liked a lot better. And here was Albright, in nobody's hip pocket, he's not paid off. Sometimes he might be dead wrong, but frequently he'll tackle a name. Why should we respect Sam Francis when I think we have many better painters here? So I think Albright does a pretty good job. And I think Sheer of the Tribune does some pretty good jobs. But we don't have...like really they can't write for a national publication.

JOHN SACCARO: We don't have that; we don't have the periodicals as Paul said and you just said, and we don't have the merchant person. We don't have the renaissance persons any more that would make a cohesive scene of this and be the glue of the area. But we don't have that. We're swamped by New York, let's face it. What happens in New York is important, what happens in San Francisco is unimportant.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I don't think it affects the artists that much, but it probably affects the patrons. JOHN SACARRO: Well, it affects them economically, and it affects your ego because, after all, everything in this God damn world is a big ego trip anyway.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But, you know, one thing, when I was back in New York that I felt that some of the artists that I talked to were affected by that I don't feel here, they're so hooked 'cause, like, say a graduate student that's fairly good back there might get on in one of those galleries. They make maybe $800 a month which isn't a lot but it's more than they can make here....

JOHN SACCARO: You mean as a painter or working for the gallery?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Painter. You know, they might get shows and they hustle, maybe sell $800 worth in a month. One good thing here is that the artists don't seem to get the hustle the same way 'cause there isn't that promise

out there.

JOHN SACCARO: There isn't that promise.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, there isn't that promise. I think that might be a little bit healthier.

JOHN SACCARO: I think so. And probably, in a way it could be.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Couldn't it work the other way, though? If you don't have that pressure on you don't really have to grapple--not that pursuing money and sales is the most important motivation in painting, but it makes you very serious....

JOHN SACCARO: But it's an important one. You've got to have money. There's tremendously a lot of out-go when you're really a serious painter. Boy, I could take you down in the basement and show you thousands and thousands of dollars just in expenses that went on canvas and paint and studio rent. Jesus, that's one of the reasons why I don't open a studio now because I get to thinking I'll do it and then I think of the overhead, you know, and the little reward I'm going to get for it. And I figure, Oh, the hell with it, I'm not going to do that. I've been through that scene. I haven't got the income any more anyway even if I wanted to. So it's a pretty involved thing. We don't have the periodicals to support us and we don't have the renaissance princes and we don't...the museums don't have the money and the galleries are working on the tax business, tax-write-off. So everybody's getting it in the neck and so you just don't have a powerful structure underneath us.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Here's another question--do you feel that good art depends upon these various support systems that we've been talking about? Or is it just sales and national....

TERRY ST. JOHN: No, I don't feel that it does. If you look back to New York in one of its best periods before all of this stuff made it, of course they had WPA to help them along for a while, but a lot of the best art they didn't have much to go by.

JOHN SACCARO: No, that's right, you're right there because I remember that; I remember it was there but I used to, you know....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I tend to think, in my experience....

JOHN SACCARO: Those were the days of Raphael Sawyer. You heard about Sawyer and the guy that painted the red barns and a few others you heard about. But it wasn't a big thing; it wasn't a thing of massive ego; for one thing, of all these artists coming together.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, there's nothing more of a sickening sight than seeing artists that are making it and then they get all powerful and....

JOHN SACCARO: And they become arbitrators.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about artists that are making it in the Bay Area? How do you feel they respond to, let's say, maybe to the recent example of Wiley, Allen....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, I don't know Wiley and Allen very well, but I have observed Mel Ramos and, being fearful of putting stuff down on tapes....

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean the fact that he's a terrible artist? You don't want to say it?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Uh, well...there's that, but also I mean just listening to him talk. Here's a damn businessman, a corporate person.

JOHN SACCARO: I don't know him at all, but those tip paintings of his, I mean, Jesus.

TERRY ST. JOHN: He seems like a nice chap and everything, but you look at him and he's talking about contracts, this and that; he's the worst name dropper in the world. God, you're talking along, first names of artists that you know in New York, like de Kooning, well, "Bill, I saw Bill the other day." He didn't say that, but of certain artists that I know that he couldn't possibly know that well.

