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Oral history interview with Rupert Garcia, 1995 Sept. 7-1996 June 24

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rupert García on September & November, 1995 & June, 1996. The interview took place in Oakland, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

RG: Rupert García
PK: Paul Karlstrom

[Session 1]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. A taped interview with Rupert García in the artist's studio, way up on the top floor of his house in Oakland. The date is September 7, 1995. This is session one, tape one, and the interviewer for the Archives is Paul Karlstrom.

Well, Rupert, we've been talking a bit already and, just to reiterate what I would like to do with this interview—which will be in series, several sessions we hope—is to really get as complete a biographical picture as we can. I know that there's been a fair amount written about you, especially recently, and there have been some shows and so forth, so there are different sources of information. Very often, though, they seem to focus on one aspect of you and your career, and what perhaps you seem to be best known for, which as far as I can tell, as far as I know, has very much a political-activist cast. But we know that that is an important part of you and your work but it's a part, not the whole story.

A recent catalog that's very interesting, I thought, was the show in New York at the Alternative Museum and we have the catalog here. That opened in December 1993. There's an interview in it by your friend Guillermo Gómez-Peñ a, which I found very interesting. It's very intelligent, I thought. Focusing though, again, very much on the political dimension. And this just stands as an example of a recent look—something that's come out recently—a look at you and your career. But it also, if I may say so, reinforces a notion—or an image—of what the essential Rupert García is. And what I'd like to do, by way of introduction, what I'd like to do is get behind that a little bit. One of the things that interested me, though, and then I'll turn it over to you to really get started, in the chronology which I think is very useful and I hope accurate at the end of this. . . .

RG: Yeah, it's actually limited in its presentation. I had pages for the. . . . I did the chronology myself.

PK: Oh! Well, that's good to know.

RG: And the chronology which I had produced was even then incomplete, and when I gave it to be edited and published they cut a lot of things out because of space, and so the chronology, though meaningful and though accurate, is incomplete. In a few places the location of certain events should have been placed elsewhere, in terms of, within a given year, I have events that happen like one, two, three, four, five. Well, maybe event five should really be number two.

PK: Okay. Well, but presumably in your papers there will be the complete version and it'll be kept up to date.

RG: Right, that's correct.

PK: So that is what a serious researcher would turn to.

RG: Right.

PK: So that's reassuring.

RG: Yes, it is.

PK: I wanted to just point to one thing in this chronology to get us started. It jumped out to me in my reading. And that was, under the little paragraph "1966 to '69," towards the end of that entry it says "assassination the same year"—and that's '68—"of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the death of Marcel Duchamp strike a deep chord with the artist." And for some reason I find this promising, shall we say, in terms of your interview, and could you expand on that a little?

RG: Yes. You know, I have always—not always—for many, many years I've been very interested in Dada and Surrealism and for sure in Marcel Duchamp and the ways in which he upset the perceived notions of what art is

supposed to be, what it's supposed to look like, and the procedure of making something called art. I found that very, very fascinating, very intriguing, and intellectually stimulating because of the challenge it proposed—to me specifically. And then the death of Martin Luther King, his assassination in the same year in which Duchamp died, resonated for me in terms of the challenges that King represented—the social-economic-racial dimension of protest, which, of course, Duchamp was also protesting—more of a cultural protest having with its moments of political ideology. So the event of these two men dying in the same year, for me, rang, as the chronology says, it resonates deeply for me because it kind of combines an aspect of who I think I am—the aesthetic, cultural, artistic dimension with the twist of having a critical bent built into it, not taking things for granted in terms of art and culture, represented by Duchamp, and then Martin Luther King representing that part of me who has always been conscious of the dimensions of racism and class in our society. Even as a kid in high school I knew about that. And even as a kid growing up, the dimensions of being an artist and then being socially conscious were always there. And so when these two men died they kind of represented to me this moment of, yes, this is really . . . these two men represent something that is a part of me, that I can actually point to these two folks and say, "Yes, they represent something that is me." And the ramifications, of course, is in terms of my work, in terms of my thoughts about my work, is, I think, more complex, but they did, nevertheless, symbolize something very great.

To me, it was so interesting when I found out that they both died in '68. I mean, I couldn't believe that they both died in '68. Let alone died, but that they both died, and I saw these two symbols that I embrace. On the one hand, this is so sad, but just so wonderful. [chuckling] At the same time it was wonderful that. . . .

PK: There's sort of a poetic. . . .

RG: Yeah, yeah.

PK: . . . quality to it.

RG: Yeah, yeah. That's a dimension that really rang true and I can point to that.

PK: Well, so I wasn't then too far off the mark. . . .

RG: Not at all, not at all.

PK: . . . to sort of focus in on. . . .

RG: Not at all. No, I think it's a really good thing, because I thought about including that in the chronology a lot. You know, am I putting this in the chronology because it looks flashy? You know, a very convenient thing to do? Or am I doing this because they do ring true. And I said, "Well, I think they ring true," so I put it in. But I didn't think deeply about it any further than we are now, for example. So your selection to begin with that moment in the chronology I think is very insightful on your part. I'm very glad that you saw that, because it does, in a certain degree, reveal much more of who I am than simply Rupert García, the radical poster-maker, or Rupert García, the socially concerned artist who always is fighting for some cause. And that certainly is a moment in me, an aspect, but not all of who I am.

PK: Well, in the interview towards the—it's in the second part of this catalog. . . . We're not going to just sit here and deconstruct this catalog. . . .

RG: [laughing] Which would be great, too.

PK: Well, I mean, it's one way to go about it, but in Gómez-Peñ a's interview with you—which, again, I think is very interesting to read—but one of the points that comes out very strongly in the interview and in your responses is that you refuse to hold any of these—or any phenomena—mutually exclusive, and you cry out against—or you at least object to—the binary approach . . . way of thinking with opposites that are somewhat mutually exclusive.

RG: That's correct.

PK: And so the notion of being able to simultaneously have a commitment—a social, a political commitment—but then also be a fine artist—which has an aspect of, let's face it, "Art for art's sake," that this is something onto itself—you have no problem with that.

RG: No, no, not at all. Because there is no contradiction. I think the contradiction that is perceived is what is constructed for certain kinds of ends by the one doing the constructing. I think to make art is a human activity, which cannot be escaped, and since that is true, then the art will have both the inherent aesthetics of whatever material is used, and it will also necessarily have an aspect that is social, because of the mere fact that human beings are social beings. So they're never separated, they're always there. And they may be there in different

degrees at different moments, but we can't escape the work of art being imbued with both the aesthetics and a social concern. Abstract art is socially concerned; there's a social aspect to it. One may not be able to read it quickly, but if one knows the artist and if one knows the time when the artist produced the work, one can see relationships between the abstract painting—let's say the artist and the artist's moment. And one can—which unlike [Clement—Ed.] Greenberg has done in most cases, [he] reduces abstract painting to a vulgar position where he does try to perpetuate the myth of art for art's sake.

PK: The formalist approach that [the ____] is inherent in _____.

RG: Yeah, and I used to believe that. So both moments are in a piece of art: the social and the aesthetic. We just can't escape it. Period. And I think the attempt to escape it has within it an agenda that is socially, politically driven. Because we can't escape the fact that it's there, both are there.

PK: So, in a sense, again, your patron saints and your heroes, at least at one moment, [are] emblematic in a very important way, Martin Luther King Jr. and Marcel Duchamp. . . .

RG: Absolutely.

PK: . . . again represent this maintaining two stances that are not mutually exclusive.

RG: Correct. Correct, they are not mutually exclusive. I used to believe that they were, because that's what was taught in school. But when I began to. . . . Even though I always knew art and everyday life was connected, just in terms of. . . . As a child and as a young man, I always strongly felt it and somewhat knew it, but then schooling tried to discourage that. And when I come back from the military in '66 and go to San Francisco State, that moment of international protest brings clear to me that art and society and politics are not mutually exclusive, but we have been told that they are, and we were told that for political reasons. Political reasons. And that really gets me thinking systematically about looking at society, looking at culture, looking at history, and the various bodies of knowledge that try to explain human behavior and thought. I began to look at those with a more critical eye, whereas earlier I did not.

PK: I was going to ask you, again, Martin Luther King, Duchamp, this pairing of them—importance to you as an emblem, I suppose—was this something that you became aware of retrospectively? For instance, as you're putting together a chronology and trying to look back and explain important events. Or do you recall actually at the time this really did have an impact on you? Were you already then, at that point, which is, what, '68. . . ?

RG: Yes, oh yes.

PK: So it had, even then, the same kind of meaning to you as it does now.

RG: Yes, it was so fascinating. Very fascinating.

PK: And so by that time, then, you had come to the point where you no longer bought this business that you had been taught.

RG: I began to reject it in. . . . Let's see, I came back to this country [in] '66, began school in the fall of '66 at San Francisco State, and by that time the anti-Vietnam War movement was taking hold, and then the developing movements of African-Americans, Chicanos, Asians, Native Americans, was starting to happen as well. And so within that context I began to reexamine—to *really* reexamine, to *really* deconstruct. I mean, in the true meaning of that word: to take apart the present moment and then also in retrospect. To understand, "Well, how did I get to this point? Why is there this grand critique around the globe? What happened to cause this?" And so, in the sixties. . . . And by '68 it comes to a head, for me because of. . . . And in '68 there was this moment, not only in Paris in May and in Mexico, but also at San Francisco State and other moments in our country, too, on the various campuses. So that '68 is the moment that I really began to look really consciously, pinpoint what I think I want to do. And to make connections with things that I used to think were separate. And so, indeed, Duchamp and Martin Luther King do that for me. I could point, yeah, that's it. That certainly is it. Those two guys do that for me, they represent that. And I think, yeah, that's what.

PK: Well you're an artist, it seems to me, [that] very much combines art and life, in the fullest sense; you understood, you recognized that that is not only an important and a choice perhaps that you make but that maybe it's unavoidable.

RG: It's unavoidable. I mean, life and art are not separate. Life and art can be perceived to be separate. You can construct an argument that they are separate—and this is *why* they're separate—but that's only an argument. That isn't necessarily a fact; it's just a perception of the human dynamic, and here is this explanation of why it's that way.

PK: Well, see, if that's the case—and it seems true to be the case—then our interview needs to deal very much with the circumstances of your life, which is what we will look forward to during these sessions. But before we jump back to the beginning—which I would like to do, and get you born and so forth. . . .

RG: [laughs]

PK: . . . in a place that I've never heard of before but we'll save that for a little bit: French Camp, California. But before we do that, we were talking earlier about this particular catalog, and you said that you weren't entirely pleased with the essay, the introduction. . . .

RG: No, no, the. . . .

PK: Apparently there was something important you felt [left out].

RG: Yeah. See, what happened was I was initially given the option to select *whom* I would like to have write about me. And I wanted to have Carlos [Monsivais] from Mexico, who was one of the world's greatest cultural critics—an amazing mind, an amazing man. And I called him at his home in Mexico City and I asked him, and he said he would love to do it. He says, "Matter of fact, I have your catalog right next to me from this earlier show you had in Mexico City and I want to do it. I'd love to do it, it would be a pleasure." Well, for whatever reason, Carlos Monsivais couldn't do it. So, in the meantime, the Alternative Museum gets somebody else to do it. The role of the essay was supposed to help inform the New Yorker—the New York art lover—to help contextualize what it means to be a Chicano. To help contextualize, perhaps, the dynamics of being a Chicano in our society, and the art and the culture of our times. Which to me is a good idea. But I had hoped the article to be broader.

[Here some material was excised by the artist—Ed.]

PK: Well, the theme will reemerge constantly over the interview; there's no question about it. Your notions, your ideas—as you say, what it means to be Chicano and an artist—and this is something that I'm very much looking forward to. But one thing at the get-go, I guess, we can clear up is that, at least in my understanding of your thinking—and then even what I read in this catalog—that you resist very much this sort of self-imposed—almost a marginalization that's self-imposed—by being too exclusive or essentialist or restrictive. That you really do insist in your own work—and, I suppose, activities—to be more open.

RG: Always. Even as a child. Raised calling ourselves Mexicanos, or Mexicans, did not preclude any other possibilities. It just meant that this is how I see myself and I also have a lot more I wish to do and have an interest in. And that's always been with me as a kid—always, always. And whenever I confront—as a child, too—when folks talk about being a Mexican at the exclusion of incorporating other kinds of activities and friends—or even religion—I always got sick in my stomach, because it didn't feel right, because the friends who I had in grammar school up to this moment have not only been Mexicano/Chicano/Latino, but rather they have been whoever they are. And so as a kid, when I was told that I shouldn't date this one person because they're not Mexicano, or you shouldn't go into other churches because only the Catholic is the right one and closest to God, it didn't make any sense, because how could my best friends who I dearly loved and trusted completely, how can they not be a part of whatever else is a part of me? I didn't sense that there was a contradiction. And so as a child I began to reject those rigid codes of perception and behavior. And I think there's Duchamp there, and there is also Martin Luther King there, back as a kid. And so I have always rejected that kind of convenient and oftentimes rigid political point of view about nationalism, in particular.

PK: Well, it seems. . . . I don't want to jump ahead of us here, because we're going to build to this kind of an understanding in terms of your–and these are very, very important ideas I think, particularly with an artist like you who stands very, very solidly in a political or activist arena. And that can't be separated—but what interests me and what I already get a sense of is that you're quite skeptical, or have been quite skeptical, about the primacy of, well, really of identity, of group identity—of group identity then determining everything. I gather that you are much more interested, finally, in looking at individuals, whether it's within this group or _____ _____.

RG: I'm interested in both the group and the individual. I mean, I don't mean to say that I am preoccupied with this romantic notion of the individual and the ego. Not at all, not at all. I respect the individual and the ego, but the fact that we are social animals, I look at both. But what I do shy away from is the vulgarization of a given person who is of a certain group and make them both one simple experience.

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing the interview with Rupert García, session one. This is tape one, side B. And we were cut off. Did you want to finish up on that thought, with the individual and the group?

RG: Well, you know, I think it's an impossibility to separate the individual from the group. You have to look at both of them, because one's identity is gotten by the interaction of the two. And so when people arbitrarily

separate them and say only one is the truth, that creates a lot of problems for me. A lot of problems for me. Because we are a mix of the both—the interaction of both. You know, I probably had something else to say at that moment, so now I'm kind of like reaching out for something, so. . . .

PK: [chuckles] Well, believe me, there's no question that we're going to come back to this theme. [both laugh]. Why don't we. . . .

RG: And the issue of the individual and the group, which adds up to what is called "identity," is an issue—and I mention that in the catalog—that is a human condition. All human beings, willingly or unwillingly, contend with the formula "the group and the individual." Everyone. That's how it works. And so what I have been so amused by, for the past few years—I should say decades, really—is the whole question of the "identity crisis" of the so-called minority in this country, which is the biggest myth going in the world. I mean, the identity crisis is the condition of the human being. It's to figure out, Who in the hell are we? Where do we begin? Where are we going? What do we want? How do we want it? All those issues are. . . . The amplification of an ethnic minority identity crisis is given birth in a context, and that context is historical domination. That's what gives it that twist. And then it's those who have done the dominating say, "Well, you've got a problem!" You know, *you* got a problem. And then they somehow escape the responsibility that they must confront to make things better. But if they don't identify you with their humanity, then they don't care. If they cared, my crisis is their crisis. If they don't identify with it, they're racist, or they're sexist, then they're saying, "You are not a part of my humanity. There are somehow, arbitrarily, a variety of kinds of humanities, and the one I am in is exclusive of you." And that's [the whole lot] that binary stuff, too, which is about power. Economic power, culture, political, spiritual.

PK: So another way to say this, I suppose, you're saying the current vocabulary would be this notion of "the other" that you might. . . . Would you define that word "other" as those who—for one reason or another—are not participating. We don't perceive them as participating in our humanity?

RG: Yes.

PK: Another way to say it.

RG: Yes, yes.

PK: For you, that's how. . . .

RG: Yeah, and there are different ways of approaching the notion of "The Other." There's a capital "O" and there's the small "o." And "the other" is always somebody else, other than you. That's just the way it goes. And then there is the social/cultural context in which you are raised which will come up with *its* version of who "the Other" is. "The Other" always is perceived not only as being somebody else but oftentimes as an enemy, and if you can sufficiently come up with definitions that make that Other, the enemy, appear to be so evil that you can rob him or her of her humanity and, therefore, you can kill them.

PK: Somehow, not human, not fully human.

RG: Not fully human. They're [not] human at all. I mean, if you look at some literature by organized racists, it is clear that they believe and subscribe to the notion that nonwhite people are . . . some are not human, some are not quite human. They may say that, too. Some who are not quite human, who aren't as African, perhaps, in their perception. But, basically, it is. . . . One approach to "the Other" is creating the nonhumanity of a human being, so you can, then, destroy them without feeling any kind of guilt. Because if they are not human and you kill them, where's the guilt? There is none. So you have to somehow create that myth, that perception, and then you got to internalize it, and then really grasp onto it for your existence. And then that gives you the power to kill.

PK: So you do social. . . .

RG: But also "the other". . . . I began thinking about "the other," really, when I began to read Jean-Paul Sartre back then, the existentialist. I really began to think about, you know. . . .

PK: When was that? When did you do that?

RG: Oh, you know, I think I started really thinking about existentialism probably when the Beatniks were out, and stopped and. . . . It was kind of like floating around, that sense of alienation and the sense of rebelliousness and all that kind of stuff was kind of. . . . [chuckles] Even in Stockton it was kind of like hovering about, and so it kind of fashionable, in a way.

PK: Right, right.

RG: You know, so, me being at the time very ignorant but somewhat attracted by this new-found thing,

somewhat identified with it as well as being an artist.

PK: This is, what, the late fifties or 1960, perhaps?

RG: The late fifties. Possibly that, yeah, because I leave Stockton in ‘62. And now when I come back to this country in ‘66 from Indochina, and I begin to systematically look at Jean-Paul Sartre, to really look at his stuff—I took a seminar which dealt with one particular book of his—and so, in looking at "the other," I began to [think], okay, "Well, the other, the other, you know, being, non-being," all that kind of stuff. "And the other person is the bad guy because they’re going gobble you up for their own end." And I thought, "Well, that seems to be of interest, kind of makes some sense." But then I began to realize, "Well, you know, it doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t make sense. . . ." It doesn’t. . . . "Why is it that ‘the other’—who is, you know, my brother, my sister, and people in the family—how can they be considered to be evil?" Meaning for them to survive they have to gobble me up and deny my singularity. So even though I accepted that that may be true—there *is* the other—and we all have the potential to manipulate somebody and we do that in varying degrees, but why must it be so absolute in the way in which Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about it in *Being and Nothingness*? Then later he begins to change his ideas. It becomes more. . . . He contextualizes his existentialism with this his Marxism. He begins to look at the psycho-social dynamics of being and nonbeing, if you will. And so then I began to, "Oh, so ‘the other’ isn’t what I thought it used to be. Well, some of it is still there, because it is true, people who aren’t you are somebody else. So they’re "other." And then I began to think about, "Well, ‘the other’ doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re *completely* separated from me, because we share certain kinds of things in common. So there is the dialogue, so then we can change things and make things better so I don’t have to think that Paul Karlstrom wants to absolutely manipulate me and deny me of my humanity so he can forward his." So then, when "the Other" comes up for discussion—and in particular with multiculturalism and so-called "people of color"—I did not subscribe to that. I said, "This is bullshit, what you’re trying to do. You’re arbitrarily creating a category that pushes me to the margin and, by implication, you aren’t the Other, you’re just fine. It’s "I got a problem." Well, goddamn it, my problem is created in part by you, and the history which we both share. So we’re both "other." You’re just trying to make my "other" be more sick than your "other."

PK: Aberrant.

RG: Yeah. You know, at a CAA [College Art Association—Ed.] meeting in New York many years ago I gave a presentation of my work, and then there was a Q & A, and somebody asked me about "the Other," what I thought about it, and I said then what I’m saying now, in part—that I do not accept most of the current literature that talks about *me* as being this Otherness.

PK: You mean, writing about you, Rupert García?

RG: Well, no, no. I mean, when people talk about "the Other" oftentimes they talk about, in this country, those who’re not white.

PK: Right.

RG: And so that’s me.

PK: And so I said, "I do not accept the current literature that creates the idea that "I am of difference, I am Other," as if nobody else is.

PK: Right.

RG: You know, at the exclusion of somebody who is doing the excluding. I mean, I said, "I find it very confusing but very c*onvenient*—politically, very convenient—it means that I’ve got a problem that I somehow created and I’ve got to fix it. My response is, "No, no, no, no. *We’ve* got to fix it. *We* got a problem." And, furthermore, now there are some who write about "the Other" in different . . . in the context of history, politics, racism, sexism, and class domination. Now, when that is done, then you see the actual dynamics that have created the possibilities to talk about somebody as "Other," then you understand it. Then you understand why "the Other" is created, when it comes down to a discussion of power. I think power is very important. And by power I don’t simply mean, "I can beat you up," although that’s part of it. Power has to do with philosophy, psychology, economics, culture—all the various human aspects that we manifest through time. Built into that is power. At whose expense do things happen and for whose benefit? That’s about power. And so creating categories like "the Other," and discussions of difference without contextualizing it, without doing that, is arbitrary and perpetuates the problems that in fact caused the reason to create these categories. But if you contextualize it, then you understand it and you see that we’re all involved in this issue. All must discuss it, and all must do something about it. And if you don’t do that then we perpetuate the way things are.

PK: Well, let’s now, given all that—and these are important subjects to which we’ll return. . . .

RG: I know we will.

PK: . . . but let's go back and try to lay in a story about you—about your life and those experiences. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: . . . like where you come from—that ultimately these issues become, not only important to you, but personal.

RG: Yes.

PK: And, if we may, why don't you talk about your own family background, where you come from, who you are in that respect.

RG: Yeah, like you said earlier, wondering, "Where in the hell is French Camp?"

PK: [laughs]

RG: Well, I was born in French Camp, which is right outside of Stockton, California, in the San Joaquin Valley. French Camp is as big as the snap of a finger.

PK: [laughs] How big is that?

RG: [snaps finger] That big. [laughs]

PK: You can go through it in that _____.

RG: You go through it and, truly, if you blink you miss it. Truly. Now I was born in French Camp, which is to say simply this: I was born at the general hospital, and all poor folks, or working-class folks, are born there, because it's the cheapest place. So I was born there.

PK: French Camp has a general hospital?

RG: Oh, a big one. They have *the* general hospital in. . . .

PK: What county is that?

RG: San Joaquin County.

PK: Okay.

RG: Yeah.

PK: Central Valley.

RG: I'm sorry?

PK: Central Valley.

RG: Yeah, yeah. So then '41, September 29th, born there. My dad, Frank García, and my Mom, Dolores Atilano.

PK: Will you spell that, please?

RG: Which one?

PK: [chuckles] The second one, your mom's. . . .

RG: Atilano? A-t-i-l-a-n-o. At-tee-lano. Then she became García and then she then became Warren. Then we go to Manteca, California, and I have no consciousness of that. Then we moved to Stockton a few years later, so somewhere in the forties I'm in Stockton, and when I gained consciousness [laughs] of my surroundings and what's going on, I'm in Stockton. And I was raised . . . see my brothers and my mom and my grandmother, Guadalupe Cuevas Atilano, and then eventually my aunt and uncle lived with us for a while. And I recall having a great life as a kid. It was wonderful. I couldn't have it any better. When I think about it, it's wonderful.

PK: Well, going back a little further, you're first generation?

RG: Second generation.

PK: Second generation. Carry it back. Let's go back a little earlier in terms of the people. . . .

RG: Well, maybe the third. See, my grandmother came from Mexico, my mother was born in California, and then me. That makes me third or second? I get confused.

PK: Second.

RG: Second, yeah.

PK: Isn't that right? Yeah, isn't the first generation the one that's actually born here?

RG: Born here. I'm second, oh yeah. [Actually, I think it is based on the generation living, not necessarily born, in the U.S. This would make RG third generation.—JR]

PK: Yeah. If we're wrong, somebody will [write us a note]. [laughing]

RG: Yeah.

PK: But, now, where did your ancestors then come from?

RG: My grandmother and grandfather on my mom's side came from a place called Jalostotitlán, which is outside of Guadalajara in Jalisco, Mexico. And on my dad's side, at this time, El Paso, Texas.

PK: Oh, really!

RG: And I'm sure that that's only partially true, which is to say. . . .

PK: It was really Juarez?

RG: Back then, when they were living there, many came from Mexico, especially during and following the revolution of 1910 to 1920 in Mexico. As a matter of fact, that's why my maternal grandparents came to the U.S., was because of the Revolution. The Civil War caused *many* people to move, as we are finding today around the world. People want to leave the war situation.

PK: So in a sense, then, they were typical émigrés, coming to this country for the usual reasons.

RG: In their case, yes. And there are many who. . . . Yeah, those who came here probably came for the classic reasons of immigration, just as the Surrealists leave Europe in the late thirties and early forties come to Mexico because of the War [World War II—Ed.] so they immigrate, and so my grandparents immigrated for the War of 1910-1920, the Revolution in Mexico.

PK: How did they, then, connect? How and where did they come together?

RG: My parents?

PK: Well, parents, yes, that's right. Or did the grandparents actually converge in California?

RG: You know, that is a little confusing to me. I hear stories that the families knew each other in California—either in Stockton, Modesto, or Manteca—because I have family in those three places. And elsewhere, too. And they must have met at some kind of a function, because they didn't go to the same high school. As a matter of fact, my dad didn't finish high school; my mom did. So they must have met at some kind of family thing or a dance or a fiesta or something like that. I don't know. . . .

PK: They never told you. They never shared that.

RG: Not in a clear way, no. No. And I want . . . I think it's always fascinating to know that about your parents, you know. How'd they get together, those kinds of things. I think one would find it very interesting. I would.

PK: Are your parents living still?

RG: Oh, yeah, they're still alive. My mom is seventy five, seventy six. My dad is about the same age. Both are retired. [My father died in 1997, after completion of this interview—RG]

PK: So you could ask them, you see.

RG: Oh, yeah. Absolutely, and I will. Yes, absolutely. I'm very much interested in that. Because for years I just never thought to ask about those kinds of questions. And only recently, when I began to do the chronology and then when you invited me to join the Archives and then when another fellow wanted to do some work on me, I begin to think, "You know, I don't know all that much about those early kinds of questions." [both laugh] And so I began to think about it and I don't have them all at my fingertips. I have to do some oral history, if you will.

PK: Well, it is interesting, and it seems to me this is a case where you as an individual, this is your specific, exclusive story—unique story.

RG: Yeah.

PK: And with your concern about your identity—who you are and what it means to be who you are—this then is the individual story put up against or included within this group experience.

RG: Yeah, absolutely.

PK: Then there's the other great story, on one hand, in which you participate in Mexico and so forth

RG: Absolutely, yeah.

