



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral History interview with Nell Sinton, 1974
August 15

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nell Walter Sinton on August 15, 1974. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a conversation with Nell Sinton at her home in San Francisco on August 15, 1974.

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: I feel that way very strongly, because of the total blank about my grandparents back then—not total, but—there's a picture of the house in Germany.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [Inaudible.]

NELL W. SINTON: Yes. It was a picture of the house in Germany. I don't even know how my grandfather got here, whether he came around the Cape of Good Hope, I mean, Cape Horn. I don't think he came in a covered wagon, but I know that he came in the 1850s.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Eighteen fifty your grandfather came to San Francisco. That's even better than Lewis Armor Branston [ph]. Because her forebears didn't come, I think, until the '60s, I think.

NELL W. SINTON: Really? Well, my grandfather's firm—it was established in 1858—was in San Francisco. So before that they're similar to that [inaudible] were similar.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think that's really amazing.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I mean, you've—there aren't too many around who can carry back that far.

NELL W. SINTON: Right. Although it surprises me. [Laugh.] Until the war, I mean the Second World War, I thought everybody was born here. [They laugh.] I thought everybody in this town was born here and I could cash a check on the streetcar and —

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It will be okay.

NELL W. SINTON: —and it would be okay. Yeah. And now it's just exactly the opposite. Hardly anybody was born here it seems like. [00:02:02]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, of course, it's a bigger city. Although I guess it's shrinking a little bit now. But a lot of people wanted to come here and they did.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, sure. After the war people streamed in here. But anyway, as far as background and stuff, yeah. I think—I agree with you. The end comes someone says, "Nobody wants this anymore." But it needs to be saved anyway. For somebody, maybe not—maybe it skipped a generation.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the point is that it depends on how object-oriented people are if they—if the object itself has actually holding and owning—keeping the object. If this has meaning and value, then it's something else. But as far as the information about the family, whatever happens to be there, if it's safe, it's available, or I suppose rather [inaudible] way, but the information is available on microfilm. This is something I point out, sometimes to families that—well like, for instance [inaudible]. I trust it's something you were given to do this. important, very important recent acquisition. And the last one who really cared about this—well, she wrote a book [inaudible] in the peninsula. Well, he doesn't seem to care too much. She's the one who married into the family and is really the historian.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And she doesn't think that the kids really fully appreciate or understand. And she felt this is the time to—and obviously [inaudible].

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. But, see, I'm proud of you. It's a very nice feeling. If it had been done before, you know, I would have been able to go to you and say, "Tell me about my grandfather." But you would have told me about my grandfather. [00:04:10]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right. That's right.

NELL W. SINTON: So.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, hopefully, I mean, if it were plugged into the—the information—not to digress too much. But you were saying how there's all kinds of materials in the scrapbook.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And this is how—although we deal that the history of art, visual art, in the United States—this is our focus.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Nevertheless, you would be surprised how that then branches out. You're starting, say, with a scrapbook of correspondence of art. You know, that's not the only thing they're interested in, their art.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: They also are corresponding with other people, some interesting, some we don't know. And so we begin to move into literature, other fields—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. And tie in with the American Historical Society, which is another subject altogether, you know? But they would—they are the people who should know about my grandfather who of course don't, but I don't think they do, but I [inaudible] ask them. But it goes like this.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And you can tell that I, at least, feel a certain sense of mission about what we're doing.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think it's important, makes it very easy for me to go to somebody's home and say, no matter, you may not know us, but the thing you should do [laughs] is [inaudible] the materials to give us eventually.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And I—

NELL W. SINTON: What qualifications do you have to have for this?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: For my job?

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, I don't know that it's really spelled out. I can tell you what—

NELL W. SINTON: I mean, you have to have an M.A. or a Ph.D.?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I've got a Ph.D. in American art.

NELL W. SINTON: American Art?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. I'm a historian.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, I guess that's the best thing. [00:06:03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I'm the only one.

NELL W. SINTON: Where did you get it?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I'm the only one in the organization. At UCLA. I did my undergraduate at Stanford—took

my M.A., and my Ph.D. at UCLA. In fact, I got my undergraduate degree in English, English literature. So—

NELL W. SINTON: My son has got his Ph.D. in Russian history, 18th century, in Indiana, which is a good department. And now—and then gave it all up after he did his dissertation and had a job. He gave it up for ecology, and now he's a land use planner.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hmm. That's—I can't imagine there are too many. He must be a rather rare bird in this country.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, he's in a very popular field this minute.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right. Yes.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. It was Russian history of the 18th century [inaudible].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't know. I imagine he could get a very good teaching job somewhere with that now.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, the coasts are full of them.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: And the State Department is full of them. Or he could get a really interesting job and be in the Middle West or the South at least.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Is that right? There are that many people in that field?

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, sure. Oh yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That shows how much I know. That sounds exotic to me.

NELL W. SINTON: Really exotic, so's Chinese.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: But they don't have that much pull as far as—.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, as far as the qualifications for this job, it's kind of—I suppose, frankly, the most important one is somebody who can be reasonably pleasant and enjoys people. I frankly think that's the most important qualification. It helps to have some background in art, history or art history. And it so happens that I am very much an art historian. But as I say, I'm the only one in the whole Archives organization who is this much of an academic. [00:08:04]

NELL W. SINTON: Do you know Joe Goldyne?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, I don't.

NELL W. SINTON: Have you met him? I mean, have you heard of him?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, no, I haven't.

NELL W. SINTON: Haven't you?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No. Joe Goldyne?

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, Joe Goldyne is about 30, a local boy who graduated from the University of California Medical School. He was a doctor. And then he decided he wanted to really be an art historian. And so he went to Harvard and got a Ph.D.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: In what? What was his specialty?

NELL W. SINTON: English landscape painters.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah? Huh.

NELL W. SINTON: And he's simply delightful. He moved back here, and —

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He's teaching? He must be teaching.

NELL W. SINTON: He's teaching some at the University of California, but he's also decided to be an artist. And

he's an etcher. He's at the P Galleries in [inaudible]. He's going to have a show in September. And he does fantastic etchings and a person of enormous—and old-fashioned—discrimination [ph]. And pace. He's a delight. I mean, he has a gigantic collection of art, of Italian Renaissance drawings, paintings. Uh—he's a historian. He collects. He's a professor. He's a delight.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Joe Goldyne.

NELL W. SINTON: G-o-l-d-y-n-e.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I'll jot that down.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He must know some of the members of my [inaudible] committee. [Inaudible] at Huntington.

NELL W. SINTON: Probably. Oh, yes. He does goes down to Huntington.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, because Wharf [ph] is probably the most respected scholar in late 18th-century British—[00:10:06]

NELL W. SINTON: Do you know Jim Ackerman [ph]?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't know him personally.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he's an old friend, from here. Because his family was [inaudible].

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

NELL W. SINTON: I like him. He's nice. He's a good person. You'd enjoy Joe.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. I'd like to meet Joe Goldyne. You know, there aren't many—that many art historians around. I don't think there are more than half-a-dozen or so. But —

NELL W. SINTON: Well, one of Joe's people that he's very fond of—and I only met her once, and I hope to see her again—is Phyllis Hattis at the Offenbach [ph].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I know her, although she's hardly ever around here. She's always on the go.