JOHN SACCARO: But even if he did, what the hell? Why...?

TERRY ST. JOHN: But then this whole corporate thing, you know, and contracts and all this horse shit.

JOHN SACCARO: See, he's plugged into the gallery game now. That's the thing; he's plugged into that.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But I mean, that's the thing here, that a lot of artists aren't plugged into that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you think it's beneficial; is that what you're suggesting?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, I don't think it's beneficial to him because I think he's a bad artist and....

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I mean the fact that the artists here are generally not plugged into the gallery thing the way Mel Ramos and some of the more successful....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Oh, yes, I think that part of it is beneficial.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about this, though: you have in terms of not just galleries but I'm thinking of something like Gemini in Los Angeles which's done several things. You know Gemini, the lithography groups?

JOHN SACCARO: I'm not familiar with that scene.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, the point is that they published a lot of, printed a lot of blue chip painters, a lot of them from New York, not just local artists. But the fact that it was there brought a tremendous number of the top....

JOHN SACCARO: You mean it was sort of a Tamarin thing?

PAUL KARLSTROM: It was an offshoot of the most successful lithography workshop probably in America and all the top names printed there.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, we had that exhibit at the Museum a while back. Did you see that? Yeah, that was Gemini we had. Who does Gemini handle? Rouchet?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Everybody. That's Ceris.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Ceris, excuse me, Ceris.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ceris publishes more of the local artists. But the thing I'm getting at with Gemini is not, I mean, that's a big business, extremely successful. One of the reasons they imported the top names from Jasper Johns to everybody, but the interesting thing is they bring these people in, they spend time there and theoretically, and I think in practice this happens, there's a certain amount of direct residual communication. Maybe Ellsworth Kelly was there doing a series or Lichtenstein or somebody. And in theory--actually I'm asking you a question--one would expect that this would enrich in terms of exchange of ideas and contact, the artist scene. Do you think that this is true and would this be--as we're talking about support systems and infusions or transfusions--would this alter in any way the San Francisco situation?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, it would if there was someone here to support the Gemini gallery to begin with. There would have to be someone here, a millionaire, that would say I'm going to set up a great big printing establishment and bring in artists from all over the world and particularly emphasize San Francisco artists. That way it would help. Otherwise, it might just as well be somewhere in the mid-West.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I think that's true, you have to have support. In one thing I notice a lot with certain artists like Diebenkorn or Lobdell or a lot of the artists in the Ceris edition, just because you have a master printer printing this, it seems to me the best prints a lot of times are the ones that artists are actually printmakers...

JOHN SACCARO: Like Nathan.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...like Nate Oliviera. A lot of these things don't look that hot to me. The technique of printing might be okay, but it goes way ahead of the image. So I know very little about prints other than when I see these shows they usually seem very sort of sterile to me.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I never liked...print was never my...I think I told Paul, when I was at the art school, I had an opportunity to buy a lithograph press. I paid $200 for it, real soldier, they don't make them any more now, and it sat in my basement down here for eight years. Finally Nate asked me one day; he told me that he had a woman student that wanted to buy a press. And he said to me, "Do you still have yours?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Do you want to sell it?" I said, "Sure," and he says, "Well, there's a woman that'll pay any price for a press," student of his. So I said, "Sure, I'll sell it for $800." So I sold it, gave her stones and all. Then Nate gave me hell later on because I should have sold the stones separately because you can't get those damn...they have to come from Bavaria, you know, if they do at all any more. And I never used it once, I never...I kept it greased, I kept it oiled, I covered it, no rust or anything else. And when I turned it over, was like a brand new press. Never used it once. But then, as I said, print has never been a big thing for me and I absolutely detest etching because I haven't got

the patience to have to sit there with a needle and scratch out. It's a matter of patience, that's all. Can't stand it. I have to have a direct attack, that's the main thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's see, what else?

JOHN SACCARO: How about sex?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, let's have some gossip about which artist was sleeping with who or whom. Do you have any questions for John?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, getting back to what you were talking about on support, I don't know if we answered that too well or not. In a way, there's a lot of support here, and in another way there's no support.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, it depends on what kind of support you mean. You mean economic support or do you mean psychological or emotional support?