PK: So it's all important.

RG: It's all important and I find it *real* exciting.

PK: But is this something that. . . . I gather from what you say that it really is still evolving or developing, that earlier on you didn't have this same kind of interest in your own . . . certainly the details of your own background, except maybe in a more general way, which would be, you know, this Latino or Chicano experience.

RG: Well, you know, when you're raised. . . . Well, I was raised [like] that much earlier. We all called ourselves Méxicano or Mexicans, nothing else.

PK: Even though you were born in California?

RG: Here. Oh, yeah, and I never thought about being an American. I mean, calling myself a Mexican did not negate being an American.

PK: So these weren't really in opposition?

RG: No, no, no. It's just, "I'm here and this is what I call myself because. . . ." I mean, at school maybe things come up about, "What is an American?" But I never felt. . . . The only time I felt any kind of conflict is when some of the kids used to make fun of some of the braceros [migrant farm workers from Mexico—RG].

PK: Oh, yeah.

RG: And they would, like, point and say disparaging remarks and that would separate the Mexican national from the Mexican born here or who has been here for decades. So there was that. And I always felt. . . .

PK: So that's a classist thing, I suppose, in some ways, or country-of-origin classism?

RG: Well, it's a combination of. . . . You can give a contrast. . . .

PK: . . . it's complex. . . .

RG: It's *very* interesting. But it's a classic. . . . In this culture, it's classic, because this culture defines what is good by being as Anglo as possible, so if you could put someone else down and put yourself seemingly closer to being a "genuine American," you're better off.

PK: So you were a little more Anglo than those braceros, right?

RG: I'm not saying this is me. I'm saying there were those who did that, whom I observed. Well, because people in my immediate and extended family were farm laborers]. I didn't want to, I mean, ridiculous. I mean, never. Crazy.

PK: Right.

RG: But those who *did* do that and who would bad-mouth them . . . I was introduced to the perception that there is this difference. And it was class, and it also was cultural. By that I mean those who were more Méxicano than those who were. . . .

PK: Mas Méxicano.

RG: . . . were "less Méxicano" were better off, because they don't have those trappings. And those trappings that they perceived in the Mexican national farm workers were cultural and class-based, because of the economic and Eurocentric situation. I mean, I used to work in the fields as a kid myself, so how could I. . . . I

mean, there was no sense. . . . It was like self-negation if I were to do that. But that's what some of these people were doing—this denial thing. It was denial. And so that introduction of that kind of perception, to negate true Méxicanos, also made me sick, just as it made me sick when people in my family would tell me, "You shouldn't date that girl, you should date Méxicanas." As a matter of fact, my grandmother told me that. And I told her—and I had never done this but I just couldn't hold myself back—she asked me, "Where are you going?" "I'm going to see my girlfriend." "What's her name?" "Oh, mí hijo [my child—RG]." "Oh, no buenos. . . ." "What do you mean?" She says, "Well, you know, keep to your people." This high school girl was Japanese. And so I told my grandmother, I said, "Grandma, you go to hell." Cursed at her.

PK: No!

RG: Oh, yeah. And I stormed out of the house. Because I knew, I felt that she was absolutely wrong. There was no way that she could be right. So I experienced it both within the family and outside the family, this way of trying to create this convenient "Other," if you will. So I grew up having a perception of being Mexican, which later in the seventies I have a great experience and a story to tell about confronting the reality that I'm not a Méxicano.

PK: Well, why don't you tell it now, so we don't miss it.

RG: Oh, okay. In the mid-seventies, late seventies, I was teaching at San Francisco Art Institute a course on . . . I believe it was culture of Mexico. And it was during the spring and we had a break, an Easter break, and I went to Mexico. First time. No, second time. I came back—I went to Mexico City, as a matter of fact—I came back to the seminar at the Art Institute, and I began to talk about my experiences and my feelings. And I said, "You know, I felt, being in Mexico, a variety of sensations. Excitement. Overwhelmed. Couldn't believe the architecture, couldn't believe the wonderment of Teotihuacan, etc. But . . . but I felt disconnected. I didn't really feel as if I could say, as I did, as a kid and for many, many years, 'Yo soy Méxicano,' 'I am a Mexican.' And I felt nauseous about that, and I felt guilty about that. All those things came to me." And everybody's hand in the class went up and they all had stories that were identical—or very similar. And so we talked about that, and I said, "Well, in my case, calling yourself a Méxicano and then actually going to Mexico, especially Mexico City, and you have this perception of you, and that there in Mexico City you realize that you are not Méxicano in the sense in which those *in* Mexico are Méxicano. And I began to realize the complexity and reality of the adventure of my family from Mexico coming to here, then I began to weigh it and understand. And that's how I came to realize that my responses of guilt and nauseous were absolutely natural. There was nothing wrong with it.

PK: It's like you were thrown off balance that that which. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah, I felt askew.

PK: . . . [you] had ____ by yourself was really not?

RG: I'm sorry? Yeah. I felt askew from what I had perceived myself to be earlier.

[Break in taping]

PK: This is continuing the interview with Rupert García. This is session one on 7 September 1995. This is tape two, side A. Rupert, you were cut off right in the middle of a good run.

RG: Yeah! Boy, it felt good for a moment, didn't it?

PK: [laughs]

RG: So, we were talking about being askew and then gaining balance from the experience of going to Mexico and finding out experientially that I am not Mexicano in the sense which Mexicans *are* Mexicano living *in* Mexico. And I guess specifically *in* Mexico City—because, you know, Paul, there are truly *many* Mexicos. Based upon class, race, ethnicity, the culture you embrace—it's just very, very complicated. In any event, so in this class, after talking about this and everybody saying, "Oh, I thought *I* was crazy." I thought something was wrong with *me*." We all realized that, well, we're not all crazy. This is simply part and parcel of what happens . . . the way it happens in *this* country, with folks coming from places that are perceived, when coming to this country, as being not American, and when there is this whole cultural bias of not only language, but food, how you look, that dynamic of stereotyping and ethnocentrism which we began to talk about. It gave us a handle to understand why we felt all these different kinds of things. Well, what was really interesting was in being in Mexico and seeing all these people, the variety of people—from blonde Mexicans to Mestizo mixing of cultures, to African-Mexicans, to Asian-Mexicans, Arab-Mexicans, and I began to think, "Well, what the hell is a Mexican?" And I began to think and ponder that and I began to do a lot of new research and reading and learned about the historical development of what we call Mexico. And began to learn that there are all kinds of Mexicos at different times in history. And so that helped me understand . . . helped me gain balance in terms of my earlier doubting

of being a Mexican. As I began to realize that, "Well, I *am of* Mexico, and in many kinds of ways, but that's only part of who I am potentially, and who I am at the moment."

And so that began to open up the spectrum for experience and to include whatever I want to include. So since I didn't buy any kind of really vulgar Mexican nationalism—which some people in the family did—I was able not only as a kid but also even after going to Mexico to truly embrace a lot of aspects of being of Mexico. Just in the food alone. Let's just take food. As a child, up until before I leave home, never gave a second thought about the food that we ate and what it symbolically means. I knew that it was different from eating baloney sandwiches and eating hotogs. I knew it was different than spaghetti. I knew it was different. But I did not know that the food that I was raised on was basically Mexican indigenous cuisine. It was nothing that was discussed. It was just a fact of life. A fact of life. There was no need—it seemed at the time—not to do that. Later—and the issues in the mid-sixties, late sixties, begun to be discussed for ethnic studies, Third World studies, and those kinds of issues; in the context, again, of what I call "the grand critique," which occurred in the sixties and seventies—began to think about all kinds of things. And among them was food. And so I began to like do research on the food and, wow, it was amazing what it means—symbolically, what it means—because of its resonance of a certain aspect of being a Mexican who maintains, through food, a cultural tie with an *ancient* people. It was an incredible experience to become aware of that, to know what that really, really means for me. I don't know about my other brothers and sisters—I have no idea—but I know for me. But to realize, it was just so exciting.

PK: But this is mainly after your visit to Mexico, is that right? Or was this. . . .

RG: That's before. Actually before.

PK: Before?

RG: It was before.

PK: And so this self-awareness or this. . . .

RG: Well, it's not so much a self. . . . It is kind of a self-awareness, but it's like a reclamation—a conscious reclamation of something that you have done all of your life but didn't . . . well, it was done unwittingly. I mean, you didn't reflect on, "Well, let me see now, is this food . . . what part of Mexico did it come. . . ?" No. We ate the food and we lived. But later when we began to raise many questions. . . . See, I began to raise questions about *everything*.

PK: Well, it would seem to me that there. . . . I won't say there's a self-consciousness there, except in the sense of you're conscious of yourself and those habits, those experiences, as a child. . . . You mentioned food. . . .

RG: Yes, absolutely, food in particular.

PK: . . . [which would] contribute to who you are.

RG: Yes, in my family never did I experience open denial of being Mexican. Never. They were always . . . now, in retrospect, the embracing of the Mexican was very strong, and it was demonstrated in a variety of kinds of ways. Not only in the food, but in the activities, the fiestas and the jamaicas [pronounced "hah-mike-uhs"—Ed.], and my aunts and uncles who were in the local Ballet Folklorico, and my grandmother would design and produce all of the Ballet Folklorico dance garb. I mean, it was always around me. The music. . . . But it wasn't like. . . . It was no big deal. [laughs] But it becomes a *big* deal with the Chicano movement, the Chicano cultural-political movement. Because when folks call themselves Chicanos. . . . I mean, I didn't have a problem with the identity of being Mexican. That wasn't my problem. I didn't have a problem. But some did and some still do. That wasn't it. My problem was finding out what the hell caused it all to get where it is. That was very curious about that. So I didn't have any denial stuff. That wasn't it. But what I was curious about was [the] *before* story of Mexico. Before our story of how people . . . Mexican linkage got to this country. The story of those who had been here for centuries—in the Southwest, in particular. That I wanted to know about. Now *that* I was curious to know. But I didn't have necessarily an identity crisis. The crisis that I had lasted for half an hour after going to Mexico and coming back. That was something, I think. . . .

PK: Right, nausea.

RG: Yeah.

PK: Like Sartre.

RG: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, really. It was like, "Wow, man, those folks are 'other.' " No, it was just. . . . [laughs] But. . . . I'm losing thought in here.

PK: Well, let's pick up on this. You said in a jesting way, of course, that you were in Mexico saying, "Well, those

folks *are* ‘others.’ " That was your epiphany.

RG: Well, for the moment they were. Because my framework that explained to me what being a Mexican was didn’t fit any more. It was too narrow. It was too narrow. And so my framework is, let’s say, five inches wide and that which I am perceiving is a mile wide. . . .

PK: Right, right.

RG: . . .conocido, and so there was that separation and sense of alienation. And so for the moment they were an "Other."

PK: Well, you know it’s a very complicated business, and it’s not something, of course, that everybody is concerned about this and writes about it, and there’s all sorts of books on the subject.

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: But it does seem to me very, very interesting, because you, as an American—and you can get into sort of politically charged discussions about even these terms; you know, what I am first and foremost?—but you, as an American, find yourself then confronting your background in Mexico and finding, apparently, that your experience and your understanding of being Mexican. . . .

RG: Yeah, incomplete.

PK: . . . is incomplete, quite different and, indeed, there is a kind of separation.

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: So I guess the question I would ask: At that point did you find your own self-discovery involving more fully understanding this broader picture of being Mexican?

RG: Yes.

PK: And that was the most important thing for you on this journey to self-discovery, if I can put it that way?

RG: Well, it was not a journey of self-discovery. No. It was not an odyssey. It may be perceived as such, but that wasn’t the intent.

PK: Okay, but. . . .

RG: [pauses, thinking] Having arrived and being there for a while in Mexico City, seeing things, I felt, "Damn, I have a limited historical knowledge about Mexico. All I know and what I learned from experience back home with my family and the. . . . It was a limitation that was imposed because of economics. Some finished high school. Virtually *nobody* went on to college. So their interest was a mode in survival, and so there was no one to talk about all these vast, divine, Teotihuacan, and all that stuff, you know.—or the writings of [Octavio—Ed.] Paz and all that. That was not a part of my experience. Not at all. But going to Mexico and seeing all this stuff, I realized, "Wow!" "Wow," the weight of what is there to investigate about Mexico is so deep it’s bottomless. Okay, on the one hand nauseous, on the other hand so elated. And I didn’t blame anybody in my family for not giving me that because they didn’t have it. They have what they have. But I was so elated that I really . . . I taught myself the complete history of Mexico from the Olmecas to the present.

PK: Wait a minute. I have to think of how I’m going to phrase this. Because this is a big subject. I was going to ask you . . . you said that you went to Mexico and you discovered that you really didn’t know about this stuff, see.

RG: Nor did the schools I attended ever tell me anything about it either.

PK: Okay, my question is—and I think this is an important question, it’s not a flippant one—what difference did it make? What does that have to do with you, that civilization, Teotihuacan? What does that really have to do with you? You have, of course, your own experience. Your immediate experience was being born in California, growing up within that circumstance.

RG: Yeah.

PK: One could argue that that is your true experience, modest as it may be compared to the great accomplishments of Pre-Columbian Mexico.

RG: Well, it made me realize that the dynamics of anybody who was born anyplace and goes to somewhere else

and who is not conscious or aware of a full spectrum of who they are, existentially and historically, who does not know that, is to a certain degree and in certain contexts, limited in their true potential of grasping. . . . See, I'm interested in knowing the whole thing. I want to know everything about the world. Everything. So this is part of that. Not only was it a journey. But it matters in the same way in which it matters for anybody who learns, "Damn, you know what? My family . . . they're from Ireland. I just really found that out, that they're from Ireland. They never talked about it, or maybe there were things around, and then I did some work on it and I went to Ireland, and, wow, it's just amazing. I can now see these things I saw when Grandma and Grandpa and whatever . . . I can see the connections and I can see. . . . It's just amazing. It's amazing." And what it does, it amplifies your sensibility of who you are. You are more than whom you thought you were. You're more than that. And so for me that's what happened. It just opened up this. . . . And it resonated with a psychological elation as well as with, more important for me, an intellectual resonance and heightening. That awe: There's just so much out there to know about and to learn about. And go to Teotihuacan.

You know, I studied before I went. I studied the philosophy of Mexico from ancient times to the twentieth century as well as I did art history. I learned all that information. So I went and looking at what I studied, and then I'm going, "Jeez, this is absolutely astounding to look at the production of this culture." And also understanding that while all of it is wonderful and profound, there was also certain aspects in Teotihuacan and the Aztecs that I found to be problematic. Which is the case for all cultures—high *or* low, so-called high or low. But the opening . . . see, the experience . . . it matters because it told me, it demonstrated to me, "Rupert, you are who you thought you were and more. If you look at, in an orderly fashion, if you look at how you got here, how you got to French Camp, how you got to Manteca, Modesto, and Stockton, how you got to San Antonio, Texas, for basic training, how you got to Indochina—all those kinds of connections, relationships, I wanted to know. And then experiencing the thing in Mexico gave me the opportunity to feel that and to sense it and to realize. Because for some people it doesn't matter. For me it mattered. Wow, I was like stimulated, like I said earlier, intellectually and emotionally, to get into this thing and just get as close as I can. Because what it did, it made me understand the significance of the cuisine on which I was raised. It made me understand why we had cactus plants in our backyard, nopales. It made me understand that a Nopal is more than simply a Nopal. It's more than that. It resonates, that's why. It amplifies, it rearticulates, it opens these doors of experience that made me feel that I am who I am—yes, I am. But I'm also part of something much *larger* than who I am. And I feel the same way when I meet people from anywhere—that I am who I am, but I'm also a part of you. And perhaps knowing you I know in some way is going to enhance me. And anybody who says—I know you just raised a question, what does it matter?—anyone that raised that question in a way to demean or to diminish the significance of same is one who is questioning their own selves and at the same time wished to deny the humanity of another. You're denying the intelligence of another who wishes to use that intelligence and imagination to enlarge their world view, their point of view. I'm not saying that's you.

PK: No, I understand.

RG: There are those who want to fight true multiculturalism, that's what they're doing. They're doing, in part, that. They want to deny the true complexity of, not only this country, but the world. They want to deny others' existence and meanings and sense of music, all that is one's culture. They want to deny, because they want to perpetuate their myth.

PK: To what extent does racism in America and then that whole history of not allowing different groups—usually people of color—to have full participation in our society, and in the promise here, what does that have to do with the great importance that's attached to these national origins or to the ethnic background? Do you see a correlation there?

RG: Between, on the one hand. . . ?

PK: Well, I didn't ask this very well. Institutional racism and the experiences of discrimination that various groups—Mexican-Americans—have experienced. To what extent has that experience, in your view, led to this effort to discover and retrieve national origin in the experience?

RG: Okay, I've always been curious as a kid, always very curious. Always interested in discovering things, period. I used to redesign my mom's jewelry. I would take toys apart and put them back together. So there was this sense of discovery always there, really strong. Well, as a kid and a young man in Stockton I grew up with rampant racism and rampant class divisions.

PK: That really was your experience, your first experience.

RG: Absolutely! Damn, I knew where I lived and why I lived there. Absolutely. I knew why my friends lived where they lived. No question about it. I knew why I went to that high school where I went to. It was a good one, too. [both chuckle] You know, I knew why we used go up on the north side of town and beat up white kids, steal their cars, rob 'em, kick their ass. Absolutely.

PK: Oh, my!

RG: Absolutely. I was very angry, very upset. And so I knew all that stuff—from experience. I knew why I had to work in the fields every now and then, why other people in the family worked in the fields or the cannery. I knew why they had these certain kinds of jobs. Tired. . . . And it was terrible, terrible. So I grew up experiencing discrimination not only because of Mexicanismo, but also my friends who were African-Americans. And who were Asians. I grew up with friends who were born in the camps for Japanese-Americans—in grammar school.

PK: Sure, yeah.

RG: You know, these friends of mine that I went to their house and they told me, "Don't talk about. . . ." [whispers the dialogue—Trans.] I said, "Why not?" "Well, the family didn't want to talk about the camps." I said, "Wow! It's too deep, you know, deep, you know, wow." So I didn't. So I knew that. I knew friends of mine weren't allowed to be in the Boy Scouts because they were black. I knew I was shuttled into an all-Asian Boy Scout troup because I was a Mexican. You're not blind! So, yes. Now, so having experienced that, knowing that, and simultaneously feeling the hurt and having the anger, the wanting to get back for this, you have that, and what you do with it depends upon a lot of factors. And I at a few moments got involved in some self-destructive stuff, but fortunately I was able to curtail that by seeing that people die from doing these certain kinds of things. I mean, drugs, gangs, robbing—serious stuff. And I saw that this for me didn't make any sense.

PK: Did you ever get caught or in trouble with all of that?

RG: Never got caught. My friends got caught [at that time].

PK: You were lucky.

RG: I was lucky, simple as that. Simple as that. Just lucky. One time they got picked up for robbing a guy when I was there with them when it happened, and they caught my friends and the sheriff was driving a car down the street and I saw my friends in the car. The cop stopped. I had in my hand a wallet that we stole so I threw it in the bush. And I said, "I want to go with my friends." And the sheriff said, "No, I don't think you want to go where these guys are going." "Yeah, but these are. . . ." "No I don't think you want to have anything to do with this. These guys are going away. They're going to go to juvenile camp." Whatever it was called. CYA, California Youth Authority. And to me it was about being with them; it was not about anything else. So, yeah, I had this self-destructive avenue that was available to me to deal with, the context of

being—let's call it what it is—being dominated. When you are dominated you are not being allowed to be your true potential and so when you sense that, this frustration and anxiety. . . .

PK: You want to get back.

RG: . . . you want to get back, you want to do something. And so I did. And then I realized, "Oh, man, this is. . . ." People dying, people getting hooked on drugs, that didn't seem like the kind of thing that I wanted to do. And fortunately the friends that I ran with also were not so much in that kind of a mode. We used to be singers. [laughs] We used to have a singing group, a capella.

PK: Los Lobos?

RG: No, no, no. Nothing was. . . . That was the furthest thing from our mind. We were singing rhythm and blues [à la the Five Satins or the Meadowlarks—RG]. And so that was an avenue, and the guys I hung around with were very, very smart guys. Smart. And so, in other words, I had those experiences of class, race, and cultural domination—by the true "Other." There is a true "Other." The one who does the dominating, that's the root of it.

PK: That's the real. . . .

RG: That's the root of it, who creates the semblance of Otherness. So these. . . . But you asked the question for what reason now?

PK: Let me dodge that and let's flip the tape and I'll get into that.

[Break in taping]

PK: Rupert García, continuing our interview, session one, this is tape two, side B. Okay.

RG: You were asking me something about the oppressed minority of this country—are they more keen to know about their roots or their past because of the oppression, because [some] kind of denial and such, as opposed to those who haven't been, in quotation marks, "denied" certain aspects or possibilities in human experience. And my answer is a very complex answer, because to ask that question has with it questions that I need to ask and

clarify, because the way in which questions are stated often has a subprogram built into it. Or certain kinds of assumptions are there. And I asked that question by simply saying, this country in which we now live has, in part, historically survived on denial, and by that [I] simply mean to deny the true history of the development of what we call America. If we were to really analyze how we got to this moment in history today—I mean, if it was done authentically, and some have attempted this—we would be amazed at the complexity of what's taken place. Not only by those who have been oppressed but by the oppressors themselves. They [the hegemonies—RG] create a myth about who they are—as being the true Americans—and in so doing they deny or mask their authentic history. I was asked at a conference by a white guy in the audience, "Gee, you know, I'm just a white guy, working class, an artist, and I don't have all these wonderful things that you have about your roots and your history." I said, "Look it, man, look it. You have been fed and have accepted a magnificently constructed myth about who you are. You are pretending not to know who you are. You have accepted something that denies who you really are. If you really want to know who you are, talk to your mama, talk to your daddy, talk to your grandma, blah, blah, blah, and find out who you are as an American. However, if you adopt and believe the myth of what an American is then you have no need to investigate who you really are. But once you find out that what you have been fed is incomplete, which is what all oppressed people say: "I am not complete. I have been denied the right to exercise the human potential of my imagination and my mind. On the same hand, if you don't accept that myth about being American, and if you realize it's only part and parcel of who you are, you will be very excited and stimulated to do the research. To go back to wherever it is your family comes from." Absolutely. And those who say, "Nah, it doesn't matter." I said, "Man, it matters so much, you're going to cry. That's how much it matters because if you don't deal with it you're going to be part of the problem. See, if you can't accept the myth of America, we have to really redefine it. Or rather, to truly define it in all of its complexities and all of its problems and all of its wonderment."

So everybody cares in one way or another. Why do so many people who are not, let's say, Mexican really care about what we do? I mean, they embrace it, they love it. Well, they sense something is happening. God, there is a driving concern. There is an exercising of the imagination, there's this intelligence, there is this love, this vitality. So they're probably sensing within themselves that something is missing that they might like to do. Maybe unwittingly, or maybe they're still denying, because they see . . . they love. . . . I mean, they're so many books out recently about the African-American biography. A *lot* of them came out. They sell like crazy. Why are people buying them? What is in there that's being said. Well, there are personal stories about, I think we can say, a life's journey that has within it this *incredible* sense of discovery, of making connections, of struggle, of overcoming—which *all* human beings experience. But those who are in the denial mode [have] got a problem of discovery, not me. They may say, "I know who I am; I'm an American. Why should it matter to me?" It doesn't matter to me, but it matters to them. But they [the deniers—RG] buy these books so much, they go to these movies, they listen to this music, with which they identify with the other person's journey of their humanness, but they deny their own. They're not investigating their historical own. It's as if it's not their problem. There's a denial there. There's a denial. And it may be an unwitting exercise, or it may be very self-conscious. Or there are those who feel very good within themselves, who they are. So it seems as if there is more of an intensity for the oppressed minorities in—I hate that word "minorities"—for the oppressed people of culture in this country called America to want to discover and investigate because of the need to understand historical domination. ____ _____ _____.

PK: And perhaps the fact that they maybe don't feel that they fully belong.

RG: Oh, we have *never* felt. . . . We have never, *never.* . . . From the beginning of the making of this country, it's [hegemonic—RG] job was to deny you feeling a part of it. That was part of its philosophy—to keep you out. Better keep you out, try to make you feel marginized, make you feel as if you are "the Other," make you feel less than your potential. "Why would you want this?" you know. So from the beginning there is the necessity, in terms of the dynamics of domination, to come in and, if you will, push aside the indigenous—move 'em aside. Create a social dynamic that makes the exploiter superior and the exploited less. So therefore, at the founding of this hemisphere. . . . You know, let's say, at least since Columbus. You can say that. The need to marginalize and to move aside, to make you feel not part of the picture of America—which was a constructed picture to begin with and which you were the main painter heretofore—you are now made to feel as if you're not an important part of it. As a matter of fact, the conqueror says, "We're going to call this hemisphere 'America,' and you don't fit in because you're aren't part of how I define it." So from the beginning that's what it is. So, I mean, we grew up . . . I grew up knowing that . . . *feeling* not a part of certain locations in Stockton, California. Having never gone to the museum as a kid, maybe once.

PK: I was going to ask you about that.

RG: You know, once. And knowing that, you know, I'd been led to believe that this is not for me. Not of me.

PK: This high culture was then not for you.

RG: Whatever it was. We can now say "high culture." I have no idea what it was then. But whatever it was, it

wasn't supposed to be for me. And what was supposed to be only for me was boxing matches, going to the circus—which was all fine and dandy—carnival, movies, playing baseball, and the like. But not the museum, not going to the symphony. So most working class people of color—not all, not all—but most know from the beginning that they are not. . . . They get the sense that they are not supposed to be a part—a significant part—of the dynamic called America. They knew that they were a part because they work in America. . . . Well, they know that, but they know that their contributions are not perceived as significant, and they're not often, if at all, called upon to contribute meaningfully. You know or feel that you are not a *meaningful* part, you are not being allowed to be a meaningful part. That creates all kinds of issues inside somebody.

PK: This is getting us very neatly, I think, then back to your arena, or that part of your arena that's really the reason for this interview, which is your connection with culture—in the sense of the arts, the visual arts—and what you have just described is a situation in which you grew up feeling that this was not available to you. The museum, for instance; you mentioned the symphony and the museum and these kinds of things.

RG: Yeah, I mean the museum was not placed near where I lived or where I hung out. It was not on the south side of Stockton. No. It was located in what we called the "Four-O" district on the north side.

PK: The "Four-O"?

RG: The "Four-O" referring to the number of circles behind the digit you got in your check. [laughter] In the tens of thousands, in other words.

PK: Right.

RG: At that time, in the late forties, early fifties, that was a lot of money.

PK: Yeah, yeah, right.

