Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Vincent Price, 1992 Aug. 6-14

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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 Vincent Price on August 6, 1992. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, side A (30-minute tape sides)
[At the time of this interview, Mr. Price was quite ill with Parkinson's disease—Ed.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Archives of American—Ed.] Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Vincent Price on August 6, 1992, at his home in the Hollywood Hills—I guess this area is called—up at the top of Doneny, in a home that's literally covered with art objects. This is the first session in a projected series. We'll see how it goes over a period of time, dealing with Mr. Price's career, and particularly his involvement with the arts, specifically and primarily in Southern California. This is Tape one, side A, and the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom, West Coast Regional Director.
So I think that we can get started. Well, I should say that this is a pleasure, an honor. I'm pleased to be here, and I'm glad that I'm the one that gets to do this interview. You of course, Vincent, have been prominent in the entertainment industry for a good number of years—film and television—and I think that this aspect of your professional life is quite well known. I think less known is your involvement which you described earlier, as we were chatting, as sometimes almost interfering with your livelihood, and that is as a patron, a collector, of the visual arts, involved with a number of organizations and efforts on a volunteer supportive basis. And so this is what is what we are going to focus on in this interview. his doesn't mean that we can't of course digress a bit and talk about your film career as well, because that is the context in which you were working. But at any rate, this interview is intended to deal with Vincent Price and the visual arts, and specifically your observations of developments over the years.

VINCENT PRICE: I have one thing that I would like to say. In the last year, 1991, I was given by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association a career achievement award, and I really didn't think that I deserved it on the basis of my films, and I was wondering if they did? You know, because films do change in their appreciation. There are films that become classics that weren't classics when they were made, and half of this award was given to me because of my involvement with the arts, the other arts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And was this stated as such?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. Very much so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Well, then that's good. There was recognition of that side of your contribution.

VINCENT PRICE: It's an area of my life which I didn't really know that people knew about as much.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I'm glad to hear it, and all the more reason for us then to take this opportunity to describe what form that all. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Dig it up a bit. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's dig it up. One of the things I think is very important, and we'll have a chance to talk more about it, is your involvement with endeavors that were intended to reinforce the arts. In a way you have almost an entrepreneurial approach; you were interested in generating interest in education and art history. And so one of the institutions that you were involved with from the very earliest days was the Archives of American Art. And it seems, since this is an Archives interview, that that would be the best way to start out. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . for you to tell us about the early days and your involvement with the Archives, and then how it played out over time.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I've always known really that the institutions that I have been involved with, the art institutions, used me for one reason: for its publicity. I was good copy. I was an actor doing popular pictures, and it did make it good copy to have somebody talking about the Archives of American Art when they were first started—for instance, person to person with our friend, the great man [E.P. Richardson]. And I think they wanted this kind of publicity because they needed it desperately and they really couldn't get it with a lot of the people

who were involved in it. Even though they were big-money people, and people of great renown in the arts, they needed an actor. And when the Archives first started, I remember being called back to Detroit to do an evening entertainment at the auditorium to raise money because, even though we had Mr. Dupont and Mrs. [Edsel] Ford and people like that on our committee, we needed money from the general public. And I was the person to be used in that way. And the same was true out here with the Archives. Not the Archives out here, but the Art Council at UCLA, and with the beginning of a museum out here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: All of which we're going to, I hope, talk about in more detail.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who first contacted you regarding the Archives? Who invited you to. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I was flying back to New York every weekend while doing films out here in the West Coast. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were living there or here?

VINCENT PRICE: I was living in Los Angeles, but I'd fly back every weekend to do a show that was called The $64,000 Challenge.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, I remember that.

VINCENT PRICE: And it was Edward G. Robinson and Billy [Pierson, Pearson], the jockey, and myself with the contestants, and it was all on art. And when they asked me if I would do it. . . . I had a game that I used to play which was highly publicized, that I could take any volume on art with reproductions and almost identify a hundred percent what the things were—with certain exceptions, like Oriental art and so forth. You know, different things that were not in my particular ken. And this was publicized at one time, and so when The $64,000 Challenge became a very popular show, they asked me to be on it with Billy [Pierson, Pearson], who had won The $64,000 Question, which was another program. So I went back on the condition. . . . I made the condition that I could talk about American art, about the [deposits] of American art, about the need for study of American art, which now was being done with the Archives. And when I was back there one weekend, Ted Richardson. . . . Edgar was his name?

PAUL KARLSTROM: E. P., Edgar Preston Richardson.

VINCENT PRICE: Edgar Preston Richardson, who I knew slightly, because he was at the Detroit Art Institute, which is my sort of family home. I'm actually from St.Louis, but my mother's family are from Detroit. And he and Larry Fleischman asked me to have breakfast with them one morning in New York, and asked me to be on this committee. And they as much as admitted that they wanted me there to get them publicity. And I was just going to be on Person to Person, which was really the show of America at that time, and also I was still on the $64,000 thing so I could talk about. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were pretty visible.

VINCENT PRICE: I was pretty visible at that particular time, because that was the biggest television show ever in the history of the business. So that's how it began. Because I was fascinated. I had tried to do a little research on certain painters—Missouri painters particularly—and had found it very difficult to do because there was no center for it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right.

VINCENT PRICE: And this is what Ted Richardson, who had just written this very fine book on American art, told me—that it would take him like a year to find something out about an artist, because the artist's wife, when the artist had died, had left it to the local library, who never unwrapped it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Nobody knew it was there.

VINCENT PRICE: Nobody knew where anything was. This is the kind of thing that I think [was] needed at the time desperately. I don't think people realize now, fifty years later, or thirty, forty years later, how little was known about American art, how little was understood. I remember, just to divert a minute, being invited to go to Canada at that time for the first American art show ever put together in Canada, in Vancouver. I couldn't believe it, but there had been no interest in American art. People just didn't know. And I sort of appointed myself a voice for the propagation and to arouse interest in American art because I'm terribly American.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, "terribly" maybe isn't the right word.

VINCENT PRICE: Misnomer. I really am violently American.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Violently. I like that. That's even better. Well, do you remember what year this was? It sounds to me as if it was the very beginning [of the Archives]. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: It was the very beginning.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . like fifty-three or 'four.

VINCENT PRICE: But in our talks from now on, I have a terrible sort of lack of understanding about years. I never know what year anything was, except for Pearl Harbor. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's one of the things you remember.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I presume it was before the Archives actually was set up.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, it was going to be set up in a basement room at the Detroit Art Institute [Detroit Institute of Arts], with Larry Fleischman giving money and getting money from the community and using his enormous interest, and Ted Richardson, who was the director of the institute at that time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And at this stage was the board actually put together, or this was the founding committee?

VINCENT PRICE: It was just being put together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, I don't really know, because they didn't [tell me], but I knew they had Mrs. Edsel Ford, who was a wonderful woman, and strangely enough a friend of my family's in Detroit. So that made it nice because she knew who I was, other than being an actor. And Ted and Fleischman and several other people in Detroit; I don't remember their names. But that's the way it was beginning.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you agree right off the bat?

VINCENT PRICE: Right off the bat, yes. Because I thought Detroit was a great center for it. My great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather was the first silversmith in that community. His name was Pierre Desnoyers. I just gave a spoon, the only spoon I had of his, to the Detroit Art Institute.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: And he was the same time as Paul Revere.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's amazing.

VINCENT PRICE: And then his brother came over, another Desnoyers, who was the first, I think, secretary of state of Michigan.

PAUL KARLSTROM: For the sake of the transcriber, would you spell that name?

VINCENT PRICE: It's now pronounced Dez-noy-yers, which is horrible. It used to be Den-why-yay, and it's D-e-s-n-o-y-e-r-s.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Thank you. We'll learn more about that background when we talk about your biography. So you were approached by Ted Richardson, who had not actually met you before, but there was a family connection, is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, no, I had met him before, because I had been to Detroit [before]. I was a lecturer on art for many, many years—for about thirty years, actually—so I had lectured all over the state of Michigan. Michigan is one of the best states in the Union for lectures. I don't know why, but they're curious. And I had been very much in that part of the country, in and around Detroit and all over the state. And so it was through being in Detroit that I met Ted. I know he wrote in the volume that he gave me of his book that I had done so much for American art. And that was on The $64,000 Challenge. And I also I talked, I had the opportunity to talk about American art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, this is interesting beyond your involvement with the Archives, which of course is the question at this point. But it sounds to me as if you were really one of the pioneers in stimulating interest in the American field.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. There were very few people who were really interested. It was a tough time to get money from people to really back the knowledge of American art that was needed for the scholars that were about to

come up. Because strangely enough Ted's book is one of the early books on American art, and certainly one of the best. He was a marvelous man.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, he certainly—or I should say, you all—were clearly successful in terms of setting up an on-going program to deal with the gathering of. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: It wasn't at the beginning, though. You know, it wasn't at the beginning.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, why don't you tell me about that.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it just was a hard job to interest people in. . . . I came out here and thought that I might sort of do some work out here getting people interested. They really weren't. They were interested in West Coast art, if anything. Because the difference between—which we'll talk a lot about, I hope—between the West Coast and the East Coast, and the Middle West, and the Northwest. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, absolutely, the regions.

VINCENT PRICE: The regions. I mean, there was in the Northwest [Mark] Tobey and all those people who really didn't like San Francisco. [laughing] They didn't like Los Angeles at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why don't you recount the nature of your involvement of the early activity of the Archives. You mentioned that it was a grand ideal, a wonderful idea, but that generating the funds and the support was a real struggle. And presumably you attended meetings. Were there regular board meetings? What was the nature of discussion among the board in the efforts to establish the Archives and get it on a solid basis?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it was all round Detroit, because we had the room in Detroit to do it. And we also had the backing of certain very important people, like Mrs. Edsel Ford.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

VINCENT PRICE: And we had Ted and we had Fleischman. And it was started in a very small way. It started with people going out and discovering little packets of letters and documents that related to some of the artists, many of whom were completely forgotten until the Archives started to dig them up. And not only did the Archives record them—this was what excited me, that it put them down permanently in microfilms and in other ways—but it also gave interest, local interest, in small areas that had some wonderful artists that had been completely forgotten, and would have—if I know our dear country—remained forgotten forever had it not been for the Archives coming along with the powerhouse names of Ted Richardson and Mrs. Edsel Ford and the other people who were on it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you recall, again, the nature of the discussions on the board? Did you attend board meetings regularly?

VINCENT PRICE: No. I didn't get a chance to attend many board meetings, because. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: But some, presumably.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, some, at the very beginning. But I was becoming busier and busier as an actor in Hollywood and also had founded a museum out here [Modern Institute of Art] and become involved in East Los Angeles and things we'll talk about later. My life was out here and it wasn't that easy in those days flying back and forth to Detroit. Because we didn't have jets, and it meant you had to give a whole weekend to go to a meeting, and then it had to be on a Saturday or I couldn't go, because I was under contract to Twentieth Century Fox.

PAUL KARLSTROM: A couple more questions on the Archives. One relates to something that I know we'll talk about more later, and that has to do with attitudes, especially in the east—or in this case Midwest, but reflecting presumably a certain eastern perspective—of different areas of the country. You were presumably the only, or certainly one of the only West Coast-based trustees or individuals involved with the Archives.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And did you ever get a feeling for how the Archives of American Art, meaning those who were involved early—the trustees, Richardson, for that matter Bill Woolfenden, who became after Richardson the director. He's been retired now for perhaps six years. He hired me, so I was brought in by Bill Woolfenden. But at any rate, these individuals presumably had certain notions about what American art was, what was important about American art, where was important about American art. Do you remember getting any sense of how they viewed the west, looking west?

VINCENT PRICE: There was a very deprecating attitude from everybody about Los Angeles. Not San Francisco, though San Francisco had really—our cultural capital of the West Coast—really was not very cultural at all, as far as the visual arts were concerned. There were no galleries. There was a lot of theater. I did a lot of very erudite plays in San Francisco as a cocktail of T.S. Eliot _____, The Lady's Not for Burning, and you could do anything in San Francisco in the theater. But the visual arts were not really sponsored very well. I can't remember exactly whether we [L.A. County]] were before the Modern Museum in San Francisco, or whether we were about the same time. Down here it was very difficult because we had a museum that was so dated and antiquated. We inherited, strangely enough, from Detroit, Dr. [Wilhelm] Valentiner, the great Dr. Valentiner, who came down and saw the building, took one look at it, and said, "It's big and empty. Let's fill it." [laughs] He told me this one time, that that was his ambition, to get some pictures on the wall, but we didn't have the money or the interest to really put good pictures on the walls, so it was just filled. And it's taken the museum a long time to weed it out. But there was a great sort of feeling that we were a cultural wasteland. And we weren't. We were an extraordinary place. I had a little gallery in Beverly Hills, a little art gallery. And one day I had six of the major musicians and writers of the world come in the gallery. You know, like Stravinsky and [Franz] Werfel, and Thomas Mann, and incredible people who came in all the time. It was a great cultural capital, but nobody knew where the center was. Somebody once described Los Angeles as seven suburbs in search of a city.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right.

VINCENT PRICE: But this is not that long ago.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, that's not.