TERRY ST. JOHN: There's no economic support.

JOHN SACCARO: No.

TERRY ST. JOHN: But there's a lot of the other stuff. There's an awful lot of the other stuff here.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's it precisely.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Like, very much, I imagine more than a lot of areas.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Specifically, what do you mean in terms of the other?

JOHN SACCARO: Psychological.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Interest in the community?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Okay, yeah, there're a lot of artists that I know of and John knows of, they're very supportive. In economic terms, it just isn't here.

JOHN SACCARO: No, it isn't. Well, look at that time I'm involved in right today; I'll let you read the letter here. Here's a doctor that's presumably interested in art and he buys six paintings or whatever it is from me, and I can't get paid from the son-of-a-bitch. And he's one of the biggest cancer specialists and I hope he hears this tape one of these days.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Dr. White?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Give his full name.

JOHN SACCARO: Dr. Laurens White, yeah. And here I am in the business of writing letters and thanking him and going around and asking people, "Well, how would you approach this guy?" Before you came, was it you or Terry I was talking to, that I was going to go and see Frankenstein and tell Frankenstein the whole story and write a God damn column about it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about Frankenstein, by the way?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, there's a subject. The guy's been on the scene here 40 years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, a long, long time. I would say in terms of longevity and maybe even in a national audience, the most important writer in the area. How do you feel, what do you feel has been his role?

JOHN SACCARO: His has been a supportive role, Frankenstein has been a supportive role. He's done his God damn best, he's even praised artists lots of times--and I may be one of them, I don't know--that didn't deserve the good reviews that he gave. And he's been consistent over the years. This guy is a hard worker and he's hardly ever missed a week. I don't think the guy's ever missed a column except when he had a heart attack.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, he's a hard-working son-of-a-gun. In his own way, he tries his best.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right.

TERRY ST. JOHN: My only thing with him is that he's absolutely blind.

JOHN SACCARO: Right, he's blind and he tends to be deliberately dishonest. Lots of times he'll go to a show and

he knows God damn well that it's no good, and he'll say, "Well, I'll give this guy a break. It's a stinky show but..."

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, but I've seen him bomb a show that was pretty good.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, he can do that, too, sure, sure.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I can't knock him terribly because I think he's terribly well-intentioned and I think he tries his best; he's an honest, good critic....

JOHN SACCARO: I think so; I agree.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Any drawbacks he has he....

JOHN SACCARO: Well, his major drawback is that, like Art Bloomfield...when Art Bloomfield writes about music, he writes with real authority. When Art Bloomfield writs about art, Holy Christ, it's incredible, it's so bad. And Frankenstein is not that bad; Frankenstein is a very perceptive guy for the most part I've seen. He's very perceptive, but he doesn't write well. Now Tom Albright is a guy who can both see and write about it, make you understand what's important about the thing. Frankenstein can't do that. He will use cliches and he will look up the history of this artist and get some good quotes out of it and make up a good column out of it, but he doesn't write interestingly. He's got no vibrancy, no tension in his things.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Frankenstein doesn't have a catalogue from...if you're doing a show and if you haven't got the galleries or it isn't ready, man, he is upset. Oh, he needs that stuff.

JOHN SACCARO: See, that fits into what I just said.

TERRY ST. JOHN: See, the difference between, say, him and Albright is Albright will come in and he really doesn't need the catalogue but he'd like it, and he'll spend ten minutes and never bother you, and go through the show and understand it.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, you can see that from his writing, see. That's the difference between Frankenstein and....

TERRY ST. JOHN: And even though a lot of Tom's coverage's probably superficial because of the time element....

JOHN SACCARO: Well, I think that Frankenstein really is an art historian. He's an art historian....

PAUL KARLSTROM: He's a 19th century specialist.