RG: A lot of money. So the museum wasn't placed near my home, and so it was never. . . . And I don't recall people in my family going to museums, symphonies. Nobody even mentioned it. But I did go. And so when I went to the Haggin Museum, I walked in and I saw things and I felt completely disconnected from them. Nothing—as I recall, walking in, looking around, looking at paintings and looking at historical artifacts—nothing seemed to ring as being personally a part of my life in an honest way. So it was as if "This *is* really not for me. I do not see me here."

PK: You don't see yourself making those kinds of things?

RG: No. No, I don't see me *represented* here.

PK: But at that point. . . . Well, let me ask you this. . . .

RG: I was very young.

PK: Yeah, what led you to the museum?

RG: It was a school trip.

PK: A field trip.

RG: A field trip. You know, just went. And I probably otherwise would never have gone.

PK: But were you interested already in art? In making objects, pictures?

RG: I was interested in making objects since I was about five years old. I am writing a short story about the first time I became aware of combining different things together. I was, I believe, five years old, and me and my brother and my cousin made some fake tamales. You know, we got mud for the masa—or dirt and water to make mud for the masa—and then we would grind together red bricks to make this red powder which, when mixed with water, looked like mole—that's a kind of a sauce—and then we would wash used corn husks. Not the husks but the corn, the jackets of corn, to make tamales. So I remember doing that and, like, it was just so exciting to see what was happening by bringing together different things—you know, water, dirt, bricks, and used corn shells. It was awe-experiencing. It was almost overwhelming and then at the same time just plain exciting. And that moment of doing that had some of kind clarity for me. And it was just like, "Damn!" Just like, "Wow!"

PK: In terms of a vocation for you. . . .

RG: No, no, no, no.

PK: I don’t mean a job, necessarily.

RG: Just doing it. Just doing it. The act of doing and the sensation experienced therefrom was such, so great, that it rang true. It just felt amazing.

PK: Well, how did you understand that, though?

RG: Oh, then it was just a feeling. As a child you don’t understand it. As a child, you just do it and you go, "Ooh, gee, isn’t that great?"

PK: Oh, that’s right, you were about what? You said five or six?

RG: Five, yes. It was just wonderful. But that activity was reinforced by what other people in my family did. People were dancers, people sang, people made clothes, people made hats out of feathers.

PK: You would call this crafts, I suppose.

RG: No. We didn’t call it nothing. It was life; it was about what my family did.

PK: No, one would. . . .

RG: Oh, now. Now, in retrospect, you call it craft, but to me it was meaningful. . . . It was just meaningful, period. There was no categorization of what it was. It was just meaningful. It was real and it mattered and it was stimulating. That’s what it was.

PK: Do you have any stories about how you were reinforced in these feelings.

RG: I want to do it now. [laughs] People in my family were involved in all this activity—I mentioned singing, playing instruments, dancers, designing and making their own clothes, designing and making hats out of feathers, my mom who wanted to be an artist herself (she was a very good drawer), and I had other people in the family who wanted to do theatre in high school. People played accordion, and my older brother was a superior athlete. So all this was around. And so the activity. . . . I mean, seeing this and experiencing the water and the mud and what it took to make these fake tamales, was supported by experiencing my family members’ activities in a variety of. . . . Making the clothes and such, it all seemed to be connected. It didn’t seem to be disconnected. And so nobody said, "Hey, are you stupid or what?" And my grandmother used to make vignettes of people and animals out of Kleenex. And the first time I saw that, which was after I experienced making fake tamales, was one of exalted wonderment. She would squat down on the floor in the living room and pull from under her long-sleeved dress pieces of napkins or Kleenex, and she would twist these things and make animals and people. I’m looking at this on the floor and I’m going, "Wow, what’s going on!?" It was amazing. It was a certain kind of mystery happening, actually. And so that, and working with the mud stuff making tamales, seeing people dancing, people singing, it all seemed to be part of everything else. Nothing was considered insignificant. It all seemed important. And I, unlike my other siblings, took it in. For whatever reasons. It just rang true. It just felt like this is . . . great! Why in the hell not? It’s just great. And so I got involved in drawing at a very young age, in making little sculptures out of wooden clothespins and carving it out and, like I said, redesigning my mom’s jewelry. And so it was always there. I mean, I cannot recall not being amazed by making things and seeing people make things and seeing people perform. It was just amazing. It’s just amazing.

PK: Was there a point when you saw that all of this interesting activity might could lead to an occupation, to a career being an artist?

RG: I knew in high school I wanted to be an artist, someone who made things.

PK: So you had this concept. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: . . . of making a life as an artist.

RG: I don’t know about a life. It wasn’t like that. It was just "I want to do it." It wasn’t like, "Oh, I can be a cop or I can be whatever." It was just like. . . . It was, "I’m going to do that."

PK: Well, that’s not too ____ ____.

RG: I mean, I’m going to be that. I mean, It wasn’t a life choice being, "Oh, you had to look at these five options, and you pick this one for your life." No, it wasn’t like that. It was as if. . . . See, choice implies some kind of an "intellectual exercise." I’m sure that was there that, but it was as if I was somehow profoundly attracted to it or it into me.

PK: Well, let me ask this a different way.

RG: And then I saw people who were artists—"real artists."

PK: Artists, that's it. It's the idea of the artist.

RG: In high school I had friends who were in theatre and played music and some who were in art classes in high school. And they were *really* good. As a matter fact, in grammar school [Nobi, Noby] Oshidari and [Jess, Jesse] Oji, in fourth grade or whatever it was, made drawings and they were spectacular drawings. I'd see their drawings and I couldn't believe it. It was amazing! In high school I had friends who made drawings and the like. And so at that level, being a teenager, there was approval by peers. It seemed right. And then, while still in high school—I think that's true—I went to my first gallery opening. In Stockton, California, on Main Street, a small gallery right next to the Esquire Theatre. One of the artists showing was a friend of the family, and he used to work at this store called [Brown & McKeegan], men's clothier. I don't know if I was going to the movie or why I was downtown. I walked by and I saw these people inside talking and fooling around, and I must have thought, "What the hell is this?" And then I see Peter Rodriquez. Peter is the founder of the Mexican Museum [San Francisco—Ed.]. He also was cofounder with the Galería de la Raza, 1970—the museum in '75—and he was an old friend of the family. So I walked in to see Peter. I said, "Peter, what's going on?" And I see all these paintings, these drawings, I'm looking around, these people talking, and having a little bit of wine, and whatever they're doing, and I said, "This show's really good, man." [laughs] "This is all right." And I met Terry St. John there, too.

PK: Really?

RG: Yeah.

PK: Did Terry grow up there?

RG: Well, he was in the show.

PK: Oh, he was in the show.

RG: Yeah. I don't know where he was living. And everybody. . . .

PK: When was this? This was really early.

RG: Oh, yeah. Maybe in '59, at the latest 1960, at the latest. And so I see all this activity, I see these interesting paintings and drawings, and, you know, seem interesting. And it didn't seem harmful, you know. [chuckles]. No one told me to get out.

PK: Well, it beat running around in gangs.

RG: Yeah, and it seemed really interesting to me, and it seemed different from making hats and folk dancing. And so by that time I had entered a couple of contests and won first place in my age group and got a big book on Monet. My first art book. I think I was eighteen years old.

PK: One of the first art books you'd even seen?

RG:*The* first art book I had ever seen—on Monet. A big sucker. Abrams, you know, a serious book, whoa! Hard back with a dust cover no less.

PK: Oooh!

RG: A real book.

PK: Probably tipped in plates.

RG: I think they were. Absolutely. I think I might still have that. So these kinds of things came while I was in high school and while I was senior class president and that was when I was expelled. I got impeached and expelled from school because I went to the high school junior prom as a guest, because I was senior class president, and I got plastered. Absolutely plastered. Made a complete fool of myself. The principle escorted me out. And come the next Monday, I learned that not only am I *expelled* from school, but I am *impeached* from the presidency as senior class president.

PK: That's worse!

RG: Well, it was during that time that I was being seriously considered for a scholarship to San Francisco Art Institute. And that went down the rathole—or whatever it was. And I say this to tell you that I knew about art

schools, and I knew somehow that this art school in San Francisco was *the* place that you go to if you want to be a genuine artist. So I knew there was study involved.

PK: Were you a pretty good student?

RG: I was a very good student.

PK: And, obviously, you were popular and one might even say political, because you were class president then.

RG: Yeah, I guess, I guess.

PK: You were interested in power yourself already maybe.

RG: No, you know what, that's funny. It had nothing to do with power at all, not at all. Well, not at that time.

PK: Was it validation? You enjoyed that?

RG: No, I don't know what it was. I wasn't even going to run, and my friend—a guy who was in the class in front of me—said, "You know, you should run for senior class president." I said, "What for? I don't give a damn about this, man." "Hey no, man, you really should." And he always seemed to me to be kind of serious. Roy Sánchez was his name. So I said, "Well, you know, why not?" It was like, "Why not?" Not, "Well, what can I get out of this?" And I was always gregarious—always gregarious—and my mom used to say, "You're so sarcastic." She said, "I can't believe your friends still come to your house to pick you up in the morning and go to school, because you're so sarcastic I can't believe it." I said, "Well, I don't know what to say." [chuckles] But I don't think it was about . . . it had nothing to do with power. You know, not about power. Popularity, perhaps.

PK: Did you like to be the center of attention?

RG: No! No, no, no. No! I may end up being, but not because that's my intention. I may end up being, because I feel so strongly moved by something I'm the one who sticks out, and then function like a magnet. But the intention is not. . . . That's a fine point, because it's a point which many people who write about me make a mistake. They think I'm trying to attract attention, where in fact what's happening is I am moved and feel very strongly about something and I do it and because of that something happens. You see what I mean? It's not trying to achieve the end results because of what occurred. I'm not trying to become rich and famous—although that's not bad either—but it's because I feel so strongly about something and I'm able to in some way articulate it that attracts. I'm not trying to attract anybody. In my own painting and in my own work, I'm trying to figure something out for *me*. That's it, ladies and gentlemen. For me. You may not get it. But *I* got it. *I* got it. That's what it's about. Me understanding, getting some kind of meaning out of existence through the activity of making a picture. Making a picture and gaining knowledge both emotionally and intellectually is a total process.

PK: Unfortunately, though, then with your misadventure at the prom. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah, [loss].

PK: . . . you lost a chance. . . . And I guess you were encouraged. There was probably a decent chance you could have gotten that scholarship to the Art Institute so it was ____ ____.

RG: Evidently. But it was a mystery to me that it even was discussed. I had no idea about this phantom scholarship.

PK: But you were aware of this. Was this something that in some way you were saying, "Hey, maybe this is what I should do. I can go there and be an artist"?

RG: No, it's as if the connection with the school possibility came from somebody else, not me. But the fact that it was proposed, and maybe never realized, put in my mind, "Hey, it's out there. It exists."

PK: So you weren't hugely disappointed by that. This was not something that you were striving towards?

RG: No, no. I was more depleted from being expelled and dethroned.

PK: [chuckles]

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing the interview with Rupert García after a break, this is session one on September 7, 1995, tape three, side A. We got you through high school. That's what we've managed to accomplish so far, and I had one question. I know you have a few more things to say about that time. But I would like to know just what kind of

art training you had received at that point. I know you had some drawing classes, but what was the nature of the art training?

RG: In high school?

PK: Yeah.

RG: In high school, I only took *a* class in art, and it was a class that was set up for students who misbehaved. Now I didn't get there because I misbehaved. I took it because that was the only class they had to offer, and I also took a course to design the yearbook. So my training in high school in all certainty was by default. In grammar school, however, I had an instructor who introduced us to painting and to mural painting when I was in the sixth grade.

PK: Really?

RG: Yeah. So I directed a team of students in making a mural in '53, or something.

PK: What was the subject?

RG: I forget what that was.

PK: Something probably celebrating. . . .

RG: I have no idea.

PK: . . . agriculture in the Central [Valley].

RG: I have no idea. It could have been for all I know.

PK: That would be a WPA Project.

RG: I have no idea. So in grammar school and in high school, I had no real art training as such. The only introduction I had in terms of making things was in industrial trade classes such as woodshop, metal shop, and a couple of courses in drafting, which I really enjoyed. And that's it.

PK: Well, did you learn about, like, perspective? You know what I mean, that sort of really basic. . . .

RG: I learned that in drafting, because we did isometric, oblique drawings. So I learned that. No, training in perspective and other art-related concerns I got at a junior college in Stockton but not in high school.

PK: Okay. Well, we can save that until you get to junior college.

RG: Yeah

PK: But you had a couple of other anecdotes.

RG: Oh, yeah. While I was in high school, my mom had a boyfriend, Henry Olivier, who went to my high school. One of my instructors spoke of him, unbeknownst to me that that was the same guy whom my mom was dating. I learned about that later on. But, nevertheless, Henry Olivier was a real good artist—a really good artist. Went to his studio, met his dad, and all that. And I was so impressed by his work that he gave me a photograph of one of his drawings of an old Chinese man that I carried it in my wallet for years. You know, it was so wonderful to know an adult who had made these great drawings and it was so fantastic. So it was especially precious. And he was a very nice guy, and so I kind of got a sense of a person who has their own space and who makes things and feels good about it.

PK: Did he have a studio there in Stockton?

RG: He had a studio in Stockton. He had a studio.

PK: He was an illustrator?

RG: I don't know. I just know he made what at the time seemed to be real good stuff, you know, and he had a space in which to work. And so that was encouraging. And that my mom was with him, that was also encouraging. And a little after that is when I actually go to that gallery in Stockton. I used to know the name of it; I can't recall it anymore.

PK: Maybe it's in your chronology.

RG: Ah, I don't think so. Because I would remember that one. What was the other anecdote? Did I say I had two?

PK: Maybe, but it doesn't matter. If it comes up. . . . Well, so we left you disgraced in high school; you were impeached and you were expelled. Then did you go back to finish up or what?

RG: Well, what happened was I was expelled for so many weeks, then I went back and it was very embarrassing going back. You're at the top one day; the next day you're at the bottom. And you have to go to your classes and everyone in the whole school knows about it. But, I guess the story about the chemistry instructor. . . . He welcomed me back into his class. And he explained to the students, "We all know what happened to Rupert. Let's talk about it and let's bring him back." It was marvelous. So he really, like he welcomed me back to school. He knew it was a mistake. But he allowed me and the other students to deal with it in a way in which it enfolded me back to normal. And it was fantastic. He could have gone the other way and said, "You know, Rupert is an example of what you should not do." But he didn't do that. And so I guess it was, in terms of developing what's called a character, that was an important moment. That it's possible to make a mistake, but it's also possible in the right circumstances to rectify it in some way.

PK: Well, then so you did graduate and you finished?

RG: I did graduate [after that].

PK: Good for you. Congratulations. [both laugh] And then you went on to what they call community college, or junior college.

RG: Yeah, it was called Stockton Junior College, and it was wonderful. I took many art courses—jewelry-making, art metalwork, ceramics, drawing, color, a lot of painting classes. It was a very good experience. I mean, I learned a lot about color. We just had a whole semester of nothing but color, so I learned a lot about the technical aspects of color: how color works, how the eye works, how different media can produce colors differently. And painting—I think I had two or three courses in oil painting and I just learned a lot just by practicing and watching, not so much what was instructed. Unfortunately, the guy who taught painting, his love was ceramics and jewelry-making. But we had some good fellow students who were very good painters. I think I got a very good foundation in junior college in Stockton, a really good foundation. And then after graduation me and two friends from junior college, one who I've known since grammar school, come to San Francisco. My two friends come to go to school at San Francisco State. I had no money even to go to a state college, so what I did was I made plans to become an "artiste" in San Francisco, having no idea what that really meant or how to go about it, having that romantic vision you spoke of earlier. And we end up living in an apartment in what's now called The Haight, on Cole and Haight Street in San Francisco in 1962. I'm drawing in pencil and crayon, maybe some pastels . . . I mean, maybe some chalk, I'm not quite sure. And also I'm washing dishes at a restaurant in the Mission District, on 22nd and Capp, washing dishes and I hated it. Just couldn't stand it. And I disliked the people I worked for, couldn't stand it. But I had to pay the rent. And then we had a show at a place called Papa's Pizza in San Francisco, across the street from Kezar Stadium [home of the San Francisco 49ers—RG]. Three-person show. I had drawings—I think there may have been Elizabeth Taylor and some musicians I was making drawings of. And it was great. As far as we were concerned, we had arrived in San Francisco, showing at Papa's Pizza—*across from* Kezar Stadium, no less. [chuckles] And then I quit my job, I go home to Stockton, stay at my brother's, and for the moment feeling a little lost. . . .

PK: Mainly for financial reasons you went back to Stockton?

RG: Absolutely, absolutely. And I knew I could get a job at the cannery if I wanted one, and I had no interest in doing that because it seemed deadly and many of my family were working in the cannery and did for years. So I took a walk during the week, and went to the post office, and began talking to the various military. . . . What do you call them?

PK: Recruiters.

RG: Recruiters. And none seemed to be what I wanted to do, because I was looking for a job. I went to the air force recruiter and he seemed the most sane. And I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind working there." See, I went for a job interview. I wasn't going for patriotism, flag, America, democracy, none of that crap. Not at all. I was going to get a job. And a four year job, hey! So I do that, and the guy says, "You look really good. You look like you could be an officer candidate and look like you'd be pretty good in doing some kind of flying." So, "Hey, you know, wow!" But anyway, so I go, I join, sign up, go to San Antonio, Texas, and what happens? Well, when I first arrived at San Antonio in 1962 the moment I get off the bus and I hear this drill instructor crowing at us, I know it's a mistake. I said, "It's a mistake, Rupert. You made a mistake." But I'm the kind of person who makes a commitment and I stick with it. For good or for bad. So I stayed and I realized that, "God, I wish I didn't have to do this." And I took a test for OCS [Officer Candidate School—Ed.]. My scores were too low. And then, the Cuban Missile Crisis happens, and so the whole base went on alert, and so we all knew then that we're either going to be cooks or air police. And I ended up being air police. I got to my first base in Montana—Great Falls, Montana—

1963. It's after Christmas of '62, I think. Yeah, it's in the beginning of '63. Malmstrom Air Force Base. And what happens, I find out that I'm going to be working at a secret air base, secret fighter squadron, with nuclear weapons on the fighter jets for the NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command—Ed.]. Our job was to protect the northern part of the U.S. from invasion by the Communists from Russia. And so for three years that's what I did. I secured people, information, nuclear weapons, fighter-bombers. Three years, man, almost three years. I hated it. Hated it.

One incident happens while I'm in the Air Force in Montana that really helps me believe in myself as a maker of pictures. One afternoon I'm securing—now mind you, this is nuclear manned fighter-bombers, secret mission—I'm securing an access route—instead of doing that I'm making drawings. I'm drawing the landscape. My weapon is laid almost on the gravel. I am so wrapped up in the drawing that I don't hear a big truck drive up with the sergeant of the day coming to inspect the posts, and he comes to mine. I don't hear a thing. I'm just drawing like crazy, just drawing. He walks up to me and he shouts, "García, what in the blank are you doing!?" I say, "I'm drawing the landscape, Sarge. Look, it's fabulous." He says, "García, don't you know your mission?" "Yeah, Sarge, but look at this great. . . ." So he grabbed my drawings out of my hand, just took them up, crushed them, threw 'em in the garbage can. I reached in the garbage can, pulled the drawings out, straightened 'em out, and I commenced to tell him that he has no right to stop me from making a drawing, from making art. And I went on for quite a while. At this time, he had the right to shoot me.

PK: Insubordination?

RG: Absolutely. Hey, this is a real deal, this is a secret mission.

PK: Right. Different rules, probably.

RG: People's lives were at stake. I mean, it was just real serious. I didn't give a damn. I was making my drawing. I was so intense about the drawing I totally forgot about the mission. [both laugh] What mission? And I must have told it in such a way where he was affected, because he just looked at me and walked away and never reported it. Nothing. As if nothing ever happened.

PK: Hmmm, he was a closet art patron.

RG: I don't know what he was, but he was known to be a hard butt. You know, a really hard guy. But he just didn't do a thing about it.

PK: You were three years at that base?

RG: Yes.

PK: What's it called? What's it's name?

RG: Maelstrom Air Force Base.

PK: Maelstrom?

RG: Maelstrom, M-a-e-l-s-t-r-o-m. [This was probably a joke; the correct spelling is Malmstrom—Ed.]

PK: Maelstrom.

RG: I loved the landscape on location, and I loved some of the people. A lot of the people downtown were racist.

PK: Really?

RG: Oh, yeah, man. I go into a bar and they say, "Who are you? Who are you? What are you?" I say, "Hey, it's time to go, man. It's time to get out of this place." Didn't like it, man, didn't like it. But I met some real nice folks, but I didn't have no soft touch for that city at all. I didn't like it. You know, there was a lot of racial violence on base and downtown.

PK: What was the town again?

RG: Great Falls, Montana.

PK: Great Falls, Montana.

RG: Yeah. And while I was there, though, I made drawings of models based upon photos in magazines, and I was asked to make holiday cards for some friends. They wanted to send a card home; I'd make them a card.

And then I realized that. . . . After being told, I realized the following: "If you are stationed at this base in Great Falls you will be here until your duty is fulfilled." And I thought, "Oh, my God, I gotta' get out'a here." The only way to get out of here is to volunteer for a location that nobody wants to go to. Well, in '65 there was already this discussion on base about Vietnam. So I volunteered. I went to Vietnam. And before I volunteered for Vietnam, I volunteered to become part of what's called the. . . . What did they call that? It was special forces for the Air Force, and I forget what they're called. So I volunteered, signed a bunch of papers, and I decided at the last minute, "I don't want to do this. Why do I want to do this?" I felt it would really be injurious to me. So I went to tell the Sergeant, "Hey, Sarge, I have decided not to go into Special Forces. I think that it would really be bad for me." And he says, "García, you see this stack of papers here on your behalf? You're gonna tell me that you're not gonna go now?" "Yes, Sarge, I'm not gonna go because I. . . ." "See that stack of papers?" "Yeah, Sarge, I mean I don't want to go." And he was like this guilt trip. But I didn't go. But I volunteered to go to Vietnam as a way to get out of this place and so I get sent to a secret air base.

PK: Another secret air base?

RG: Oh, yeah, everything. I had top secret, I mean, secret status in terms of security clearance.

PK: Clearance, yeah.

RG: So we go to this secret air base in a place called Ubal Rachatani in up-country Thailand near the Laotian border. In 1965 I arrived there—via, by the way, Hawaii and the Philippines (we do some training there) and then we fly to Japan from the Philippines. Flying into Vietnam to refuel or something, and when we land at a Vietnam airbase, I'm looking out the window and I see all these foxholes and all these weapons and everyone at the ready. I'm thinking once again, "This is a mistake. This is a major mistake. What the hell am I doing?" [laughing] So then we take off to go to our base. [laughing]. So we arrive at our base on a rainy night, as I recall, and they were still in the process of preparing this air base, which is really a Thai Air Force base in conjunction with an Australian Air Force base. See, we aren't supposed to be there. We are there illegally. So I believe we were there with the group called MAAG.

PK: MAX?

RG: MAAGS, Military Assistance and Air Advisory Group, something like that. Along with, as I recall, the CIA. And so we were supposed to wear a kind of a hat and look like Australians, with these bush hats. And so we arrive on a wet night and I don't know [literally] where we are or what's going on. And so we were taken here, there, and just [untranscribable sound]. We just go to sleep, wake up the next morning, and look around and, hey, we don't know where the hell we are. You don't know where you are. But what we do know is that we're going to meet what we have to secure—and that's people, information, ordnance, and jet fighter bombers, napalm. I don't know how many jet fighter bombers we had. I mean, God damn, it was a lot. Then, we would learn we were going to have to also secure a munitions dump in the jungle. And so we go out there and, man, once again we don't know where the hell we are. We don't know *nothin'* except this little piece of geography we have to take care of—you know, guard it with our lives. And so I did that for a year, and every day saying, "This is a mistake, this is a mistake." [laughs] And so during that year I maintained staying in great shape. I was in the best shape I've ever been in my life—for the simple purpose of survival. Taking self defense, karate, judo, all that stuff, and really ready, at any moment, to go to do what you've got to do. And eventually some of the guys started to get strung out on dope, and a lot of booze, and they would come to work loaded. So you go on duty, and your every movement is potentially something quite disastrous. And there these guys are, you know, they can barely stand up to keep their eyes open, and they're supposed to be lookin' out for your butt as they look out for the security of the aircraft and so on and so forth. Now I know this is really not where I'm supposed to be. One guy tried to commit suicide, just to get out, to go home. They got a little strange. A little weird.

Let's see, what else happened? Oh, I learned then, while I'm in Indochina at Ubol Rachatani, I learn about the antiwar movement back in the U.S.

PK: Now how did you learn about that?

RG: You know, I don't know how we got word of it, but we got word of it because I led a discussion about why we should be flown back to the United States with our M-16's, with which we would shoot these students protesting, to show them what's really going on. [laughs] You know, I was stupid. But that's what I felt.

PK: Yeah.

RG: I felt very strongly about that, that we should. . . . And I was very ignorant.

PK: Well, you part of it. I mean, you were stationed there, right?

RG: Yeah, and very ignorant about why even we were there in the first place. For me it was a way of getting out

of Montana, as far as I was concerned.

PK: But by that time, I gather, that at least in terms of your eagerness to fly back and show those protesters the truth, by then you at least had come to believe that there was a reason for our being over there in Vietnam?

RG: I don't know if it was a reason or if it was just a defensive gesture. For my own well-being, how dare somebody question me being here. Having my life on the line twenty four hours a day and some son-of-a-bitch back in the United States drinking coffee, just protesting. . . . I said, "You go shoot 'em. That'll teach 'em. [both laugh]

PK: Did your colleagues agree? You were leading the discussion.

RG: Hey, we're ready to go. "Where's the plane?"

PK: You said, "Hey, Sarge, let's go!"

RG: Yeah, "We'll go. Just point us in the direction of where they are and we'll get 'em for you."

PK: What kind of a story, though. . . . Well, you said you don't remember. . . .

RG: I don't remember how we got it.

PK: Because it would be interesting to know how that kind of information got to those in service, those stationed. . . .

RG: It would be fantastic! Absolutely. It really would. . . . I don't know if it began as a rumor or if we read it in the paper in the library.

PK:*Stars and Stripes*, you mean, or something like that? Or whatever you got.

RG: Well, we had a library with different kinds of publications. And then down—called downtown, _____ small place—there was a. . . . What do you. . . ? It was a U.S. governmental library. Ah, God, it was a classic anti-Communist setup. It was propaganda for democracy as to why we should fight the Communists, and I can't think of the name of the organization that set it up, but they had like a library and books, and, I think, newspapers, and I may have come across it there or at the library on the base or through somebody who knew and just talked about it. I forget exactly how I knew. But nevertheless we got it. And we felt very strongly about it.

PK: You probably viewed these characters as traitors, basically.

RG: Yeah, I think there's no question about that. I think, like they say, we felt that *we* were the true Americans and that they were just. . . .