NELL W. SINTON: I know it. Yeah, she's in New York [ph].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, she's a very interesting—well, they must have met—maybe they were at Harvard together.

NELL W. SINTON: I think so.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, she's very interesting [inaudible]. Very enterprising, I think is the—

NELL W. SINTON: Aggressive, yeah. Very.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You know, one of the things that I had hoped to get from you—yours is another name [inaudible] that keeps coming up, always. Always, we all have talked to Nell Sinton. Everybody seems to have the idea that all of the information from the last few decades resides in a few memories around here. Yours is one of them. Ruth Arbor [ph] is another one, although she disclaims that she—she says, "I don't know anything. I don't have anything to say."

NELL W. SINTON: Well, she—she—that's one of her things. She—I don't know why—I don't know why she doesn't want to talk about it. She has rich memories. [00:12:01]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I know she does. And I know she must. And it's funny.

NELL W. SINTON: She liked you. So I would think you could—you'd have her confidence.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, we certainly got along. And we did a tape, about two hours yesterday afternoon. And she was a little apprehensive about it, because she seems to genuinely to feel that she's not that articulate, that she doesn't have that much to say. And so I structured it so that I would have a number of questions of specific things to ask. But I also have the feeling that I'm going to have to get back to her again. Since this was—she enjoyed the session, much to her surprise. But still, I know that there are a lot of things, especially about the

twenties and thirties that—a lot of things that could come out looking very helpful that not too many other people know.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Right. Not anymore.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Not anymore.

NELL W. SINTON: They're gone. [Inaudible.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Do you know when she was born?

NELL W. SINTON: Eighteen ninety-six?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Yeah. She's not well.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: She doesn't show it, though.

NELL W. SINTON: No. She has the best spirit.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hm. Well, she has emphysema. She mentioned that. I was smoking. I asked her if I could smoke and I offered her one. She says, "No. I found out too late about that."

NELL W. SINTON: Well, She's an extraordinary person. Terrific strength. Yeah, I'm very envious of her youth, which I consider mine having been misspent. [They laugh.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I [inaudible] take that slim topic. [They laugh.] You know, one thing that interests me—I don't really want to talk too much with you about really interesting things—[00:14:02]

NELL W. SINTON: All right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —because I'm not—I don't have my tape recorder.

NELL W. SINTON: Okay.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But you've got yours. But some of the things that I'm obviously an outsider. I mean, I make no uh—at least I'm a Californian. But I wasn't around in San Francisco during most of the time that [inaudible] you were collecting [inaudible]. And so I really didn't know the situation—it's been an education. I've been here a year, and I've been learning quite a bit—learning about people, finding out about people I hadn't heard of. And it's fascinating. And the pieces are coming together. But some of the things that are very interesting to me, the whole business surrounding, you know, groups surrounding together [inaudible].

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, yeah, that's what we started on in the first place.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right.

NELL W. SINTON: When I gave you that [inaudible].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And the parties and so forth. And of course, I've interviewed Wally twice and quite interesting. And I haven't met Jane. And I hope to that soon.

NELL W. SINTON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But you obviously at one time were very much involved.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, yeah. I was very involved with them. It was—let's see. When was that? The mid-60s? It was a time in my life that I was desperately looking for an identity with the art world. And then I found it there, which was actually where things were going on, in my opinion, at that time, here. Afterwards, you know, when you get into something—at least when I get into something I get sort of a resonance for it. Afterwards, when I can look at it at a distance, I can see what was really going on. [00:16:22]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It was a very special time.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. And I know why these people—I think I know why these people had prominence then, and they should have had. Um, but I don't know how much you want me to go into depth about that at this time.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, [inaudible].

NELL W. SINTON: You know, I'd be glad to do it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think we should wait and really hit some of these, some of this—

NELL W. SINTON: This is a part that I know better than any others, it's nearer to me. And it's a time when I finally did get involved personally in—with people, with artists. And the other—I've spent an awful lot of my life skating and stirring up—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: This is a part of that misspent youth?

NELL W. SINTON: Hm?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Misspent youth.

NELL W. SINTON: My misspent youth. And my very misspent youth and being enormously spoiled.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [Laughs.] That's nice though.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, actually, see—well, I'll tell you so you'll know where I'm going further with this, I guess. I'll tell you this, when—in 1958 I got separated from my husband, I realized that I would have a hell of a lot of work to do. And so, um—through therapy, very creative therapy, I got to look back in a very, very good way. So I brought my whole back up and was able to go ahead. Now, now I'm surrounded—that's why one reason I'm so interested in scrapbooks and things because I couldn't know how to go ahead or what my even present was until I knew what my past was. And so I've been working at this since 1958. So I got a pretty good idea of it now. It's not very—I mean—and it's documented and corroborated, you know. I mean, we have integrated the things that happened so I could, so I have a correct view. Uh—let's see. Oh, [laughs] I made a scroll. I'm on my second scroll now. This was away from my painting. And this one, the first scroll, I hope to have exhibited at the Art Institute sometime in September or October. It's supposed to be. The date hasn't been set yet. Anyway, it goes on for 30 feet. And it's called *Under the Table at the Donner Party: A Dining Room Frieze*. [00:19:36]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [Laughs.] That's terrible.

NELL W. SINTON: And it's terrible. It's terrible. And it's kind of—everything I've ever known in my life has gone on under the table.

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

NELL W. SINTON: Activities under the table.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, great. Now it's not just a scroll, it's a document.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. It's 30 feet long and two feet high. The one I'm doing now is going to be even longer, and it's called [laughs] *A Social Development of an American Female*. So when you see these things, you'll see how I was able to bring my misspent youth up and on into really triumphant and creative way of spending my life finally, the rest of it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: When did you do *Under the Table at the Donner Party*? [00:20:33]

NELL W. SINTON: When?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. Was it recent?

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, yeah. I guess in the last two years. See, I was the first—first I was a representational painter. But cute, because that was all I knew was cute. That's all I wanted to know. I did not want to really grow up because grown-up life looked awful to me. So then I stopped that and went into abstract painting, which was pretty successful. I did that for 15 years, I guess. And then in the last two years, in getting ready for this show, I had models, and it's all figures. That one, is one. And one on the other side of the wall. So I've given up abstraction for the time being. I hope to get back to it sometime, in another way altogether. I'm not quite [inaudible]. And so, I had these models. Well, at the same time that I got into this scroll business—[00:22:00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I'm certainly was going to ask you about that more when you uh, go on the official tape. That sounds fascinating.

NELL W. SINTON: [Laughs.] It is. It's fun. At first I couldn't—it was too painful, I couldn't do it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So, it's really autobiographical.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. And so—yeah. I did—and at the same time, I also did—gosh, it's all been going on for the last two or three years—an autobiography for the book about me that we're writing. And—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: What is this for, by the way?