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. And that's his real field and he's a scholar of art. Whereas, he can go back and go into his library in his house and go through the books that refer to so-and-so and then he'll come out with a good column on Sunday about some 19th or early 20th century. He knows the whole God damn history of art and he can do it that way. Whereas, as Terry just said, Tom Albright can come out and look at it and see the things from a standpoint of an artist and make you really appreciate the show or know the reasons why he damned it and know that they're authentic reasons. But Frankenstein can't do that. I think he's really done a hell of a good job in helping the artists here. I know he certainly did good for me and I didn't know him from Adam. I still don't. I talked to him only twice in my life and he's a very difficult guy to talk to as far as I'm concerned.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Terribly introverted. I've met him at parties at Albright's and we've been on a first-name basis, and it seems like two weeks later he's shrink.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Listen, we don't have a heck of a lot of tape left, but one thing that I thought that we might do--and I'm not sure that on the other tape John and I covered this adequately--I know that it's extremely hard for an artist to talk about his work. It's one of the hardest things to do. But I think we could perhaps the three of us knock some ideas around about your work, and specifically, I think you know what I'm getting at, perhaps concerns that you have, aesthetic concerns. I realize that this changes over a period of time, but you obviously, from at least the time you enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts, had a real commitment to abstract expressionism.

JOHN SACCARO: Yes, that's true.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is something...we've been talking more generally, but I think now might be a good chance to zero in. And I think Terry, you certainly have appreciation for John's work; maybe you could ask a few pointed questions in terms of concerns or problems that you maybe were dealing with.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, what distinguishes your work from others of your contemporaries?

JOHN SACCARO: To me? What distinguishes it is that I always and deliberately come up with a Rorschach image

rather than an over-all pattern like the picture that you have over in Oakland which is a real abstract expressionist. And so could this one qualify, but at the same time, if you look at this one, you'll see something. And that's always been my thing. I never went for the little business of dripping the paint on the floor or jumping up to the canvas and making stripes. Now, I always had to come up with some sort of an image--I couldn't explain what the image was, I couldn't say, even when I gave it a title, I couldn't make you really see what I saw because everybody sees different. But I had to have something there. And you can see that in every...that's as fine a little landscape as I've ever seen right there, that one right above the TV set. It's called Mountain Barn or something like that. The other one on top of it is the mining country up in northern California.

TERRY ST. JOHN: One thing I'd like to interject here. You say Rorschach, and I've seen Rorschach blot tests, but I see much more in your paintings than those.

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, because they're simple things. This guy White, this doctor, I asked him last time he was here, I said, "What the hell is a Rorschach test, anyway?"

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, you'd seen them?

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, And he said to me, "I'll tell you," He had his girl friend sitting right there where you're sitting, and he said, "Oh, it's very simple. If you see something human, that's good. And if you see something animal, that's not bad but there's something wrong with you. And if you see weird faces, devil, then you're nuts or paranoid or neurotic." Then he said to me....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Is he a psychiatrist?

JOHN SACCARO: No, he's a cancer specialist. But then before he got off the subject, he says, "I always see cunts." His girl friend was sitting right there. (LAUGHTER)

TERRY ST. JOHN: One thing that strikes me about your stuff--and I've looked at an awful lot of abstract paintings dating from about '45 to the present--and, as Lou Sigrist has a distinct image or Jefferson or Lobdell and people, you have a very distinct image. One of the things...I don't think just the description Rorschach covers it...

JOHN SACCARO: No, but I just said that, you know.

TERRY ST. JOHN: ...but there's a beautiful...when you say Rorschach, it implies too much of an intuitive approach. In your stuff, I see always a very beautiful structure. It's almost like slapping layers and layers of things on top of each other in such a way that really pops.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, something happens.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah.