VINCENT PRICE: But it's getting a long time ago, because of the rate that this town has grown. Incredible, it was like eight hundred thousand in the whole county.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that certainly has changed.

VINCENT PRICE: It's still difficult.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And one of the things I'll be very interested in hearing over our discussions will be observations on the change here. But in regards to the Archives, what is of interest, perhaps symptomatic, is a point of view on the part of a national organization, or an organization that has set itself up to deal with the art history of a nation, and that is the Archives of American Art, at the early stages with what form that vision took, and you're one of the people who is in a position to comment on that. In other words, what was the mandate? You know, how much attention needed to be paid to different parts of the country? Was it just Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No, I think the ambition for Ted Richardson, his concept of it, as I understood it as he explained it to me at the beginning of our relationship and my relationship with it [the Archives]. . . . As I said originally, I knew that the reason they wanted me was for publicity reasons. And I was perfectly willing to be used as such. I also could not, as I said earlier, because of the increased work and demand for my "talents" [chuckles] in the motion picture industry, go back and forth to Detroit. With Larry, who was in the rug business, it was very different. He lived in Detroit, and he could be there. So they knew perfectly well that I couldn't come to all the meetings. But I felt so keenly about it that I wanted to be used up to the extent that they wanted to use me. Once it was over, that was it. And I think I was an officer of the Archives at the very beginning. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

VINCENT PRICE: Second vice president, or something like that. But I had nothing to do with policy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, we'll have to look that up and determine just what office you did hold. Obviously during these early years, you were pleased with what you saw in terms of the way the organization. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . with limited resources was trying to do the job.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, and also limited information to me, because they didn't have the setup to keep me informed all the time, and as I remember there was no interest in spreading it necessarily to the West Coast.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

VINCENT PRICE: It was just to try and get it started.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you remember how long you were on the board?

VINCENT PRICE: I think about two and a half years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, so it wasn't really a long time.

VINCENT PRICE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did things develop then that you got off the board?

VINCENT PRICE: I think once they had their use of me, that it was perfectly natural that I should just sort of fade away, because I couldn't keep it up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

VINCENT PRICE: It was very difficult. I was on the White House art committee for Mrs. Kennedy, and when you're summoned, you're supposed to go. Well, it's not that easy to do from Los Angeles.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, that's true.

VINCENT PRICE: And it was particularly [difficult] then before jets and everything. It took a whole weekend to go to a meeting. Then, as I say, it had to be on a Saturday or I couldn't do it because I was working in pictures all the time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was there any tension or—what shall we say?—disagreement or unhappiness about [your departure]?

VINCENT PRICE: No, I felt that I sort of was passed over in the early. . . . When it did become established. That a lot of people didn't. . . . They didn't use my name in the early history of the thing, which made me a little angry. But later on I found out that it was because I didn't involve myself in policy. I think that they just sort of decided to let me go. But it didn't really bother me that much.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was your term up? Was it a matter of terms?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, probably.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you probably got a nice letter, maybe?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Saying thank you so much for your. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. But I was fifteen years on the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in the Department of the Interior, and it was the same thing. It was just very difficult to run a career that demanded that you be there. If you're the head of a steel manufacturing company, you can leave to go to a board meeting in Keokuk. But you can't do it if you're an actor. So I always had it understood that anytime that they wanted to get rid of me that was fine. Use me for what they could. It was the only way I could work. And I think I did a lot. I was their fundraising speaker. I was their guest in Detroit for fundraising parties, local parties, and things like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that's the kind of thing that you did?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this is how you made your board contribution, in fact?

VINCENT PRICE: That's right. I could neither give a great deal of money, nor could I give a great deal of time. But if my time fitted their time, that was great.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, this is good to know, and it sounds like it worked out pretty well, because after all the Archives did get established. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, it did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and eventually hooked up with the Smithsonian. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Sure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and here we are now with you to. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: But you're almost the first person that's taken any interest in the fact that I was in at the very

beginning of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you know, here we are historians. . . . It's ironic, and this is by way of a little aside, but very often that which we pay the least attention to is that which is closest at hand.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the Archives in fact only in recent years has begun to document its own history.

VINCENT PRICE: Sure, which is perfectly natural.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, because we've been out there, you know, running around documenting the rest of the visual arts. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and some of us try to make the distinction between American art history and the history of the visual arts in America, the second having of course a much broader scope.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At any rate it's interesting to have this [background].

VINCENT PRICE: The Indian Arts and Crafts Board, for instance, while I was in on all the policy meetings at that, because there was just five of us on this committee, and we tried to meet in Washington as much as possible, or in locations --- and different parts of the country where there were Indian centers. Still, you can only. . . . It was my way of saying, I give this time to establish my feeling of what American Indians, what injustices have been done to American Indians through the lack of interest their art, through the lack of interest in their lives and their problems. It was the only way I could do it.

Tape 1, side B

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, this is an interview with Vincent Price, session one, tape one, side B, continuing. Vincent, we've been talking on the first side of the tape mainly about your involvement with the Archives, and then we've of course stepped aside from that into interesting themes which we'll develop further, but just before we had to turn over the tape you said something that was interesting to me—and I think revealing, because you're talking about a fairly early stage. But you described yourself as, I think, "terribly" or "violently" American. And it occurs to me, from what you said about your involvement, not just with the Archives, but with the American Indian arts, that you recognized the connection between these objects and these artifacts and the cultures themselves, and then perhaps the very essence of the community or of the group—or of the nation, if you will. And although that's a big subject, I can't help but ask you about some of your own thoughts on that issue, which of course has to do with the connection between the art itself and the —what shall we say?—the character of a people.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. Well, I think you know that there are people who can become terribly involved in social programs, or artistically social programs, or whatever, and it's usually. . . . When I was one of the founders of the Arts Council at UCLA, about the third year as president I suddenly realized that it had to be turned over to the women. Because they not only had the time to do it, they had the money, and the leisure to do it. Not that women aren't busy. God knows they're busy. But it had to be turned over to them, because they could socialize us, you know, they could make it a social entity, which [n]either Kenneth McGowan [n]or myself or any of the other people who were president of it could not do because we all were involved in our own lives, in our own careers. I think that's one of the reasons you sort of get left behind in the consideration at the beginnings of things, but there has to be somebody who begins it, who starts it, who sticks their neck out from the beginning of it. And then they fade away, which is right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you obviously see this as your special role, or this was your special role in these different organizations.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. Didn't occur to me altogether, but with the UCLA Art Council, which is I think the biggest council in the University of California, I lent my name to start it because I had already started a museum in Beverly Hills.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What interested me from your remarks as we were wrapping up on the other side was what appears to have been an early recognition on your part of this essential connection between art and the appreciation of art and an understanding of culture and its identity.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I don't think that this was necessarily always the case at that time. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . where there seemed to be, what did you say, a more elite, sort of scholarly, if you will, view.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. It was either the scholarly or the money. But no, I think that with me it was a need on my part to be a part of the arts community where I lived—wherever I lived, in New York or here. I'd gone from Yale, where I graduated. . . . You weren't allowed to elect courses at that time unless you were on the dean's list, but I finally made it, and majored then in art history.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't know that. You actually majored in art history at Yale?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. And I taught school for a year, and then I went to the University of London and went into the Courtauld—the second, I think it was the third year of the Courtauld—and that was a great experience, because Hitler was driving out all the great art historians, who were all being brought to London, so it was really a mecca. But then I went into the theater when I was in London. [chuckling] But the inoculation [indoctrination] of art at Yale and the Courtauld really set my life's pattern. And I've probably kept up more study in the history of art than most people who are in it professionally. Because I'm not a professional at it. I'm an amateur—in the French sense of the word, a lover.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, this seems like a perfect moment then to go back in time. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . back to the beginning. And one of the things that I very much would like to do with you is get some understanding of the nature of your own background—your family and your circumstances. I'm intrigued by your description of yourself as being very American and very rooted in an American experience. And why don't we just do that, starting at the beginning—where you were born, when, family, and so forth. I believe you said you had early days in Detroit, or family connections there.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. My background is, as I say, about as American as you can be without feathers.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles]

VINCENT PRICE: And my Desnoyers great-grandparent, Pierre Desnoyers, I found out that some of the things that he made when he was the top silversmith of Detroit. . . . He made little silver bands with little silver feathers on them that the Indians wore around Detroit, because Detroit was a real Indian outpost then, French-Indian outpost. And my family on my mother's side were the Desnoyers and the [VanDykes], and Dutch and French people who settled Detroit.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was the eighteenth century?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, the very beginning of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: _____ quite early.

VINCENT PRICE: And my father's side were. . . . His mother was named White, and she was a direct descendent of the first child born in the Mayflower, Peregrine White.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

VINCENT PRICE: So he is my ancestor on one side, and Desnoyers on the other. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's amazing.

VINCENT PRICE: . . . so I'm something like eight generations on one side and nine on the other. Couldn't be more American if I tried. [laughing]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, well, you didn't have a chance. I mean, what else could you be?

VINCENT PRICE: No, I know. And I was born in St. Louis where my father was a businessman. He had gone to Yale, and his father was a man named Dr. Price, who invented baking powder, to help his mother bake. And when he was a young medical student—he was also a chemist, because he was a homeopathic medical doctor—he had to grow a beard because nobody would go to him. He didn't look old enough. So he took the time out to study medicine and during that time invented baking powder, and made a huge fortune—huge fortune for his

time, you know. Two or three million dollars in this period that we're. . . . And sent my father to Yale, and then he lost all his money in the crash of '92. I've never forgiven him for this, never. Because I should have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Made by your great-great grandfather.

VINCENT PRICE: Great, great, great, great, great great grandparent. But that's sort of vaguely that background, but I'm really proud of being an American, and I'm fascinated with America. I'm not fascinated with America at this moment. I'm disenchanted a bit, which is very wrong for me, because I don't like being disenchanted with my country. And what's happening to the arts is. . . . Once again, if I were younger and healthier I would be out there proselytizing the arts again, because I do feel that I have contributed something in my association with the Indians and the Archives and the things that I did here: started a museum here. That I've made people aware of art where they might not have been. I was the top lecturer in America for about thirty years, and I talked about art. And every time I got on a television show with Johnny Carson, I talked about art. One time I took a picture down. He said, "You love modern art and nobody understands it. Bring something down and explain it." So I took a Jackson Pollock that I had bought, took it down with me, and the criticisms that were heaped upon this poor painting were unbelievable. And it was great fun over the years. He'd always ask me, "Now how much is it worth now?" And it went from being worth two hundred dollars to being worth almost a million.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this was rather early on with the Johnny Carson show?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh yes, very beginning of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Jackson Pollock certainly was shocking then and to some still is.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, oh absolutely. And then I was on the Carson show a lot. This is the kind of thing that I went. . . . I called him one day, and I said, "I've been invited on your show. May I read some American Indian poetry?" And there were young kids at a school that I was partly responsible for founding in Santa Fe, the Indian [Art, Arts] School. I gave a prize to the young poets, and they became wonderful, and this was something that I was very proud of. And a book was published later on, I think by Doubleday, called The Whispering Wind, of American Indian contemporary poetry.

AUGUST 13, 1992
Tape 2, side A

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Vincent Price, at Mr. Price's home in Los Angeles. This is a second session, August 13, 1992, and the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom. Well, let's get right into it here. Last time we talked about your early involvement with the Archives, and I think we dispatched that subject pretty well, and we began to talk about your own background, some biographical information, which I'd like to go back to today. The early years there in the Midwest, St. Louis?

VINCENT PRICE: St. Louis, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At any rate, we talked a bit about that. First of all, when were you born? What was the year?

VINCENT PRICE: May 27, 1911.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. So now we have that officially for the record.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And if I remember correctly you spent most of your youth there, and I was wondering if you could describe briefly your family background, your home situation, especially that which might give us an idea of how you ended up being Vincent Price the actor and also your interest in art, how that may have been stimulated.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, my mother and father moved to St. Louis about 1909, I think. My father was a Yale graduate. His father was quite a famous man who invented baking powder. I think I said that. But he couldn't. . . . There was a crash in 1892—come to think, it's a hundred years ago now—when he lost all his money. [laughs] For which I have never forgiven him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, we can't celebrate that.

VINCENT PRICE: No, not at all. But he took my father out of college and put him in charge of a kind of defunct candy business in Chicago, and my dad was a very earnest young man who worked very hard and brought the candy company up to sort of world renown, and moved to St. Louis where it later was called the National Candy

Company and was a huge success. And my father was president of it.
My mother was from a pioneer family, French. I think I said too that her sort of ancestor was originally a French priest named Desnoyers, and then his brother came over and started the family—Pierre Desnoyers, from Detroit. In St. Louis, my family had no social connections, and St. Louis is a town of very definite social connections. It helps to be either German or French in that town, and my family were neither. So they had to make their way in the town. But my sisters and brothers were all very artistic. My brother was a wonderful jazz pianist.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How many siblings?