NELL W. SINTON: Where? Oh, the book I'm writing is with a woman named Juanita Sagen [ph], who is a therapist and a teacher across the Bay, and she's also friend now, of mine. And we taught together. And—taught once at the Art Institute—twice at the Art Institute. And a couple other places. And she has something across the Bay called the Institute of Creative and Artistic Development, where she teaches creative behavior, a writing class, and an art class. Well, she knows lesson plans and teaching techniques. And I'm more of the critic, my writing in it is more like an essay. Like, essays. My personal experiences with these lessons. I—we never teach anything that I've haven't done a lesson of. Then, in doing this, [00:24:00] I made a whole bunch of drawings and paintings of my family in my head, out of my head. And then I composed a painting of them. It's a huge painting. I don't know if I'll [ph] ever get to see it, but it looks kind of like a Wilkes [ph] Gallery. [Laughs.] Uh, someday it will be seen. So, I suppose almost all my work in the last five years has been very autobiographical. And that's why it's comparatively easy for me to talk about it because now I don't have any [inaudible] by the [inaudible]. I suppose—I never thought about it, but I suppose I might frighten some people with some of the things I'm perfectly willing to say because it's true.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, you will won't frighten me. After all, I'm—

NELL W. SINTON: [Laughs.] I've gotten to the stage now when I don't even know when I'm frightening someone [they laugh]. That I should be aware of.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That you should regain, perhaps, but I don't know, it's refreshing.

NELL W. SINTON: Right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Certainly from my point of view, the story from the archivist's point of view, that's the ideal.

NELL W. SINTON: [Laughs.] Yeah. Well, sure you don't want any embroidery.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No. It's uh—you get it a lot of those times but it complicates things and you equipped to be able to slice it away or interpret what does this really mean? But luckily I don't have to do that.

NELL W. SINTON: You don't?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No. We at least what I'm paid for doing is to just gather the raw material, the information and then it's—the scholar uses it in graduate student work and dissertations, and all those things. [00:26:01]

NELL W. SINTON: Oh.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's how it's used. We don't—the Archives doesn't write this—all of our [inaudible] amount of materials up, it's there. The whole idea that the historical pieces, the documentation be brought together in one place for the writing of books and dissertations. That's—

NELL W. SINTON: How fantastic. And I have a very hard time staying in focus, actually. I just now I wandered away. I have to be pulled back, by the way. You may have noticed that. I don't mind at all. Please pull me back. [They laugh.] Pull me back.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well I'm not so good at that unfortunately, because I find these wanderings often very interesting.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, maybe.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I have a question, though I don't want to interrupt your frame, but since you already wandered off.

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: What?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Is that still going?

NELL W. SINTON: Yes. I'm always nervous about that part because I always think it's going to stop and it's angry, and has a life of its own. [Laughs.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I want to know of something that's personal, separate from [inaudible] you involved with people. Uh, the material that you—the Jay DeFeo letters that you left to the San Francisco museum and now we have in our collection I think are tremendous—tremendously revealing, very sensitive. I won't say awe-inspiring—I don't mean that—but they're unusual in the—in their personal quality. And it's funny—one thing that I want to ask you about because I was about to ask Wally. Wally Hedrick acts in a way as if Jay left him, although he didn't say it exactly that way, but you know, he puts a certain light on it. And then of course in the letters from Jay at that time to you she says "Wally has left." Do you feel like just setting me straight on what the situation there was? I don't know if this is really important. [00:28:10]

NELL W. SINTON: Well, I suppose it could be complicated because Wally was—Jay was behaving totally immaturity—all her life, as a matter of fact, I think she probably still is. I don't see her anymore. She had a real hard time growing up altogether. So, at that time, I always thought of Wally as a father to her. Afterwards, when I had a chance to look at them at a distance, and he had left, I thought that if there was any immaturity going on it was certainly Wally's. He posed as a patriarchal type, you know, what was he—the supervisor of the night school, I think. And he had a lot of responsible jobs given to him, which I thought he was very fully equipped to take. As a matter of fact, the [inaudible] was—when was it? Student protest time in the schools—at Berkeley?

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

NELL W. SINTON: And the schools closed down for a week, I think?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. I remember that. It happened at UCLA, too, and that was 1969.

NELL W. SINTON: I had just come back from Europe.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well it wasn't that long ago, we're talking about, I think, 1969, or 1968. I had to be. It had to do with the Cambodian invasion. [00:30:06]

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Well, at that time I happened to have two run-ins with the [inaudible]. I'll tell you off tape. Uh, I was interested because of the [inaudible] at the Art Institute. And then being genuinely interested always in the students.

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

NELL W. SINTON: And goings on there, so I was hanging around the school watching what was going on. And Jay was very excited. She was teaching. And I got carried away and told her I had a book called *Hello Sur le Mir* [ph] that I had just gotten in Paris from the students protests. I just gotten it now, where the hell was I? I was in Paris. Nineteen sixty-four. Hmm.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Did that have to do with the student protests—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. And you know, in France, when the students have a protest, there's a scribe or a publisher or something going right along next to them and writing down everything, all that scrap-eating on the road [ph] [laughs]. They were good about publicity, so I told Jay about this and she wanted to see it, and she wanted to show it to her class, and so I lent it to her and she of course—what a dummy I was, I knew she would lose it, and she did. So she tried to make it up to me by giving me a collection of all the posters the students made, which did not make it up to me. But you have to take responsibility for this, I lent her the book. Anyway, so that was the whole thing with her. So then I'd listened to Wally harangue the students about that time in the lecture hall. And he was absolutely awful. He said, "If this were my school, there wouldn't be any classes. The school would simply be open 24 hours a day and there would always be teachers to teach whenever a student felt like being taught. There would be no schedules. And there would be no clean-ups." Well, he was describing anarchy as far as I was concerned, which, I can't stand in his school because if you pay money—it would be different if it was free for everybody but you pay money, you better get taught. [00:32:58]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Incidentally, it sounds very similar to Ruth Arbor's [ph] view, a certain disenchantment with the Art Institute—another thing.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Now they're hiding under—they're saying, "Well, what do you want us to be, a regular commercial school?" They're just lazy. Sloppy and lazy. You know, looking for excuses to not work. I find it arrogant. Besides—anyway, I was very annoyed at Wally because Wally is enormously mischievous, which was okay because he was in the right place, but he was being mischievous in the wrong place, and I didn't like it. I was very disappointed, because I thought he was a really good artist. I don't know if he's working any more than Jay anymore.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've seen his latest paintings by the way. [00:34:03]

NELL W. SINTON: How are they?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I'll describe them to you. They're interesting. I'm trying to—I have pretty much a chronology—he and I went through the evolution of the—the disclaimers [ph] of any evolution and real development. He doesn't like that idea. Nevertheless, there are phases. And his latest things are—we talked about one, I think. And he has—oh, they're in his little Wally's fix-it shop there out there. And they're big white canvasses, [inaudible] canvasses, and what he does is reproduce, blow up and reproduce sort of cuts, engravings from commercial catalogs of the early part of this century and maybe the late 19th century—I can't remember the name of the company, but there was one company that as a kid he used to examples of this catalog. Well, I don't know where he actually gets the engravings now or what. But of course, they're kind of popular anyway. They've republished in the Sears catalog and so forth.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And as things, they combine the image and then some text—

NELL W. SINTON: You mean, he blows them up with a camera and—projects them on a canvas?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, he projects them on a canvas, and he actually works in the dark. I mean, he paints the projection.