PK: They were "Other."

RG: . . . riding on our. . . . Huh?

PK: They were "other."

RG: They were "the Other." [laughs] Yeah. It was crazy. I volunteered. . . . See, our planes would go up and drop bombs in Vietnam, and then would come back, and on the way back from the sortie, if the bomb didn't go off, they had to drop it someplace. They couldn't land with it. See, what they would do, they would drop it in someplace, some jungle with water somewhere. And this happened once, and we had to have a mission go out and secure it, and they needed volunteers and I volunteered to lead the first team to go out. And so I did. So we flew by helicopter and, again, going to a place who knows where or what's happening in the drop. Like a big lake, surrounded with tall palm trees, lot of greenery. What we landed on wasn't bigger than this platform. What was it? Maybe six or

seven by eight or nine or whatever that is. [Bigger than that.] That was about how much we had to sit on, three guys. And our job was to make sure nobody went towards the bomb—whose location was unknown to us. [laughs] It's crazy. And so people would come by, animals and. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing the interview with Rupert García, September 7, 1995. This is tape three, side B.

RG: Continuing with—this'll be very short—continuing with being in this location to secure a dropped bomb that didn't go off from one of our fighter-bombers coming back from North Vietnam, as we were securing the area,

we noticed a lot of people and animals walking around us, some at a distance, some real close and we wanted to determine who were the bad guys and who were the good guys and it got to the point where I was in charge and I said, "Look, we can't tell what's going on. Let's go to sleep and we will be notified of the change of guard by the sound of a chopper. Who will know the difference? They'll be too far away to see us, as to what we're doing, because the sound. . . ." So we did. I said, "Forget it." So we went back to sleep and waited for the sound of the chopper to wake us up. And it did, and put our clothes on, changed the guard, and went back and said, "Sarge, everything is fine." [laughter]

PK: And all your buddies, they thought that was fine, too?

RG: They didn't care. I mean, they didn't care meaning, what's to care about? I mean, even our fear for our own life didn't matter because we didn't know what to . . . how to determine like if. . . .

PK: What was a threat?

RG: Yeah, we didn't know the signal or the codes. We just said, "Forget it. Let's go to sleep."

PK: So, your entire time there. . . .

RG: I made two drawings.

PK: Only two drawings.

RG: I made two drawings while I'm in Indochina, just two.

PK: Of what?

RG: One is a portrait of a Sikh man. I was surprised to learn that they were in this town. A lot of Indians-India and Chinese—who were merchants in this village-town. And I did a drawing of one of the older Sikh men with whose family I became friendly. I taught some of his daughters English. And the other drawing is of a traditional Thai house on stilts. Both are in pencil. And that's all I do, although I am approached by the base to do some art work for the base. And I, by this time, realized that I don't want my work to have anything to do with the base or with the military, and so I refused. And so this one other guy who decided he was going to work for the base asked me, "Hey, man," he says, "it's great!" "I don't give. . . . I don't want my work to be associated with the base at all."

PK: Now why was that, Rupert, though, because you just said that. . . .

RG: I know, I know, seems contradictory.

PK: Even though you have been saying all along every time you'd show up in a new place you say it's a mistake. Every day you kept saying it's a mistake.

RG: Oh yeah, a mistake.

PK: But it didn't sound to me as if you were, at that point, philosophically opposed to the, well, to the military or certainly to the involvement there.

RG: Not at all, not at all. Not at all. That happens later.

PK: Yeah. So can you figure out why you didn't want to have your work associated with the base?

RG: I think I felt that it would debase it.

PK: Now that's a good one: debase it.

RG: Yeah, that's. . . . [laughs] To be debased. That's all I could think of. I felt it would lessen it. It would lessen the truth of my vision.

PK: I see.

RG: It had to be pure. Unconnected. As well as with like, with selling art at that time, I felt like. . . . I never considered selling art. It seemed to be debasing to equate art with money.

PK: So you really had a fairly exalted idea then of. . . .

RG: Yes.

PK: . . . making art and what it meant to be an artist.

RG: Oh, yes, yes. Very, very strong. Very strong. Absolutely.

PK: Well, how did you finally conclude this tour of duty and how did you get back?

RG: Well, it seemed like forever, I'll tell you. So after the year was up—I think it was in May of '66. . . . Oh, I failed to mention, while I was in—to digress for a moment—while I was in Montana at Great Falls I saw JFK [John F. Kennedy—Ed.]. It was later, during the time that JFK was assassinated, we went on a *major* alert, an absolutely high security alert, as you can imagine. And so, what I'm saying, I was able to experience in the Air Force for those four years, the Cuban Missile Crisis, seeing JFK, JFK's assassination, and involvement in the Vietnam War. You know, that was really something!. While at the same time, hearing about the different kinds of civil rights Movements in the United States. So all this is happening. All these things are happening, these layers of events that are happening, I'm hearing and somewhat thinking and feeling about all of them. Anyway, so in May 1966 it's time to go home. I was at this base for one-year—it was called "one-year isolated duty"—at a secret air base. So it was time to go home, and I was ready to get out.

PK: So it was one year?

RG: One year. And if you wanted to volunteer for one more year you could. Not me, man, I want to get out. [laughs] [There was a moment when a rumor was going around that we were to stay for the war's duration!—RG]

PK: And then that concluded your service?

RG: Absolutely. Yeah, I got an early out. They gave me a few months because leaving Indochina—it was in May . . .

PK: Is that sixty. . . ?

RG: '66. And so the government said, "You got a few months left; we'll give you early out." And I also argued that I was going to go to school in the fall, so it was getting time, dah-dah-dah." So they gave it to me. So I got home and one of my high school buddies came and picked me up, drove me home from Sacramento. I was stunned. When we landed in Seattle, we changed planes and I remember walking into someplace and I saw this big glass door with door handles and I remember seeing all the glass and the door handles. They seemed very unique because where we were that didn't quite exist. Maybe in Bangkok, but not where we were. And so that was. . . . And seeing Anglo ladies. It seemed strange—real strange. It was just stunning. "Jesus Christ!" And so we land there, and then we come into. . . . What's the air base near Sacramento? I forget the name of it, the big one out there?

PK: Well, let's see . . . Travis?

RG: Travis, exactly. Travis. We land at Travis and we get out and we walk into the air station there and we see a bunch of young guys gettin' ready to go to Vietnam. And I'm thinking, "Man, they don't know a thing about where they're goin' to, and they will shortly." And so we were there for a couple of days, and one of my friends picks me up that I went to high school with and I'm very quiet. Very quiet. I never wore my uniform again once I got in the car. Never again. Because I knew that that could be trouble for me. Because of the antiwar sentiment.

PK: You picked that up that quickly?

RG: Oh, I knew it would be problematic.

PK: Yeah, I mean, other than those reports you somehow got in Indochina. . . .

RG: Absolutely. Yeah, I just knew. I just knew. . . .

PK: That it was more widespread than, perhaps, you realized.

RG: I felt it'd be dangerous. I felt it'd be dangerous. And so I didn't. You know, through all. . . .

PK: Did you still think that they were wrong or were you beginning to think about it a little more?

RG: I remember think[ing] about it. I remember feeling very ambivalent. Very, very ambivalent. And not knowing why. Very confused. Because, on the one hand, there are those who are saying, "The war is wrong, the war is wrong." On the other hand, there were those saying, "The war is all right." And then there were those who actually participated. And eventually, even in '66, the dissents in the country started to really get heated—and particularly the anti-war sentiment. And so I'm a pretty open kind of person—things would affect me—and so I'm

starting to listen to this. Then I go to San Francisco State in 1966, and then on campus a lot of discussion going on about the war and other issues and no one knows where I just came from a couple of months ago.

PK: And you don't enlighten them?

RG: I don't advertise it. No. Very quiet about it and holding all this stuff inside of me and listening, taking these courses that are very intellectual—they're very critical—and then I start to do reading, I'm involved in discussions about the war. In some classes what we have to read are books that look at how things occur in a social context—like how meaning is achieved in a social context. And I recall reading a book *called The Social Construction of Reality,* by Peter Berger and [Thomas—Ed.] Luckmann—or something like this—and its like the sociology of knowledge, which was a way to explain how we give meaning to certain things and the process by which that is done and how arbitrary, in some cases, it is to say, "This is true and that's false." And so when I learned about that then that means that everything is up for grabs, everything is up for reconsideration. What we had been told as being true may in fact not be true; it could be something else. And what we *were* told was for an ideological reason. And I thought, "Oh, that was like. . . ." That threw me for a loop. That really threw me for a loop. So intellectually I started to understand how things work. There is a system to the apparent haphazardness of everyday life, and to what seems to be natural there's something behind it that is driving it to make it appear such. And that helps me look anew at everything now—including my involvement in Indochina and the Vietnam War. What was that about? You know, I learned, "Well, God damn, I had been duped into believing all this stuff about the Communist." All that stuff comes out and I'm very disappointed, very upset, and very angry about how I, in particular, was led to believe that what I'm doing is the right thing to do—is in fact propaganda. And, man, you know, that's an eye-opener for a young man who had just come back a few months ago.

PK: Do you remember. . . . Well, a couple questions. First of all, how would you describe your politics prior to going to Indochina? Or would you describe them at all? Did you have any real political views?

RG: Well, I didn't have any political . . . I mean I didn't have any organized political views. What I could say was that my point of view. . . . I mean, I had a sense about racism, how that works. Had a sense as to why some people are rich and why some are not. I had a kind of a commonsense understanding of certain conditions in our society—not systematic by any means, not really historical by any means. I just think I had a kind of understanding that could be classified, if one would want to. Kind of a laissez-faire point of view.

PK: So perhaps what you describe it as liberal on social issues primarily—that's what your main concerns were, how people were treated and what's fair.

RG: On some things I was liberal and some things I was absolute. Like when it came to racism, absolute. There was nothing liberal about that. But in terms of lifestyles, I think kind of liberal—you know, people doing. . . . I mean, like your homosexuality or smoking marijuana, that's kind of very. . . .

PK: But did you feel. . . . When I say liberal in terms of social issues, I mean, in the traditional sense that it's the job of the government to try to correct certain social injustices to make _____ _____.

RG: I think that is true. I think that's true.

PK: And so you felt that way to some degree, that whoever's in charge should be taking care of this shit?

RG: Yeah, I think that that's true.

PK: And so then you went to. . . . You had this war experience which, in retrospect, must have. . . . Well, I mean the whole experience must have been somewhat confusing because you were operating with really no information. . . .

RG: None whatsoever.

PK: . . . but then, anyway, you come to San Francisco State and engage in a course of study. What did you study? What's your major?

RG: I majored in painting.

PK: In painting.

RG: And I minored in sociology. For some reason I was attracted to sociology.

PK: Would you describe the department. . . . Of course, those were very specific times, but do you remember any of your teachers or any of your courses?

RG: Absolutely, absolutely.

PK: And to what extent did you feel their politics—their political orientation—was evident in the instruction?

RG: I think in one specific case it was true. In social psychology the instructor had a point of view that was highly critical of the way things worked in our society, and we had reading and discussions and papers to write that allowed us—it allowed me, anyway—to gain a sense of empowerment for thinking for myself and making decisions. And on the reading list was the book called *The Social Construction of Reality.*

PK: Yeah, you mentioned that.

RG: And I remember reading that, and that just got me going. Then we had books to read. We had to analyze one book, which was a play by the then-known-as LeRoi Jones, *The Dutchman*, and I did a piercing analysis of that. And in doing so a lot of information came to my mind about what's going on in our society. And so in this class in particular I think the faculty gave us a critical paradigm that allowed us to differentiate different ways of looking at the world—that there's not only one, but rather within that one there are other points of view, and they're fighting each other to win, to become hegemonic where they rule. And so that was, you know, "God, wow!" I also had a course in criminology that also looked very, very critically at crime and prisons and things like the sociology of crime and how people became criminals. They didn't fall from the sky and they didn't all tend [to want to be criminal]. It was more complex than that. So I began to get a sense of how complex things are. They may appear to be simple, but you scratch it and there's a lot of subtext there. And then in anthropology it wasn't what the instructor gave us in terms of point of view, but the mere fact of studying anthropology and learning about the complexity of the human family, in terms of knowing all the different cultures and then in looking at how different people do different things for certain kinds of reasons. That was just really opening my mind in terms of it was not all smooth out there. The world isn't of one mind.

PK: What I'm trying to, obviously, try to determine then, to the extent one can in a conversation like this, is this process of the formation of a political perspective. . . .

RG: Yes, it is.

PK: . . . and clearly it largely was formed—or the beginnings certainly were there at State, and with these courses and readings.

RG: Well, yeah, see what happens is this. What happens is that as a youngster I'm exposed to some of these things much earlier. Speaking about racism and speaking about the apartheid that I experienced in Stockton, California. You live here, we live over there, and the twain shall never meet. Later in school at San Francisco State, through classes and discussions and reading, I begin to understand that social partitioning is systematic; it's not haphazard that these types of things happen. And so I *am* developing a point of view that is more critical than it ever was before. Before it was a little bit more liberal, kind of foggy, laissez-faire, kind of do-your-own-thing point of view, where now it's becoming a bit more critical and systematic. And at the same time, now in '66 going to '68, there are the various civil rights movements going on—the African-American civil rights movement, and the cultural component, as well as the other complex contentions of the Chicano and other Latinos, Asian-American, and Native American. I'm a part of this. I'm a part of this, and strongly identify with it, because as a kid I grew up with Asians, Native Americans, white working-class folks, African-Americans, so it's like it's me from years earlier, but now understanding the dynamics of how many of us working-class kids got to where we have. And so my mind becomes politicized with, not necessarily a dogmatic perspective. I'm not a. . . .

PK: Old-guard leftist.

RG: Yeah, I'm not a Marxist. There are Marxian perspectives that one can have without being a Marxist with a capital M. So I am molding a point of view that is shared in different ways with other groups.

[Interruption in taping]

RG: You know, I often say that my involvement at San Francisco State during the sixties and into the early seventies—in San Francisco—changed my life to the good. There's no question about it. If I didn't experience what I experienced in the late sixties, early seventies, *in* San Francisco, I would not be the kind of person that I am, that I like tremendously. You know, I like me very much.

PK: [chuckles] That's good.

RG: You know, I really do. And I'm glad that I went through those experiences and I have no grudge against those experiences. They have only benefited me—in many ways.

PK: [Alongside of this], these were growing experiences.

RG: These were growing experiences.

PK: The world became larger, more transformative.

RG: The world became larger and it became. . . . Some mysteries were demystified, and the world became such that I could reach out to it and grab it and do something with it.

PK: How would you describe. And I don't know what a critical moment might be. You might be able to say there was some critical moment during this process, but at that moment—or, anyway, during these years—how would you describe your own ideological or political perspective as it matured, as it develops in this experience?

RG: You know, I think what it. . . . At first, I could say it became more critical—I mean, real critical—in terms of understanding that some material realities are caused by the relationships to events that interact to cause them to happen, whereas before I wouldn't look at things exactly like that. I used to just look more or less at the event for explanation. Now, during the late sixties, early seventies, I begin to look at relationships between an event and other events, and seeing some kind of cause-and-effect relationship. And I would say as an ideology it's more. . . . Well, you know, it was leftish, it was Third Worldish, it was all kinds of things. It wasn't one thing. It was Chicanismo—but not of the vulgarized position, which I totally fought against.

PK: Which is?

RG: Well, there was a. . . . I remember going to a meeting in 1971 in Los Angeles with a friend of mine from San Francisco, and there was a moment when people talked, and I said, "Francisco and I are from San Francisco, from the Galería de la Raza." And the question was, "Why do you call it the Galería de la Raza?" So I said, "Well, we call it that because there are many peoples who live in the Mission District who are from various places in Latin America, not only Mexicans, Chicanos." And, man, they just booed us out. I said, "Francisco, man, let's get out of this place. All they're talking about it is a "pure Chicanismo." I said, "That scares me, man. It sounds really dangerous. Let's go." So we left. So

this kind of vulgar, reactionary cultural-nationalism was one that bothered me to no end.

PK: I see.

RG: It didn't make any sense to me at all. It scared me.

PK: It was exclusive rather than. . . .

RG: Very exclusive. Very exclusive. And one which, in the context of being in San Francisco, would not have worked at all. It would have been divisive. So that's what I mean by this kind of vulgar Chicanismo. So I never really subscribed to that, and when hired to teach at San Francisco State when they first founded the. . . . We called it the La Raza Studies Program. I was asked to do the first class called La Raza Art Workshop. And I was interviewed to do this in '69. And I told the interviewers, I said, "Look, if you want me to work for you, and if you expect me to produce little Diego Riveras, little Orozcos, and little Siqueiros, I'm not your man. If that's what you want, find somebody else, not me." And so they said, "No, no, no." "So, okay, let's go to work." So, see, I always fought that even inside the academy. I have no interest in it. If it's going to be vulgar, essentialist, and exclusive, its vision is therefore myopic. I'm not interested in that.

PK: Let's start talking about. . . . Looks like we have only a few more minutes here [on the tape—Ed.], maybe we ought to, since this is a breaking point, let me put in another one.

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing session one interview with Rupert García. This is tape four, side A. Let's see, we have you now . . . we finally got you into San Francisco State, and we've been talking more about the formation of you, intellectually.

RG: Now, we didn't talk about the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, a lot of the. . . .

PK: No, we haven't talked about that yet.

RG: . . . AIM, the Prisoners Union, all kinds of stuff.

PK: And we certainly haven't talked about the art department yet.

RG: Yeah, well let's talk about that.

PK: [laughs] Your choice. But what about that? Obviously you enrolled—or at least I think you enrolled—already

you had an A.A. [Associate of Arts?—Ed.] I suppose from community college at _____ _____.

RG: Yeah. In painting.

PK: In painting. And so you enrolled at State presumably with credit for those—or you came in as a junior.

RG: As a junior. To study painting.

PK: Come to study painting.

RG: Come to study painting.

PK: So what was the nature of the course of the program for you at that time in San Francisco State? Who'd you study with?

RG: Well, I came there not knowing a thing about the school and came to the big city again, but now to live. And I came on campus and I felt totally isolated, disconnected. I was lost. Even when I came on campus in '66 for the fall there was a lot of protestation against the war and social injustice. I'm trying to study art and deal with these intense and serious issues. I'm taking art classes, taking drawing and painting, taking a course in sculpture, and I'm working with people like Dick McLean, Bob Bechtle, John Gutmann, and Dennis Beall in printmaking, and art history . . . some teachers who limitedly talk about art history.

PK: Like who? Do you remember?

RG: Oh, I can't think of the names right now, man, cause they retired and/or hopefully they're not in the art history business.

PK: They were that bad?

RG: They were dangerous. They were very dangerous.

PK: Well, you can't just say that. You have to expand on that.

RG: They were dangerous because they spoke in such absolute terms about why Western cultures are the exemplary examples of human achievement. And by omission implying others were not. And so I'm doing this listening, and at the time now my mind is growing critically, beginning to understand that there's always an agenda—whether you're for it or against it—that's always the subtext of "knowledge wars." So we had Western art history, looking at, and what are. . . ? "Ah, damn, all that I'm looking at is, you know, wonderful examples of culture, but I don't see anything from Mexico. Nothing at all." As I recall, there wasn't even a mention about other world cultures to broaden the class's context. And so I just. . . . And the strike happened in '68 and, during this Western art history course, I stand up and I criticize the instructor, I criticize the material, and I say, "Here we are talking about this art history and its culture and how important it is and how some of the artists were critical. Outside the door of this art building there are students doing the very same thing about which we are studying. So what do we do? Do we just sit on our asses here? Or do we go out and participate in this important "decolonial situation?" So I said, "Let's go!" [laughs] "Let's get outta here and go out there." And so some students come and some don't. I have no idea who came and I have no idea who didn't. But I know *I* went out.

PK: Do you remember. . . .

RG: [_____—Ed.] Morrissey was the teacher.

PK: Who?

RG: Morrissey. I think it was Morrissey, who seemed harmless. And it was a course in either Western . . . something in Western art or modern art. [We used H. W. Janson's History of Art.—RG]

PK: But you felt . . . first of all, you were annoyed by the course, anyway.

RG: Yeah, the perspective was very narrow. The perspective was all too acceptable. There was no questioning at all. Everything was fine—set in concrete, and to last forever.

PK: The "great man" approach.

RG: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And it didn't ring true. It just seemed like there was much more that must have gone on.

PK: So you had no objection to . . . you had no argument with these artists who happened to be presented, like,

oh, say, Mondrian or somebody like that, but what bothered you was that you figured this can't be the whole story.

RG: Can't be the whole story. Can't be the whole story—which in fact is the case. But we weren't being told that that's the case.

PK: There was nothing more.

RG: Nothing more. This is it. If there was a little more, its purpose for being was to somehow make inevitably possible the "greatness of Western art."

PK: As you remember it, it was that direct.

RG: And nothing else was happening. Only *this* was happening. You know. And these were the examples of what was going on that was the best.

PK: What did they talk about then. . . . I mean, did you take any courses in, well, modern art, contemporary art, where they focused on abstract expressionism sort of as the late . . . as the greatest peak of achievement?

RG: I'm sure. I have to look at my transcript to tell you. Oh, in Spring '66 I studied Easter art, good class!

PK: So you managed to sort of set aside what the message was other than in a general way, would you say? I mean, you don't remember what style was being presented as the [pinnacle].

RG: I do. In the school, I do. What was presented by example as the thing to do was photo-realism.

PK: You mean in the studio?

RG: Yeah, in the studio. But in art history it was Pop Art . . .

PK: Oh, so you talked about that.

RG: . . . right before [Robert—Ed.] Rauschenberg and [Jasper—Ed.] Johns—hand-made Pop Art—and then I remember going through A.E. [abstract expressionism—Ed.] and that kind of stuff, for sure.

PK: [Clement—Ed.] Greenberg ideas, at all? Did they get into that sort of critical. . . .

RG: Not. . . . That wasn't all being thought about critically. It was just accepted totally, and if we talked about it at all, I don't remember about that. It just seemed that the instruction in art history was incomplete. You know, it left a lot. . . . And, of course, as you know in any art history course there will be gaps anyway.

PK: Yeah.

RG: But when you're in a critical and deconstructive frame of mind, in the late sixties, early seventies, I mean, you *really* see those gaps. They were huge. Because the moment was about reexamining, revising, all human production. And as far as I was concerned, it came down to that. [I must remind you that by 1968 the campus had student groups like SAD, PL, BSU, TWLF, Asian and other groups.—RG]

PK: Now, did you have fellow students there who shared these views? Is this something you would talk about with other students?

RG: Yeah. There was a couple, there was a couple.

PK: Anybody you remember or not?

RG: A little later there was a guy who used to work in the audiovisual area who became a part of a group of us—Saichi Kawahara—and now goes by "Fred." We used to talk about these things. There weren't many I talked with on campus. Now when the strike actually took place and we had discussions and they were usually with students in other areas of study. I don't recall *anybody* from the art department going to these meetings downtown and discussing ideas and strategies there with hundreds of people from different camps.

PK: Where were these groups?

RG: I remember one in this church in. . . . I know where exactly it is; I forget the name of it. But we had meetings [up at the]. . . .

PK: It must have been Glide Memorial. [said tongue-in-cheek—Trans.]

RG: No, no, no, not Glide. It wasn't Glide.

PK: That was a good guess, though.

RG: I had no idea what it was. I mean, now, in retrospect, it is, but at the time. . . .

PK: Yeah. But then, maybe not.

RG: I have no idea. But this one church. It was known to me, and we had meetings at a big church, too. And it was kind of like, not really Western Addition, but going towards the Haight area. I'm not doing a very good job of pinpointing it, but anyway. . . .

PK: But this was one of a number of meetings.

RG: A number of meetings.

PK: And so you represented a contingent of. . . .

RG: I didn't represent anybody. I went as an individual.

PK: Well, you went as an individual, but, . . .

RG: I think I was the only art student from my school.

PK: But there were other San Francisco State students.

RG: All. [Well, it seemed like all students.—RG]

PK: All? Okay, that's what I was trying to clarify.

RG: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was very interesting.

PK: It wasn't a broader public?

RG: No, no, no. Well, the people from various neighborhoods came. But we had like Black Panther Party people there, BSU [Black Student Union—Ed.] people, TWLF [Third World Liberation Front—Ed.], different Marxist groups, Trotskyite groups. And I'm hearing all this critical disrouse and, God, it was just amazing. So I'm listening to all this stuff, and no one really knows me. I'm looking around and I'm listening and trying to make connections with what's happening on campus and with what's happening off campus and what's happening throughout the country and what's happening around the globe in 1968, because what was being talked about what happened in Paris in May and what happened in Mexico in October and what happened in other places in the world at this time. And so I began to see this global interconnection of these movements of protest and critique and a desire to redesign the fabric of society, to define and produce a new human being. And which all made sense to me—that something had to be done. I didn't know exactly what, but certainly something has to be done. And I didn't necessarily subscribe to a structured ideology. You know, no particular line did I subscribe to. I wasn't CPUSA [Communist Party USA—Ed.]. I wasn't Progressive Labor Party, not an official member of the TWLF. And they were all there. But I was just interested in what's going on. And no one knows where I was a couple of years ago. That was all kept very, very inside.

PK: Now, how involved did you get in any of the. . . . Well, you attended the meetings, but I'm trying to get enough sense of. . . .

RG: Well, in the art department we did eventually respond, in terms of faculty. . . . Some faculty, some students, at the suggestion. . . . We had a big meeting of art students and faculty about how to address the campus strike. And one faculty—I guess, a faculty from England, who had just come back from visiting France and Paris—mentioned to us what he saw some students doing there—which was to make posters. And so we—some faculty and students—organized a poster brigade. And we used Dennis Beall's print studios and his instruction on how to do silkscreen and so we learned this technique, like on-the-job training. There was no course, no class. And I was a liaison between the art department and the other members of the Third World Liberation Front organizations. I would go talk to them and come back, and this kind of thing. And so we began to make posters dealing with the issues—issues from racism to better education to police brutality, anti-war, and much more. I mean, all the issues that were being addressed at that time made for a heady experience. Many of those issues were being dealt with in our poster brigade. And the posters were used in the demonstrations on campus, and some were used outside of campus, and some were sold to raise money to get people out on bail, people who had been arrested. And it was going very well. We had really wonderful teamwork.

PK: This had the approval of the art department—the administration of the art department?

RG: Oh, there must have been some approval because. . . .

PK: You were doing it.

RG: . . . not only did we do it, but we reconstituted our classes. We had discussions about reconstitution—you know, how to reorganize our classes to make them more relevant. And some of the instructors didn't participate. And at the time some of us were really, like, disgusted with some of them. But in retrospect there could have been some very understandable reasons as to why they were not. I mean, at the time, in the heat of the moment, it's either you're for us or you're against us. And so I had those moments every now and then, which now I think sadly that I held them, but that was the case.