VINCENT PRICE: I had two sisters and a brother. And my two sisters played the piano beautifully. What started my interest in the visual arts was that I couldn't tell what my right hand was doing to my left hand on the piano. They didn't work together. And so I developed a love for the visual arts, and theirs was entirely musical. We had no pictures around the house at all, except one horrible sort of picture of some cows in a landscape and a couple of family portraits. My family apparently had no taste in who painted their portraits at all, and they were dreadful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles]

VINCENT PRICE: But they were there and. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you see them that way at the time?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. And so did my family.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You'd already developed some idea of what was. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. But we had a wonderful museum. The St. Louis Art Museum is a wonderful museum. My mother was one of the founders of a very progressive school called St. Louis Community School, and we visited the museum all the time, which I didn't do later when I went on to a thing called St. Louis Country Day School, which was a boys' prep school. And that was of course to get me into Yale if possible. And I slid in by the slightest margin. But that's sort of my background, falling in love with the visual arts, deeply and sincerely and very thoroughly, and finding among my older sister's books art books that meant a great deal to me, that I still have. A funny little book called The Apollo, which has eight million reproductions of everything. They're the size of a postage stamp.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right, I've seen that.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. But that was really my break-in to art, my own doing, because my family really didn't have much interest in the visual arts at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When you went off to Yale, which was. . . . I'm sure you remember that year.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, 1929. [laughing]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you see yourself as possibly studying, majoring in art or art history?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, I did see myself majoring in art history, because there was very little interest in art at St. Louis Country Day School then. Now they have three theaters and art classes and it's joined up with the famous Mary Institute, a girls school. They just named the little theater, experimental theater, after me, which is kind of nice.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. That just happened.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this is a new facility?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, good.

VINCENT PRICE: And it's kind of fun.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't want to interrupt, but was there any special ceremony or. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No. That's still to happen, but I won't make it back there. I've been back there and been honored by the school. But I'm kind of tickled. I gave them a wonderful drawing of me by [Albert] Hirschfield, to

put in the little theater, a cartoon, which will be fun.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Anyway, you went off to Yale with a very real interest in art.

VINCENT PRICE: With a real interest and a real sort of feeling that college was going to give me a wonderful visual education. It really didn't do that very much. Yale was at that time the old Yale, academic and scientific. And I went to academic, my father went to scientific, my brother went to scientific. And there wasn't much interest in the arts, in letting the undergraduate really into the arts, because you had to be on the dean's list to be able to elect courses. I finally was so discouraged that I made an effort and got on the dean's list, so that the last two years I took almost entirely art courses. And in my art history course I think I got a ninety-eight or something, which is not bad. But it's a game that I've always played all my life, of identifying art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were there any professors that especially impressed you? I mean, this was of course before the time I think that there was this great immigration of brilliant art historians from Europe. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . but was there anybody that you remember especially that you took classes. . . .
VINCENT PRICE: A couple of people at Yale art school who were very good [directors], and really did introduce you to certain areas. But the Yale art school at that time was turning out Prix de Rome winners, who went to Rome and began to do terrible sculptures. But there was a man named Carl Rollins, who was very famous. There was a man who taught a course in Shakespeare who was a very big influence on my life, and sort of put me in touch with the theater, which I didn't really have. . . . St. Louis is a good theater town, but really being near to New York, and being in New Haven where shows were tried out, was very important to me, and certainly aimed me towards the theater, though I didn't know how to get in. But two years after I got out of Yale I was starring on Broadway, so it worked out all right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, how did that happen? You weren't majoring in theater at Yale, although Yale now has a distinguished program.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did that come about?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I tried out for the [dramat, Dramat], but I didn't like it. Yale at that time was turning out not actors but technical people and playwrights, and some very fine people. But I wanted if anything to go into the acting thing. And after I graduated from Yale, I taught school for a year, at Riverdale Country School outside New York City, and so I had the inoculation [indoctrination] of theater in New York, because I could go in for very little money and see all the plays. And then I went to the Courtauld in London and there I fell in love with the theater, and that was that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, how did that come about? You went to London to study art history, presumably. That's why one goes to the Courtauld.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you mentioned when we were talking the other day that it was an ideal time because of the number of distinguished, primarily German, art historians who were coming either to this country or to London.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what then deflected you from the study of art and art history when you were in London towards this other area, which then turned into your career?

VINCENT PRICE: The British theater. That's all you need. It was wonderful. I met all the stars. They were very friendly and very interested in my thing at the Courtauld, because it was new at that time. And people like John Gielgud were very considerate of my ambition to be in the theater.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, is that right? So how did you. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I just met them, you know, because I was at the Courtauld, and in England the actor knows everything that's going on in the arts. It's very different than it is here—or was, actually. I think it's a little better now, but. . . . The English actor knows about set design, knows about art, knows what's going on, knows all the painters. If you enter into that world at all—and being at the Courtauld was enough to enter me into that world—I met everybody. I was not an unattractive fellow, and so they accepted me. And then I got a job playing the Prince Consort in a play called Victoria Regina by Lawrence Housman. And this just came about in the funny

little theater called The Gate. And I tried out for the part. And my first job at The Gate was a part of a Chicago policeman, with no lines.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you looked the part presumably.

VINCENT PRICE: I looked the part of the Prince Consort, and I'd been to Germany quite a lot in Austria. And everybody in Germany wanted to learn to speak English, so that they all tried their broken English on me, so I ended up with a German accent, which fit Prince Albert very well. And that was a tremendous success in this funny little theater that only held a hundred and fifty people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what was the theater again?

VINCENT PRICE: The Gate. The London Gate, and the Dublin Gate, but they weren't connected. The Dublin Gate was the great sort of tryout theater for all the Irish playwrights. The London Gate was founded as a club, and people had to belong. I think you paid like a pound a year, five dollars a year, and then you had the right to buy tickets, and that way they got out of censorship. Victoria Regina was censored because Prince Albert and Queen Victoria had not been dead three generations, and you had to be dead three generations before you could be portrayed on the stage as English royalty.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wonder if Shakespeare obeyed that rule?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, he did. I think he never. . . . Did he do a play on Henry the Fifth? Henry the son, eighth?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, I don't think so.

VINCENT PRICE: No, no, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay, well, that's news to me. But anyway that's how they got around that kind of censorship.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. And it was a wonderful play. Lawrence Housman was the brother of A.E. Housman, and he'd written this series of _____ plays about Queen Victoria and Prince Albert mostly. And the original production cost seven hundred and fifty dollars, and the stage was so small, and the backstage so small, that you carried the furniture on with you and put it into place, and then sat down and did the scene. Later on when I did it with Helen Hayes in New York the play cost 75,000 dollars.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, my lord. How many years afterwards was that?

VINCENT PRICE: One year. Because you could play it in New York, and it only ran for about twelve weeks in London, and then I came back to do it with Helen Hayes in New York.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that's how you got started?

VINCENT PRICE: That was my first play, with a real speaking part, and I suddenly was co-starred with Helen Hayes in New York.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was the theater, just for the record?

VINCENT PRICE: The Broadhurst. It was the biggest success of its time. It ran three years in New York, then went on the road, and then came back to New York and played again. And certainly the biggest success of her career. That's 1935 and '6 and '7.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you were with the production the whole time?

VINCENT PRICE: No, I was with it the whole time in London, and the whole time in New York, but then I didn't go on the road with it, because Miss Hayes felt that I needed to really get out and have some experience in the theater. So I did a lot of summer stock and then went into New York and did one flop after another and then joined Orson Welles in the Mercury Theater, and that was a very exciting experiment.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm sure others would be interested to hear as well.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, Orson had done a couple of plays for the WPA, mainly Horse Eats Hat and the wonderful production of Macbeth that was done in Harlem. The black Macbeth was really a wonderful, wonderful, exciting

play. And Orson opened a theater called The Mercury in which he did a play, a modern version of Julius Caesar. And then it was so exciting that everybody wanted to be part of it, and the next play they were going to do was a play by [Thomas—Ed.] Dekker, who was an Elizabethan playwright that wrote a play called Shoemaker's Holiday. And Orson asked me to be in that, and to sign a contract with him to do that and Heartbreak House by [George Bernard] Shaw and a couple of other plays. So I joined, and it was really one of the exciting times in the American theater because there was The Group Theater doing the modern plays of . . . oh, all the modern playwrights.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was Eugene O'Neill. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: And contemporary with that, too, but. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about [Clifford] Odets?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, Odets, Clifford, most definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you knew him personally?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, very well. And we did those two plays, and then Mercury Theater was really established and doing and. . . . It didn't go very long because Orson was a very undisciplined fellow, unfortunately—a genius but very undisciplined.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now this was before his time in Hollywood.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. This was the theater. It was before the radio thing too. But I was with that, and then I came out to Hollywood to do a couple of movies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did that come about? Did somebody see you at the Mercury?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. When I was in Victoria Regina, they wanted me to sign a contract to come out to Hollywood, and I went to Miss Hayes and she said, "Don't do it. You'll just be lost out there. Learn your business first." So I turned down a million-dollar contract, and I was getting two hundred and fifty dollars a week, so it would have helped to have the million somewhere. But I turned it down to do summer stock, and to do the different plays that came along.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So Helen Hayes really was an important, very important. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Very important person in my life. She was marvelous to me, marvelous.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you keep up with her at all?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. I think if I have any regret at all about my theatrical career, it was that I didn't stay longer in the theater. It was very hard to do because the transportation problem was quite serious. It took thirty-five hours to fly out. [laughs] So you couldn't really commute to the movie business the way you can do in London. But I wanted to be in movies, because I loved movies. I was a big movie fan. And still am and always have been. But I waited until. . . . After I got out here and signed the contract with Twentieth Century Fox, after doing a very successful play in New York called Angel Street, which was one of the great melodramas by Patrick Hamilton. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was not Mercury Theater.

VINCENT PRICE: No, that was not Mercury. That was after the Mercury. And I came out under contract to Twentieth Century Fox, and I must say I loved it, but I missed the theater and I realized that I would be very [remiss] if I didn't keep up with the theater, so I did a lot of plays. I did plays down at the La Jolla Playhouse, sort of erudite plays like The Cocktail Party and The Lady Is Not for Burning, and Billy Budd, and so I kept up my exercises in the theater.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You kept your hand in?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. But I wish I'd stayed longer in New York.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was the year? When did you come to Hollywood?

VINCENT PRICE: 1938.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And was there any particular figure. . . . Well, I guess somebody at Fox presumably talked you into this, into making the big move?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, and I wanted to try it and see whether I photographed well. There were a lot of. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Screen test?

VINCENT PRICE: Screen test, oh, yes. I came out and did a screen test for Gone With the Wind. And didn't get the part unfortunately. But it was fun. I've had a very exciting career, as a matter of fact, simply because I think I've varied it more than most people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that gets you here [to date—Ed.]—pretty efficiently, I must say. We've covered a few years. You arrived in Hollywood with an interest in films—or let's say, popular culture, if we can use that term.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I think you've already distinguished a bit between people in film or in theater, let's say, in London, and out here. There was a broader cultural awareness and involvement [for] those involved with English theater than out here. Presumably then there was a difference between New York and Hollywood in that same way, that those who were involved with the theater in New York had broader cultural awareness, interaction with artists and so forth than was the case in Hollywood, although I don't want to put the words in your mouth. I guess this is by way of a question.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it's _____ true. It's true. Now during the three years that I was in Victoria in New York, I took advantage of everything in the art world that I could. I went to every show. I had a little money, very little money, on a small salary, but enough to buy an Andrew Wyeth watercolor for fifty dollars, and to be a part of the New York art scene, because the New York art world of course welcomed an actor in a successful play. And Miss Hayes was very curious about art and had not really known a lot about it because she'd been a very busy actress, so she and I really covered the New York art scene.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you actually began your collecting at that time?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, in New York. But when I came out here I missed that terribly, because I suddenly found that there were only about three people out here with any really deep interest in art. One was certainly Edward G. Robinson, who became a close friend of mine. And Billy Wilder. . . . A few other people. A violinist named Louis Kaufman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know Louie. I know the Kaufmans.

VINCENT PRICE: Do you?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, wonderful fellow.

VINCENT PRICE: Very nice people. And Charles Laughton. But it was a different kettle of fish to live in California than living in New York, and very legitimately so. San Francisco was being cultured, while we were being looked down upon.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Can you describe the circle—let's call it a circle—here in Hollywood, of those involved with what's called "the industry," but also having a real interest in the visual arts—in collecting, perhaps even in more contemporary things, and the creation of art as well as gathering old masters or whatever may be of interest. When you look back now, do you think of it as a sort of a subgroup, a group of these people with interest in the visual arts but working here in the industry? And what was the nature of the interaction, if any? What was the situation for you with them?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it was a time, in 1936, '7, '8, '9, you know, so forth, when a great many of the most distinguished artists in the world—in music and arts and letters—were living in California. It was kind of a shelter. It was a place you could come and live very cheap and dress your kids very cheap, and educate them very cheap. And there was a really incredible crowd of people, with Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff and Piatagorsky [the cellist—Ed.] and Thomas Mann and, you know, really incredible people living here. The art community of California was very happy to get these people here, and there were people like Millard Sheets, a whole school of artists, some of them pretty good—Phil Dike—some of them not so good, and a school of women painters who were kind of wonderful, who are being discovered now, who painted Western scenes. But there was Lorser Feitelson and a few other people who were modernists. [Stanton—Ed.] Macdonald Wright. But it was a scattered group of people. I was on one of the art juries at the Los Angeles County Museum that was really hysterical. We came in for really terrible criticism because we tried to look at art very seriously, and not just accept the painters who people liked.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh. You mean there was an interest in quality, _____.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. It was Perry Rathbone, who was the director of the St. Louis Museum and Boston. And Perry

was a very dear friend of mine. We were on a couple of juries out here that were hysterically funny. We came in for criticism of being leftist when we gave a prize to a picture called The Little Red Schoolhouse. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were you on that jury?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because that's a famous story.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, I know, and we kicked out a nude painter, who really sort of painted lascivious nudes, and he picketed on the steps of the museum with some nude models, which. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I never heard of that. Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Tell me about it.