NELL W. SINTON: He paints the projection, I see.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: On the canvas—

NELL W. SINTON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and like, one of them was a big funny head of cabbage—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and I can't remember what the text, the lettering was. But he did it all by hand and it was just kind of rough. But then on the wood engraving or an engraving, the cut that was blown up was rough anyway.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And it's sort of interesting. And in a way, I asked him if he wasn't afraid or didn't know how people would look at these sort of post-Pop—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and he laughed. He didn't care, of course. So that's what he's doing now. [00:36:04]

NELL W. SINTON: He's post-Pop.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hmm?

NELL W. SINTON: He's post-Pop. Uh—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, these are the latest things. These were the things he's working on right now, so he is doing some work, anyway.

NELL W. SINTON: And he has a baby?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: Somebody told me he has a baby.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He has a baby called Max, nine months old. In fact, my wife and I went out—let's see, we were out there twice. The second time I took my wife and our little girl, who at that time only about two months. And he and Julie, and Ann, and Max, and Clara our daughter, played while Wally and I did the taped interviews. So—

NELL W. SINTON: Wally—did not used to be cute. I thought his work was tin cans, beer cans.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes.

NELL W. SINTON: And those kind of [inaudible] emblem things were genuinely funny and original. But now this sounds—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, of course, I don't know if I'm describing it well but that's just basic description. And I find him interesting. I don't know what I think about it at this point, but I was most interested to find out that he was working again, because he—most people think that he's just dropped out.

NELL W. SINTON: Is he teaching?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He is. He's been teaching down in San Jose two days a week or something like that to a hell of a crowd. But he needs the money, I gather that he's kind of hard up. Everybody is a little bit in one way or another.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, everybody is in one way or another. But I never thought Wally really was good for that school until he was [inaudible] as an artist. [00:38:01] [Inaudible.] Um—Jay. Oh, Jay was a good artist too, but she paralyzed herself, absolutely crippled herself by refusing to face life [ph].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Would you agree with Coplans—I mean I know John Coplans is a dirty name here—

NELL W. SINTON: It sure is.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —but nevertheless he did a bit—of course, he's written a lot on California art, but in—there's an issue of *Art in America* devoted to several California artists, and this was—I can't remember what year it was, I have a feeling it was in the late-'60s. Just about the time we're talking about.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Probably the mid-'60s. And really a survey of Northern and Southern California artists, and he was talking about Jay DeFeo and [inaudible]. You know, there would just be little parts about different people, and how he she was really a strong artist, really a capable artist, but that she had more or less fallen into state of inertia, working and re-working the same painting. I guess that's *The Rose*.

NELL W. SINTON: That was *The Rose*.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And would you agree with this, that she really—there was an obstacle there, that she—in other words, he felt that there was no real development, no expansion?

NELL W. SINTON: Actually, I even don't like the painting. I thought it looked like a portrait of Queen Victoria. There's something very [inaudible] and opaque about it. I just don't like it. I think it's been revered in a way out of its—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Where is it?

NELL W. SINTON: It's now at the Art Institute. Bruce Connor [ph] knows the most about it. [00:40:03]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He—

NELL W. SINTON: It's being restored. And after that, someone has to pay for the restoration. Nobody is willing to.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: They own it though?

NELL W. SINTON: Nobody owns it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Nobody.

NELL W. SINTON: Uh, I think probably several museums are willing to accept it as a gift. But nobody wants to pay for the restoration, or for the dra—what do you call it? Drayage. This is what I heard from Bruce.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well one would think the SFMA would be interested.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, but someone has to pay for the—he told they were. But furthermore, oh, I think there was something else about that Bruce was telling me. Jay wants to be paid for. Nobody wants to buy it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I could understand, of course, she spent half this time working on it.

NELL W. SINTON: That's right. And yet—and the friends [ph] think she's entitled. And yet she said—I'm quoting her as to me as saying, "I just wanted to have a nice [inaudible]." Oh, forget it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, it's something of a sacred cow, representing, perhaps, I'm just guessing, it sounds to me, is that it's importance is almost symbolic that it represents an era of more than, perhaps being a strong work of art. So it takes on—it's almost a document.

NELL W. SINTON: I think that's just what it is. It's a document. She worked on it for—

[Audio Break.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Continuation of conversation between Nell Sinton and Paul Karlstrom.

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: —[inaudible] [00:42:02]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And I want to hear more about—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, it was beautiful. Really very, very, very good artists.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well they sound like works of—

NELL W. SINTON: They were works of art. She spent three, four, five months over—getting them ready. She took that long to decorate Christmas tree. And then she never displayed them, you know? The Christmas tree's sitting until the needles fell off and [inaudible] five coat racks. They were all left in the apartment, in the flat.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's where Wally got his idea for the strange mechanical Christmas tree that—with the lights that would—

NELL W. SINTON: They were there.

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

NELL W. SINTON: He had that there.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Because he exhibited them in the San Francisco museum.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He had that—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I can't remember if the piece actually had—maybe this was another piece that had parts that would reach out and uh—

NELL W. SINTON: God, I don't know that one.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and grabbed people.

NELL W. SINTON: I can't [inaudible]. I have never saw it in my life. Really? That's wonderful. [Laughs.] That's really nice.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, it would be [inaudible].

NELL W. SINTON: I—would—I don't understand him saying that she left him.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, I should qualify that. I don't know if he out and out said that or if he was just being delicate and maybe—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, probably. Being a little bit—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Modest, or—

NELL W. SINTON: —modest. Well, the day that that painting left Fillmore Street, he left.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: *The Rose*?

NELL W. SINTON: *The Rose* went off to Pasadena, and Jay with it. And Wally left with Julie that day.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Julie. Uh-huh [affirmative]. So that was—I see—

NELL W. SINTON: And Julie, you know, was called "Sam." You know why?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No.

NELL W. SINTON: Because he was absent from home so much, and Jay used to say "Where are you?" and "Where do you go?" or "Where are going?" And he would say, "To play poker with Sam." [They laugh.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Play poker with Sam. That's terrible. That poker game produced Max.

NELL W. SINTON: Yes. [Inaudible.] Produced the baby. There is a poker game, by the way, that's been going for years and I don't know how often. There is a poker game by the way that's been going on for years over at Peter Voulkos's. You know that poker game? [00:44:30]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, well, some day you will but—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Peter and the—

NELL W. SINTON: Peter and Ann—Peter Voulkos and Ann stopped and ran a poker game all night. I don't know how often. Sam Tchakalian goes, and another one who doesn't work much anymore, Sydney Gordon goes, and I think Jimmy Suzuki goes. I forget who else—that's been going on for years and, years, and years, and they drink champagne.

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

NELL W. SINTON: And they stay up all night long. And that's another—but that's another group. That's a whole other—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, this time, we do it—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, that's a whole other subject. Another interesting little part of the Bay—I don't know if it's interesting to you, but it may not be—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, try—

NELL W. SINTON: —of any significance is that Joan Brown lives there, you see?

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

NELL W. SINTON: And I think there must have been a good deal of jealousy going on. Now, Joan is a much more disciplined—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: She's a wonderful—

NELL W. SINTON: That's right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —person.