PK: Yeah. I mean, I actually remember that very well, because I was at UCLA at the time and I remember meetings in the art department there. We put on an exhibition, for instance, with basically the approval. The department tried to be flexible. They figured they had to allow some expression of the concerns. So I remember. . . .

RG: Ours was very good, as a matter of fact. I was very surprised. Very open and. . . .

PK: Well, what about people like. . . . Well, let me ask you a couple of questions. First of all, very interested, obviously, in the posters. Now did you design any of them?

RG: Many, many.

PK: Many? And then how did it work? I want to know how it worked. People will come from certain groups, with certain concerns, and say we need an image like. . . ?

RG: No, no. At first, we made our own designs. Our own designs. Which may have been generated by knowing some of the issues that were being addressed in the overall strike on campus. And some folks made their own statements in the posters. Now eventually we begin to get requests. But that wasn't the main reason for being. The main reason for being was, "How do we as artists relate to the present moment on campus and the world?" So, many of us who were "painters". . . . [pronounced in a "high-falutin'" voice—Trans.] And I very consciously stopped painting.

PK: Why?

RG: Because it seemed momentarily impractical as a form. It didn't seem to address the situation. And I don't know if I was at the point where I was exposed to the notions of easel painting being bourgeois yet. I don't know. But painting seemed to be impractical. It seemed to be uneffective at the moment. And so I just stopped painting. I put on the brakes. Because I felt . . . it wasn't so much of a political decision [or was it?—RD] as it was that I felt it was impractical. Easel painting didn't seem to be answering the questions being raised. And then the discussion of making posters seemed to be, "Oh man that was it." That's how we will address the moment. And so I learned how to screen-print—on-the-job training. Now in junior college I had a course in which we dealt with poster design in '81 or early '82 [must mean "'61 or early '62"—Ed.]. And so I did several layout posters way back then. Very simple image, high contrast colors, very much similar to what I began to do later on at San Francisco State. So I had that sense, but my first silkscreen posters were really inconsequential because I'm learning the medium, you know? [My paintings and prints before the strike were influenced by minimal art, English Pop, American Pop, photo-mediated imagery, antiwar sentiments, civil rights—RG]

PK: Right.

RG: And then I begin to really take off and I fall in love with screen printing. I really am enamored by the color, how the ink behaves, how the ink smells, how the squeegie works. I become seduced by all of the complex practices of making a silkscreen poster. That becomes my exclusive medium for the next seven or eight years.

PK: Are any of the images that you produced with the Brigade at that time, are any of them the ones then that are familiar from your own work? I mean, are any of them the ones that you view as mature?

RG: I think the one I did in '68 of Che Guevara. It's called ["Right On", *Right On*].

PK: Yeah, yeah, okay. Well, that answers my question, yeah, so this really marks the beginning of. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah. The second image, which is the one with Che, that starts to solidify for me—and now, in retrospect—that this is where I'm starting to get it. The first one, it was really weak, but it was important because it demonstrates that I could use material.

PK: So that really did launch you on that aspect of your career.

RG: Absolutely. What began as a moment of artistic expedience in the context of the strike in 1968 becomes a turning point for my sensibility as an artist. Yeah, that's correct, in terms of the medium of screen-printing and posters and prints. A lot of things happened at this time. For example, the previously held notion that painting was the end-all of human expression is challenged by this popular medium—silk-screen, making posters and prints—and that becomes as significant as making an easel painting. So I begin to understand how arbitrary the categories are of craft and fine art and how that distinction. . . . I begin to wonder, who made those distinctions? How did they get here? How did they get to think of these like that? And I begin to research and do reading and find out. And I find out what's arbitrary. I mean, historically silk-screening becomes called "serigraph" during the WPA to differentiate the use of silk-screen from the commercial and fine art. And I'm thinking, "Wow, isn't this something? That's really interesting to me." So then I begin to, as an off-shoot of intellectual interest, I begin to see how the arbitrariness between high art and low culture is simply that: arbitrary. And then looking at Pop Art in that context, I begin to see that some of what they were saying was very important to me. Because of my imagery and how I use it, I lose some of the mainstream "Pop Art sensibility," without question. And some very specifically. But even though that's true, I felt that what many of the Pop artists were doing was unfulfilling for me. Many of the Pop artists were simply Pop artists, not really avant-garde like the Dadaists and Surrealists, in the profound sense of that word. They really were not.

PK: Well, doesn't this also have to do with what one views as the function of art? The more important primary function of art? Whereas posters have a history as communicating.

RG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PK: For instance, advertising. You know, certainly that's, in the nineteenth century, how they were used. And then certainly with painting there's a communication there presumably, but it's not mass communication. . . .

RG: That's correct.

PK: . . . which lends itself to the needs of the political _____.

RG: Well, in '69 somebody puts in my box. . . . I'm teaching in '69 with the La Raza Studies Program, but my box is in the art department because I'm still a graduate student getting an advanced degree at State. I find in my box a Xeroxed chapter ["Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art," May 1942—RG] from a book by Mao Tse Tung on art. I read this chapter. Man, I'm telling you, it scared the hell out of me. Because it raises the questions about the artist's responsibility—the role of art and the artist in a revolutionary context. And, wow! [laughs] "Wow, this is heavy. This is heavy, heavy!" And so I think about that a lot. So some of that, what I read, gets into my point of view. But not all of it. You see, I take things from many places. I don't stick to . . . I don't become a Maoist, for example. I just kind of take what's there that seems to ring true for me. See, I'm not doing any of this because of any organized ideology to please anybody else, except to achieve understanding and meaning for me. Very selfish, in a sense. You know, really just trying to figure things out for me.

At the same time in '69, on campus I meet the guy I mentioned earlier with whom I went to Los Angeles, Francisco Camplís. He's on campus, he's in the Student Union putting up an exhibition, and I happen to go inside. He's putting up paintings, and he says, "Hi, My name is Francisco," and I say, "Oh, my name is Rupert García." We shook hands. He says, "You know, you should come on down to Artes Seis. It's a gallery run by Latino artists at 18th Street and Dolores, right near Mission High School." "All right, I will." And he's putting up an exhibition of artists from the Mission, Latino artists. So I go down to 18th and Dolores and I go to the Arte Seis and we have the meeting and I meet these other artists. And, wow! Wow! I mean, it was beautiful.

PK: This is '69?

RG: '69. '69. The Galería is founded in 1970, so Artes Seis is really a precursor. And so we start classes to teach people in the area how to make prints. I begin to instruct a few people on silk-screening—those who were members of Artes Seis, I mean. And we talk about why we exist. We talk about the Chicano/Latino movement, as well as other movements happening in the Bay area. More specifically dealing with culture. And then we began to expand membership. And then we get to a point where we need to establish a larger space which is [at] 14th and Valencia. And so in 1970 the groups now making up Artes Seis become founding members for the Galería de la Raza in 1970. Which includes some people from Oakland, in particular René Yañ ez, who was a member of a group over there that was also very important and very influential to us in San Francisco.

PK: What was that group?

RG: MALAF, the Mexican-American Liberation Art Front [pronounced "mahl-lah-ef-fay"—Ed.].

PK: Oh yeah, I've heard of that.

RG: Styling their name after the National Liberation Front of Vietnam. So they took on "Liberation Front" to

identify themselves with the struggle in Vietnam. And so ‘69 is important, too, because of how my involvement on campus becomes involved with activities off campus. See, relationships between what I do in school and on campus are about making connections in real life, in quotation marks, which is to say with what happens off campus. Which seems to be more real than what happens on campus. [laughs] And so the moment I meet Francisco to make a so that is the beginning of ‘69 with Francisco, with my direct involvement, along with many others, in culturally a very important cultural milieu out of the Mission District in San Francisco.

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing Rupert García, this is session one, tape four, side B. Rupert, carry on.

RG: Okay, we were talking about Artes Seis and ‘69, how important it was for me because it’s the cultural instrument that connects me with not only Camplís but also many other artists in the Mission District (as well as others) and how we become a part of a cultural force along with Carlos Santana and other musicians and cultural producers. We were all part of this large group. I mean, we were not buddies; we were all part of this contextual moment—which must be seen, by the way, in the light of the Chicano-Latino civil rights and cultural . . . what we called a renaissance. So the politics and the culture expression were intertwined. In other words, the Artes Seis wasn’t set up as fancy dressing for the politics. Rather, we saw ourselves as paralleling and crisscrossing with the social and political thrust of the moment.

PK: Let me ask you—excuse me for interrupting—but "Artes Seis," Six Arts"?

RG: Yeah, Artes Seis. Yeah, Six Arts. When I came in it was already founded. I wasn’t one of the six founding members and. . . .

PK: I just wondered what that might mean.

RG: I never really asked anybody to what it symbolized. If it was . . . did they mean to say the seven arts and they thought it was six? Or is it because there were six artists and instead of saying artistas, they said artes? I have no idea. But it’s Artes Seis. And one of the members of Artes Seis, Rolando Castellón, not only was he our first director of the Galería de la Raza, but he later becomes a curator for San Francisco MOMA and eventually becomes the director of the art gallery at UC Santa Cruz [and later the Meridian Gallery in San Francisco—RG]. So by 1970 Artes Seis becomes the Galería de la Raza. And earlier I mentioned about the word "la raza" and how some of us went to L.A. and had a problem with some vulgar cultural nationalists.

PK: Right.

RG: At the first meetings of the Galería we had to think of a name. What are we going to call ourselves? And it was a very serious, heated discussion. Really heated. And because of what I mentioned earlier, the complex nature of the makeup of the peoples in the Mission—not to mention in Oakland, and we also thought about San Jose, a little bit, not too much—we realized that we couldn’t say Chicano. That that did not reflect the multiplicity of Latinos. So we figure, okay, "la raza," the people. So "The Peoples’ Gallery" or "The Gallery of the People." That’s how we finally came up with the decision to call it that.

PK: Was it understood then that La Raza would be equivalent to Latinos?

RG: Yes, yes.

PK: Because of the Spanish word, and Spanish name.

RG: Well, absolutely. That’s correct. We made a point, because some people tried to join us who were *Spanish* Spanish and they realized on their own, "Hey, this ain’t me. This really ain’t me. It may be a part of me, but it ain’t me." So we didn’t have to tell anybody not to join. We had Anglo artists who joined because they were decent people who were sympathetic.

PK: Yeah, supportive.

RG: Absolutely. I mean, see what was wonderful about the Galería, as we were—and this is why I stayed for as long as I did—there was no strong, strong attempt to be exclusive. Number one, we didn’t practice a vulgar Chicano nationalism. We stayed with a kind of La Raza-Latino umbrella. And then some of the founding members who were from the Artes Seis were not Latino. And then eventually the Galería began to show all kinds of different things. It was wonderful, wonderful.

PK: What was your role? Describe your role in bringing that about. You were one of the founders, right?

RG: Yeah, that’s correct. Well, I think what I brought to it, I feel, is my intensity. You know, my sense. . . . This is certainly my perception.

PK: Yes, of course. This is your interview.

RG: Yeah, I felt that what I brought to not only Artes Seis—because I had my graduate Master show at Artes Seis and not one faculty member from the art department came to the show.

PK: No.

RG: And I repeat, not one came.

PK: Not one?

RG: Not one.

PK: Not even Gutmann?

RG: Not one. That includes John Gutmann.

PK: Who otherwise was just splendid.

RG: Yeah. I love the man.

PK: Okay.

RG: I love him.

PK: Why?

RG: I have no idea why no faculty came. I have my guesses, but they're unfounded. I think they were afraid.

PK: Yeah, well, I was wondering. You did ask them, though? You didn't say, "Where the hell were you? Were you sick? Did you forget?"

RG: You know, I think I was so disappointed. . . .

PK: You must have been hurt, as a matter of fact.

RG: Of course I was hurt. For about half an hour.

PK: Well, good for you.

RG: But I certainly felt it. There's no question about that. So Artes Seis was doubly important because I had joined it, plus because I had my. . . . I made a point. I consciously decided to have my master's show at Artes Seis in 1970. Because I wanted to demonstrate that the art that I made can be shown anywhere I want to show it, and I want to show it now in Artes Seis because I want to make a statement. And the statement is that, "At this moment I'm working with these artists in the Mission District and what I'm doing is a political gesture. I'm making a statement, making a point."

PK: What about the work? The content of the work? Was there anything political in that?

RG: The work was. . . . Good question, because the work I did show for my Master's is the work I did during the strike.

PK: I see.

RG: So I wanted to marry art and life. What I showed for my Master's show was what I practiced in life. There was no separation between, "I want to make art over here and I'll do life over there." Rather they were merged. They were one. It was an attempt to embrace both. And that's why, also, I wanted to have it in the Mission, where I was working with other artists. At that time it was very meaningful to do that. And I also had my master's show and the opening—as it were—on tape. Somebody shot it on super eight and then I had it transferred to video, to VHS.

PK: Great! Great, that'll be part of your papers.

RG: Yeah. But somebody came by. It was a fellow graduate student in ceramics. He happened to have his camera and he filmed. I'm about 85 pounds. [laughs]

PK: No, this, this _____ _____. . . .

RG: This is true.

RG: [still laughing; joke obscured by both talking simultaneously—Trans.] And the film maker goes around and I'm there, Peter Rodríguez is there, Ralph Maradiaga was there, and there's a woman—I forget her name—and that's it. He was going around and it was great because. . . .

PK: That was it?

RG: That was it.

PK: Those were the people who attended?

RG: That was it. That was it. No, no, no, sorry. That was not the opening. The opening was. . . .

PK: There were more people.

RG: There were more people, yeah.

PK: Okay. [I'm glad to hear that.]

RG: But nobody from school I recall. None of the. . . .

PK: Not even a fellow student?

RG: I don't remember now. I can't remember, man, I just can't remember. It's terrible, though. Anyway, so what I brought to the Galería, in terms of your earlier question, I brought with me, like I said, my intensity. I brought a vision, a sense of craft, and a sense of the importance and necessity of making art. A total *commitment* to being an artist. Absolute commitment.

PK: What about this? Am I reading into it by saying also, a dedication to art put to the service of the community, to the people?

RG: Well, again, that may have been there, but that was not all that it was about for me.

PK: I see.

RG: You see what I'm saying? I didn't work from a narrow ideology that attempts to put across only something political. I may have every now and then overlapped into something like that. Whatever was done was what I believed in, that I felt was necessary. And that can be perceived. . . . "Rupert, I see in looking at all that you believed that it's important that art is being produced for the people." Well, that might be true, but that's not only why I did it. See, because many people who write about me reduce it to that, and they forget the possibility that I was doing it for *me*, which was always the case since I was ten years old. Me, me, me, me. [laughs]

PK: [chuckling] The me generation.

RG: Absolutely, the me generation before its time. But I will not deny that we had discussions about these things. We did. And I even wrote about it. But it wasn't *why*. It just seemed it was important and it seemed necessary and it rang really true. It was as if I was doing it as an extension of my family. That's what it was like. Because it was like being back home among my family, who did the dances, listened to the music. It was that. It's that. It's not. . . . Yeah, it was more like that. And when it didn't feel like that I would move away. "It just doesn't seem like I could bring my cousin here and we can talk about things. It doesn't seem like that anymore; it's changed." You know, if that happened that's how I would react. I always had that sense of family—even though it was me, me, me, me. [I am my audience!—RG]

PK: Still. . . .

RG: Yeah, still, because that's what I used . . . that's my framework for sensibility is that sense of. . . .

PK: Was this a way of you and your art remaining true to yourself?

RG: Absolutely.

PK: This was what you could measure it against.

RG: Absolutely. Absolutely.

PK: Interesting.

RG: I remember in the early seventies when I was at my aunt and uncle's house in Stockton, and my cousin's, and I had brought some screen prints that I had done. I laid them all on the living room floor and we were all going through them together, and my aunt is watching and she says, "Oh-h-h, Rupert, you want us to think." I said, "Wow, what a trip." And I said, "Man," I says, "Yes. Because *I'm* thinking." And I was so touched to hear her say that in front of everybody there that were just going through all these screen prints together. It was great. And it was. . . .

PK: See, now, that is. . . . I know you say that you make your art first and foremost for yourself. . . .

RG: Absolutely.

PK: . . . but this is a kind of communication, nonetheless.

RG: No, see. I know it's seemingly paradoxical. I do know that I cannot escape the communication aspect and the social aspect. I don't deny that. But that's after the fact.

PK: Okay. So you insist on that. You're going to hold on to that?

RG: Oh, yes, because it's. . . . The reason I hold onto it is because it is true that me doing this kind of. . . . When I began, if I wasn't doing the posters or prints I'd be doing the painting. If I wasn't doing the painting, I was doing the prints and posters because I felt as sure about doing it as I did about making paintings. It's the same energy, the same dedication. I don't know about the interest; maybe the interest may be different. But it was that intensity and that obsession that I had about making easel paintings that was the same that I had for making silk-screen posters—eventually. At first I was scared to death to screen print. When I got into the aesthetics of silk-screen printing, man, I just fell in love with it. And so that was it. Because I. . . . [I] the big ego. . . . But the ego embraced it as being, "This is truth for you, Rupert. This is truth for you. It's true." And I said, "Well, I did it." If it wasn't true I would have changed, I would have done something else but it rang true.

PK: It sounds to me like you're working very much also with the notion of authenticity, that which is authentic in your own experience, and that's. . . .

RG: Yeah. Yes, very good. That's good, Paul. I'm really glad that you said that, because I think that is very important to me. It's not only originality. but that it's authentic—meaning that it really represents how I think and feel. It might be social. It might be political. Whatever it might be, it's authentic.

PK: Let's get you back to this founding moment of the Galería. And I want to be clear on the cast of characters. You've given some indication of what you feel you brought to the mix. Well, you know, what was the process? How did it come about? Who were the people? And did you have meetings to discuss that you wanted to set this up?

RG: Yeah, well, see, the reason for the existence of not only the Galería but also Artes Seis, not to mention other art centers throughout the United States vis-à-vis African-Americans, Latinos, and so on—not to mention women's buildings and centers—had to do with its connection to the grand critique at the time of the late sixties and early seventies that variously reexamined the cultural apparatus. Whose interest does it represent? How does it do that? Many of us viewed, "Well, they're not doing a very good job as far as we're concerned," and so they were identified to a certain degree as being part of the problem. So what do you do then? Well, what you do is you create your own venue. So up springs a lot of Galerías, a lot of Centro Culturales. These centers become simultaneously negation and affirmation. A sense of protest and a sense of empowerment. And that's why they existed and that's why some still exist—but perhaps in a different kind of form or a different variation.

PK: What about the process? Who were the other principals in. . . .

RG: Well, the main principals who eventually founded the Galería came from Artes Seis and a group called Casa Hispañ a de Belles Artes in San Francisco. Francisco Camplís was a member of that, and I think possibly the Artes Seis was a satellite of Casa Hispañ a. And, see, Casa *Hispañ a*.

PK: That's right.

RG: And so we saw that primarily as a *Spanish* concern.

PK: Yeah, European.

RG: European. And so an interesting dialogue went on. Nothing hostile, but there were some Latinos who thought they were Spaniards, and they had to work that through. And there were some from the Casa who were indeed Spanish. And so Casa Hispañ a—you know, the "Spanish House of Fine Arts"—part wanted to call it the Palace of Spanish Fine Arts if they could. Well, some members in Artes Seis were from Casa, and eventually supporters of Artes Seis came from Casa. When it became the Galería we also had members from Artes Seis,

Casa, and another group called ALAS—Artistas Latinas Americanas. It was a mixed group dealing with Latin American artists, something like that. So it was like a mix of different groups whose members got together and all of whom were not "La Raza." And some who got together with us weren't members of a certain group, who through the help and efforts of Francisco and me and Rolando [Castellón—Ed.] and a few others—and I think by this time René Yañ ez was with us, too—found the space on 14th and Valencia. And at meetings we just. . . . Oh, before that site we had meetings elsewhere, and then we finally found 14th Street and Valencia and. . . . It's been so long I'm just not remembering, and so many people, too. What I remember distinctly is trying to come to grips with the name. And then what we're going to show. And we began by showing . . . we tried to develop a sensibility—not strong enough—but to be sensitive to and supportive of women.

PK: I was going to just ask that.

RG: Yeah, and one of our early shows was dealing with the Latina artist. But the thrust of the Galería, up until the past few years, has been pretty sexist. And it's not unique to the Galería. And then when we first opened the Galería we were doing solo shows, and we eventually realized that we no longer wanted to do solo shows because, "ideologically," we felt it more important to demonstrate solidarity among artists, and so we will exhibit maybe two-person shows at the least. And, see, we tried to hang onto that idea as long as we could. And we also decided to have classes at the Galería, kind of a continuation from Artes Seis but a bit more organized and a bit more spaceous.

PK: Now you actually taught as part of that program didn't you?

RG: I never taught a course, no.

PK: You didn't.

RG: No, no, what I did was I was to mentor certain people. Like Ralph Maradiaga, I really facilitated him in becoming a very good silk-screen printer. I was a mentor to many people. We didn't define it as such and I didn't want to do that. I said, "I want to. . . ." Because I knew I was being a mentor; I could tell. But I didn't wear it on my sleeve. I let it be more like friends, but knowing that I was doing that, and being careful so I'm not condescending and demeaning. That's very important in mentoring. And I also brought to the Galería a Third World perspective—which is to say demonstrating in my work and in discussion the solidarity among people of color not only in this country but in the world. So it was a jump to being international, not only domestically but in fact globally. And that's always been important to me, even going back to grammar school. To maintain that. And I always understood about working class—you know, white working class. Where I lived there was a *lot* of working-class white folks out there as well as Chicanos, Mexicanos, Asians, and Filipinos, African-Americans. Working class to the bone. And in the group I hung around with in high school we had working-class white kids. You know, they were just right with us, boom. Each other was what the group stuck to, you know. It was beautiful—in a kind of poetic sense based upon a lived reality. You know, it was beautiful. Where were we? I digressed for a moment.

PK: Well, you were talking about your own bringing international _____. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

PK: You were mentoring, but then you moved on to mention the global [aspect].

RG: And then I designed and printed many of the posters for the first few years for the Galería. And I eventually began to do some book covers for some of the poets in the Mission [District, San Francisco—Ed.]. And I might mention—I forgot this—in 1969 I did some visual journalism for a local newspaper [and artwork for a national new left tabloid, *The Leviathin*; I also wrote for and did artwork for another local newspaper, *El Tecolote*.—RG]. Oh, man, the publisher was Abdon Ugarte from Colombia—or Bolivia—and I used to make drawings of indigenous peoples from Latin America. And then he did an interview with me in 1969, and I did a poster for his newspaper, *La Prensa*. To get people to subscribe I made an edition of silk-screen prints with the portrait of Zapata and so if you came down and got a subscription you got this silk screen of Emiliano Zapata.

PK: Well, that's a famous image.

RG: Yeah.

PK: Yeah, I know that.

RG: I can say that, yeah!

PK: Well, that's true. I could. . . .

RG: So that's what I also brought to the Galería was the sense of the importance of*writing* about art and about

getting involved in journalism and getting involved with writers. I wasn't the only one who did that at the Galería but I was one who in fact not only talked about it but who did it.

PK: So you saw this as a fuller cultural group created . . . a group of creative people working together.

RG: Ah, yeah, creative people. We fed off of each other—the energies and ideas. It wasn't always smooth, of course. We tried to be a collective, which we tried to continue from the Artes Seis. And at this moment the notion of collective work was broadly being discussed all over the country in terms of the progressive movement. We tried to work as a group, not as individuals. Let me see, what else. . . .

PK: Do you remember how selections were made? Was there a committee that would make selections for exhibitions, who would be included. How did that work?

RG: Yeah, at the beginning it was pretty loosey-goosey. But not anybody could show, and we didn't let in just anybody. . . . We have never let just anybody show. Our first show was [Esteban] Villa. I think every show was really curated in a sense. We didn't just say, if you came off the street, "Ah, go ahead." No, no, no. We took care. So there was a selection process. I can't tell you who made them. [chuckles]. It could have been Rolando at first, then maybe Jay Ojeda, and then eventually René, and then Ralph and René became co-directors. I never became a director or a curator. I *knew* I couldn't do both—both meaning to *be* the director *and* make my work. I knew that all along, so I never allowed myself to do that. So there was a way of deciding who was going to show. To describe that mechanism more clearly, I can't do that. I just don't remember. But I do know it wasn't haphazard—never been haphazard.

PK: Right.

RG: Because I know people tried and it just never happened, never happened. There's always been some kind of curatorial process.

PK: Do you feel that the. . . . Well, we're coming toward the end of this [tape side—Ed.], but. . . . In fact, probably, rather than asking you a question that then you don't have time to answer. . . .

[Session 2]

PK: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Continuing an interview with Rupert García in the artist's studio in his home in Oakland, California. This is session two. It's November 10, 1995, and this is tape 1, side A. We . . . well, we had the benefit of lunch, and over lunch we discussed many weighty issues, which I think led to some possible topics for us to pick up on and continue our discussions. At the end of session one, the last taping, we concluded with the discussion of your involvement in the Chicano activist art groups, Artes Seis and the Galería de la Raza. And that was in '69-'70—about—that you started.

RG: Um hmm, exactly right.

PK: Another point that was made was that you actually stopped painting at about that time, I believe. . . .

RG: Yeah, I stopped painting in 1968.

PK: Oh, or a little earlier.

RG: Yeah, that was when the strike was occurring at San Francisco State Uni[versity] . . . College, then. And so I stopped. . . . I was a graduate student working toward an M.A. in painting. And it was during the strike that, among a variety of other critiques, the role of easel painting came under attack, and at the time and in the context in which we found ourselves during the student strike at San Francisco State, the questioning of painting seemed natural. And so painting on canvas at the time didn't seem meaningful and so I—I forget if we discussed this, although we may have; I don't know—but a faculty person who had just come back from Europe—and France, in particular—said that in May of that year—'68—he had seen students making posters in support of the student worker strike.

PK: Right.

RG: And it was then that we as students found a means to participate at school, and so painting lost its meaning for the moment it was dead. Then I went back to painting; I made one painting in 1970.

PK: One painting? Just one painting?

RG: One painting in 1970. It was done for a show at the Galería in 1970 a few months after Rubén Salazar was killed in L.A. And it was the centerpiece for the show. And then I did one more painting . . . no, two more large paintings on paper—one of Frida Kahlo for the Galería , for the window, and a painting of Che Guevara for this

Latino cultural center in Berkeley, La Peñ a. So that was the extent of painting, as such.

PK: Now that was 1970, did you say?

RG: Which?

PK: The return to . . . the doing the three paintings.

RG: Salazar was 1970, and then the others I have to look it up but it was during the early seventies.

PK: Let me ask this. Why was it that you were moved to return, in sort of these isolated moments, to painting, where you had apparently, at that point, pretty much. . . . Well, as you said yourself, you'd been seduced by the graphic medium, by serigraphy and ultimately lithography, I believe—printmaking. So what was it that made you, well, sort of regress momentarily, if you want to use that [expression].