VINCENT PRICE: Jazzed it up a bit, but he just said, "You know, you can't kick me out. I'm a legitimate California painter."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you kick them out on the basis of the subject matter. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . or simply just they weren't good?

VINCENT PRICE: No, they just were no good. They were calendar art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So if they had been splendid. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, nude painters, it would have been something else again. But they were. . . . It was a funny group of painters here. But the people who came later on were not here yet. It was exciting though, because you came from New York and London and Vienna and all the places that I'd been with a sort of idea of what was going on in the world of art, and it wasn't going on here.

Tape 2, side B

PAUL KARLSTROM: Continuing an interview with Mr. Vincent Price on August 13, and this is session two, tape one, side B. Vincent, we were beginning to talk about what you found in the art world here when you arrived on contract to Twentieth Century Fox, and I think '39 was the year you gave. And you were describing, I guess, an art world—visual arts world, cultural community—that was just beginning to be formed; I think you used the term "scattered" to describe it. And I believe you even suggested that it was somewhat deprecated from the east.

VINCENT PRICE: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At least it was a familiar pattern and still hasn't entirely changed. And you'd mentioned a few others of like interests in the community. I'm very interested in what you have to say about this, and would like you to continue to paint a picture, if you will, of the situation and how it changed, who were the important. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I came to realize something the longer I lived out here, was that while having, as I say, lived in Vienna, London, and New York, when I came here I found a sort of [desert of people with culture].

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you really would use that term?

VINCENT PRICE: It was in a way, but as I look back on it, there were hundreds of little groups of people fighting desperately to become known and to become a community of artists. There was a group called The Women Painters of the West.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know that I've heard of them.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, they were wonderful. They were all over, and they painted the West, let me tell you, every inch of it. Every eucalyptus tree, every wild flower _____. They were not bad. And one time, as a sort of smart-ass actor being interviewed for a fan magazine, I said that it was a shame that The Women Painters of the West were all women, because the men were still the best artists.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh-oh.

VINCENT PRICE: And they challenged me to a duel. And I never had a better time in life, and I came to admire these women enormously. They were women who had either gotten rid of their husbands or parked them on the side street, and who painted California. We won't belabor the subject of the dialogue. I took it very seriously, this challenge. And it was true: There have been many fewer women artists than there have been men artists, but there were wonderful reasons given for it by these old ladies and young ladies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So was this duel, or this challenge, kind of a debate?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, a debate in a packed theater.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow!

VINCENT PRICE: With me and these ladies. It was great fun. But I became known sort of as a champion of the arts. And this was when I began to have a much greater opinion of the West Coast and of the people who were desperately trying to give the West Coast a cultural identity. San Francisco, as you know, was a great cultural center as far as opera was concerned and many other areas of culture, but San Francisco has never really been able to afford a great gallery. I don't mean a public gallery; I mean a sales gallery.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure.

VINCENT PRICE: It has always been very poor, mainly because the people in California, both in Los Angeles and San Francisco, want to get away to buy pictures, so we never could afford great galleries. We still don't have one here. And San Francisco didn't have them for a long time. But there were people who were really champing at the bit for somebody to come along who would dedicate a lot of time. And for a short while I was that fellow. Walter Arensberg, the great collector, called me up and said that he wanted to leave his collection, which was one of the great modern art collections of the world to Los Angeles. Would I help him start a museum? Well, I dedicated my life to that, to the Modern Institute of Art in Beverly Hills. I'm going to stop talking for just a minute.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure.
[Interruption in taping]

VINCENT PRICE: Walter Arensberg asked me over to his house, and I must say I was absolutely bowled over. There were something like eleven Brancusis, you know, with their mounts and everything, which took up a lot of space. The famous Nude Descending the Staircase, incredible things. Walter Arensberg told me how he'd become a collector. He went from Boston and from Pittsburgh, where he was from, to see the Armory Show in New York, telegraphed his wife and said, "I won't be home until the show closes." And bought most of his pictures at the Armory Show. And it was really a nucleus of modern art, incomparable. It's now in the Philadelphia Museum and can be seen. . . . He backed Duchamp and bought wonderful things. I mean, it was an extraordinary experience, and it would have, if we had been able to succeed in making a gallery, of financing a gallery, and getting that collection, it would have made the West Coast a center for modern art study, it really would have. And so I felt that it was worth really giving up a lot of my time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this? Do you remember about the time or the year that Arensberg. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Well, let's see, 1941. Forty, '41.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So about the time of the beginning of the war?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. And I got together a group of people: Edward G. Robinson, Fanny Brice, Sam and Mildred Jaffee—Sam was an agent—Edward G. Robinson, and a couple of other people. Let me think. Mrs. Walter Maitland, who was a wonderful woman. And we were all determined to try and get the collection to stay on the West Coast.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were the Weismans around yet?

VINCENT PRICE: No, they weren't. This was before the Weismans. And we started this little gallery—on Rodeo Drive, in a loft building. We paid the rent ourselves. We all put about two thousand dollars apiece, and our time. And we started it, and we had a wonderful two years, but our problem was that we didn't know how to run a museum. We knew how to run it artistically. We had a very fine fellow named Kenneth Ross as the director, who was later fired through some misunderstanding that Walter Maitland wanted a guy named Carl With as the director.

PAUL KARLSTROM: From UCLA?

VINCENT PRICE: From UCLA, yeah, before he went to UCLA. And so we changed and Ken Ross became the city art director down at Barnsdall Park. But it was a terribly exciting two years. We had thousands of people come to

this funny gallery. We had shows that were wonderful, because we had Wright Ludington from Santa Barbara, with this great collection there, who would lend us anything. We had Mrs. Maitland's collection. We had Walter Arensberg's collection. We had my very modest collection, and [there were a lot of people like me]. [Interruption in taping]

VINCENT PRICE: There was a time towards the end of the life of the Modern Institute when we decided to do a Paul Klee show, because there'd never been one seen out here before. And we were very limited for money and very limited for help. Everything was volunteer. And we collected within a radius of a hundred miles almost two hundred Paul Klees.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was Galka Scheyer. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Galka Scheyer had already given them to Pasadena, but of course we had access to her material. Mrs. Maitland had superb Paul Klees. Walter Arensberg had great Paul Klees. Clifford Odets had forty Paul Klees.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Forty!

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. I was told that, and it was just incredible because the. . . . You know, he [Klee] was very cheap at that point, and people could afford to buy him, and he was sort of chic. It was extraordinary what was here, what was around this neck of the woods.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did Clifford Odets get forty Paul Klees?

VINCENT PRICE: I have no idea.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you have any idea what his source was?

VINCENT PRICE: No. I think he met different people. There was a woman named Estella Katzenellenbogen, who was one of the great collectors of Germany, and she brought Paul Klees here because she was a friend of the people in the Bauhaus. There was lots of activity going on here but you had to. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So there really was a market, despite what we had been told?

VINCENT PRICE: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And people were actually. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: But they mostly all bought in New York, you see, and there wasn't a dealer. There was Frank Perls. Mrs. Katzenellenbogen had a gallery for a little while. But there just wasn't enough people who didn't want to go to New York or London or Paris to buy art. It was a strange situation. But the thing that impressed me was the fact that there was this enormous art vitality here, but it had no sort of center. And so we. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Excuse me, but you were trying to create some of this. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I was sort of being a catalyst for it. And we did it. But we failed. And what came out of us was the Art Council at UCLA, with Fred Wight directing it, and he brought us all in, and we all just poured everything into the. . . . Because the county museum [Los Angeles County Museum] is a strange thing. The county museum was really one of the dullest places I've ever been in my life. It had a small collection of pictures. It was downtown. It was run by people who didn't have any knowledge of how to get the public there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This wasn't the time that Jimmy Burns was there?

VINCENT PRICE: Jimmy Burns was the end of it. But there had been a lot of them. [James Henry—Ed.] Breasted and Valentiner and [Jean—Ed.] Delacour and a whole. . . . Really, they just, they couldn't get 'em downtown to see the thing. And it was funny, but it was true. The county museum sort of didn't serve anybody.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that [it] in no way ever was a focal point for those with art interest—collectors and others?

VINCENT PRICE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They didn't see that as a viable. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Not at that time, not at that time. It later became that. And I don't really know who deserves that credit.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe Rick Brown?

VINCENT PRICE: Rick Brown certainly did. I was on the board of the art museum for about two years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that before it moved to Hancock Park?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, just as it was about to move to Hancock.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's an interesting time.

VINCENT PRICE: It's an interesting time, but it again was a terribly frustrating time if you were interested in fine art, because the determination of the board was to get a big building, and one time I made a suggestion that they spend half of the money on the collection and the other half on the building. [laughs] It was frowned on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: _____ a heretical. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: It was heretical, is right. Because there was nothing to put in the museum once we got it. But I had to resign from the board because the board was made up of businessmen who could obviously take a meeting day off, but I couldn't do it because I was in movies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

VINCENT PRICE: So I became one of the first presidents of the Art Council at UCLA.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Could we back up just a minute?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I apologize. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: This is all so disjointed, I know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, no, this is all right, this is fine. The only problem is it raises all these interesting questions in my mind. But, getting back to the Modern Institute of Art, you mentioned this special series of exhibitions, and I would like to ask you a little about the exhibition programming there and just how it came about. But you mentioned this Paul Klee exhibition, and that you within a certain radius here found an incredible number of Paul Klees held locally in collections. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and I gather that was the last exhibition and you were starting to tell about that show and its significance. Was there something about it. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No, it was one of the last shows. It was just an example of what was here, really, that we could have continued a little bit if we'd had any support from the community. But the community was highly suspicious that the Modern Institute of Art just belonged to Fanny Brice and myself and Eddie Robinson. It was not that at all. It was really an eleemosynary condition that we all gave our time and effort. But nobody believed this. They thought we wanted a memorial, you know, and we didn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course, what's wrong with that? [chuckles]

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, Joseph Hirshhorn has his museum, but anyway. . . .
[Interruption in taping]

VINCENT PRICE: Our board on the Modern Institute of Art were just the people that I had mentioned—Eddie and myself and Fanny Brice—and only through Ken Ross did we have any connection with the [professional] art world, and that's why we hired him as the director. We knew people. We had contacts of friends, like Wright Ludington, that we could borrow from, and things like this. So the shows were really not planned. They just grew, like Topsy. You know, we'd say, "Let's get a show of. . . . Modern Artists in Transition, I think was the name of the first show. Trying to show to a community that had not seen a lot, because Los Angeles had been bypassed by the great traveling shows.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because there was no proper venue?

VINCENT PRICE: There was no proper venue, or no interest in trying to make them come here. The thing was that we were trying to bring eye-opener shows, and it was not easy to do, and that was one of the reasons that we failed, because we didn't have the money to really hire somebody to do it, and to hire an exhibition

committee, which we should have had. Because all of us did other things. Edward G., Eddie Robinson was a great star. Fanny Brice was a great star. Mrs. Maitland and Walter Arensberg did not want to do anything publicly, because they were very private people. It sort of bore down on me, an awful lot of it. I found that I was sort of running the place and trying to have a career at the same time, and it just finally failed. But it did have an enormous impact on the community, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In what way?

VINCENT PRICE: It brought people in. And suddenly there were hundreds of student members. There were many more student members than there were people who had money. And I remember one time when we were closing down, making out seven hundred and fifty checks for a dollar apiece to refund to students. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: You actually refunded. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I refunded to students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: My god, how responsible. [laughs]

VINCENT PRICE: Well, that's the kind of idealized place it was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In terms of a policy, if you had to describe the goals, the mission, of the institute, how would you do so? Was there a mission statement? You know, were there records generated that would include a kind of consensus perhaps on the part of those of you who were involved of what you really wanted to achieve, what did you want this to lead to?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was it more of an emphasis on art in general, art aesthetics and beauty and so forth, or was there more of an interest in modernism, in more advanced or in local art?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were you interested in showing local artists?

VINCENT PRICE: [nods]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who were they _____?

VINCENT PRICE: The county museum at that time did show local art, did have a yearly art show of local art—some of it fairly good, some of it kind of mediocre, and some of it absolutely dreadful. But it did represent the community. I think it was a hundred-mile radius, again, which includes Pomona and the big compound of colleges over there. But our ambition, I think—and nobody's ever asked me this question before—was to show modern art. The county museum was ultraconservative. It was run by people of the old families of Los Angeles, who really didn't give a damn about modern art. And modern art was only being seen in New York and a few other places—Chicago, and a few places like that. We wanted to bring it here, to Los Angeles. San Francisco has always been ahead of us in museum. . . . They had three museums, and the Modern Museum just coming along. And the DeYoung and the Legion. But we didn't have anything, and we knew we were going to be the great city. So it was really an idealistic lot of nonsense that brought us all together to do it, but it was love, and it. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sounds great.