NELL W. SINTON: Person. Yeah. Joan is very clear.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I—I think so too. I've spent time with Joan. We filmed her papers and then some interesting things, but I don't want to interrupt your story. But, well, one of the most interesting things because her baby book that she kept for Noel. [00:46:05]

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, yeah?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And she loves babies and she—and she loves—you know, it's a terrible thing in the way of saying because women hate it and they should. But in talking about women's art, there are art historians, mainly men who've have been critics and have talked about this feminine quality that supposedly comes from their instincts or at least their habits having to do with their role as a homemaker and a mother and a certain sensitivity and tenderness in the domestic side coming into the work. And I think—in other words growing imagery from their own kind of role on domestic activity, and it's true of Joan's work, some of it. I have no question about it in terms of drawing directly images from her own—her family life, her child for instance, things from this baby book. This is the interesting part that there are photographs in that baby book that are—parts of them are maybe the photographs used as part of a larger composition of a painting she does or maybe she just did part of the photographs of—you know. That's not—that has nothing to do with growing your value. It's just that—

NELL W. SINTON: I think that's—yeah, after all, a woman is sitting around more with the babies than the man is. All man artists paint their kids.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Hmm. That's true too.

NELL W. SINTON: They all do. Picasso did it—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Take Renoir and all the—

NELL W. SINTON: And Renoir did it too, but women, perhaps a bit more. I don't know, they can be real hostile. I know I had terribly hostile feelings about my children just because I wanted to paint and get out of the woman—
[00:48:04]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: She didn't seem to have, and I find her to be delightful. I think she's one of the most interesting little packages in town. She's cute as a button, and she's vibrant. Well, we sat and drank wine the first time I met her. I went over there and just I thought it was going to be a brief, little visit, and she brought out the wine. We sat there and smoked. Even though she's this champion swimmer or wants to be, she smokes like a fiend. We smoked and drank, went through, God a big—the better part of a big gallon of wine, and I think I left about 4:30 or five— got there early in the day, and I was really bombed and she was—you can imagine what that would to a little—

NELL W. SINTON: Well, listen, one time, in the '50s—oh, let's never forget—I must ask her. I don't see her much anymore either, but I must ask her if she remembers. We were in an opening, and she and Manuel and I went out to a bar, and they started to drink martini—we started to drink martinis. I never saw so many martinis in my life, and I said to myself, "I'm goddamned if I'm going to let these kids beat me up in a bar." After five martinis, at which only took about an hour and a half—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Jesus.

NELL W. SINTON: Jesus.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's almost enough to kill you.

NELL W. SINTON: [Laughs.] Oh, I think you could practically killed. Somehow, we got home here, and we started to fool around in the kitchen. I can't say what we must have—I must ask Manuel, I saw him the other day, if he remembers it. And then all of a sudden—we did eat something. All of a sudden, Joan just slid off the table on to the floor. [Laughs.] She was so little and young. [Laughs.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I could see it, interesting. [00:50:02]

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Because she's, uh—she's a character, and I imagine, I imagine she must have been something really, you know, naiveté, maybe not, something of a femme fatale when she was younger. I guess the—maybe that's not the way—

NELL W. SINTON: She was sharp. She was so sharp that when George Staempfli came to see me and said, "Who else is in town painting?" and I took him over to see her. They started up a relationship, and he really—he really exploited Joan enormously, and finally, she got fed up with it. But during that time, jeez, she was only about 23 and to be flown to New York and have shows was pretty important. When that, well in other words, Staempfli. I don't [inaudible] him at all until he gave me a bad deal, but I was delighted that he invited Joan to Costa Brava, and I think the place that his wife paid for because he had a rich wife. And Joan responded by bringing Manuel along. [They laugh.] I thought that was just neat.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Good for her.

NELL W. SINTON: I was very glad about that. She wasn't married to Manuel then. And then after that, she was really, really sore at Staempfli because he kept sending her stretcher bars and paints, and that isn't what she wanted. And buying her paintings that were done, \$50 apiece and pure exploitation, and she cut that out, so she was pretty good at taking care of herself. She cut off the whole relationship, and she didn't have any choice, you know what I mean? She has no other place to exhibit.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You know she's not exactly an innocent [inaudible]—[00:52:00]

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-mm [negative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —Wally Hedrick kept talking about Funk art, you know, with the quotation there, so you

have, uh—was citing people whom he consider funky. He says funky. You know, you can't be—you can't choose to be a funk artist. You're either funky or not. This is Wally, he doesn't think he's funky, interesting enough. He says, "I'm not funky." He said—he listed Joan Brown, for some reason Neri, and he thinks—he thinks Jay DeFeo was one of the funkiest people he had ever known. It wasn't entirely helpful to me. I think it didn't—it didn't focus in on what he means by funk.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But it was fun to talk about it anyway. Um—

NELL W. SINTON: Jay DeFeo was a—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He wasn't talking necessarily about the work even; it's funny. It was about—

NELL W. SINTON: I don't think he knows anything about—I don't think—I think Wally doesn't celebrate. He doesn't have consecutive thoughts. I don't think he thinks.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really?

NELL W. SINTON: I don't—no. I think he's just purely—not emotional, but at least he's emotional enough that he's spontaneous. Does what he feels like, and he's not a responsible man in my opinion. He's—you know, people like that often start to think of themselves as spokespersons. I find Roy De Forest thinking of himself, now —

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I can see that, yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: —as a spokesperson, you know, me and my dog.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think it's dangerous, very dangerous to the art. That's my personal opinion because then—

NELL W. SINTON: Very—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —you begin to live your work of art as a lifestyle or an image or a legend rather than what you produce. And I think that that's—I see it a lot here in the Bay Area. [00:54:04] It's certainly true of a lot of Southern California artists too.

NELL W. SINTON: Very diluted. They see—they give us all the responsibilities they should be having as being critics, as assessing their times, as being of their time. It's just absolutely crucial for an artist to be of his time, and the minute he stops assessing himself, he's either behind the times or possibly ahead of the time but usually drops fast. Henry Hopkins says, "Artists are not ahead of their times, they're of their times, and most other people are behind them," but I don't know with art. I don't know how I feel about that.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, because of what—specifically what we're talking about—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —and I appreciate the meaning, you know the impression.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. But I think it's extremely capricious and dangerous to behave—I mean, Roy is a naturally good artist. I can't understand a word he's saying because—I used to say if you read anything, you'll realize that an artist does not have to be cuckoo or neurotic.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's' right.

NELL W. SINTON: As a matter of fact, it's a temperament.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But he doesn't know.

NELL W. SINTON: I used to think that's very important. I went through a period of wearing blue jeans all the time because—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, it helped you?

NELL W. SINTON: I had to because, you see, my daughters went to a private school. In a certain school where I had gone, I didn't want them there. I hated it. I didn't want them there. They're better than me, so I didn't want them in an awful school. And I used to go to parent-teacher meetings in blue jeans where all the other mothers were dressed up appropriately for a meeting at a girls' private school in the city. [00:56:11] But I had to be in

gunk and wear blue jeans and sandals for fear they wouldn't know I was an artist. Then that night, I might go to an artist's party and still keep on my blue jeans and sandals because I was afraid if they thought I had money, they wouldn't like me. [Laughs.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You might have been—

NELL W. SINTON: It was—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —will try to exploit you.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, and so I never took off my clothes. I had a closet full of clothes, but I have to wear my costume all the time because of my affectations. And if you get stuck in that, you certainly are not going to grow. That's the truth. It's a trap. Yeah, and clearly, you can't—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [Inaudible.]