RG: Well, it never was about regressing. It was about. . . . It's as if to say that the moment within the moment—the big moment being that when I was producing posters and prints; the moment within that was the Galería and La Peñ a—to do these projects seemed to be not regressing . . . the visual answer didn't seem to be a print or a poster. The visual answer seemed to be a painting, a painting-type effort. And so it was an answer to a question at the moment, and there was never a sense of contradiction, conflict, or regression, or whatever. It just seemed to be the thing to do.

PK: Is it possible that you felt the occasion, like with Rubén Salazar, that the occasion itself called for a more important _____.

RG: Well, it may have been because. . . . I don't know if it was more important but I think it was more that I was asked by members of these organizations to do something special, one for La Peñ a and these two other things for the Galería . And they were asked in a way in which . . . as if it was a request for a large picture, a single one, and that seemed to be the thing to do. So it's not as if it's more important or more reflective—now, I'm talking from the inside—and so it just seemed to be the right thing to do at the moment. Because we didn't make multiples of these—although the Frida Kahlo that I used for the Galería window was based on my earlier 1975 silk-screen; that is true. And then the Rubén Salazar I used in the painting was also connected—now we're getting somewhere—is also connected to the poster I did for the show at the Galería . And then the image I did of Che Guevara for La Peñ a was not necessarily directly based upon a '68 silk-screen I did of Che Guevara, but that connection is there.

PK: Well, I guess what I'm driving at—and obviously, you know, I don't want to try to impose an interpretation—but it just does occur to me, it's interesting, that the possibility that you still, even though you had made this commitment and were working almost exclusively in graphics. . . .

RG: Exclusively. I would say exclusively.

PK: Okay. But then there were these special moments. Now, in your mind then. . . .

RG: I would say "special moments" is good. That's good, that's good.

PK: In your mind did painting still carry with it, what shall we say, an image, a quality of fine art, that gave it more. . . .

RG: No, no.

PK: Not at all? No?

RG: No, not at all. I think it would have shortly after '67, '68, I think so. But, no, it was just another venue to realize an image. I think *that's* very true. Earlier, I would agree with you.

PK: So you really had, somehow then, been able to shift over without giving up art at all.

RG: Absolutely, absolutely. I was doing. . .

PK: Just a different way of image-making.

RG: I was writing for a newspaper, and I was doing drawings for another newspaper—I was working for three newspapers at one time—and then doing prints and posters, and then occasionally these works on paper you just mentioned and the ones on campus. So it was if the. . . . What was important was the idea, not necessarily the form. So the fluctuating with different modes of making images was an approach in which I didn't find any conflict of interest at all. They all seemed valid. The hierarchy was not there.

PK: And also, of course, with the multiples you have the advantage of distribution, communicating in a [broader way].

RG: Oh, yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

PK: Well, let's then shift along those lines. You stopped painting. . . .

RG: Yeah.

PK: . . . you had embraced the poster medium, presumably—and we can get into this stylistically, content, but also then distribution of idea—and then this constituted your main work for, I think we agreed, about seven years.

RG: Yes.

PK: So could you sort of reflect on some of the reasons for that in terms of the choice of the medium, the style, the content, the function?

RG: All right. The choice of the medium was circumstance—which is to say, in '68 there was discussion by art students and faculty as to what to do in terms of supporting the strike as picture-makers. And the notion was introduced of making posters, and then the medium introduced was silk-screen. So that determined my association with silk-screening. And then the style is determined by two things—one, the medium itself, and how I was introduced to it, and then secondly, and maybe perhaps more importantly, is that I've been using the photograph as a frame of reference since the mid-fifties. And so I think that really is what determined the style—that is the style determined by my love of the photograph and long-time use of it, and silk-screen itself allowed me to use the photograph. I could define shapes easily in terms of using the photograph. And then the content, well, that depends upon the issues I was interested in or that was before me.

PK: Let's talk about that a little bit. Again that harks back to the conversation we were having at lunch. I mentioned that I had just read Lucy Lippard's excellent and long, fairly long, thorough essay on your prints and posters in the catalog that was done in '90, isn't that right?

RG: Yeah, 1990.

PK: Yeah, and to go along with an exhibition organized . . . well, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and then it went on to Mexico, Mexico City.

RG: And then throughout the country here, too, the U.S.

PK: Okay. And, of course, the subject was [prints and posters, the years 1967 to 1990, Prints and Posters 1967–1990]. And we were talking a little bit about Lucy Lippard's essay and her interpretation, her way of describing really the meaning of your work and its position—or at least the poster work in its position within your broader, shall we say, vision as an artist. And it seemed to me in the reading—and I'd like to have your response to this, your thoughts on this—that in her reading of the work, and then the impression that is left in her essay—is that your work during these years is largely, if not entirely, polemical and ideologically driven. And I won't say that in an absolute sense, because she also discusses it in terms of other considerations. But that's the . . . you know, that the content and the social issues that it deals with are politics.

RG: Well, those issues you just mentioned certainly were important concerns that comprised part of the machine that drove me. But there were other components involved in that socio-aesthetic machine of just the nature in which, for example, silk-screen can achieve certain ways of developing shapes and colors. And so that to me was a very important part of why my images look the way they do. We mentioned the photograph; we haven't mentioned this, but she may have mentioned this, and that is when I did some reading and critiquing of Pop Art I did embrace and enfold into my work some of their issues, and that also determines how my art looks. And so there is an art-historical concern, and there was just the aesthetic foundations that one can get in silk-screen printing. And also this—see, I think she discusses this, too—my concern with consumer society and culture. And there is an aesthetic in that, which the Pop artists have found, of course, too.—and earlier artists as well: Duchamp. And so all that is in there for me, and the concern with the politics is an important concern, but it didn't seem to be, for me, the only driving force. It is an important force, but it wasn't the singular driving force. Because I had opportunities to belong to groups who saw art and culture as a mirror of the economic visions, and I did not go with those groups. Because I didn't see. . . . It wasn't a simple relation as between base determining superstructure, and there was a relationship, yes, but not a one-to-one relationship. It's a bit more complex, and I have found art and society to be relatively autonomous at certain moments. So, in other words, the art and society wasn't lock-step with politics and those kinds of issues. They have never been, and I still feel that way. I feel the same way now as I felt about making prints and posters back in the late sixties. I still feel the same way about my making my paintings, and whatever I do I feel the same way. I haven't changed. I feel very,

very strong about. . . . Because there were moments. . . . There were some people in the Chicano movement who had a very clear vision as to what it takes to make a Chicano image, or painting, or something like that. And it was like they had an essentialist, reductive formula—and one which I have always fought against and did not subscribe to. Because it always seemed to me it was more complex than simply highlighting five elements that must always be in a work to have it equal, in this case, let's say Chicano art. Which to me was very simple-minded. And it wasn't an all-embracing view, but it was enough of a point of view embraced by some people who made it difficult for some artists to figure out what it is they would like to do. And it wasn't difficult for me at all. I knew that it's more complex.

PK: What would be the five? Or however many that may be Chicano.

RG: Well, I mean, for example, that was a running notion that Chicano art equals posters and murals. And there's also a little running notion that what goes into that is images of the Virgin Guadalupe, skulls, pyramids, images of native peoples of the Americas, chili peppers, popular images of culture from Mexico. Any references to stylizations and depictions of Orozco, Diego Rivera, and Siqueiros—sometimes Tamayo. So those very obvious elements by some were considered to be necessary in your work to be accepted or recognized as Chicano art. And certainly are use of those things, no question about it, absolutely, but to reduce it to that is a major problem for *any* peoples. Now, I understand the issue and then the necessity for the development of a certain kind of nationalism. I mean, our country, the U.S. of A., has always done that. You know, to put forth what America is, what American culture is. All nations do that. And even peoples within nations who are unhappy with the situation will oftentimes revert to some form of nationalism as a way to organize people. So I understand that. But there are different kinds of nationalisms. There can be a reactionary nationalism where you can say only your people have the answer and they are the closest to God. And then there is what's called a revolutionary nationalism, whereby it was not felt that only your people have the answer and are closest to God, but rather there are a lot of other people in similar kinds of conditions who may be as close to God. And I think if one has to put me someplace, I was more in that kind of a point of view, where it was more embracing and more reflective of the realities of conditions not only with Mexicanos or Chicanos but all working people.

PK: At lunch we were also talking about a related topic, and you bring it up again by this term nationalism. You were making some observations about different developments in the Chicano art movement, particularly. I brought up [Los Four], for instance, and you had some very interesting things to say about that.

RG: Yeah, you mentioned Los Four, and I mentioned Asco. And Los Four became emblematic, to a certain degree, of what Chicano art was supposed to be and look like. And then, at the same time in Los Angeles, there was a group called Asco, A-s-c-o, which means nausea, nauseous. And these young Chicanos and Chicanas from East L.A., who were not disconnected from the times of the late sixties, early seventies, but as performers, as picture-makers, as writers took a stance vis-à-vis the Chicano sociopolitical context as artists who really pushed the envelope in terms of hammering out a sensibility of Chicanos and Chicanas in the early seventies that didn't transcend but embraced Chicanismo and that also went beyond it. "Beyond it" meaning, they saw themselves as being Chicanos and Chicanas—and more, as something else. And it's that something else that was, to me, a breath of fresh air. Because they made fun in a satirical way of what murals were. They made walking murals. Or they would make a no-movie. So they were working within the context of Chicano cultural and nationalism, yes, but they were also stretching it. And I could identify when they were doing this that to me there was a tradition that they were working from, mainly the Dadaists and the Surrealists and, to a certain degree, the Situationists. And I thought this was absolutely fabulous. Not everyone thought it was fabulous. Many Chicano artists and politicos thought that they were silly and stupid and were not making Chicano art. They didn't know *what* they were making but they *knew* they weren't making "Chicano art." And I thought they were making fabulous, fabulous work, and that I always applauded and supported and would oftentimes point to as an example of what else can be done instead of having an easy answer to a cultural and political dilemma. And so I thought they were very good. As a matter of fact, later on a group. . . . Actually, before then, '69, the Royal Chicano Air Force in Sacramento comes into being. They carry on in kind of a Dadist, Surrealist way, but their content and stylization of the work was consistent with an almost reductive cultural nationalism. But they had a certain kind of humor and panache that helped them.

PK: Are those the Montoyas?

RG: Mainly José Montoya and Estéban Villa, both of whom were influential MALAF members, and an entourage of other younger artists in Sacramento. Malaquías Montoya was more like in Oakland with a group called MALAF. MALAF was the Mexican-American Liberation Art Front in Oakland.

PK: You mentioned that earlier. Well, how did you come. . . . I'm interested in learning a little bit more about these groups and these developments from your perspective. How did you—getting back to Asco—how did you first encounter their work?

RG: Asco?

PK: Yeah.

RG: You know, it may have been through a publication, because there were many publications coming out in California and throughout the Southwest dealing with . . . like what you call "underground publications" about poetry and writings and reproductions of art.

PK: Were there any particularly specifically Chicano versions of those?

RG: Oh, that's what I mean, those.

PK: Oh, all of them were.

RG: Yeah, yeah. And it could have been there. I don't remember exactly. And it could have been an early introduction to them at the Galería by René Yañ ez, who had an early affiliation with them. He could have done something that introduced me to them. I'm not quite sure exactly when it was that I made the connection. It could have been in '71 when I went down to a cultural conference dealing with Chicano artists. It could have been there, in East Los Angeles, that I. . . .

PK: Was that the time that you told me about when they really were not receptive, that they. . . .

RG: No, no, that's a different time.

PK: That's a different time?

RG: Yeah, that's a different moment. Yeah. I went down to L.A. quite a bit during those years.

PK: Well, what about this? Tell me about that conference.

[Here some material was excised by the artist—Ed.]

RG: Oh, yeah. That was very exciting.

PK: And what about that one? Do you remember the circumstances?

RG: Yeah, it was like an invitation of artists—it seems as if they came from throughout California—had come down to this meeting, and it's like some kind of international hall or something like this. And we had an exhibition and people talked about their work and saw films. And it seemed very open and very exciting and no one particular line seemed to be. . . . Well, at this time—I mean, in '95—it didn't seem like there was a narrow line being laid down in terms of how we should all make our work in terms of content, stylization, as I recall. That could have been discussed but I don't remember that.

PK: Excuse me, let's flip the tape.

[Break in taping]

PK: Rupert García, continuing our interview, this is tape one, side B [of session two—Ed.]. Without further ado, Rupert, you were talking about some of this interaction between different elements within the. . . .

RG: Yeah. Unlike that meeting we had in L.A. where we were more or less booed out of the room, most of the people were not artists. They seemed to be more like academics and political or social scientists. And there was—and there is to a certain degree—many political social scientists who believe that art and culture was just a way of decorating the social/political movement. And on the other hand the meeting we talked about a little while ago was *all* artists in East L.A. That was just so exciting and more open in terms of discussion, and because we called ourselves the Galería de la Raza was no problem. It wasn't even an issue. Now, earlier, before we went to this meeting in '71 of artists in L.A. at the Galería—it may have been late '70 or very early '71—there was a confrontation between artists from Oakland—the group called MALAF—and many members of the Galería in San Francisco. The confrontation had to do with. . . . There was an exhibition at the Oakland Museum, and members from MALAF, and I guess some others, felt that the show was not correct and that we should pull out from the exhibition. I was having, at that time, a one-person show in a special exhibition space [my M.A. exhibition, in fact—RG], and I was confronted about not taking it out. And then a few other questions were raised about me, too. And I just said, "I don't know who you are. You don't know me. You have no idea who my parents are, who my friends are." I said, "I don't know why you're asking all these questions." And I said, "Also, I was never informed of *any* of this stuff you're talking about. So I have no idea why you're all up in my face. I don't understand. No one called me, no one came to my house, nothing. So there's some kind of false pretense going on here and. . . .

PK: This is the MALAF group?

RG: Yeah.

PK: How do you spell that, for the tape?

RG: Well, it's the Mexican American Liberation Art Front, MALAF, M-A-L-A-F. And they were a very important group, by the way. A *very* important group. And a necessary group, too. They did good work. But there was this tendency for them to see the Galería as less than politically correct.

PK: Not sufficiently engaged.

RG: Yeah, my sense was that. Or not engaged in the way in which they perceived that one should be engaged. And that had been a running situation for many years, as a matter fact. And we at the Galería could care less. We could care less. It's not that we didn't sense the importance of engagement. And we did. All the time. But on our terms and, often times, they would correspond to what they were doing in Oakland. And I finally realized what was going on, that, well, the Galería had a certain kind of sense of nationalism. It was not driven by a narrow ideology. There was no particular platform from which we were working. While, on the other hand, in Oakland the MALAF seemed to be following a particular political line. And that was the main difference. So we had no single line, an identifiable line. I must say there was something to our thrust, yes. But the MALAF seemed to have a well-defined position on the role of art and the artist in the context of the Chicano civil rights movement.

PK: Where do you suppose they got that? Obviously, it had to come from somewhere.

RG: It comes from . . . it's very simple. Because there were a lot of organizations in the Bay area. The Communist Party, a lot of Trotskyite movements, a Mao group. There were many, many groups. And I eventually found out, I think, that the MALAF were embracing, I think, a group of Trotskyites. I forget the name of the group right now. It's not as if. . . . I don't want to suggest that these artists didn't have their own minds. They did. Because you can see their styles are very different. So there was freedom within what they produced and how they produced it. But there was an. . . . [coughing]

PK: You want a drink of water?

RG: . . .an overriding definition of the role of the artist.

PK: Okay, let's stop.

[Interruption in taping]

PK: So we're back on line.

RG: In talking about the MALAF, the difference of their point of view and of the Galería, it also differed with other groups throughout California—and the Southwest, as a matter of fact. For example, in '69 there was a very important Chicano youth conference in Denver. And out of that came a manifesto [El Plan de Aztlán—RG] that, among other things, put forth a notion of the role of art and culture in the context of the Chicano civil rights movement. And at the same time there was another manifesto put out that was called something like the "Revolutionary Manifesto." And while the first manifesto [El Plan de Aztlán—RG] was nationalistic, and it didn't absolutely define what the artist should do, and the politics were not defined clearly in terms of issues, let's say, of class, and let's say race and gender. That wasn't there. But the other group who called themselves revolutionary had a position that did address class and race and economic conditions and a sense of internationalism as well. And as it turns out, that group was composed of many folks from Oakland who belonged to this Trotskyite organization.

PK: MALAF.

RG: Well, MALAF had some affiliation.

PK: Okay, right. Good.

RG: Be very careful about this.

PK: Okay, I just want to be clear.

RG: An affiliation. To what degree was the affiliation tight, I don't know. And because I read that manifesto in one of the tabloids coming out of Oakland, *La Bronze*. And it to me was very fascinating to see that there were two manifestos coming out of this 1969 conference, which was attended by a *lot* of people from throughout the country.

PK: Now you said this was in Colorado.

RG: In Colorado.

PK: In Denver?

RG: Denver, Colorado. The Chicano Youth Conference. And [Corky] Gonzáles was kind of spearheading the organization and this big meeting.

PK: But artists were just a small component of this. This was much more. . . .

RG: At this meeting, yes. Of that meeting, yes. Yes, yes, yes. That is true. But some of the people . . . the man who was behind the writing of the first manifesto was a poet, Alurista.

PK: Would you spell that?

RG: A-l-u-r-i-s-t-a, Alurista, who's now a Ph.D. in comparative literature. And he came up with the manifesto and discussing the notion of Aztlán,
A-z-t-l-á-n. To the other group who had the revolutionary point of view, they found that to be too narrowly culturally nationalist—because it didn't address the international issue or workers' rights. It was more culturally based. Well, there is something to the problem with what's called cultural or race politics.

PK: Identity.

RG: Well, I'm thinking more about this recent book, *Race Matters*, by Cornell Wilde.

PK: West.

RG: Cornell Wilde! That's the actor. Cornell West! [laughs] Maybe Cornell Wilde is racist, too, who knows, I don't know. But Cornell West wrote a book in which he talks about race politics and the problems that hover within that notion. And I am one who also subscribes to the problems of racial politics—or strictly a cultural/nationalist politics. Because oftentimes what that does is explains away contradictions within one's own group, because with Chicanos, how can they make mistakes? It's anti-intellectual; it's anti-critical. [And that can be] a problem.

PK: You mean, in other words, there's virtue simply in the self-definition of being Chicano that in effect is a statement of. . . .

RG: Can do no wrong.

PK: Yeah, it's a statement of a condition that is above critique or criticism.

RG: That's correct.

PK: It's virtue is carried within it.

RG: It's metaphysical almost [and can be used as a way of shunning responsibility for doing wrong—RG].

PK: Yeah, that's very romantic it seems to me, kind of _____ _____.

RG: Well, at the time it was not perceived as being romantic. And the conditions still exist that make it also not romantic in 1995. We hit upon this earlier when we first talked about why is it important to go to Mexico? Why is it important to know your roots?

PK: Right, exactly.

RG: Well, it's *always* important to know your roots, always important to know your history, at all times. Because it's not as if one is *born* with an identity. One gains an identity through time and space. It's called history. And what we learn is good and some of what we learn is bad. And when you internalize the bad you are a twisted and disruptive human being. So how do you rectify that? Well, you have to find out, "Welll, how did I get this way? What happened? What are the dynamics?" So you look at history, try to figure out what has occurred. And that's always the case, especially in our country it seems to me that all people should know their history. Their individual personal history, the family—in all its complexities—as well as the development of one's own city, state, and nation and how it fits into an international context. Otherwise, you don't know who you are.

PK: Well, so you really are concerned about too narrow of a casting.

RG: Since I was a little boy being raised as a Mexicano Catholic—and there is a difference between a Roman Catholic and other kind of Catholics. We were raised as Mexican Catholics. Now I was told that Catholics are

going to Heaven; all others are going to Hell. You cannot go into another temple of worship because if you do you're performing a sin. Only God resides in the Catholic Church—or Jesus, but anyway. . . . As a youngster, I had friends who were Buddhist and Confucian, and I couldn't understand how my friends—James Young, Nobi Oshidori, Jesse Oji, and Ray Oji, and others—were evil. They didn't seem evil to me. I'd been at their houses, and the food didn't seem evil, their mom and dad didn't seem evil. How can this be that they're not Catholics and they don't go to the church to which I go to, that they are necessarily bad. So even as a small kid this narrow definition of religion was problematic, really problematic. And even later when I was dating a woman who was not Latina. . . .

PK: Yeah, you mentioned that.

RG: Yeah, I may have told you about that. My grandmother told me, "No, no, mi hijo. No. You should be with your own people." And that hit within me in a very sour chord, as if I only have one people, as if the human race is not of the people with whom I associate, who are not Mexicano and Catholic. That was very strange to me. It was the first time—*only* time—I've ever talked back to any of my grandparents. And so that also struck a chord about this narrow vision. My mother was never that way. My mother was an interesting woman who is still alive and who always encouraged the embracing of all peoples. My feelings for the openness of human experience, thankfully, beat out the narrowness of certain visions of the human family. And so later with the Chicano movement—or other kinds of movements. . . . There were many nationalist movements. You know, Asian. . . .

PK: Farrakhan, for instance. . . .

RG: Well, that's now. I'm talking about that back then. Some were very, very narrow, and I always felt personally sickened by that. And even as a kid I remember—maybe it was in the military—the anti-Semitism and the racism was so strong that, again, this narrowness of vision was so much a problem for me. It was a like a knife in my heart, whenever I heard about these things and saw it. It was just unbelievable. So I always had this kind of a—I won't say instinctual; it almost feels that way—of responding negatively to narrow visions of defining human behavior and thought and those kinds of things that seemed to be very powerful.

PK: Did you find that in. . . . Obviously, you went to a number of these gatherings and conferences. . . .

RG: Many, many.

PK: . . . and did you find overall that there tended to be . . . things would move in that direction—in a narrow rather than an inclusive structure or program or agenda.

RG: I don't know. I don't think I felt that.

PK: And you wouldn't characterize the majority of these as being extremist.

RG: No, no, no, not at all. Oh, no, no, no. There were specific kinds of groups and specific organizations who had agendas. That's true. Some agendas like the Farm Workers Movement and some culture-[centered] movements had agendas, yes, but they were also a bit more embracing. The Galería continues to exist after twenty-five years, and it has always been an embracing effort and one which I. . . . Why I stayed, why I was a founding member and stayed is because I felt that love.

PK: Are you still connected?

RG: Off and on. I used to be very strongly connected. I used to write catalogs and design and make posters and curate.

PK: Maybe you're emeritus now.

RG: Oh, I'm sure I'm emeritus. But I'm going to be interviewed in two weeks, as a matter of fact. They're doing a major catalog to honor the twenty-five years.

PK: Oh, good. This is a good warm-up scene then.

RG: Yeah, oh yeah. I'm getting ready. I would not say that there was a narrow perspective that one can identify with the Chicano movement. It was too complex to say that. But it *is* true that there were individuals and organizations who *had* narrow points of views that were both cultural/nationalist and some of which were varying shades of kind of a Marxist point of view. Some were very vulgar and some were a bit more open and embracing. But there was no one. No one thing. When I was hired in '69 to teach for La Raza studies at San Francisco State, they asked me to teach a course called La Raza Art Workshop. And I was interviewed for the job and I said, "Lookit, if you want me to come and teach this class to punch out a lot of little Orozcos and Diego Riveras and Siqueiroses, you've got the wrong guy. You've got the wrong guy. If that's what you want, then I'm leaving now. But if you want someone else who has an interest in that and more, you got your man." So they

hired me.

PK: When was that?

RG: 1969.

PK: Oh, yeah. Back then, okay.

RG: Back then, back then.

PK: Way back then, when you stopped painting.

RG: That's correct, that's correct. I stopped painting.

PK: I can't help but think that politics had a great deal to do with that decision.

RG: Well, the decision to. . . .

PK: That it played an important role in how your career developed, actually.

RG: Well, the decision to stop painting was circumstantial.

PK: Yeah, well, I understand that.

RG: Circumstantial. And did I ever develop an ideology that would cleanly separate easel painting as bourgeois and printmaking and poster-making as revolutionary? No. No. I've been asked that question numerous times, and I usually say, "It sounds to me that *you* have a problem, not me." I see no problem. I see no contradiction. There are just different venues. If you're going to tell me that form determines idea and ideology then we've got to talk a little longer about this. But to simply reduce me so quickly is anti-intellectual. And I'm not interested in pursuing that discussion. I'm asked that to this very day, I'm still asked that question. And it's a good question, and it's one that has been going on for a very long time. I mean, even in Mexico, after the revolution painters like Siqueiros, Orozco, and Diego Rivera, and others, they signed manifestos in which they condemned easel painting as bourgeois.

PK: Elitist.

RG: Yeah, you know. Abstract. And these guys all along were doing drawings and easel paintings and loving abstract art. So, see, there's the ideology and then there's the practice of everyday life. And I have tried to have the two be close, not have a disparity. To me, it would be too stressful. [chuckles] I couldn't make any work.

PK: Let's turn again back for a moment to Los Four, because I think. . . .

RG: Great guys, I love them.

PK: Yeah, and I think there is more that you could say about that—and I don't mean just in terms of the issue of nationalism. But what about some recollections? How did you first hear about them? How did you first meet? Which ones did you know?

RG: I knew all of them. I knew Carlos [Almaraz—Ed.], I knew Magu [Gilbert Luján—Ed.], and Frank, and what is the other guy named? God damn. [Roberto de la Rocha, also later joined by Judithe Hernandez and John Valadez.—JR]

PK: Gronk.

RG: No, no, no, Gronk's later.

PK: No, he wasn't in that right away.

RG: Gronk was Asco.

PK: [raises eyebrows?]

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: Let's see, Magu. . . .

RG: Beautiful. Magu, Carlos, Frank Romero, and I forget the other guy's name.

PK: I should know.

RG: They had a big show at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art—Ed.].

PK: Right, right.

RG: And I knew about them before that. That's in the early seventies.

PK: [still reciting names sotto voce]

RG: Jane Livinston did that.

PK: Well, anyway, it'll come back.

RG: Roberto something. [de la Rocha—JR]

PK: Yeah. . . .

RG: In any event, I thought it was great because when I saw their show at LACMA, it was so joyful. A lot of fun, very exciting. You know, making a sculpture out of the front end of a Chevrolet. I mean, wow, it was beautiful. And there was all kinds of stuff these guys did, and I just thought it was just absolutely magnificent. Because the joy of life in the context of struggle was being manifested. You know, it was as if the . . . I felt like I was walking into. . . . As a kid, I used to go to a lot of fiestas and jamaicas in Stockton. And there was always a lot of music and people dancing, a lot of color. And it was like going to see their show, like going to a fiesta. And I don't mean a small "F." I mean a big "F." You know, life. And so seeing this work in the context of adversity was *wonderful* because it underscored for me the magnificence and the wonderment of art. If one wants to talk about art metaphorically, how it—for me—represents life. If I did not want to live I would not make art. The fact that I make art reminds me that I wish to continue to live.