VINCENT PRICE: There was a passion to it that people still talk about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was your notion of. . . . I guess I have to ask you this directly, but perhaps you can also—perhaps—generalize with regards to the others involved with the institute. What was your idea of modernism? Who were some of the artists that would come to mind? You were obviously interested in educating, introducing this community to modernism, modern art, but what did that mean to you? Obviously Arensberg, it's pretty easy to figure that out, because we know that whole story and the collection.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the rest of you?
[Interruption in taping]

VINCENT PRICE: As I said before, it was a funny community that had an enormous art vitality sort of just underneath the skin of it, but it was a new city. You know, when I came here there were seven hundred and fifty thousand people in Los Angeles and the county. It was a small, hick town. It's now a big hick town, but it was a

small hick town. And there just wasn't the interest, as there was in San Francisco, because San Francisco was a more tightly knit community, for interest in the arts, and all of us—like Edward G. Robinson and the Maitlands, and those people, and Walter Arensberg—had lived in great metropolises, great artistic centers, and they just wanted something that would satisfy their desire to see what was going on in the art world. So we started the Modern Institute of Art, with the hope that it would generate interest in seeing better things through exhibitions. What we didn't realize, of course, was that exhibitions cost money: cost insurance, cost shipping, and everything else. That was eventually solved in that, in the Paul Klee one where we collected within a hundred miles and could drive and pick up the pieces.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you do that?

VINCENT PRICE: Sure, we drove out. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you went out there with your car. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Sure, picked them up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and somebody else went. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not Edward G. Robinson, I suppose.

VINCENT PRICE: No, Eddie didn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

VINCENT PRICE: But I did. And I had a Ford truck at the time, which I packed stuff into. No, it was a labor of love—in a community that needed love, very much. There were exciting things going on in Pomona, there were exciting things going on in Long Beach, there were institutions of learning that were trying to do much the same thing we were trying to do: Scripps College, Pomona College. There were painters here, like Rico Lebrun and Howard Warshaw and Billy Brice, who were bursting to try and identify themselves with the modern movement. Eugene Berman lived here. Man Ray lived here. These were all people who were sort of wandering around with no focus. And what we wanted to bring to the Modern Institute of Art was a focus. We went to Louis B. Mayer, we went to everybody, to try to get them to back this focus, and they had no interest in it whatsoever.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No interest at all?

VINCENT PRICE: None at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So outside of the group that you've described. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: And a few other people, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . those working in Hollywood, you would describe Hollywood as fairly indifferent to culture of this type?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, _____. They were indifferent to a museum about their own industry! You know, I've been on fifteen committees in this town, I think—it's a little exaggerated—trying to get a museum of the motion picture started. One of the real American art forms, and Mr. [Cecil B.] DeMille and all these people—Mr. [Fred] Wight, Frank Freeman, and, you know, [Adolph] Zuckor and these, have had no interest whatsoever of preserving a museum of their profession.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is something, by the way, that I hope we'll be able to talk about a little later on, but I'll just mention this to sort of prime the idea. I just picked up the records of the Lytton Center.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You certainly knew Josine Kline [Ianco Starrels], I'm sure.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Obviously we don't want to get into it now, because we want to finish off our Modern Institute, but Lytton Center was, in that collection. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I knew [him] very well.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . at one time was the beginning to pull together this sort of Hollywood industry collection

more than anything else. So that's something that perhaps will be a fruitful area of discussion. But what's interesting here, and what you're saying I think is very important, is that there was an effort made on your part to go directly to the potential Medici in this community, those who are working in an industry that purports to be somehow connected with art and culture, at least in a general way.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And there was, I gather, an almost total indifference to the idea of institutions that would serve to preserve the artifacts of these other aspects of culture, presumably therefore enriching the community in which these movie people were working. Is that fair?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, absolutely. And there were places, you know, like the Southwestern Museum with the American Indian. Now there's a great tradition of American Indian art in the west, but nobody backed the Southwest Museum. It again was a little isolated thing that happened here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: With Carl Dentzel.

VINCENT PRICE: With Carl Dentzel, um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who I'm sure you knew.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, I knew him very well. He was a tough cookie. But it is still floundering around, you know. It's an extraordinary community, California, and very hard to explain. St. Louis, my hometown, always had a center in the St. Louis Art Museum, which was built in 1904 for the World's Fair. The arts centered there and are still centered there. California had nothing. Los Angeles had nothing like that, so we tried to bring this, as I say, sort of magnet, but it didn't work.

Tape 3, side A

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is the continuing interview with Vincent Price, second session, on August 13, 1992. This is tape two, side A, and once again the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. Well, Vincent, we were well into the Modern Institute of Art and I guess our real topic here is that organization or institution as exemplary of an effort that you and others in this community were making to try and create a focal point for interest in the arts and culture. As you said, there were plenty people around who wanted something like this, felt that the need for it. And you've said several times now that the project failed, and I would suspect that there was still an energy created that then took other forms, which you I know will mention. But what I was trying to learn from you was the notion of modernism that was held by those who were involved with the institute. What did you see as modern art at that point?

VINCENT PRICE: It's a funny, funny place, California, and the people don't really realize how young it is—young and still sort of searching for an identity of its own. One of the things that I mentioned a little while ago was about the summer theater down in LaJolla. Gregory Peck and Dorothy McGuire and a whole bunch of people started a summer theater down there, because there was no theater in Los Angeles. There was the Pasadena Playhouse, but there was no theater in Los Angeles. I once did The Cocktail Party here, and I'd done it in San Francisco where it was an enormous success. It came here, people didn't know what it was about. One of the actresses in it said that opening night was like playing to an empty swimming pool. You know, it was unbelievable that in this community which was the home of the art of the motion picture industry—and really motion pictures are one of the great American art forms—it had no interest in theater at all. Because theater was separated in their minds from motion pictures. It's the same thing that art was separated from modern art, if you follow what I mean. Modern art was something entirely different than art. Art meant pictures of landscapes and pine trees and the coast up at Carmel. Modern art meant something that nobody understood at all. So we tried in our little way to introduce some modern art. We were introducing fabulous things, because we had the Arensberg collection, Maitland, and so forth and so on. But so short time ago that it seems preposterous that this was true, but it was true, and there was a little group of people who tried to make it untrue. We did in a funny way, but we all slipped on the banana peel of lack of interest, and we came up on our backside, except that we did sort of. . . . As a spinoff there was the Art Council at UCLA, which is enormous, has floundered a bit, [but] has done its job for the students. I tried to do it in an exhibition way, but it's very hard to do in a college that is a monster, growing and growing and growing. But California was a special place. It seems amazing that I'm still alive to talk about it. [chuckles] But it wasn't that long ago. But it's all so abstract, isn't it, what I'm talking about; it's an abstract idea of trying to understand what's going on in the rest of the world, and other communities in America have had it, too. But we lived in a community which we knew was going to be one of the great centers of the world, and we tried to sort of catch it up to things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, and then it's also different. . . . I think you've suggested in your comments and observations that this was the home of the film industry, entertainment industry, and some of the people employed within presumably had interest in art and culture, unless these things—movies and the rest of it—are

entirely separate, so one would think that there would be something special in this environment that would at least provide a situation for interaction between culture, even in the more traditional sense. . . . After all, there were musicians that were coming here. You mentioned the Kaufmans, certain artists actually came here a little bit involvement with. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Movies. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . writing, yeah. So all of these people are presumably cultivated people, with a background, with an interest in this sort of thing, creating something. One would think that this would be a fertile area for thriving art forms. It's sort of a nagging question, and one that I don't think is easily answered—at least I don't have a clear picture—of how did, what form did this take? And you've been answering some of it. But this community. . . . I'm sorry for this long question. This community is distinguished by Hollywood and the entertainment industry. Was there simply no point of intersection between Hollywood, the film people involved, and these other arts that you [and a few friends] were interested in?

VINCENT PRICE: There really were very few collections. There weren't collectors. Now there are millions, you know. Everybody and his kid brother has all the same pictures. They all have four Ellsworth Kellys, and three of the next chic painter. But they didn't have them then. There were very few collectors. It was extraordinary. They just didn't know how to see. And one of the reasons, again, abstractly, that we [the Modern Institute of Art] wanted to do was to be this kind of focus, where they could look through us and see some of the things that were going on in the rest of the world.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So the connection was not made, the leap was not made from popular culture in the film to. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No. Well, let me explain it. There were certain people. . . . Fortunately, I knew and worked with a great many of the great motion picture stars. Ronald Coleman, Charles Boyer. . . . Charles Boyer was a Frenchman of great cultural background, a great actor from the theater. Came here, became the great romantic leading man. They wouldn't allow him to lose his accent because it was what made Boyer. I went out on tour with him at the end of his life, and it was very exciting. He's one of the great actors. He had a small collection of paintings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't know that.

VINCENT PRICE: There were a few other people who had. . . . Billy Wilder who was a really avaricious collector, you know. He's wonderful; he loves everything. He adores everything, and he's marvelous. But nobody ever asked Billy Wilder to sort of show his things or to. . . . I don't know whether we even tried to get him on our board at the Modern Institute of Art. But there were other people. I remember Kirk Douglas coming to my house and seeing a big painting by Billy Brice—and Richard Diebenkorn, who. . . . There was a huge painting that I bought from his first show down here. And people really hated it. We opened our house one time to a charity. Some woman came up to my wife and said, "Now look at that great big abstract picture. It's hideous. You know, what a big mess of colors. Has it got a title?" And my wife said, "Yes, it's called We Like It."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs]

VINCENT PRICE: And there were funny things [that] went on that are sort of pat stories about modern art. But now it's changed entirely. I mean, there are hundreds of people with hundreds of collections. But even then. . . . Oh, who am I trying to think of who bought the Pasadena museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Norton Simon.

VINCENT PRICE: Norton Simon was just beginning to collect, and was using people for advisors of what to buy. And it's a great collection now, but made out of money, and a tremendous knowledge, but it didn't happen. It wasn't there before. Now it's there. That time when I'm talking about, when the Modern Institute happened, and all of that, was a time of great sort of wonder. It's just too abstract to talk about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: All right. Well, I get the picture, from what you've been describing, of a city or a community with potential, which some of you perceived, and of which some of you were then determined to try to abet the realization.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. You've hit it right on the nose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so it was something where you perhaps had to try one thing, and then if that didn't catch

on, then you turned the energy elsewhere.

VINCENT PRICE: Right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But from what you've said and what I know, the energy continued, and there was frustration and disappointment. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: After all, Arensberg finally—unfortunately for Los Angeles community—left his collection elsewhere. So that could be viewed as a rather colossal failure. And as a matter of fact, I would like you to comment on that event. But then the other thing, just as a more positive evolution from what you've been discussing, including the institute, was the UCLA Art Council and efforts like that to continue.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We're talking about Arensberg. Were you privy to this whole business of his efforts to try to find a home for the collection?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. Well, this was what he called me about. He said, "If you can start a museum, and it's a success, and it lives up to what I want. . . ."

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the collection then would have. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: It would have come here. He then tried UCLA. After we failed him, he tried UCLA. Well, UCLA couldn't raise the money to. . . . You know, he had this thing about Bacon having written Shakespeare. Well, you had to house this library and create, have the researchers and everything. I mean, just nobody could do it. Nobody could do it in six months, which we were given to do it. He then tried the Chicago Art Institute and turned them down because they didn't paint the gallery the right color, or some ridiculous thing. He was a pain in the ass, to tell you the truth.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is what I have heard, yes.

VINCENT PRICE: Real pain in the ass. And he used all of us. He used everybody in the country, and finally there was a museum that had enough room to house it. But it would have done miracles to have it here. It would have done miracles.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I had a gallery, you know, called [the, The] Little Gallery in Beverly Hills, before we started the Modern Institute of Art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We didn't get into that very much. Could you tell me something about that?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it was just something to do. I found that, and still find—or did find, until I retired—that motion pictures and acting wasn't enough to do. If you're in a hit play, you've got all your days to fill up. If you're in a movie, you've got your nights to fill up. There was no theater here. You know, there was nothing here. So George Macready and myself founded this Little Gallery in Beverly Hills.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who is George Macready, now?