NELL W. SINTON: No, but he—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Roy De Forest is interesting because just yesterday or was it the day—no, the day before, the San Francisco Museum of Art sent over a couple of tapes. As you know, Bruce Conner is extremely conscientious in getting material to—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he loves it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —the archives.

NELL W. SINTON: He loves it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And he loves it, and more power to him, but he called—he told whatever his name is Bob White over at the San Francisco Museum to get—he told them all that stuff and have—make sure that we get a copy of this tape. It's a panel discussion [inaudible] I'm not sure. And Bruce was on that panel discussion. This is Bruce's interest that anything with Bruce on it get into this collection—the Conner collection. And so okay, well, that's how it got started, but I talked with White, and he said, "Well, that will be—it's fine with us, and we'll sent over that and copy it." He said, "Also, what else?" [00:58:00] "Well," he said, "we have some other tapes. There's one of Roy De Forest giving a lecture at the museum."

NELL W. SINTON: There's a movie about him. I saw it in his show last—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, yeah, I saw it too.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Pretty interesting I think—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, kind of—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You did too of the—

NELL W. SINTON: The one, that film made about me at the [inaudible].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. Well, I'm sure—

NELL W. SINTON: And—[they laugh]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Really, just this tape.

NELL W. SINTON: Much better.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: So the—we received the other day the two tapes: One was a panel discussion with Bruce Connor and other people on it and then this Roy De Forest tape. Well, I stuck it in the tape recorder the De Forest one. You know there wasn't else as much that he gave, I guess, in conjunction—obviously in conjunction with the show, and he was talking to a group of people. And there was a black [inaudible] with all the dogs I imagine. And so he taught this—it was amusing, it was funny, but basically nonsense—about the history of dog tail and the tail of a dog in Athens, in the Hellenic time.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh no.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And so it started out as if he was going to get a serious of reappraisal about western art

history and then he ended up with this thing, the only thing on the dog's tail. It was—I guess it had to be entertaining or amusing the way his—the way this works often in his view. And to me, this seems a little bit lightweight itself, I feel—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, but—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, and it was too bad because I like Roy. I think he's neat and he's fun.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, fine, yeah, all that, but every time I see him, which isn't often—I don't see anybody anymore. [Laughs.] But he says, "Oh, Alan Lynch is coming to town. I think I'll have a party and invite you." Well, I don't—you probably don't know Alan Lynch.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't.

NELL W. SINTON: No importance at all except for being a total phony which many of us are was that Roy wanted something because—for no reason. [01:00:00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Maybe the guy likes dogs.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, maybe likes dogs. I don't know. Anyway, Roy has gotten married somebody had told me.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right.

NELL W. SINTON: He's going to have a baby.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, I didn't know that.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. Roy got married.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Gloria, this girl who's been living with him for a few years.

NELL W. SINTON: She's not a bad girl. She's—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No, she's very nice, very sort of straightforward, and sweet, and almost shy, so it's—which I find refreshing. But she was married to Louis Bunce, this fellow in Portland, Oregon, an old-world artist.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: She was Mrs. Louis Bunce.

NELL W. SINTON: Really? I know his name.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, and I—

[END OF TRACK AAA_sinton74_6955_r.]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Conversation with Nell Sinton, side two.

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: I thought he was from Oklahoma or someplace like that, and he has a mommy.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [Cross talk.]

NELL W. SINTON: I never met his mommy.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He has a mommy?

NELL W. SINTON: Oh definitely, he's had a mommy for years.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Around here?

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh yes, mommy is pretty important.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, dear.

NELL W. SINTON: But I was discussing the other day with Tony DeLap about Roy who is very friendly with Roy, and he said there are dark, oh, references to a father who used to throw shoes at him and—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: [cross talk]—

NELL W. SINTON: —or things that have been damaged—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —work you mean?

NELL W. SINTON: —damaging things. When Roy was a little kid because you never could get Roy to talk about his parents.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But he said there are dark references in conversation or in—

NELL W. SINTON: In conversation—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see.

NELL W. SINTON: —with, yeah, that's all and—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I'd really like to get together with Tony DeLap. I gather you and he, you're friends?

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He's coming soon. He's going to have a show on—oh, and he talks very willingly.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, you could do me a big favor when he's up here and get us together because—

NELL W. SINTON: Hmm. I think he'd like to talk to you. I think right here—his father and mother are across the Bay, and he has to go see them. He's been on a vacation, and I'm going to see him when he has his show, and I sure will do something about it, yeah. I did like him. He's—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Whether it happens up here, that would be ideal, or I certainly—

NELL W. SINTON: He's fun—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —could get to him—

NELL W. SINTON: —to talk to. Another person who knows quite a lot about this scene is Gurdon Woods who's down in—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —at Otis down there.

NELL W. SINTON: —at Otis.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. [00:02:00] This is—

NELL W. SINTON: And he'll be in town. You want to see him?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, yeah. I don't want to put any burden on you, but as long—if you would—it'll be interesting—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, he'd interested—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —enjoy it.

NELL W. SINTON: —in this whole subject. I think I'm—partly, I'm interested for myself, of course, but also I'm interested as being the only way for a place to get identity.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's right.

NELL W. SINTON: And we are in such a provincial, regional condition, I mean, in the pejorative sense of it, that I think if we only could get properly documented—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, that's exactly, of course, what—that's exactly the way I feel about it. And that's why I think it's so important that the archive establish a West Coast office. As far as I know, we're the only organization that's really concerned about this on a broad, national scale and just documenting things. California hasn't received the attention. As a result, they only know what has been published about Californian art, about the Bay Area art is generally the view of a handful of people. You could even just take it down to one person, John Coplans. I think this is as true in terms of the broader coverage and what's written subsequently about the Bay Area art or Californian art, but more so Bay Area art is that Ron from what Coplans—his point of view already or Peter Selz more recently—

NELL W. SINTON: We did have a really interesting period with—I told, you know, well with the MacAgys.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: They were—but they didn't document what Coplans did.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, interestingly enough though, I discovered this recently, the archives has 24 boxes of the MacAgy, Douglas MacAgy material all waiting to be filmed. [00:04:08] I don't know how it got to the archives or what, and of course, I have to do my end.

NELL W. SINTON: Jerry was marvelous. Jerry was, for me, more interesting than Douglas, and she had such great concepts. She did these marvelous shows, and the fact that Thomas Carr Howe put up with her is a real tribute to Tom.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And she was elderly too, she—

NELL W. SINTON: She was assistant director during the war.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I see.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, and she did these marvelous shows. Oh, I was so jealous of those shows, of not being in those shows. I remember they were so great. They were really good, and she was good, and she was a good friend as far as she could be. She was—I often have told Tom, and I don't know whether he felt emasculated by her or helpless. She really was the kind of board of directors he had, he could have fired her in a minute if he felt like it. But he somehow—now, this is the best part of Tom Howe. He knew there was something really good about Jerry that—and she put on these outrageous shows. She never spoke except in terms of a whole lot of words. She had great catalogues. It's a real big credit to the Legion of Honor, and these things happened, and that Tom let them happen, and it was awful when she left.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I know Tommy Howe. He's one of the first people I met out here because he's so close to me and my wife, and to the museums and also to—[00:06:02]

NELL W. SINTON: Your neighbor?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, he's right outside. And I—I really think—it's funny sometimes these obvious things you don't have to find. But I really should do a tape or some tapes with Tom, Tom Howe. His is going to be—would be much more social.