JOHN SACCARO: That's true. Fundamentally, what it amounts to, and it always has been this, I made this discovery myself at the art school, when I took a blank canvas.... There was a guy...do you know Knute Styles? This guy was at the school at the same time I was, and Knute, all the time I was there, the only thing I ever saw him do was prepare canvases, beautiful, perfectly square, pristine white, the size and all that, and the undercoating and all that. And nothing ever happened. He never painted a picture. I never saw him once paint a picture. Okay, you have that extreme. Then you have the other kind of painter that goes up to a canvas and starts smearing paint here and there and works and works a picture. I discovered I couldn't do that either. So the way I went, finally, is I'd take a canvas, a big canvas, and just load the God damn thing helter-skelter, every God damn color I could throw out and was available, I put it on with a knife and with a tube, squeezing it and spreading it and brushing it and everything until I had an absolute chaos on it. And this is the formal, philosophical way of the--I don't know what you'd call it--the ontology or whatever the hell it is, where you bring order out of chaos. Right? I mean, first of all, I established chaos on my own canvas and then I started in as Terry said, I would look at the canvas sometimes for 40 minutes or an hour--Jim Weeks could tell you about this--and all of a sudden I'd see something and I'd go up there and--BANG--I would go into it with the red and then I'd retire to that great big old chair which was in that picture and sit down there and I'd get on the chair and I'd start another one and make another big slash. Pretty soon I would establish a certain order, and that's how my pictures were all done.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Did you actually think that much in between them?

JOHN SACCARO: Well, you don't so much think as you're looking.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I mean, you spend that much time?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, yeah, lot of time. Cripe, lot of times I'd sit there and look and I'd say to myself, "There's got to be an answer to this problem. There's always an answer to the problem." This was the big thing I did, always

an answer. And lots of times I'd wind up with a fucked up nothing for having this attitude. Just a big mess that I'd have to....

TERRY ST. JOHN: What's the longest you'd spend on a big canvas?

JOHN SACCARO: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Off and on for a ....

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, sometimes I would finish a canvas and I thought it was a good one and I'd put it away, and I would look at it a month, two months, three months later and turned out to be a real dog. So then I would paint that one over again. On the other hand, just the exact opposite, I would finish a canvas and I'd say, "I'll start another one tomorrow morning, it ain't that good."

TERRY ST. JOHN: How about color? You have a very nice color sense, unusual.

JOHN SACCARO: I've been called a colorist, but I don't consider it a compliment. I wish to hell that I was not a colorist, myself. But I know that I've been called a colorist and all that....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Well, you have a difference sense of color. You use very muted colors and occasionally you use bright colors.

JOHN SACCARO: Well, they always change. They change from picture to picture. It seems to me one of the big pictures there....

TERRY ST. JOHN: There's no formula. How come? Why didn't you want a formula?

JOHN SACCARO: Don't ask me. Maybe I didn't know enough....

TERRY ST. JOHN: Wait a minute. Why did you quit painting in the '63? Did you run out of formula?

JOHN SACCARO: No, the reason I quit painting in '63 was I could see it was the end of abstract expressionism for me.

TERRY ST. JOHN: For you?

JOHN SACCARO: For everybody, you know. Pop art had already come on strong and op art was already waiting in the side wings there to come on stage strong. And them from there on it went to, what? Minimal art then conceptual art and asshole art and vaudeville art and every other kind of art. So I just couldn't get with that stuff.

TERRY ST. JOHN: What would have happened if you'd have kept painting? You mentioned that you and Lundy and a number of artists.... What happens if, like now it looks like there might be a resurgence of abstract expressionism?

JOHN SACCARO: There could be.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I know what you mean about '64, what happened in the area. But why? I don't quite understand. I know it happened but....

JOHN SACCARO: Why not?

TERRY ST. JOHN: But why was pop and everything like that so...?

JOHN SACCARO: Why did it stop me? Oh, it stopped me because there would have been, first of all, there would have been no economic base; I would have been just painting for myself which would have been fine, but I wanted to.... My wife kept me going for every year of all the years I painted, and one of the big debts I owed her and one of the God damn reasons why I want this guy to pay me. She created me in a sense. I created the pictures, but Marie created me. And that's why I'm really burned up at this bastard if he doesn't pay me, this doctor. So first of all, there was the economic thing. I finally got to the point where I wanted to make some money and bring some money in here on my own, that's always important.

TERRY ST. JOHN: About in '64?