VINCENT PRICE: George Macready was an actor who was with me in Victoria Regina.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

VINCENT PRICE: He played my brother. And he came out here about the same time I did. And we were under contract with studios, and we weren't being used, so we took what little stuff we had and started this gallery, and it was great fun. Everybody came—Tallulah Bankhead and the works. But it became well enough known that I again was used by people, by Walter Arensberg particularly. It came out of that gallery that he knew of my interest in art. And he thought he'd try me first.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did you do at the Little Gallery?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, we had shows. We got galleries in New York to send us stuff. We had Morris Graves, which was a very, very good show. We showed Howard Warshaw. His first show was there. I had a show of Disney illustrators, because Disney was killing them, using them like mad and underpaying them, and they wanted some recognition, so I had a show of Disney things. I had a Eugene Berman show. John Decker. It was fun. It

again was a failure, but it was something that filled a need. And during the war there was only one gallery in town, called the Hatfield Gallery, down at the Ambassador Hotel. And Hatfield showed Millard Sheets and all of them—Phil Dike and all the contemporary California painters—but he also showed some Henry Moores and things like that. And then there was Stendahl. Stendahl had extraordinary things. He had one of the first great African shows out here. He had the Guernica. Not the Guernica, but the studies for the Guernica. Stendahl has never been given enough credit for what he did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, now is a chance to do it a bit of that.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. I was suddenly thinking when I was here and began to get involved in the arts of the city, it came as a surprise to me, because being from St. Louis we'd always had the St. Louis Art Museum and the people who backed the arts, the_____ Loves, the this, the thats, the [_____—Ed.] Davises, and so forth and so on, the_____. And it was something that was taken for granted, that a great city had a great art museum and a center for culture. This didn't happen in Los Angeles, largely because the county museum sort of failed to provide this. I don't know enough about the history of the county museum, except that I know that it was backed by the citizens of Los Angeles. The respectable citizens of Los Angeles, not the motion picture citizens.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

VINCENT PRICE: And they were a dull lot who didn't serve the community right. So that's one of the reasons we wanted to start the Modern Institute of Art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you see these as very different groups, [that] was an interesting observation you made, the leading citizens, the proper. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . citizens of Los Angeles, the society presumably. And then a very different group, which was the motion picture industry.

VINCENT PRICE: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, see, this is getting at something. Because it's the motion picture industry, those of you involved, and some of your cohorts who were involved with progressive issues in the east—Arensberg and so forth—that really were the ones that saw the need for a modern art institute, for a museum, for a focal point.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So in a sense, without the Hollywood community, despite the fact that it seemed, most of it, indifferent to these issues, without that Hollywood community, from what you've said, there would have been really none of these efforts here in Los Angeles.

VINCENT PRICE: No. [means yes, there would have been no effort.—Ed.] This is, it's a funny community. I keep saying that. It's just something that no other community I know. . . . I read a book one time, which is a wonderful book, called Merchants and Masterpieces, about the founding of the Metropolitan in New York, which is really hysterical, because I sort of thought it bloomed, you know, out the head of Zeus—or whoever's head it came out of. But it was a riot. You know, people blackmailing people, and really to bring this museum into focus and into existence was this wild thing of these rich men in New York using each other. We didn't have that here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not the same motivation.

VINCENT PRICE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about this? I throw it out as a thought, as an observation. I've always suspected that people came to Southern California, those who had paid attention to art in their own homes, wherever they may be—let's say New Yorkers—would come out here to work, to make a living. And then they do things that they would find enjoyable and attractive living here. But basically most of them didn't make the commitment to this community, or as a city, and not to the extent. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Not even politically, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that's right, and so in many respects they still thought of themselves as easterners, New Yorkers, from Philadelphia, Chicago.

VINCENT PRICE: That's right. Look at the architecture. It's from everywhere else.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about that? I mean, do you agree with that observation?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, absolutely. I mean, you drive down the streets of—not Beverly Hills, because that was sort of a bungalow community originally—down the streets of older Los Angeles, down a bit, and you see houses that are right from Milwaukee, or from St. Louis, or from Pittsburgh, and there's no sort of California architecture except Spanish. Its was a place where people wanted to bring it with them from other places in the country.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And apparently, until recently, if now at all, not feeling a need to make that kind of a commitment, to make a statement, to identify with this location, which then of course involves making a choice.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You're no longer really a New Yorker if you then leave your collection here, or if you involve yourself in the cultural, true cultural life of the community.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it seems to me from what you've been saying that that was the case, that this was maybe the main obstacle to creating the kind of art environment. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. It was a very impermanent place. Look what's happening now. We're in the middle of a depression, 1992, and California is being abandoned. You know, it's never going to get back to a place where we can manage it, but we're forty-five days overdue on paying the help of Los Angeles. [referring to state budget crisis?] [chuckling] It's extraordinary. It's extraordinary. Orange County couldn't exist anywhere else in the world, except Los Angeles. I've sort of grown out of it a bit. It's a long time ago, but not that long ago, as I said earlier. I found that one of the things when we started the Modern Institute of Art, was that I [was] on the board, naturally, having started the bloody thing, but there was nothing for our members to do, so we would make little shows, and have them in our houses and borrow things from different places.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of a movable feast.

VINCENT PRICE: Sort of a movable feast. We did everything to try and get people to join us. And they did. But they were unfortunately the people who didn't have the money to back it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it wasn't as if it had no support?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, no, it had wild support.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so there were probably. . . . How many members do you suppose there were?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, I think we ended up with seven hundred and fifty members. But six hundred and fifty of them were paying a dollar a year. [laughing]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Going back to the Little Gallery again, though I presume there's only so much to actually to say about it, how long did it last?

VINCENT PRICE: About two years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Also two years.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, but it was in the middle of Beverly Hills, and the rent was sixty-five dollars a month. Now sixty-five dollars a month won't hire a postage stamp in Beverly Hills. When they raised my rent to a hundred dollars a month, it put me out of business. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I see. But I gather there was a response.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. We had wild, wonderful openings. It was only one room. But everybody came: Tallulah Bankhead, and Garbo, and everybody came, because it was on Sunday. We had a big gin fest, and [laughing] we'd have black artisans, Mexican artists, and, as I say, the Disney people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were multicultural way back then.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, yeah. And then, do you know, I began being interested in East Los Angeles, which is a fascinating community. And I started forty-five years ago the Vincent Price Gallery at East Los Angeles Junior College, which is now really sort of becoming known, which is wonderful, but I was so hurt by the lack of interest in the Modern Institute of Art, and felt that there was nothing I wanted to do in this part of town, so I started this collection over there. Which is an interesting thing that I'd like to do in full scale another time. Because it's now grown to be enormous, and suddenly it's been made a foundation, and it's kind of an interesting story, because East Los Angeles is one of the exciting communities of our city.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I absolutely would like to talk about that. Well, in the few more minutes that I think we might take this morning, maybe we could polish off your effort with the Little Gallery. Did you sell works?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I mean, it was a commercial. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. We did quite well, as a matter of fact.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah?

VINCENT PRICE: You didn't have to sell a lot of stuff to make sixty-five dollars a month rent. And since George and I were taking no salary, and we had a society girl as the sort of secretary, we did all right. And it was fun. It was jolly and it was. . . . We had some wonderful. . . . We had a black artist named Thelma Johnson Streat. She was wonderful. And we had John Decker, who was the fellow who painted W.C. Fields as Queen Victoria [_____—Ed.]. Barbara Hutton used to come in and Garbo and, as I say. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did they buy anything?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, sure. Yeah, they bought. Local things and some people from New York. We had Morris Graves, as I said.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were one of, by your recollection, perhaps only three or four commercial galleries operating at that time?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, at that time. It was during the war. And Hatfield kept going, and did very well, as a matter of fact. Hatfield was a good gallery. Stendahl had a gallery, but he was really sort of concentrating on Mexican, on pre-Columbian art. And really the great collection of Arensberg came through Stendahl.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's right.

VINCENT PRICE: I always say that the next war is going to be between Stendahl and the country of Mexico. I'll never know how he got it out, but it was incredible.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it wouldn't happen now.

VINCENT PRICE: It sure wouldn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what some people don't realize is that he maybe made his money with the pre-Columbian and really that. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: And the candy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the candy which you mentioned, which was a charming story. But that also he was showing local artists and contemporary artists.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: American art.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, he showed some very exciting people. And he also showed, as I told you, the Guernica thing. There was Frank Perls, who came along a little later, became kind of a grandee. But my thing finally ended up being. . . . I was the artistic advisor to Sears Roebuck and Company.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right. That's another thing that we need to talk about.

VINCENT PRICE: That came out of all these other things, because here was this fool, Vincent Price, who was sticking his neck out to bring art to the people, and I still really believe that—that there has to be somebody who is the middle man, and says, "Here it is. Take a look at it." The Sears thing would be fun to talk about and East Los Angeles, because that's what I. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe then we could talk about them together. When did the Little Gallery close? You said it was in the war years, about two years.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were they at the beginning of the. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: It was the beginning of the war.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So probably closed in. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I opened it in Angel Street the day before Pearl Harbor, and that ran five years. Let's see, was '41 Pearl Harbor?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

VINCENT PRICE: About '42 to '44 was that whole thing of the Modern Institute of Art and the gallery.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so the Little Gallery sort of overlapped a bit with the efforts toward the institute.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, yes. It was because I was doing the Little Gallery that we started up on the Modern Institute of Art.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

Tape 3, side B is blank
AUGUST 14, 1992
Tape 4, side A

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with Vincent Price. This is our third session, August 14, 1992. This is tape one, side A, and the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom.
Well, Vincent, we've been creating for these last few sessions a portrait of the cultural and art world of Southern California, pretty much in the forties and into the fifties I think. And this is a view of those times through the eyes of Vincent Price. We talked about your involvement with several organizations that by your description failed, but nonetheless I think the fact that they have been at all indicative of interests in establishing something here in this area. And I was particularly interested in hearing about the Little Gallery, which I realize was a small operation. It lasted two years, I believe you said. And you had described it already, but I want to make sure that I understand really what it was like. What kind of impact did you feel it may have had. What was the operation like, in a very practical and descriptive way. This was at the storefront operation in Beverly Hills, is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Um hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And do you remember the address and what street it was on?

VINCENT PRICE: It was on Little Santa Monica.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay.

VINCENT PRICE: And it was next to a coffee shop called [DelHaven's, DelHaven's], and next to a bookstore called Martindale's. So it was between taste and literature. And it was a good spot, because it had a lot of foot traffic, which isn't always true in California.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right. And you described a bit about the various artists that you showed, and you did say, if I remember correctly, that you made some sales.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At least, I gather, enough to pay the rent, ____.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, we did all right. It was, again, a time when things were labors of love much more than trying to make a success financially. Because you just couldn't do it; there wasn't that kind of market out here. But I remember Tallulah Bankhead buying a picture by John Decker of John Barrymore, and that kind of thing is kind of exciting, even in a culture like this one here, which is very sort of transient.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You said that one of the reasons you could do this was that you would be between assignments, between pictures, and so forth.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did that mean that you actually held forth yourself?

VINCENT PRICE: I waited on the table.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles]

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, I was a very good salesman. Actually, one of the problems of galleries on the West Coast has always been the personality. If the personality runs the gallery that's why people come. If the personality can't take care of the gallery, the people stop coming. And where they might leave their groceries and things in the gallery, they wouldn't do it, or buy the pictures, unless the personality was there. So George Macready and I, we kind of split the personality requirements.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And did the same thing apply then to the other galleries, the only other ones—or at least the prominent ones being, as you've mentioned Stendahl and Hatfield.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. Stendahl was a big family, so they had a lot going for it, and Hatfield was Mr. and Mrs. Hatfield, and they were always there. At least they were always there when I went there. They had assistants and things, but it was really very definitely a personality kind of thing—and particularly, I think, with two actors running a gallery in the middle of Beverly Hills.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Perfect.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What could be better? How would you describe the work that was offered, shown at these three galleries? Would you distinguish between what was showing at the Little Gallery and that which Stendahl showed or Hatfield?

VINCENT PRICE: Stendahl had the great collection of pre-Columbian art. And it really was incredible what he was able to bring in from Mexico. He also had primitive art, and he also had painting. I never saw that many of the painting shows because that wasn't my interest as much as the pre-Columbian that I went there for. He was downtown, and he was. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, then—excuse me—this is before. . . . So he wasn't in Hollywood at that time?

VINCENT PRICE: No, no. He was down near Bullocks Wilshire. And it was kind of fun. I remember buying an [Olmec] torso. It was about the size of a small baby. And I remember carrying it on my lap on the bus because there was gas rationing during the war. And it was kind of fun to sit there with this [Olmec] "baby" on my lap.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs]

VINCENT PRICE: A thousand years B.C. But it was all an adventure of learning. I've always thought that going to galleries was a great experience of learning. You may see things you don't like, but it's as important to see things you don't like as it is to see things you do like. And the galleries which you asked about—Hatfield, for instance. I went there one night, and they had a show of little tiny oil paintings by Renoir. They were things that he had given to the nurse of his children, a famous. . . . Oh, what was her name? She was the famous . . . Gabrielle.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

VINCENT PRICE: And he used to give her canvases with little sketches on, and she'd cut them up and sell them. [chuckles] But it was wonderful to see Gabrielle there at the. . . . She lived out here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. And she made her living off selling these little sketches of Renoir. And then they had a very fine show of [Odilon—Ed.] Redon one time, had a show of. . . . Everything was new in California. I mean, when something came. . . . The first Henry Moore show that I saw was in San Francisco. And there was one here at Hatfield, and I bought a couple of Shelter drawings from it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you feel that your gallery tended to show more local artists?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, we tried to bring in some of the people who we thought would be of interest from Seattle. Mark Tobey. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah, you mentioned Tobey, Graves. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: [_____—Ed.] [Vargas, Varda] from San Francisco. And we tried to sort of vary it and bring in people that we thought had not been seen here. Morris Graves very definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who did you think were the most interesting artists at that time? And we're talking about the early through mid-forties.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I thought Graves was certainly one. He just had a show at the Museum of Modern Art, which was wonderful, The Seeing Eye.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean in New York?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, yeah. Really a wonderful show that. . . . [Little Known Bird of the Inner Eye, little known Bird of the Inner Eye], and things like that. Tobey I thought was a very great painter. I don't think he's had his full comeuppance yet. [means just the opposite of comeuppance—Ed.] I think he's still to be assessed. He was a friend of mine; I liked him a lot. Graves was a difficult man. They were all difficult because the West Coast again was a kind of pariah, in a funny way. And if Los Angeles was isolated, then so was Seattle.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, Seattle must have been even more so.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. They were good painters up there: [Kenneth—Ed.] Callahan, Graves, Tobey, some wonderful painters.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about closer to home? Obviously you were interacting with—not just through your gallery, of course—some of the artists here, and perhaps also familiar with some in the Bay Area, and which at the time did you feel were doing the most interesting work, who were the most important?