NELL W. SINTON: It depends how you get them.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He's not a big shot of—

NELL W. SINTON: It depends how you get them. They live next door to my mother. She was very—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, they're right up on—

NELL W. SINTON: —and then she died. Anyway, they were awfully good to her, and God, the sessions up there with my mother, and Tom Howe when they chose to let their hair down believe me that was it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think she can do with Tom—

NELL W. SINTON: And then he—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think that he knows—

NELL W. SINTON: If you couldn't get him off, the society can.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, because he likes that.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he loves it. He lives by it. He's going to Europe I think taking [inaudible] for God's sake.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think he's wonderful. He's very, very—

NELL W. SINTON: Listen, he's really—he's really—not that I'll call him solid. He has a very big heart somewhere, and he's a—and he's a first-class real snob, first class. But gossip-wise and on the subject of Jerry, yeah, I think he's rather [inaudible] not being polite.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, he doesn't—it's obvious that he doesn't really like people. I mean that's far out, but

just—you see just enough or that far to get the idea without really going too far, and he can be vicious.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, vicious. He can absolutely tear you up, character assassination is for him is—oh, holiday.
[00:08:06]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You know what he—

NELL W. SINTON: It's a holiday.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: You ought to get him to talk about Mrs. Spreckels, who he had to wait upon—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes.

NELL W. SINTON: Once a week, he waited upon Mrs. Spreckels.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, he was concerned, I don't know.

NELL W. SINTON: I don't know if he did. Hey, is that the magazine I subscribe to, the *Smithsonian* magazine that the archives sends? They always left strips.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I don't know. That would be something—

NELL W. SINTON: Is that another group?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: We put our own journal as a matter of fact.

NELL W. SINTON: I love the *Smithsonian* magazine, better than all things I get.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's great. I work for the Smithsonian, but I don't get it.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, you should.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Let me ask you. We're talking about—and I find this very helpful—people whom you think I should see or would be of—would have information that would be important to get to. You mentioned Tony DeLap and—

NELL W. SINTON: And Gerden [ph].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And Gerden, and of course I brought up Tom Howe. Is there anybody around that I might not—

NELL W. SINTON: Well, let's see.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —know about?

NELL W. SINTON: You went to Stanford, you've seen Clarke and [inaudible]. Hmm. Joel Barletta, very gossipy, very good. I'm thinking partly of the Newman crowd. That was a good period, the Dilexi.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, you know, we're—Gerry gave us all the reference of the—

NELL W. SINTON: That's good.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —Dilexi.

NELL W. SINTON: I don't know. He's another person—I don't know what he's doing since he got fat, you know, and retired—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, yeah, I think—

NELL W. SINTON: —you know, doing nothing.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I gather that he's—it's this way, he's taking stock [inaudible] in that fabulous, big mansion on Pacific Highway.

NELL W. SINTON: He used to belong to the World of Houses [ph].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah?

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was bought by [inaudible]. [00:10:00] Yeah, I don't see that he's doing anything except—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He must be extremely well off.

NELL W. SINTON: His father has a Piggly Wiggly or, what, Stop & Shop or something and—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think it's Piggly—

NELL W. SINTON: —in Omaha. But he's one of five sons.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: But still, he—

NELL W. SINTON: But still—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —comes—

NELL W. SINTON: —comes out enormously rich, and he had a good gallery in—I got invited to terrible political events, I didn't even go to them, things like demonstrating an electric chair or a gas chamber.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's what he's in now?

NELL W. SINTON: I was invited to a gas chamber demonstration so that I would be against capital punishment, and I was insulted. I thought, "Hell," you know—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You don't have to go to a demonstration and—

NELL W. SINTON: No. So that junk—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —[inaudible].

NELL W. SINTON: —junk. Joel, let me see. I'm looking at the artists whose work was around here. Elmer Bischoff?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, now, Joan Brown promised to set something up. I've got to call her because she was going to work on Elmer Bischoff for me.

NELL W. SINTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. He's really shy. I haven't seen him either. Robert Howard—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No.

NELL W. SINTON: Do you think Robert—now, Robert, he doesn't remember very accurately.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You mean as papers goes?

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, I think he would have some stuff. And that was another little—this was a very groupie town. There was Bob and Addie, of course, and the—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Who's Addie?

NELL W. SINTON: His wife. She was marvelous, Addie Kent, and they were friends—were very friendly with the MacAgys, and they were friendly with Jeanne Reynal who I just saw in New York, but she's in New York, and she was around here for a while. [00:12:04] Possible that Walter Landor were in on that, but they're really periphery being in my opinion more jet-setty which I thought was—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Groupies I think—

NELL W. SINTON: —another—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —is the word we use.

NELL W. SINTON: What?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Groupies, they're art groupies.

NELL W. SINTON: Right. Who else? I'm looking around. [Inaudible.] all this right here.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Of course, you don't have to say Diebenkorn Those have [inaudible] from the very beginning. Unfortunately, Diebenkorn about a year ago was still down south. He called about the Palisades, and he returned my call, which was very nice of him, the curator called very apologetic from the Getty. He said some great things about the Archives, but he wasn't going to involved himself from the beginning.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he's pompous. I—and that's so pompous.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, he apparently had some tremendous—I understand from Al Ellis [ph] at Stanford who knows them pretty well that his wife Phyllis, I think her name is an archivist. I mean she is [inaudible]—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, she's a Ph.D.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And she keeps—she keeps all of his stuff together, and so one day, I hope to even photocopy—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, go see Phyllis.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, that's what I'm going to do when I'm down there next time.

NELL W. SINTON: Go to see her, you know, artists' wives are so, what, jealous or something

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Maybe Diebenkorn doesn't want to come off as if he gives a damn. That's the—that's the main thing I run into is this false—it's not modesty. [00:14:04] It's something else. They don't want—they want to pretend not to be interested in the historical things and posterity, which is—I haven't run into one who is just honest where they really don't care about their place in history.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, there couldn't be.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I haven't met anyone no matter what they say. Several were neat and honest and say, "Hell yes, I want to be represented. I want to"—

NELL W. SINTON: I don't know any who truly doesn't. Oh yes, I do. They're real recluses and cuckoo like that Miriam Hoffman who did that little sculpture head over there next to the Pre-Columbian. See, it's over there. I don't even know where she is anymore. I'll tell you—now, wait a minute, Paul Wonner and Bill Brown have just been back here, and I haven't seen them—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, they're back up here? I heard they're—

NELL W. SINTON: Yes, they're in Oakland—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —going to move to [inaudible] or something I think.

NELL W. SINTON: No, I think nothing worked out, and they're here in Oakland.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Because they were in Santa Barbara for quite a while—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, when they were in Malibu for a long, long time.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Paul Wonner and?