PK: So this is what you were attracted to or saw in some of the work of these artists?

RG: No question about it. The humor, the craftsmanship, the skill—it was all there. The ideas.

PK: Now, did they sort of appear on the scene, when, in the early seventies as. . . . I mean, can you recall? They received a lot of attention then.

RG: Oh, yeah. There's a phrase called "Los Tres Grandes" in Mexico—Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco—and some of the time it's called "Los Four" when it includes Tamayo. So there is that reminiscence on their part of acknowledging artists of Mexico. And I think their emergence came out in concert with the development of the Chicano Civil Rights and cultural renaissance movement. That's when they came forth.

PK: That was their vehicle, basically.

RG: It wasn't their vehicle. They were the vehicle. They were part of . . . they were the vehicle, too.

PK: Yeah.

RG: Oh, yeah. They were part of *and* the vehicle. It's oftentimes unfortunate, when people write about Chicano art and culture as if it's a consequence *of* the civil rights movement where, in fact, it was part and parcel of it. There was no. . . . It was like a chicken/egg kind of thing. Well, they happened together. Earlier we mentioned that some people think about art as a way of decorating life, as if art itself is not integral to life. And for many of us back in the late sixties and early seventies until now, there was no separation. That was also a very, very important component that *all* of these groups embraced. No matter how vulgarly nationalist they were or how vulgar their politics were, *all* of us—and I mean *all* of us—were interested in embracing . . . or rather collapsing everyday life, art, politics, history, the moment, all that. Bringing it to a whole so there would be no arbitrary separation. And a lot of it of it had to do in part—for some of us anyway—as a counterpoint to modernism.

PK: Oh.

RG: You know, the myth of modernism. And some of us were very aware of that. Modernists had "correct" ways to think about art. Over here we have fine art, over here we have popular art or mass art, and the twain shall never meet for fear of being corrupted.

PK: Did you ever have conversations of this nature, on issues such as that—modernism—with some of these artists we're talking about?

RG: Yeah, you know, it never was that clean. It never was that clean. When I have recalled discussions of that

nature it was more in terms of the politics of culture and the culture of politics, not about modernism. It was more about discussing the ways in which the interaction of art and culture and society work [the colonizer's culture and the colonized's culture—RG].

Not about it as being clearly a counterpoint to modernism, no, no. It didn't take that kind of a path. My discussions with people came out of the context of the Third World liberation struggles happening around the country . . . I mean, around the world. In terms of what was happening. . . . Especially, after World War II. A lot of the anti-colonial movements, where discussions of the role of the intellectual and the artist were very important discussions in terms of ways to contribute to self-determination, for example.

[Break in taping]

PK: Continuing session two with Rupert García on November 10, 1995. This is tape two, side A, and I neglected to say earlier the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. Okay, Rupert, we were on to some good things, I think, here and you were rudely interrupted by the break.

RG: [laughs] I was going to talk a bit about the need for the emergence of institutions like the Galería de la Raza or even groups like MALAF and Asco and Los Four [and the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF)—JR], not to mention the multitude of other groups and institutions throughout the Southwest and other parts of the country. And I'm speaking not only for those who were the Chicano/Latino but also African Americans, Native Americans, and the oftentimes overlooked Asian American institutions that were founded in the late sixties, early seventies. They emerged—well, I can speak specifically for the Galería in '70 and Artes Seis in '69—emerged as a counterpoint to the established venues of exhibitions, museums, and galleries who at the time, and to a large degree to this day, were not interested in showing work that was identifiable to a certain people. Oftentimes because they countered. . . . Well, even though the Pop movement was going on. See, the Pop movement was not identifiable. Well, it was to white folks. That's who the artists were, white folks. But it was never written about like that, so this is where the racism comes in. Racism shows its head when Latino/Chicanos and others—African American and such—who perhaps [wanted to get a] show and whose work was taking some licks from the Pop movement but whose iconography addressed specificity of, let's say, Chicano culture, Mexicano culture. . . . That couldn't be seen because it was "too ethnic," "too culturally bound," and was seen to not transcend the specifics of the moment from which the work was done. Where, for some reason, the Pop artists—most of them are white guys—it was perceived as universal. Well, how you. . . . So the Galería, Artes Seis, the Mexican Museum, the Mission Cultural Center, the Black Man's Gallery, Japanese-American Art Movement, Kenny Street Workshop—these groups emerged as a counterpoint to say, "Well, you know, you're part of the problem. The museums and the galleries are part of the problem, because they perpetuate this myth or this image of what is perceived to be real art and real culture." Now our kind of counter-perspective has to be seen in the context of the larger cultural/social movement of the sixties. It was part of that, because that movement identified a lot of institutions as being the cause for a lot of oppression. So art and culture was also included in that critique. And so if you identify those who are the problem, and you see that they are not going to open their doors easily then you develop your own.

And so we developed a counter-cultural hegemony and called it the Artes Seis, the Galería, Mexican Museum, so on and so forth—as a venue that allowed us to discuss and hang our own work and to give classes. And also saw these institutions as in the context—and this is true—in the context of social and political movements, because we knew—and know—that the museums and galleries in general are also political. They don't bluntly say so but, indeed, it's true. No question about it. No question about it. So that's why these institutions and these groups like Artes Seis came into existence—as a counterpoint or some kind of counter-ideology, something like that.

PK: Well, it seems to me then, from what you say, that there were really at least two forces at work in the case of artists, because they are part of a group—a group that has been excluded. Because of the style of their art, or the imagery and so forth, they're excluded from establishment venues, shall we say?

RG: Yeah.

PK: It seems to me that there are, as I say, two things at work, backing up. One is that as artists they want to achieve visibility. They want their art to be on their terms, accepted within the broader notion of art history and art criticism. That this is American art, shall we say, this is art of the times.

RG: That's correct.

PK: So that's one goal. Then, on the other hand—and this probably can be more extreme in some cases or another—there is the use of art to achieve some kind of . . . to accomplish, again, through the use of imagery and _____. . . .

RG: But they weren't seen as separate. They weren't perceived as being separate. It's not a problem for us. It's not separate.

PK: Because—let me just add this—I've heard certain criticism, and I don't know from what sources. Maybe even from within the community. This is what I'm getting at, the Chicano community. . . .

RG: Well, it's complex.

PK: . . . [and, that] Los Four, in fact, what were they really after? Ultimately, getting the L.A. County Museum show, getting into galleries, and that this somehow was abandoning first principles, perhaps.

RG: That could have been perceived. And I *know* it was perceived by some of the members of MALAF. I mean, that's how they perceived some of our shows in the Galería. And as a matter of fact eventually there was a major text written by Malaquías Montoya and his wife [Leslie Solkowitz-Montoya—Ed.] that blatantly attacked artists who were getting exhibitions in so-called regular galleries and were getting some exposure as holding hands with the enemy. And I've always held this. . . . I mean, in fact in '69 I was in a drawing show at the Museum of Modern Art [San Francisco—Ed.]. It was a national drawing show.

PK: And you didn't feel that you were compromised by that?

RG: I had no problem with it. Where's the problem? Well, the problem comes, again, when you have a clearly defined notion of what is correct and what is not correct. In the case of this paper, which was very controversial, by Malaquías and his wife. . . .

PK: When was that, do you recall?

RG: I have all the stuff, but I don't know where it is, but it's a very, very famous piece, published numerous times. The argument they put forth was one which many of us saw as just being too narrow—too narrow and came from a position of being too pure and absolute in a context in which that was impossible—that context being our country and our culture. A society in which it is impossible to be pure. But that notion was put forth. The moment you show someplace that is easily identifiable as being part of the mainstream, you have sold out. So for those who subscribe to that I guess one can be perceived as selling out. And someone like me who did not subscribe to that, to me it wasn't a problem. I mean, I never felt compromised showing at the Modern in '69 and showing at Artes Seis and showing at someplace like the Oakland Museum. I mean, I never felt that venues were not open to me. Which is *not* to say that I didn't recognize that some of these venues were part of the problem. I knew that. And I probably wouldn't have shown in venues that were so clearly and obviously so—I would not have done that—but I didn't have an extreme position where *all* were seen as part of the problem. I didn't have that clean, purist position. I've never had that. Never had that. Again, it goes back to that church thing. Purity, they're trying to have things separate. So separate. But this point of view that I mentioned of Malaquías and his wife was one that was held by not a lot of people, but it received a lot of play because it raised some very important issues that many have to deal with. [Carlos—Ed.] Almaraz. . . . He was still with Los Four, I don't know to what degree at this point, but he became an ideologue, began to write manifestos on the role of art and cultural politics. And a really hard-nosed Marxist, really strong. And it got to the point where it was like almost ridiculous. And then later he says in an interview that he blames the Chicano movement for him not being as successful as he should be.

PK: Well, I've heard this.

RG: Yeah, it's true, it's true. See, that's the danger you put yourself in when you define yourself so clearly ideologically that you don't give yourself any human space to manipulate and articulate. And so that's where he caught himself. . . . I mean, to this day I'm sure he says, "God damn it, why did I do that." [chuckles] I'm sure. And Malaquías teaches now at U.C. Davis. Does he see a contradiction in that, given his platform that he issued a few years ago, several years ago.

PK: Well, there's a degree of—I mean, who knows what's in a person's heart?—but there's a degree of accommodation and one might even say opportunism in all of this and we can certainly then take a look at our choices and our decisions and find very good reasons. . . .

RG: Sure.

PK: . . . for them even though they may appear to contradict. . . .

RG: That's correct. I totally agree with that, I totally agree with that. Absolutely.

PK: Sort of like Newt Gingrich, he's just like that.

RG: He wishes he. . . . [both laugh] He _____ wish he were. I don't know what we're thinking of. But there were folks who'd had very clear notions of what was correct—what was right and what was wrong—and who later took a different path, which on the surface seemed to contradict an earlier point of view. But that was not many

people, however. But there were some, and some groups, who did do that. And the Galería never [really] did that. I did some writing where it was kind of. . . . There are moments of vulgarity in there.

PK: Oh, really? [said in a dry voice—Trans.]

RG: Oh, of course. And if one can believe that, it's true. But that's okay. As you mentioned, people grow, you think, figure things out, and say, "God, I was bad. That was whatever it was," and then you move on.

PK: It's interesting what you said about Carlos. I mean, as I said, we have an interview but I haven't read it and I probably will at some point. We being the Archives. And we do have his papers. Because it seems to me that he. . . . He's an interesting fellow because he participates in several different groups to struggle, including his own gay experience, which is very much evident, and it's no secret or anything like that. But I don't say that he was a self-styled victim because I don't know that much about him. But what you said about how later on he would turn and say the Chicano movement. . . .

RG: Yeah, that's in an interview. That's published.

PK: Yeah, and it's as if. . . . Well, it does seem in this case, as described, a bit inconsistent. But what I'm really interested in, and I don't know a lot about it yet, but how these—and I turn to Los Four because I know them a little better than some of the other groups—and they did get a kind of prominence. . . .

RG: Yeah, they did.

PK: . . . at a certain stage *and* a kind of stamp of approval from the establishment, the L.A. County Museum.

RG: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know. . . .

PK: How does that [jibe, jive]?

RG: It didn't bother me. Other people. . . .

PK: Well, no, I know it didn't bother you but I mean for them?

RG: Oh, for them? Well it seemed to me at the time when I knew them, and saw them, that there seemed to be no obvious problem with that show and being acclaimed. I think that's all I can say because I don't know any more than that. We didn't talk about it. It wasn't even an issue to be raised. As far as I was concerned there was no issue. There seemed to be nothing. . . .

PK: Yeah, ____ cool. Isn't that great?

RG: I thought it was great.

PK: Yeah. What do you want, to not be seen in the places where people go?

RG: Yeah, it didn't bother me at all. I loved the show. I thought it was great. I got a couple of the posters that they made for the show. You know, I just loved it.

PK: And Carlos was. . . . I mean, I think, aside from being marginalized or sort of limited in terms of imagery, which I don't think is the case with him, I think that those were rather wonderful. . . .

RG: No, Carlos had a wide vision. Well, there was a moment where he began to make Almaraz kind of work, you know, because he could move it. That was a problem. Showing in LACMA [_____ not] a problem. When he became to repeat himself in obvious terms at the expense of the vitality of his early work, that's a problem. That's a problem. But, no, I had no problem [with that]. I mean, it's like condemning Hans Haacke for showing his work in major museums.

PK: Right.

RG: I mean, what? You know, I mean, you have the correct answer on how people are supposed to do everything? Give me a break. You know, really.

PK: But, you know, there's an interesting aspect of this. These artists about whom we're speaking now. . . .

RG: Los Four, particularly, you mean?

PK: Los Four and the whole Chicano art movement.

RG: Whoa, wait, wait. . . .

PK: Let me finish what I was saying.

RG: Let's not get too [embroiled]. . . .

PK: _____ _____. But these artists who are identified with to some degree a group, a social or political activism, are required to carry a certain burden which white artists, if you will,—or white male artists. . . .

RG: Yeah, we're not required to carry any goddamn burden. The burden. . . .

PK: Well, internally, internally.

RG: No, no. Nonsense..

PK: No?

RG: No, no.

PK: From other artists in the movement?

RG: The burden. . . . No, no. The burden. . . . I have never felt the burden. If I felt the burden. . . .

PK: Or responsibility, shall we say?

RG: Well, there's some of that. There is some of that. But even the responsibility is one that is created not by the singular artist's interior world, but it's the context in which that interior world is created. I mean, in the context of the art market, or in a context of everyday life in this country, artists who are identifiable to a particular ethnicity or racial makeup are always pointed out as if they're not making universal work. And [it's as if] their work all the time is somehow reduced to a particular group of whom they can be easily a part of in terms of their identity. White artists, male or female, *never* had. . . . They always have a pretense of universality.

PK: Right.

RG: So it's not that we're carrying it around or it's inside of us. It's created from the external world.

PK: Yeah, imposed upon, right.

RG: Yeah. In that case, I will say yes. Yes. Some do and it's bringing in . . . the degree of the responsibility or the burden depends upon the person who is carrying them. It's not a generalized thing across the board. For some people that are very guilt-ridden that, "Gee, I have to make Chicano art to make it look like this because it's for the people." There are those people. And there's some who have no problem with it because they see no contradiction. I mean, so it's all different things; it's not one thing. What *is* generalized, however, is—even to this very day—how artists who. . . . Because, see, what we're doing is many of us are pounding our head against the modernist myth. Right? I mean, even though we have what's called "early po-mo" with the Pop artists, even going back to, what? Rauschenberg and Johns, and then coming to so-called handmade Pop, and then we have the post-handmade-Warholian notion of Pop. And all the other—the post-modernists, the image-gatherers, all that kind of stuff. They're all seen as universal artists dealing with the conditions of humanity in a post-industrialized context. Well, *we*—oftentimes—are not given that privilege. Generally speaking. Generally speaking.

PK: Right.

RG: And you wonder, "What's going on here? How is this double-standard, how has it got to this point?" Well, we have to look at it because it's cumulative, it's very old.

PK: Well, it's historical in the West. It developed. . . .

RG: Yeah. It's historical two ways. It's the myth of modernism on the one hand, and it's also the development of racism, Eurocentrism, all that kind of stuff. It's all overlapping. It's not singular. I think it's more complex than that. So it's easy to say that, "Well, I've been told by gallery people, 'You know, your work would work really well in Los Angeles.' I'm saying, 'Well, why is that?' 'Well, they like this kind of Mexican color and these kinds of images.' " And so I am told. . . . It's a major dealer. And so I walked away, I'm having coffee and I'm sitting down, you know, "What the hell just happened to me here? I went to this dealer whom a friend told me to go meet and made arrangements and he's telling me. . ." what I just told you, Paul, and I'm thinking, "Well. . . ." It didn't make any sense to me. It didn't make any sense to me. So I concluded that he's crazy. That he's crazy.

PK: Or at least he's wrong.

RG: No, he's crazy, too. He's wrong *and* crazy. And so I kind of figured, "Well, this is fascinating to me," because he couldn't see beyond what was obvious to him. He wouldn't allow himself the time to talk further with me about the work—to get into the work, to the complexities of it. He just looked at the superficiality of it and dismissed it. Which I believe he would have done the same with Los Four if they came to him. He'd do the same thing. "Well, go to L.A. and. . . ." So that kind of a situation exists to this very day. It's insidious because I know of a *white* artist who shows at a "proper gallery" in San Francisco, member of the stable, was doing some ceramics and he had images of African Americans, and the dealer told him he "can't show that in our gallery." And he said, "Why not?" She said, "Well, it won't sell and some of the people may find it offensive." This is within the last couple of years. Now, that's anecdotal; this is true. But it speaks to . . . if a *white* guy can't make black images in ceramics at his gallery and can't show 'em, I mean, Jesus Christ. I mean, that's unbelievable, unbelievable.

PK: Well, what about this. If the artist had been black, would he or she have been able to show them in that same gallery?

RG: No. They wouldn't probably be in the stable.

PK: That's a different issue.

RG: Knowing the gallery. . . .

PK: That's "No Name Gallery."

RG: "No Name Gallery." It's problematic. It's problematic. It's because the gallery *never* shows images that, in particular, that have any tinge of Africanness.

PK: Oh.

RG: So it's like an historical aesthetic, precedent, that goes on. Because many galleries aren't. . . . Because of their clients. You know, who are their clients? That's a whole other thing we never discussed that [kind of] interview. But, anyway, so where do we spring off from this, Paul? I'm [becoming crammed] in here.

PK: [chuckles] We were talking about—I guess the way I would put it—is that we're talking about limitations, art officials, otherwise our place. . . .

RG: Okay, right, right, right. Okay, yeah, again, as you mentioned earlier _____ _____, so the limitations are impositions. It's not as if. . . . One could say, "Well, you create your own limitations. You know how the art market is, and so you created the situation in which your images and stylizations don't conform to that which is selling, or to that which is historically the kind of work that moves in the mainstream. So *you* have created your own limitations." Well, that kind of argument holds nothing. What it does is to perpetuate the myth, that's what it does. But it does not address the reality of the imposition of limitations. It's as if to say—and we can look at *all* the historical movements, especially . . . even with the Impressionists. Someone could say, "The Impressionists imposed upon themselves their limitations because of how they put paint on, how they cultivate light. Monet is his own worst enemy." Or even Courbet. Or even Delacroix, Gericault. Their work was criticized. One could say, "Well, they imposed their own limitations." It's as if to say, "You can't have your own vision."

PK: Right, right.

RG: Or "Your vision is not identifiable with my vision of what it means to make universal art. If I can't identify my humanity with *your* version of humanity then *you* must not be human. Because mine has the pretense of embracing humanity and yours doesn't seem to have any."

PK: What about this dilemma—thinking of the West, especially West and Southwest art scenes, whatever they may be—many of the artists involved—Chicano, Native American, other Latinos—have chosen, as we discussed, images that are attached to their backgrounds, to their experiences, to their identity. And also the traditions of the Southwest. You think of many cases. And the way it has tended to work. . . . I mean, there's a dilemma. . . .

RG: No, no, no.

PK: There is a dilemma in terms of their reception.

RG: Okay, that's correct. Because don't you think that all artists in New York are making decisions and choices of what to make art about? Just as artists in California and the Southwest are making decisions?

PK: Right.

RG: It's not that they make decisions. It's what the decisions are about. It's what emerges as a consequence of

those decisions—the visual realization of the consequence of those decisions. That's what it's about. Because everyone makes decisions, choices. There's no doubt about that.

PK: Sure, yeah. Well, what about this? Moving away from California just for a moment. . . .

RG: Let's go to the world!

PK: . . . to the Southwest. Let's take a look at Santa Fe, let's say. And you go to through this gallery in Santa Fe. . . .

RG: Well, that's a whole different kind of fish.

PK: Well, I know, but there are . . . you encounter certain motifs that are culturally rooted in terms of traditions and so forth that seem to be—and I'm not saying that all of these artists that are producing them are, what shall we say, of a level that we've been discussing—but it would seem possible that there's a temptation—the converse side of what you're saying—that there could also be a temptation to choose as. . . . We can say that it served Carlos and others pretty well at a certain point. Or looking to the Southwest with—I don't want to say coyotes; that's too vulgar—but certain motifs that are chosen that are salable, and then it's further ghettoizing potentially, I guess is what it seems to me.

RG: Well, now the ghettoization is another big issue. Well, first of all. . . .

PK: Too many questions, I know.

RG: Yeah, yeah. The artists you're referring to, I need maybe some more specifics, because it's not a very generalized thing. . . .

PK: Yeah, well, I meant in a general way.

RG: Well, there are artists who are opportunists, and they know what they're doing. They're making money off of what. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: Rupert García, tape two, side B.

RG: You know, the problem with that kind of . . . about this dilemma. It's as if artists who make images that are identifiable to their particular culture or race or history can't make mistakes. It's as if they can't make mistakes. Why can't they make mistakes? It's as if we're not supposed to make mistakes. We're supposed to be pure. Well, damn, nothing's pure in this culture. Except the dollar bill, that's pure.

PK: One can say that about any culture.

RG: We'll talk about this one, here.

PK: Yeah, right.

RG: We'll talk about this one. Where the vulgarity art at its height. So an artist who'll makes paintings of coyotes, I mean, there are many other artists who are doing similar kinds of things and are not Native American or Chicano. So it's not that it's *them;* it's certain kinds of people who are somewhat industrious and entrepreneurial and have a pulse on the art market. And there are all kinds of art markets—from the Old Masters to ancient to nineteenth century art, furniture—I mean, all kinds of stuff. So it's as if you can only point to the Native American artists in the Southwest as making this drivel. Why you do. . . . Come on, let's spit it out.

PK: Right, true.

RG: Spit it out. You know, that's an imposition on the artist's shoulder because he's doing that. I think that's unfair. But one should say, "Well, in the context of our society, which is a capitalist-driven society, it's whatever the market will bear or accept." One has to make choices about compromise, and to what degree do you sell or do you sell your soul to the bank? And that degree is varied and depends upon the person who is executing X, Y, or Z. And that's everything. Sometimes it's as if the Chicano or the African American artist, or the Native American artist are somehow the ones who are going to be asked this question. And it's as if it doesn't happen anywhere else. Or as if *these* folks shouldn't be asked, but for somehow we're a kind of a magnet and that we're going to speak for *all* Chicanos or something like that, which has nothing to do with that. It's a perverse perception of a complex reality. And it's unfair and it has . . . there's nothing. . . . Well, I won't say it has nothing; it has something to do with the artist, yes. But the way questions oftentimes are framed or conclusions are achieved have more to do with reducing a people, separating the people really, the imposition of ghettoization,

and then, identifying them, they become a target and then we can dismiss them at the work they've done. So I don't buy that stuff. I don't buy that drivel. I'm not saying that there aren't artists who are doing that. They are. We could even go through *Southwest Art* magazine and see them all there. I went to Santa Fe a couple of times and, man, my wife and I, our hearts were broken time and time again going into galleries and seeing this stuff. And I always wondered, and I'd ask my wife [Sandy—Ed.], "Do they think that they're really making art? Do they really believe that inside? Or is it that they perceive that this is how it's done? I mean, how did they get to this place?"

PK: Well, there are a lot of artists like that, and unless we're going to get in a position of ranking, you know, many of them, I think—to answer your question; it was a rhetorical question, I know—but I think in fact many of those artists *do* think of themselves as genuine. . . .

RG: Yeah, I don't want to say that there is a right and a wrong way to make art. Let's be very clear that I'm not subscribing to that. Because I don't know what the right way or wrong way is. I really don't. I don't know. Because I look at art in the context as . . . the way in which anthropologists do—that it's a human realization of ideas and experience connected to the immediate and the past, and with a vision occasionally about the future. So art is then seen as just a human product. Not separated from life and over here and somehow, in the Kantian way, it's had nothing to do with everyday life, where it's supposed to be disinterested. I don't buy that. I don't buy that. That might be in art but that is not why it exists. See, that's the thing, why does art exist? And no one really knows why. Well, we know this. All human beings do it, and we've been doing it for a hell of a long time. That we do know. [We know humans make "art," but we don't know absolutely why. There exist, of course, a variety of theories about why art exists, but because they exist doesn't mean they're right.—RG]

PK: For me the dilemma—and I don't know if I stated this very well, see, even if it's worth pursuing—but the dilemma for me seems to be—and I think it's a very unfair situation where you have—let's talk about the coyote painters, just generically the coyote painters—but within the coyote painters there can be some people that will be artists with real vision that choose to, let's say, do coyotes because of an authentic connection they feel to the land, to the place, to the animals. I would say and I bet you would agree, too, if that's the case this is something they should be able to do. From their experience.

RG: And they should also subvert it, too.

PK: Other ones maybe are a little more cynical about their coyotes.

RG: Well, why can't they be that?

PK: Sure, they can. But it's because they're dealing with these kinds of subjects often seem lesser by high art—by arbiters of high art—lesser subjects, regionally based. . . .

RG: Well, that's their problem.

PK: Well, I know but it has an effect on these artists.

RG: That's correct.

PK: So, I guess I was trying to draw some analogy to. . . .

RG: Okay, there's a major problem. There's a major problem. And it has to do with the sociopolitical economy of art. What sells? If their work sold a lot to major collectors, they would be on the cover of major art magazines, but they don't. They aren't perceived as being that important. And if they *do* get on the cover of maybe *Southwest,* something like that. But they're not on the major *Art Forum*, *Art News*, *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *Art International*. They're not there. Because they're not seen as being "significant" by the arbiters of what is considered to be important art.

PK: Let me ask you. . . .

RG: Some don't need to be there, by the way, either. Some are real bad. [laughs]

PK: Right. Yeah, we will admit that this is possible. Well, do you see—this is sort of random, a little bit—but it does seem within our post-modern era here. . . .

RG: And it does exist. I believe post-modernism exists. Let me say this, man. Do you know what I did? At a presentation, at a college, of art professors, one professor, in front of a bunch of students, said that post-modernism is a game, it's meaningless, it has nothing to do with art . . . so on and so forth. And after the meeting, after this presentation, I walked up to that professor and I said, "Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that post-modernism, in all its complexity, is meaningless in 1995, and that students shouldn't even think about it?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, why did you tell them that then? Why did you say what you

did? It's very anti-intellectual for you to do that. Very irresponsible. Why did you do that?" Because he made it impersonal. He didn't say, "This is what *I* believe, I think that. . . ." He made it seem as if objectively the post-modern is meaningless, is only a way to sell books. And, in part, it is true. It's part of the intellectual market, that's true. But it's another thing to give the pretense that it, objectively, is worn out. And it's not. Post-modernism is a very significant framework to look at the world, especially in 1995, in its true complexities. It's very confusing out there.