VINCENT PRICE: I really can't. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Feitelson from _____. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, I thought Lorser was very good, and his wife was a wonderful painter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Helen Lundeberg?

VINCENT PRICE: Helen Lundeberg. Hatfield I think handled [_____—Ed.] [Dike, Pike], and our friend from Pomona. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sheets.

VINCENT PRICE: Millard Sheets. There was of course Rico Lebrun and the whole Jepson Art School group, with Howard Warshaw. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now did you know them personally? You met them?

VINCENT PRICE: Howard Warshaw lived with me. He and his wife lived in my house.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

VINCENT PRICE: [chuckles] So I knew him very well.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Tell me about that.

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I had a house that had an upper floor. So I lent it to them until they could find a place to live, and he set up his studio there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where was that?

VINCENT PRICE: On Benedict Canyon.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. So you lived there before moving to here where you are now?

VINCENT PRICE: I've lived everywhere. Everybody in California has lived everywhere. But Howard was a great, great friend of mine. I think I bought the first picture he ever sold, as a matter of fact. I had a habit of buying the first pictures anybody ever sold. I bought one of the first Wyeths.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You did?

VINCENT PRICE: Andrew Wyeth. Yes, when he was nineteen and I was twenty-two. And I bought a wonderful watercolor from a gallery in New York that had his first show.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When the Warshaws were living with you, which I gather was pretty much at the beginning of his career. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, the very beginning of his career.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And he no doubt had been studying at that time with Rico Lebrun. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No, he hadn't been studying with Rico.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He hadn't.

VINCENT PRICE: He had been studying with. . . . He was very much influenced by Eugene Berman and was very influenced by surrealism, and did some beautiful things. He was a master draftsman, extraordinary draftsman. But Howard was not influenced until later by Rico, and then Rico's influence became so enormous. . . . I've never known whether it was for good or for not good.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How do you mean?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, he was tremendous. He was a very forceful personality. And, unfortunately, his personality kind of shattered his work, which I think was marvelous. He was a great friend of mine, too, Rico. I loved him very much. But he was a strident personality. And a tremendous influence. William Brice, Billy Brice, who's one of the best teachers—and painters—out here on the coast, was very influenced by him. And other people, you know. A lot of people felt it was not a good influence because they made too many Rico Lebruns around.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was he viewed at the time as—I want to choose the word properly—less than progressive? That the direction which he represented stylistically in terms of his content, his interests. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Rico?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. . . . was not perhaps in the most progressive, modern [direction]?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, he was very much influenced by Picasso. Tremendously influenced by Picasso.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so he was seen as a true modernist, Rico was _____. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. But also his influence from Picasso was very apparent. He was also influenced by Goya and other people, but he went off in tangents. I bought a picture of his—that I gave to the Vatican, as a matter of fact—which was so like a Grünewald. He was very, you know, he drew from everybody. But he was a master draftsman, there's no question about that. And Howard was too influenced by him.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How long did Warshaw live with you?

VINCENT PRICE: Almost a year. And I bought a lot of his things, and then he also, when he did move away, he gave me a great stack, a roll, of drawings, which he wanted me to leave to one place, which I gave to East Los Angeles College. And actually it made a wonderful show. They were very early drawings, but they were quite wonderful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Howard Warshaw—whom I met shortly before his death; he was in Carpenteria then of course—struck me as quite an intellectual, as a matter of fact. Somebody who understood, at least by that time, had developed a real knowledge of art and art history.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I can't help but ask you if you—when you were together, when he was living with you, or sometime afterwards; presumably you kept in touch—if you would have discussions about art and art history, and the state of art here, and, if so, what these. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, very much. He was a very erudite fellow, but a very soft fellow, a very sweet fellow. And he knew a great deal about art history. I think I had a lot of influence on him, because I had just come from Yale and the University of London, and the Courtauld, and Vienna, and places like that. And I was able to sort of throw things his way, to open him up. He didn't have _____, because he was from a sort of middle class family who were all very artistic, you know. That word is a funny word, but it means something. And Howard was an incredible draftsman, really incredible. But they, you see, they lacked influences from out here. As I said, Howard had Eugene Berman. . . . And Eugene was really a very decorative artist—a sweet man, a wonderful man, but very decorative. One of the great designers for ballet and theater, but not a profound influence. But he had a big influence, as Dali did, on a lot of people. And then came along Rico. And it was a time when you took influences, because it was few and far between out here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is what I wanted to ask you. The West Coast—certainly Southern California—has been viewed as very much isolated, culturally deprived, and so forth, and yet these artists were coming up, many of them within this environment. Many others of course moved here, having the advantage of studying or traveling abroad and in the east. But in talking with Howard Warshaw or with other artists whom you knew, did you get a

sense that they were aware that they were professionally operating with a certain handicap?

VINCENT PRICE: By being in California? No question about it. I had the good fortune of knowing a lot of people back east. There was a time when Morton May—Buster May, from St. Louis, who was head of the May Company in St. Louis—was a great friend of Max Beckmann, and he wrote me a letter and told me that Max Beckmann would be here, would I give a little party, introduce him to some of the artists. And a lot of people sort of met in my house because I was able to do it. And Howard. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of a salon situation?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, it was in a very minor way. But Howard was living with me at that time, and his wife, and they came, and Billy Brice, and Rico. Dennis Hopper, who was a great friend of mine because he was the prop boy at the La Jolla Playhouse. [chuckles]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. And he still is a great friend of mine. I just bought a picture, a photograph of his, which is wonderful, wonderful. But, you know, there are people around whom things gather, and I was lucky that it was me. It was also destroying my career in the movies because I wasn't giving enough time to it, so I had to cut it down. A lot.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We haven't talked much about your personal life. We've been concentrating, and rightly so, on your art involvement, but I would be interested to know what your domestic situation was at the time. Were you married at that time?

VINCENT PRICE: I was married when I first came out here to Edith Barrett, who was a very famous actress in New York. We got a divorce. I married a girl named Mary Grant, who was a designer, costume designer. She did Up in Central Park, which I did with Deanna Durbin, and we were married fifteen years. And then I married Coral Brown, who was one England's great actresses. And she came over and became an American citizen, and we had a wonderful fourteen years together until she died last year.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I knew your wife had died recently.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so presumably these wives played a role in sort of the social aspect of your art involvement.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, except they. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were they interested?

VINCENT PRICE: We were never pretentious because I wasn't earning that much money. Nobody was earning that much money in those days. I mean, I had a good contract with Twentieth Century Fox, but I was getting what the contemporary actor gets for showing up to read the play, read the script.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it was still a shared interest to some degree?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, very much so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In each case, with each one?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. More with Mary than anyone. Coral was not socially that interested. She was interested in theater people more than Mary was. Mary was interested in the whole thing of folk art, Indian art. I'd always been a big collector of American Indian art, and she loved that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let's move along now to. . . . We'll have a further opportunity to talk about some of the other people, some of the artists whom you knew.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. We were talking about Millard Sheets earlier.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yeah, that's right. What about Millard?

VINCENT PRICE: Millard was kind of the Orange County artist. I always thought of him. . . . He lived over in Pomona, and he was a very clever businessman. He did work for the banks and did all those terrible designs of those Home Savings and Loans. And he was an interesting artist. I liked him a lot. But he really wasn't a progressive artist. I think he was handled by Hatfield [Gallery—Ed.].

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. There was a guy. . . . There were several people in the motion picture industry who were very good. Sort of on the side, you know, they. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would that be like Jules Engle, perhaps?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, Jules wasn't a painter. He was a critic. Emil. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Engle, I mean, not Langsner.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, Engle, yes, yes, yes. And Emil. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Koza?

VINCENT PRICE: Koza, yes. At that. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: So these were people you also knew then?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. I thought Emil Koza was a wonderful watercolorist. And Max Band. There were a whole bunch of them out here, and there were some of them who were very progressive, and some of them who were very Republican. [laughs] If you'll pardon the expression. There still is.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. What. . . . Well, conservative, of course. This was an apt political analogy, if you will, or adjective.

VINCENT PRICE: Boring is another word.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what about Millard? We were talking a little bit yesterday just before I left about his rather significant influence—or presence—here in the Southern California art world, from the thirties as a matter of fact. And how would you describe this influence, this presence, this position that Millard Sheets. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I'm not sure that I know how to answer that, but Millard was a businessman. He combined Art with a capital "A" and business, and he was very influential in that way, much more so. . . . He had no influence on any artist out here at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In terms of technique or style. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No, absolutely none.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about the California watercolorists [though]?

VINCENT PRICE: No. I mean, Millard was not one of the great ones. Phil Dike was a much better artist than Millard, I thought.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because Millard often is credited, whether it's right or wrong, as being a key [figure]. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: He's an art businessman who brought things together. I think he was one of the founders of the art community out in Pomona. And the Scripps Gallery, and things like that. But I never felt he had any influence on the artists. It would be the opposite way, if anything.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean the other artists might even react against his. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about your personal experience with Sheets, interaction? Didn't he ask you to serve on the board out at Scripps [College—Ed.]?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. I liked him a lot, and we got along very well. We had a lot of mutual friends, but there were other people, in San Marino and Pasadena and South Pasadena. . . . People like Henry Dreyfuss, who was the great industrial designer. And there were incredible people like that who Millard associated with more than he did with the artists, because I think the artists didn't have a great opinion of his work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. Certainly the artists I knew best did not like his work at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was viewed. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Very conservative.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . perhaps as irrelevant to their interests. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . is that a way to describe it?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. And not up to date. And if you look at those buildings with those sculptures out front, you can see them. They're dated. He just put the date on them himself.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, looking at it in a broader sense, Millard certainly was one of the more visible [artists], to the broader public,

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. Oh, very definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . even if it was just the Savings and Loan.

VINCENT PRICE: But not the artists.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He must have been one of the better known art figures.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes, no question about that, but that has nothing to do with influence on other artists.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about influence on taste in Southern California?

VINCENT PRICE: Terrible. [laughing] Terrible. I mean, those banks are really the pits. And the whole sort of movement that worked around that group of people, the taste of the Orange County-Pasadena group was not anywhere else but in their mouth, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [chuckles] This is an interesting issue, though, because Millard Sheets, part of his prominence and success, I think, has to do with his association with Howard Ahmanson. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . who was very wealthy, savings and loan. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Tremendous, tremendous.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . and actually then a collector, and I guess through his wife, if not directly, actually has been an important patron. You know, helping to fund the L.A. County Museum. And collected. Had a collection of _____. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Ahmanson?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How would you explain this? Why would it be that Ahmanson would be so supportive of Millard?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, Millard was socially a very nice man.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

VINCENT PRICE: Very pleasant man to be with. But this has happened all over America. There are people who run the art communities in every city in America, and some of them are duller than dishwater. Some of them are very adventurous. In Houston, the DeMenils, and people like that are really far ahead of the, [an] awful lot of the, other people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course.

VINCENT PRICE: Millard represented a conservative, very safe. . . . He would introduce people to. . . . But you noticed the Ahmansons I don't think bought his pictures.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess not.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you see that more as a. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: I liked him, though. I always felt that there a place for all kinds of people in the art world. But I don't think he was an influence on the art, the taste of California, except for in a negative way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you don't feel that Millard Sheets played a role in stimulating Howard Ahmanson's interest in art.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, sure. But socially. It meant a great deal to the Ahmansons and to those people to belong to the county museum. It was socially a thing to do, because the museum had been run by the old families of California. And one way in to the art world was through Millard Sheets and through people like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So in that sense Millard Sheets could be viewed as having a positive influence.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, very definitely, very definitely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: By stimulating interest in. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. It was just that his own taste and his own work was not par with what was going on in this town, because there were some very lively things going on in this town. Rico, who would have just thrown Millard away, just tossed him over his shoulder. Or Howard [Warshaw] or Billy [Brice] or any of the others.