NELL W. SINTON: Bill Brown, and they do have definite memories of life here. They were at Davis at the time.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Bill Brown, now is that—

NELL W. SINTON: That's, not Joan's ex-husband.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No—

NELL W. SINTON: —not.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —that's William Theophilus.

NELL W. SINTON: That's William—and I'm talking about William T., yeah. He and I had a show at the San Francisco Museum—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Is there a relationship there? Is it—

NELL W. SINTON: Pardon?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I mean Brown and Wonner?

NELL W. SINTON: Yes, oh my goodness, they're married or something.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's what I thought.

NELL W. SINTON: Sure. Like—Mason and Frank. Have you talked to Mason and Frank?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh—

NELL W. SINTON: Mason Wells and Frank Hamilton?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No.

NELL W. SINTON: Well, that's really important. Mason was deeply concerned with the Art Institute for years. [00:16:04] Frank is now at [inaudible] museum, and he's pretty interested in the scene. They have a lot to say. Did you talk to Fred Martin?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah. In fact, I'm going over on Monday afternoon to Fred's, and he apparently has a lot of stuff that he wants to give us.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he's got a huge amount of stuff. Fred—well, you'll see what you think of Fred?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Why I've met him, and I like him a lot. I like him as a person. I mean he's—let's put it this way, he's a very sweet, pleasant person so far in my experience.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. He's not very willing to go out on a—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Not adventuresome, as they say?

NELL W. SINTON: Well, I don't think he knows he has a—he relates himself to things more than people as best I can describe it. But I say we both separately took a trip to the Middle East. One year, I did have to go, another year he did, and we exchanged slides. And my slides are all about people, and his slides are all about buildings. And he writes. Oh, he's a good artist, I like his work, but he writes, and I write a lot of my work too, but he's very literate. He doesn't write for himself. He writes—

[Audio Break.]

NELL W. SINTON: He writes romantically and Victorian-ly. He doesn't have a—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Like he was an—

NELL W. SINTON: —personal—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: —intelligent person.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh sure, he's intelligent and educated, and he can have some good ideas on people he's inaccurate, I'd say. [00:18:09] But, oh, he would have rich recollections and memories. I mean things you could — papers—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Documents.

NELL W. SINTON: Documents. Because I think he saves everything probably.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's good. I love it.

NELL W. SINTON: That kind of stuff, I'm sure he's got lots of it, lots of it. I saw Ted Spencer the other day, but he looked awful old and sick. He was once the director of the trustees, head of the board of trustees at the art institute. Grace Morley would be a wonderful source if she ever comes here, but she's in India.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where are Mason Wells and Fred—

NELL W. SINTON: In Belvedere. Mason originated from Boston

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

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, what about—what about that guy named—I don't know him—Jess Collins? I don't know if he has any memories of that—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Robert Duncan and Jess.

NELL W. SINTON: Robert Duncan and Jess Collins. I don't know them.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I don't know—I know about them. Obviously, I've got to get to them, yes.

NELL W. SINTON: Yes, Bruce knows them. And Jim Newman knew them.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yes. He didn't know where they were, but I've got an address for them now.

NELL W. SINTON: Actually, Collins is going to go show with me. I didn't even really know, and somebody told me that.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: They're really—he's a lot more famous and important than I ever realized.

NELL W. SINTON: I have a Collins piece, and it's in the closet. [00:20:00] It's a little bit rich. I mean you can look at it for you own eyes. It's full, so full of imagery. Who else?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: And, of course, Peter Voulkos.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, Peter is fun. I like him, yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've met him and tried to set something up but he said, "I have a feeling that that guy will never respond, you've got to name him yourself and then he might say—"

NELL W. SINTON: I don't think he'll respond much. Mm-Mm [negative].

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: He said he wanted to get together, but it was at a party, and he may have been just being polite and said yes—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, he's nice.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've heard he's difficult frankly. That researchers down—kids who were working on abstract expressionist pottery or ceramics or something find him difficult to get to. I don't know—

NELL W. SINTON: You want to talk to Richard Shaw?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I suppose.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, someday, right? I don't know how much he'd be able to tell you—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I think DeLap is obviously very important. For one thing, he seems to be highly regarded by people here as well as down at Southern California, and I also gather that he's largely responsible for building—well, it's a rather impressive department at Irvine.

NELL W. SINTON: That's right.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I mean it's—in fact, it's amazing some of the most advanced artists—

NELL W. SINTON: Well, they have certain tenets. They believe that whoever teaches there has got to be an active artist, an active studio artist and must not be loaded with so much administrative work that they can't work.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Which is very effective, of course, too the—

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah. He himself is the head of the department this year. We'll see how much work he's made. [00:22:00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

NELL W. SINTON: Someone has to do it, some tenured person does have to do it, but Diebenkorn for instance got fed up at UCLA.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I know the whole story on that—

NELL W. SINTON: And I think they were crazy to let him go.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, want to know how that happened?

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Or at least—and I have it from the chairman of the department that is a designer, and he's just killed that Diebenkorn is gone. It was sort of the establishment within the painters, among the painters that felt Diebenkorn was getting preferential treatment, which is perfectly legitimate. In most any other department if you have a real heavyweight just to have him associated with the department, you get special concessions. He didn't want to teach undergraduate classes. He wanted to teach graduate, graduate students only. And this seems—I don't know, the department didn't care, you know the department itself, their own department, that's fine. But the painters felt if he gets this kind of treatment then we all—the deal is we all teach at least one undergraduate course. He was forced into a position where he had to leave because this is the way he wanted to do it, and it was his understanding when he came in this would be the situation. So the painters, his colleagues in the painting department are basically responsible for him leaving, and I imagine it's very likely that it's based on a certainly jealousy of him.

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, it was. That I'm sure. I wonder if Billy Brice—Billy and he are best friends, and Billy's in the painting department.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Sure. And I don't know which person—is how the lined up among the painters—

NELL W. SINTON: Oh, that's no news, is it?

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: No.

NELL W. SINTON: You want a morning drink like Vermouth or something? [00:24:00]

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Well, let's see.

NELL W. SINTON: I have—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You have some sherries?

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, I have to be finished. I have some sherry. I have to be finished about—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Yeah, I've gone—

NELL W. SINTON: —myself.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: This has gone on longer than I expected.

NELL W. SINTON: I love it.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: It's great, and I also want to ask you if I can borrow your cassette and record it on to one of our reels. I mean we went into it much longer than I thought.

NELL W. SINTON: Yeah, sure

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: That's great.

NELL W. SINTON: You might as well, but you give it back.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: Oh, don't worry. I'm—

NELL W. SINTON: I need it back.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: I've got my Jay DeFeo on that, that—

NELL W. SINTON: Really? No, she's somebody I never would lend anything to. Or I listen, I've got a good deal to say. You know, I painted her a good paintings from those photos, you know. They'll remain in the museum. I loaned [inaudible]—

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: You said it was wonderful. Actually, I look forward to meeting him.

NELL W. SINTON: —enriched my life a lot.

PAUL J. KARLSTROM: This interview is a rerecording from a cassette of a conversation between Nell Sinton and Paul Karlstrom. The original cassette belongs to Nell Sinton.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]