JOHN SACCARO: Sure. And for years I hadn't made any money. I haven't now, as far as that goes. And then I couldn't...pop art positively repelled me and it does to this day. To me, it's a shallow, surface'y art, Warhols's boxes of Coca-Cola or Campbell soup, whatever it was. And then op art came along which is nothing but optical

illusion, even in the best, that English Murphy or whatever her name is. Riley, yeah. That kind of stuff, and that turned me off; I didn't want to see optical illusion because there're so God damn old, optical illusion where thinking on one hand you have superficiality, on the other hand you have ancient optical illusion. And those turned me off, those two. Then along came what? Minima art of whatever art came along. Punk came along, all that. (OVERTALKING) And I didn't want to belong to any of these 'isms, you know; I didn't want to be connected with it. So I said, ah, screw it; I'll just.... I got invited to teach at UCLA and I said, "This is a good chance to chop it off, right here." I said to you last time, I was like the Indians when they sit around in council and every chief has a say and, when he's through talking, he says, "I have spoken." And he sits down. Okay, that's with me. Didn't I say that to you? I mean, I had said my say. If these God damn things are any good, they'll be here 50 years from now and be worth $20,000 maybe. Or, if they're no good, they'll be worth 20 cents fifty years from now. I said what I had to say. That's all. While I still...I have this...I would like to be painting, but I sure as hell am not going to take somebody else's school. I'm not going to become a pop artist. The art world has been so God--painting world has been so--God damn, can't say infiltrated, but maybe it's overdone. Maybe painting is a bad thing because it's impossible, practically, to come up with any original approach. I'm, I think, too much of an egotist to follow anybody else's footprints.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Are you as dead as the aardvark?

JOHN SACCARO: Sure, yeah.

TERRY ST. JOHN: In Louisiana, you'd see these strange little animals, what were they?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Armadillos.

TERRY ST. JOHN: Armadillos, yeah. They'd go over the freeway, prehistoric animals.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let me see if I have this straight, then, in terms of your methodology, your way of working: you would start out with blank canvas, no preconceived image whatever...

JOHN SACCARO: None.

PAUL KARLSTROM: ...you would lay on the colors....

JOHN SACCARO: That's right. I was establishing a chaotic situation, if you want to put it in a nice, formal way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So then you would work, then you would begin to see "images or relationships" in the chaos...

JOHN SACCARO: That's right, that's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: ...and you would probably then....

JOHN SACCARO: And that's what involved me in lots of battles with Jim Kelly. I don't mean battles, but arguments. They were all for the action, that I should go up there--and they would tell me, "Oh, that's the painting; that's finished already." For me, it was only just beginning. So that's the way, and then I would begin to see something and I would try to develop it. Either it was an image or it was a feeling. It was the feeling that was the major importance for me. But to establish a "feeling," boy, takes some God damn doing. You could paint forever, and for 50 years, trying to get a feeling, and never, never succeed and you'd wind up with nothing after 20 years. But if you sort of were willing to go for the feeling and not being able to bring forth that feeling.... It's strange, I used to...in that book there I called it "occult energy" which I don't know what the hell else to call it. But any artist, you know about it and you know you look at a painting and, Jesus Christ, you get something coming off of it. That's hard to do. That's the hardest thing to do. I'd go for that. If I didn't do that, then I would settle for whatever else was forming itself as I went along.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was the evocative agent then in bringing out this feeling, in tapping this occult feeling? You say that you resent the idea of being called a colorist. Your interest really isn't color, I gather.

JOHN SACCARO: No, it was never color, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then what is it? What is the...is it strictly a formal relationship of, say, brush strokes? Is it the material, the pigment itself?

JOHN SACCARO: No, it was the search for a feeling, that's what it was. It was a search to find this energy which has its source in photon, in light.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what in the painting carries it? Terry, does that question make sense to you?

TERRY ST. JOHN: Yeah, I understand what you're getting at and I think I understand what John is saying, too, that

he was trying to get a feeling down. I think sometimes artists used certain colors and stuff and they're struck by the question that people say, "Boy, you're a good colorist." It never dawns upon them they're good colorists.

JOHN SACCARO: Yeah, that's with me. I never thought of myself as a colorist. Somebody told me one time I was a colorist; I was insulted.

TERRY ST. JOHN: I imagine you aren't that aware of colors even though you use them well.

JOHN SACCARO: No. Well, that's what my wife used to say, too. (END OF SIDE C)

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