Tape 4, side B

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is continuing the interview with Vincent Price, session three, on August 14, 1992, and this is tape one, side B.
Vincent, we were talking about some of the people that were prominent, influential, in one way or another here in Southern California during the forties, and I guess into the fifties. And you were talking about Millard Sheets. And before we move on to talk about your involvement with the UCLA Art Council and the East LA collection, was there anyone else that comes to mind just at this moment that you'd like to say something about?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, there were a couple people, like Lorser Feitelson. He was a tough character. I kind of liked him, but he was very opinionated. I thought he was an interesting artist, but he never sort of made up his mind who he was. There are a lot of artists like that, that try everything that comes along. Helen Lundeberg, his wife, I thought was a much better artist than he was. I was trying to think of a couple of the others. Herb Jepson, who ran his art school here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which was, I think, very important.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, it was. And that was Howard Warshaw and Billy Brice and Rico Lebrun.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this was prior to Chouinard, I suppose.

VINCENT PRICE: No, Chouinard had been going a long time, I think. I think Chouinard was the old established art school. But there was lots going on, and lots of rivalry, and lots of. . . . There were wonderful people, though, that have been forgotten. Maybe not by some groups, but certainly these went out of my life. There was a man named John Paul Jones at UCLA. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yes.

VINCENT PRICE: . . . who was a magnificent etcher. Magnificent. Graphics artist. And his students were wonderful. The place that I used to find the most fun in what was really going on were in the student and faculty shows. And I collected a lot of work from student and faculty shows, most of which has been given now to East Los Angeles. But there were. . . . You could see what influences were coming along.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which shows would they be? Which institutions?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, UCLA, Chouinard, Jepson, Pomona. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were involved with Pomona, did you say, through. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Well, Millard got me on the board of Scripps College. I don't know; he just thought I would be helpful to them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were you able to be helpful?

VINCENT PRICE: I went as much as I could, but it again was as a [schlepp] out there, and always working all the time, because I had a very active career going in my own profession.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about these institutions? Let's talk about them now. We've been leading up to this for quite a while. Obviously the schools around here—in lieu of other institutions—played an important role. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. No, they had the influence that they should have. UCLA had some fine teachers, like John Paul Jones and Billy Brice. I was just trying to think. Chouinard had Jim, who died a couple years ago who had the wonderful small collection of African art, and he. . . . Oh, Jim. . . . Oh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I can't of it now.

VINCENT PRICE: You know who. . . . Moore! Jim Moore.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't know him.

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, he had wonderful African stuff, and was a great teacher of design. And there were really quite remarkable people. But they were isolated—in the fact again that they were in California, you know.
[phone rings]
[Interruption in taping]

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about these institutions? What about UCLA? Your involvement with the UCLA Art Council was fairly important, I think, in the early days, wasn't it?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You said it was [almost] an outgrowth of the. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Modern Art Institute, yeah. UCLA was growing, just like Topsy. It was just burgeoning. And they had Frederick Wight, who was a friend of mine before he came to UCLA, and he wanted to take over where we left off with the Modern Institute of Art, and he started the Art Council. Kenneth McGowan, who was a drama teacher at UCLA, and a producer actually at Twentieth Century Fox, was the first president, and I think I was the second president. And then we decided the only thing to do to make it successful was turn it over to the ladies, who would blackmail you and shoot you and stab you in the back to get you to do things, and we were right. Then we had the outgrowth of Francie Brodie and all these wonderful people who've done so much for the community. But UCLA needed that connection with the city, with the social life of the city. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you think the council has been successful in achieving what in the beginning you hoped it would do?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Presumably _____ putting on exhibitions and. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, it has. It's very difficult, you know, because you're always running up against the personalities of people who are there. Franklin Murphy was wonderful. Some of the others have been disgusting really. One of them I gave several things at their request that were very expensive and important works of art, which they promptly sold.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was to UCLA, when they had their permanent collection?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which they then, I guess, dismantled.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, just abandoned. But why did they take it? Why didn't they give them to Irvine or somewhere else? Or at least tell the people who had given them. I wouldn't give them the time of day.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know, while we're on the subject, the Grunwald Center. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, it's wonderful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . which came a bit later, presumably in the late fifties or maybe about sixties.

VINCENT PRICE: About the same time, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I know that you were very friendly with the director there, Maurice Bloch, the prominent Americanist, American art historian.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And did he get you involved at all with the Grunwald?

VINCENT PRICE: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . [prints and drawing on the UCLA].

VINCENT PRICE: The only thing I knew was that Grunwald had given it originally to the Los Angeles County Museum—or wanted to give it to them—and they treated him so badly that UCLA finally took it, and of course it's been the center of their artistic [life].

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's a great collection.

VINCENT PRICE: It's a great collection and should have been. . . . He was a wonderful man, Mr. Grunwald. Very simple man, you know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you knew him?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. And then I knew Maurice Bloch, [for] whom I liked _____ _____.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about that? You keep mentioning these people, many of whom came perhaps in the fifties, perhaps earlier, but they were around here. They came from Europe as émigrés. They came at least from New York. Bloch, for instance, studied at NYU [New York University—Ed.], and started out as an artist himself. Fred Grunwald, an important collector, built a major collection of German expressionism, which he then lost when he had to leave Germany.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In what ways did this—what shall we say?—reinforce or enhance the cultural environment here? I mean, these were educated, savvy people. And they must have created some kind of electricity.

VINCENT PRICE: They did, but don't forget it was a terribly difficult time. I mean, Europe had just been wracked by war. And a lot of these people were escapees from Hitler. A lot of them just couldn't afford to live in Europe any longer. [Aldous] Huxley wanted to live here, [Arnold] Schönberg, Thomas Mann. I mean, really incredible people all lived here. They lived very private lives. Stravinsky. Piatagorsky. You know, they were incredible people. But they didn't mix into the other society. They were busy people. I mean, Schönberg and these incredible names of this century. I met them all. I knew them all, some through UCLA, some through coming to my gallery.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So these were among the people that actually came to the gallery?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, yes. But they were not people who really did things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Though Schönberg [was] a painter himself.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, exactly. But they weren't people who did things for the community. They were too busy being geniuses.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it didn't really then coalesce in terms of a cultural/intellectual community _____ _____. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No. And then the minute it was cleared up in Europe, they went back, an awful lot of them. Very few of them stayed here. Stravinsky's world opened up, and the worlds opened up that they had left.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Though Schönberg stayed here.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, for quite a while.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you wouldn't describe this situation here, environment here, as one in which creative people in different fields gravitated to one another and exchanged [ideas].

VINCENT PRICE: No. They met each other, but they didn't really gravitate, I didn't think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you didn't get together with—well, let's just [say] _____ thing—maybe Man Ray or with. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: No, but Huxley and Man Ray, I met them all. We had some wonderful painters, like Lee Mullican.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure.

VINCENT PRICE: But it was funny. I was very lucky, in that I think they—because I was one of the founders of the Modern Institute of Art—sort of thought maybe I would have enough influence. But I didn't have enough influence or money—money particularly—or time, to devote my entire life to being the person that was the catalyst that brought them together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me ask you what I think is the big question. Would you say then that most of these very interesting people, these famous people that found their way here either briefly or actually then hung around—Huxley being one example. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: These are world-class cultural types and intellects. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Sure are.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . creative people. But is it your impression that they really weren't interested in creating in Southern California, in this "wasteland," the kind of intellectual creative community that they had left behind in London, or New York, or Paris, wherever?

VINCENT PRICE: No. I didn't _____. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: They didn't care?

VINCENT PRICE: No, I just think they had their lives to live. And they'd all been through traumatic experiences, and they wanted to be left alone, and to mix into the social. . . . But Fanny Brice is one of the few people who sort of mixed with that group. Because she was a comedian, strangely enough. I was lucky enough to meet them all. I told you that I was a great favorite of Stravinsky's because I was as tall as his wife, and he was a very. . . . [chuckles]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was she very tall?

VINCENT PRICE: Very tall. Vera. Very tall lady. And I was taken around with them to dance with her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that true?

VINCENT PRICE: Which was kind of fun, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this was still another one of your functions, then. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . as [here] in this community. What about—following that theme a bit—a more recent émigré type, your friend David [Hockney, Haackney], whose work you have here? Of course I can't expect you to speak for David, but in your view what is it that brought David to this area and has actually kept him here for many, many years?

VINCENT PRICE: What David has done in this community—and for this community, and with this community, and by this community—has been what the other people didn't do. What we were talking about. Huxley did not come and found a little group of people around himself. Neither did [von] Sternberg, or Schönberg, or any of them. But David has. David is as well-known in this town as if he had been born [here—Ed.]. And he loves it, he adores [it]. And when he came here. . . . I knew him in England quite well and saw his first show. David has done what these other people didn't do: He's made a community around himself, with. . . . I'm just trying to think of some of the people that he knew first here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, of course he had friends like Isherwood.

VINCENT PRICE: Christopher, and Don Bacardy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Exactly.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, and. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, both of them very prominent, especially Isherwood.

VINCENT PRICE: And I knew him before he came here, and so I introduced him to a few people. No, he's a wonderful man, but he has devoted his life to California, to Los Angeles. He loves Los Angeles.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think that's a very interesting observation, and if we were talking about those who had

major impact on the culture—and certainly within the art world of this area—I gather you feel that David Hockney would get the nod on that.

VINCENT PRICE: Yes, definitely. There were always people in the musical world. You know, the musical world is an entirely different world than the art world. I don't know what the hell they think is the difference between art and music, but anyway. But the musical world has always been social. It always had Mrs. [Dorothy—Ed.] Chandler. It always had people like. . . . Oh, there are hundreds of them here whose life revolves around [it]. And that had brought in the Piatagorskys and the Stravinskys and all those. But the art world was something else again. The art world didn't have the blessing of the social life of Los Angeles.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you like to talk a little more now about your involvement. . . . We keep skirting around the issue and then getting. . . . And it's my fault, because there are these interesting digressions or other avenues that appear. But, you know, we still haven't really talked about something I think that's very dear to you, and that is your involvement with East Los Angeles, your interest in that area, and then your collection of whatever it is that you set up there.

VINCENT PRICE: My interest in East Los Angeles stems from a lot of, for different reasons that are all good. One of them very definitely was that a lot of the sort of bitterness that you must feel that I felt about that period that we've been talking about, the people who let us down, the people who didn't show interest, the people like Arensberg, who was going to take his collection somewhere else anyway. My involvement with East Los Angeles is because it couldn't happen there. It's much too honest a neighborhood. It is completely isolated from this world over here. It's completely different. I was invited to come and talk to this college, which was about five quonset huts on a mudflat, by a woman named Judith Miller. And she wanted me to talk about the aesthetic responsibility of the citizen. That's a pretty classy title. Well, it fascinated me since the aesthetic responsibility of three quonset huts on a mudflat was not very high. But I went, and I fell in love with it, fell in love with the whole Latino community—Chicano, whatever they call it now. But this was where I decided to put my energy, and to do it without any way identifying myself with it. Because I was accused here of using the arts as an entrée to a world that I didn't want to be in anyway. People sort of said, "He's an art snob," and I just didn't want to be an. . . . It's very difficult for me to talk about it. But that's why forty-five years ago I started this collection in East Los Angeles. It's been used, it's grown, it's produced some very exciting artists. It's produced Olmos, you know, that wonderful actor, who credits the gallery with part of his life.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yes. Edward James Olmos. [_____—Ed.] Gronk, the painter, and _____.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sure.

VINCENT PRICE: They all credit this gallery, and the fact that there were original works of art sitting around for them to look at and to touch and to feel, with their lives in the arts. And that's enough for me, and it's been much the most satisfactory thing I've ever done. [Though, Well], some of it was difficult, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what kind. . . . I haven't seen the collection. I'll make it my business to visit. But what. . . . This is at East Los Angeles Community. . . .

VINCENT PRICE: Junior.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . Junior College.

VINCENT PRICE: It's not called Junior College; it's called. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Community College, right?

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah, just College. [East Los Angeles College—Ed.]

PAUL KARLSTROM: And it's a gallery of. . . . Presumably, if when you were first involved in it, there were just a few quonset huts and a few buildings like that, there wasn't a gallery yet.

VINCENT PRICE: No. There isn't still. It's just a room.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. And so the collection. . . . What are the kinds of works that you gave?

VINCENT PRICE: Well, I gave them Picasso prints. I mean, real prints, original etchings.

PAUL KARLSTROM: _____ [exactly], sure.

VINCENT PRICE: Yeah. [Rembrandt], Breton, Dürer, wonderful pre-Columbian stuff, African stuff. It's a wide

variety of material, which has grown enormously, and now a lot of other people have become interested in it. A few [years ago] we had a sort of fundraiser for the gallery, and [Rufino] Tamayo came up from Mexico City, from Oaxaca, and to honor us, you know, which was wonderful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, indeed.

VINCENT PRICE: And it really has done a lot of good, and it's growing all the time. And now it's a foundation.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you still obviously take great interest in it.

VINCENT PRICE: I take tremendous interest in it. I've given them about a thousand things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Gee! But clearly there's not the room to show all of these things?

VINCENT PRICE: Oh, no, it's a useful collection. It's a collection to not be hung; it's to be. . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's a study collection.

VINCENT PRICE: Study collection.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of like the Grunwald.

VINCENT PRICE: That's right. I can't talk anymore.

PAUL KARLSTR :OM: Okay. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Last updated... *May 19, 2003*