PK: Well, one of the aspects of, excuse me. . . .

RG: [laughs] [Laughing at the expression on PK's face?—Trans.]

PK: No, no, I'm interested to hear that you appreciate that framework, that you see it as a very useful construct.

RG: Very much. Absolutely, no question about it.

PK: Because, like everything else, it's a construct, too.

RG: Yeah, absolutely.

PK: And as long as we're clear on that then. . . .

RG [laughs]

PK: But let me see if I can ask this question in a way that'll be useful. [laughs] It seems that many things have opened up a great deal, and within post-modernism, in terms of, say, appropriation. Well, figuration has come back strongly.

RG: It never left.

PK: It never left. But it's come back and is now much more at the center than it was a few decades ago, where abstraction and minimalism, of course, were. . . . We don't want to get into that.

RG: I wrote about this.

PK: Okay. But it seems to me, along with this is then an introduction or reintroduction of figure-tied or expressed themes and issues—among which are identity issues, people issues—and I would say this is certainly clear with what is called "queer art," which is the term that they use now. If you go to CAA [College Art Association—Ed.] they've got sessions on queer art. . . .

RG: Queer culture.

PK: . . . queer culture and queer studies and so forth. But we're talking specifically about the art. Now it would seem that, maybe not counter to what you've been describing as the situation in which Chicanos have worked. . . .

RG: Not all. Let's be very clear, not all. Many.

PK: Okay, well let me finish my point.

RG [laughs]

PK: That perhaps in counterdistinction to that, or at least sort of another observation about evolving, changing ideas, that, in fact, these niches are being established and then presented and appreciated in the press, say, or in the art journals and all that. For instance, gay-theme, sexually based art is very much in evidence and is shown all the time, in many venues, including the top ones. So do you see that as sort of a separate issue, or do you see that opening up also, then, applying to what we've been discussing, the whole Chicano art movement and the subjects that often are used? Is there an opening because of the post-modernism, we talked about identity art. . . .

RG: Well, you know, I wrote in the prologue for the CARA [Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation—RG] catalogue that. . . .

PK: I'll have to read that. Then I might not have had to ask this question.

RG: Probably not. A lot of what we were doing in the late sixties, early seventies is what is now called post-modernism. As a matter of fact, this guy, André Huyssen, wrote a great essay called "The Great Divide," talking . . . he takes back historically post-modernism at least to the Pop artists, at least then. Maybe even back

to Duchamp, if you want to. Many Chicano artists were dealing with the issue of identity—and all kinds of other concerns, too; really, figuration, modernism pooh-poohed. So in terms of identity vis-à-vis sexuality. . . . What's. . . . I don't understand the question.

PK: Well, that's an identity. I mean, if you define your identity, it's something you choose, a characteristic you have. Choose to identify yourself as my definition of identity.

RG: But, see, queers can. . . .

PK: In the gay community foregrounds—as they say in theory-talk—this aspect of their experience and then it is expressed in their art, one could say—this is pretty obvious—that in a similar way other groups have done the same thing. And my only point—sorry for going on—is that it seems to me in my looking at the art world that this is becoming—I don't want to say more accepted—that there's more interest in this kind of expression.

RG: I will only say that there is some interest. There's more interest in gay art and in gender identity and a kind of feminism [I wish it were the kind of feminism that asked critical and fundamental questions about gender construction as it relates to capitalism, patriarchy, and its political and cultural institutions—I realize some artists are doing this—RG] than there is in artists like African Americans and Chicanos. There is not much market or museum interest in that kind of work. [Or if there is, the arbiters' selections are generally and apparently based in a kind of "exoticism."—RG]

PK: This what I wanted to. . . .

RG: Yeah, because they identify the gender-sexuality-feminist thing as a white problem—in the art world—and so there's racism there, see. If you just say "gender" and if you just say "sexuality," then what you're saying is white. That's the suggestion.

PK: What about the male chauvinist?

RG: Oh, well, that happens. How many centuries have we had museums in this country? We have one show [The Black Male, Whitney Museum, 1995—RG/JR], and all of a sudden, "What about that show?"

PK [laughs]

RG: Me, I think that's wonderful. But that's all? One example?

PK: Did you see it?

RG: I have the catalog. I haven't seen it. I mean, to me. . . .

PK: It's a strange show, but. . . .

RG: Yeah, I mean that's no way to argue—which is a way to say, that's one example, and that doesn't explain the art world's wrongs away. . . .

PK: Well, that's true, but if you're forward-looking rather than backward-looking then you can say, "Maybe this shows a direction."

RG: It's an example of what can really happen. It's an example. . . . See, I've always really believed this, and at a conference I even said this, that museums have such an important role to play in our national and global culture, they have the opportunity to do things in their many venues that can highlight the true complexity and identity of who we are as human beings. They really can do that because politicians might not do that; book publishers may not do that. TV certainly doesn't do that, generally speaking, but museums, they have a time or a moment in human history where they can really use their facilities, efforts, and finances to truly contribute—to be redundant—to really contribute to the betterment—and this is a cliché, but I do believe it—to the betterment of humankind. They really can do that. They have the opportunity, they could do it. But they don't do it. On occasion it's limitedly done, yes. But as a systematic effort with a complex vision in mind—and I'm not saying they don't have vision; they do—but of the kind of vision that is tuned in to our times and how we live. I mean, they could do a lot. They could do a lot. Unbelievable what they could do. You know what I mean? They could do just ab[out] . . . But they don't. They don't. On occasion, yes. But does the occasion, like The Black Male show, remove them from the hook? No. It says, "Gee that was great they did that. What else can you do now?" But museum's don't do that. Don't do that. They can, they really, really can. And you know this, Paul. I mean, you're not stupid. You know this. This could happen.

PK: That's true, I'm not stupid. Right. [laughs] Well, of course, that show . . . any single example then can be critiqued on other. . . .

RG: All kinds of ways.

PK: And I just mentioned that as. . . . Let me follow up, then, more in terms of what you would like to see. And I certainly. . . .

RG: I want to see me at MOMA in New York, that's what I want to see. [both laugh]

PK: Because you have an exhibition like The Black Male, which one can argue is long overdue and it could be—and it would make an important statement—it could change perceptions or move in that direction, which is all to the good. But within an art context, art exhibitions, isn't there also then a risk of continuing to circumscribe . . . to, in effect, ghettoize by doing this way?

RG: No, no, no.

PK: Is it not?

RG: No.

PK: Okay, next question is it not desirable—and this is my follow-up question—to ultimately remove these distinctions and have every kind of art?

RG: Ultimately?

PK: Yeah, ultimately.

RG: What the hell is "ultimately"?

PK: Well, two years from now.

RG: No, because it won't happen. I will say ultimately when social conditions shift, yes. Until the social conditions shift, no.

PK: So you think it's beneficial. . . .

RG: Absolutely. . . .

PK: . . . to maintain a theme? To maintain, if you will, a thematic approach?

RG: There have always been themes since the beginning of museums. What d'ya mean? All of a sudden now we're going to change it to not having themes?

PK: No.

RG: You mean certain themes.

PK: Does this then also limit certain artists then that they need to be thought of in terms of. . . .

RG: No, no, no, not at all. This is an aspect. But I helped curate the show of Manuel Ocampo at San Francisco's Mexican Museum with [Enrique—Ed.] Chagoya. We were very careful in the text, in my text, to make clear that this is an example of a Filipino artist, not *the* Filipino artist. And that he is of this and more. So because you have a show on the black male doesn't mean that all black males got to make that kind of art. I mean, because you have a show, that doesn't mean that.

PK: Right.

RG: Well, so I didn't understand that question. Why don't you rephrase the question again?

PK: Well, I'm thinking in terms of the groups in which artists exhibit, where you have the themes that are established, if they continue to be along these lines, groups. . . .

RG: That doesn't bother me. What bothers me is the bad work that's included. The themes don't bother me, because the themes are always done. And the themes of groups having shows, they doesn't bother me. Why should it. . . . It's just "bothered" because you think that you shouldn't be there.

PK: Well, some people would say on the basis of race and gender it should be there and it's important to move beyond that. I mean, that's an argument. . . .

RG: Yeah, that argument is. . . . Well, I have to see where it's grounded, depending on where people are coming

from, but oftentimes the argument is, "You know we're all human beings. You all love each other."

PK: That's what you say.

RG: But I also realize the reality. There's sort of a reality. . . .

PK: Yeah, but that's how you self-described your . . . really.

RG: But there's no contradiction in having that notion and in realizing the problems, in realizing the need for the existence of certain kinds of exhibitions.

PK: It's affirmative action in. . . .

RG: No, affirmative action, that's too loaded.

PK: [chuckles] Oh, okay.

RG: I don't want to use that kind of language because. . . .

PK: Right, but think of some word. . . .

RG: The thing about affirmative action, it's been so vulgarized from its original intent that. . . .

PK: I know.

RG: . . . I don't want to use it. But I think we. . . . for example, I've talked to art students—young white students, Vietnamese students, Chicano students, African American students—they all hunger—they really do in the end—to know who they are, where their mamas and daddies come from. They really want to know. They really care. But they tell me that some of the faculty tell them, "That's not important to deal with. That's not a good topic for art." That's modernist crap. [The quotation mark might go after "crap."—Trans.] So you frustrate or they repress something that they're interested in. I'm giving a talk next Thursday for the annual meeting of the California Art Education Association in San Jose, a state-wide thing. I'm going to discuss some of these issues, of art and art education, about how important it is that the student be allowed to connect with their everyday life in the production of whatever they make at school. That connection is so important to them. No matter what it might be. And to deny it is to frustrate, and then they have to go somewhere else to find meaning, both intellectual and emotional.

PK: But nothing I have said denies that.

RG: Don't get defensive.

PK: No, no, no, I'm not defensive. I just want to make sure we're understanding one another.

RG: Okay.

PK: In fact, it's exactly the opposite. What I am suggesting, what I was asking you, is don't you think that these artists, whether they're youngsters or young professionals, should exactly be able to make art completely out of their own experience as they choose and that it should be valued and exhibited equally with some high-modernist. . . .

RG: I agree. I agree.

PK: Okay, that's what I was. . . .

RG: Absolutely.

PK: And it occurred to me that it's possible that that really isn't going to happen until we move beyond . . . it's called like "Special Olympics" or something almost. That would be one way to look at it. You know that these. . . .

RG: No, I am offended by that comparison.

PK: Okay, that's. . . .

RG: Because the Special Olympics, these people are indeed biologically and physically impaired. So to draw a parallel to say that Chicanos are similar, they're somehow impaired. . . .

PK: No, but maybe they're viewed that way.

RG: But that analogy, the analogy is one I wouldn't even want to talk about.

PK: But isn't it possible that that, in fact, in a certain sense is what. . . .

RG: People perceive?

PK: Yeah.

RG: Yes, unfortunately yes.

PK: And so that. . . .

RG: If you're discussing the perception. . . .

PK: Exactly.

RG: . . . I would agree.

PK: Yeah, exactly, it is this perception. And it would seem that it's possible then to continue then to make special groupings—well, I mean, my opinion doesn't matter—but to make special groupings and special shows that eventually in some ways that could perpetuate the notion of "other."

RG: No. . . . Well, I mean, it is possible that it would perpetuate already demented minds. It would fulfill their prophecy, yes. Yes, that's true. But that's true with anything. And so. . . .

PK: So the way out could be . . . one of the ways out is to get rid of the distinctions. Not because they're bad or lesser or anything like that but to deal with the basis of strengths and show work together.

RG: Well, there's nothing wrong with showing difference. There's always difference, always difference.

PK: Right.

RG: But, see, we're talking about this kind of notion of otherness and difference in the "social context of madness." And that madness is the complex society in which we live. That's what we have to talk about, so we can't get too abstract and too metaphysical. We could bring it right back down to here, to what it really is, and it seems to me that there's nothing wrong with conflict. The problem with difference and otherness is the context in which we have to discuss it. It's that context. . . .

PK: Whether it's used against somebody or valued.

RG: That's correct. That's correct. So intrinsically is it bad? The answer is no.

PK: No, no.

RG: But can it be perceived as bad, yes.

PK: And so I gather then that you don't feel all that much progress actually has been made yet.

RG: That is correct.

PK: Okay.

RG: Absolutely correct. Absolutely correct.

PK: Well, I got that out. [said with a smile—Trans.]

RG: There's been some progress, cannot deny that for a moment. There has been global progress, can't deny that for a moment. Is it significant? To a certain degree, of course it is. Is it moving too slow? No question about it. How are the conditions now? The same before World War II.

PK: That's pretty dreary.

RG: Yeah, but does it negate and dampen my hope? Absolutely not.

PK: Okay.

RG: Absolutely not. Am I hopeless? No. Not at all, not at all.

PK: Well, that I'm glad to hear.

RG: If I did feel hopeless, Paul, I wouldn't make any more work, wouldn't make any pictures. Wouldn't be talking to you. If I didn't care.

PK: Well, *I* believe that.

RG: Yeah, I believe it to the bottom of my toes. You know, I mean, I was raised that way and later I began to reflect on how I was raised and now I really believe it. [laughs]

PK: Well, we're about done for this session.

RG: This is good, this is. . . .

PK: Thank you.

[Session 3]

PK: Archives of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with my friend Rupert García. Good morning, Rupert.

RG: Good morning.

PK: And this is, if I'm not mistaken, the third session.

RG: I believe it is, too.

PK: Yeah, it's been spread out a bit over time. Anyway, the date is 24 June 1996, and as usual the interview is being conducted at the artist's Oakland home—also studio but the studio's upstairs. . . .

RG: It's too far to walk.

PK: [laughs] Yeah, too far to walk. For local color, shall we say, we'll set the stage within your dining room, actually.

RG: That's good.

PK: Rupert, we have been chatting a little bit about various things, catching up a bit. And one of the things that I've been filling you on a bit is this Latino-documentation project that the Archives has underway, which is funded with certain Smithsonian money that was really made available, continues to made available, as the result of a study. There was a task force led by. . . . I forget the fellow's name—used to be at Stanford and now I think is in the east. Anyway, the findings of this study then led to the formation of the Latino oversight committee, which watches the Smithsonian Institution in terms of our activities involving the broadly described Latino community. And although we've agreed to move a little bit beyond the political dimension in this last interview, I think it's worth making this observation that the findings of this task force that led to this Latino project were—and I think these were the words—that they discovered and described something called "widespread institutional racism," within the institution. [The published document is titled *Willful Neglect*.—JR] So what we're doing now, although I was doing this anyway with you, could be seen as participating in some of the remedy. But you had an observation, I think, to make in response to that committee.

RG: You said it was negative response, didn't you say that?

PK: I did.

RG: Yeah, and I said it was positive—that the response to what would be the findings of the task force in your perception was negative. In my perception it is positive. "Positive" meaning acknowledging the fact that racism institutionally exists not only politically and economically but also culturally in all of our institutions in this country, and so to not deny that but rather to do something about it is positive. I think to have continued not acknowledging it would have compounded the negativity. So this is a good small step in the right direction.

PK: Well, I certainly agree with that, and from a very pragmatic standpoint since I'm always looking for funding to do interviews and so forth, and this actually then has freed up certain funds that. . . .

RG: What this speaks to, Paul, really, it speaks to the politics of culture, is what it speaks to—which is to say, certain kinds of positive shifts or changes for the good, sometimes only comes about as a consequence of both protestation, in the streets, let's say, by human bodies and voices as well as with studies. And so studies are political. They do cause certain institutions and people to move and to change and to do things. So this is a very

good example to me of how the politics of culture on a certain level works. Which is also to suggest that everything is potentially political to cause change. And I think this is a wonderful step in the right direction.

PK: Do you think that it's a bit ironic that you have on the one hand this kind of positive movement as a result of this study within the Smithsonian Institution, but at the same time the Smithsonian is being pretty heavily criticized by a different kind of response to different pressures—like Enola Gay.

RG: No, I don't think it's at all ironic. I think it's endemic to human affairs, where there's going to be at all times something good and something bad. And something good will come from something bad, as well as something good will cause something bad—in various kinds of ways. So, to me, on the one hand it is not ironic, but it is emblematic of the history of our country. I can't divorce it from the many things that have historically, materialistically caused certain conditions to not only happen but also to continue and be perpetuated. So this thing with the Enola Gay on one hand—and other exhibitions by the Smithsonian—and this, on the other hand, with the Latino project and the task force, is the reality of given affairs. You have to confront these issues directly, and in so doing there are going to be wonderful things that are really positive and will contribute to the benefit of all peoples, and on the other hand there can be things that need to be changed or discontinued or criticized. So to me it's just part of that what I think is. . . . To struggle is to be human. Because if you don't believe that then things are static.

PK: You see it as a kind of dialectic?

RG: Of course, of course. Not in the vulgar sense either. Not in the. . . . Some people have perceived that the economic base determines the super-structure. I don't mean that at all. That's not my dialectics. My dialectics are a bit more complicated and also involves cycles as well. I don't believe only in a linear kind of dialectic but also very strongly in a cyclical kind of movement.

PK: Do you see—although I promised that we wouldn't get overly immersed in the political aspect, which, well, I mean, it's evident that this has always been in the forefront for you and. . . .

RG: Not always, not always.

PK: Okay. You always catch me, you know.

RG: [laughs]

PK: You always catch me with the wording. But, at any rate. . . .

RG: Well, I think it's good, Paul, because this kind of a discussion . . . when we talk or with whomever you speak goes on tape, goes to the Archives, that's what they have to. . . .

PK: That's right.

RG: . . . the researchers and whoever comes in to look at the material will listen to what we say or read what we say and then make a conclusion based upon that information, so I think it's correct for any interviewee to say, "Wait a minute."

PK: It's not only correct. It seems to me it's a responsibility to the, quotes, "truth."

RG: Yeah. And the truth is very complex.

PK: But rephrasing it slightly, often you, to a large extent, have been identified with a political position.

RG: This is true.

PK: And in some cases—and I've been talking with some of your friends and colleagues who knew you long before I met you, like Jacinto Quirarte and others about you when you were younger, and you were fairly militant. So this has been—I think this was the term—in your activism, you know this was an important part, as we discovered in the earlier interview, was a very important meaningful part. . . .

RG: Um hmm, very meaningful.

PK: . . . of you, your identity, and then, of course, your art, which comes from your identity. So I guess in a way I'm just reiterating what the earlier tapes will evidence. But I guess there are two questions I'd like to ask still on this subject, and then what I would like to do, if possible, is move on to some areas of you, your life, and your art. Maybe I'll just put the two questions to you and maybe they'll end up melding anyway. The first one coming out of what we were just saying, a dialectic as opposed to a kind of linear look—or, rather, your avoiding a more linear dialectical description of events. What I wanted to ask about that is that, nonetheless, over all you see a

kind of, I don't want to say modernist progress, but a sense of progress, a movement towards, in the social realm, a greater equality, a coming together. Do you have an optimistic or a positive look at the direction things are going?

RG: In general, you mean?

PK: I mean over time and in general, because you have these different forces at work. We talked about within the Smithsonian. It's a natural thing. You've got your Latino on one hand; we would say that's good. You've got some of the other decisions; many of us would say this is not so good.

RG: That's correct.

PK: Question, then, number one is: Nonetheless do we have, out of this, a progress towards a better social situation, an ideal. Number two question is related to this: How do you see the broader Latino movement or enterprise at this time in America? And I think those are related, maybe.

RG: The first one, because of my optimism, which goes back to when I was a child, I have always felt and believed that the good will win out, what is right will win out—in the end. But at the same time I've also grown to realize that it's going to be very, very difficult—very, very difficult. And have changes occurred with time? Of course. I mean, we no longer have classical slavery, do we? That's a major thing. Women can vote, that's a major thing. So there are a lot of things that have happened over time, since the founding of this land called U.S. of A. So there have been good things. But the continuation of the institutionalization of oppression is always there; it always raises its nasty head. But nevertheless I do believe, I really believe, strongly, in the end that what is right will overcome that which is evil. And I don't want to sound like a fundamentalist Christian. [both laugh]

PK: Oh, poor things.

RG: You know, "The devil made me do it," kind of thing. But I really feel strongly. Because if I didn't feel strongly about the way I do about human beings I couldn't be the kind of artist that I am.

PK: Well, yeah, why do it then would be one question. I mean, other than the internal—I guess—drive.

RG: Which is paramount. The individual . . . for me, the internal epiphanies that I experience working reminds me of—I don't want to sound too weighty—but of the profundity of being a human being, I am reminded of whenever I am working. Meaning I feel all my creative juices, my mind, my imagination, and my deep feelings all working at their fullest when I'm making a piece. And that is very, very exciting. Very exciting. And that's where I get a profound sense of affirmation, that human beings are basically good. And so I think that's where this being positive and optimistic comes—from that kind of a. . . . My feeling about being alive lets me know that in the end we're really fine animals.

PK: So would the problem then come with sort of collective action, meaning then finally government and institutions? I mean, is that too simplistic? If you have to look for explanations, why did we go so far astray throughout our history? Which everybody's got to agree is the case.

RG: Yeah.

PK: If people are basically, fundamentally, good in some [pure] way. . . .

RG: I believe that. . . .

PK: . . . then what's wrong? And I guess I'm asking, do you place that at the feet of institutions and government?

RG: And individuals. I mean, we make choices as individuals, and we're also strongly influenced by institutions, from the family on up to the governmental. So I think it's a give and take in terms of what causes economic deprivation, racism, sexism, homophobia, and numerous other problems that we have today. And it's not one thing or the other. I think it's a dialogue between the two. But what the question comes down to is who has the power to run the social, cultural, and political and economic machine? And then how will they think about the rest of those in this country and the world? So it's as if to say, who has the power, what they do with it, what do they have in mind, who do they have in mind, when they wield it about? Because those of us who are citizens of this great country—and it is a great country—we don't have much power. We do not have much power—meaning the kind of power that will realize the necessary and profound change to make better human beings in our society. We just don't have it; we do not have it. The myth is, of course, that our government represents us. That's the myth. And then that corporations and manufacturers have the betterment of society in mind. Another myth. Maybe we should say that the government and corporations have the citizenry unevenly in mind.

PK: Or they've convinced themselves that's what they have in mind, for PR purposes.

RG: Oh, yeah, look at Philip Morris. But we don't have the power as citizens. We can superficially. . . . Well, for example, the Vietnam War. There was an incredible social outcry that really impacted, eventually, the ending of the Vietnam War. I mean, that was a world-wide outcry, and in our country as well. So there are moments when that can happen. But, Paul, what's more important to me is when we have these kinds of responses from the citizens of our country to something that they see as being a problem, and the government and even manufacturers respond, but it's usually for the moment. It's usually for the moment. Just to make us feel as if something's going on. Because the next time you turn around, we find our family members involved in a war with or for some other country. So it's as if we can protest, yeah, we can take an eye off the ball for the moment, move it around. So the complexity of diversion, which is in the hands of the powers-that-be. . . . And that is really a reality, the powers-that-be. That does exist. I mean, even Eisenhower talked about that, the. . . .

PK: Tri-lateral. . . .

RG: Well, no. The military-industrial complex. He said, "You've got to be careful of that unit." So even though I paint the historic and cloudy sort of picture, our government and the corporations are not going to be iron-handed like the Fascists and Nazis in Europe. That wouldn't happen in America. They're not going to do that. There's a great book called *Friendly Fascism* by [Bertram—Ed.] Gross, and that's what they use, friendly Fascism.

PK: This leads, I think, perfectly into another area that I want to investigate just a bit to make sure that we're clear [about all this].

RG: The responses I'm giving to you right now on these questions—or the question—is very reductive.

PK: No, I understand, yeah.

RG: It needs more edification to really get to some of the issues. I don't want people to think that I have knee-jerking. . . .

PK: Well, nobody's going to think that because fortunately you have other interviews underway. Also you've got some publications. But I think this is certainly very much to the point that comes to part of the essence of Rupert García.

RG: I'm not an essentialist. I don't believe in essentialism.

PK: [laughs] All right. To aspects of the thinking and activity. . . .

RG: That's true. [both laugh]

PK: Okay. Well, you're going to keep me honest if it kills me.

RG [laughs].

PK: The second question, though—this leads into it very nicely, was a concern—or my interest—in your views having been an observer of the movement, starting with Chicano movement, but now a little more broadly, a little more inclusive as you described.

RG: I've always been inclusive.

PK: I know, you talked about it. But what interests me is how you see this now at this point. And I'm going to tell you real briefly a story just that you can play around if you would like, if it seems to be relevant. You know that I just returned from this interesting conference in Mexico City. And I gave a talk. It was a wonderful thing dealing with art and culture of the thirties into the early forties, Mexico/U.S., and I talked about California. I learned a lot from this conference, and I mentioned it to you on the phone. One of the things that was especially interesting to me, and that I think touches on the whole idea of the Latin American, Latino-Chicano presence in history here, was that in Mexico there were some very critical disassociative views that I heard regarding Mexican-Americans from colleagues and others that I spoke with that were part of the conference. And it had some scholars, many scholars; most of the important ones and others were there. That, in my naiveté surprised me a little bit. I found myself being an advocate then of like the Chicano murals. Not necessarily in our [formalist spaces] at all—I didn't need to do that—but trying to say, "Wait a minute, these are meaningful, and they're about something that is important, that matters. They don't have to match your idea of Los Tres Grandes."

RG: That's correct, that is correct.

PK: But I thought it was interesting that *I* as an American, as a visitor at a conference in Mexico City, had to take this advocacy position for my fellow Americans and that it was an uphill struggle and I had a lot of convincing to do. Number one. That is one aspect that I think touches on this issue and I'll try not to go on too long here, but

I'd like to set a kind of stage for your thinking. And then the second thing that happened down there, I was on part of a woman, Raquel. . . .

RG: Tibol.

PK: . . . Tibol. She's a character.

RG: Yeah, she is.

PK: And you know her, I can see, and so she, of course, carried on this polemic.

RG: Oh, yes.

PK: She wasn't even. . . . You know, in everybody's talk she uses the chance to go on for half an hour.

RG: Oh, yeah, that's. . . .

PK: But what was interesting about it was this broad characterization of the U.S. and Americans in general and—almost without exception—as Fascistic. You know, this is the buzzword. And I just sort of mention this because I found some real paradoxes—or conflicts—between these different views that are held. And I don't know about Raquel, but some of her other left-leaning colleagues were, again, very dismissive of their brothers and sisters north of the border, Chicanos. So I guess that's kind of the environment that I want to share with you and I know you might have some thoughts on this.

RG: Oh, I have a lot of thoughts on this. Well, what was the first part you asked me about?

PK: Well, the general question was about your current views of the movement as it is in the mid-nineties.

RG: Well, of course, the movement, if one can even. . . . Well, one can use that word. The Chicano/Latino movement of the sixties, like all the movements of the sixties, continue into the nineties in various kinds of ways. All of them. Some of the contributions that were created in the 1960s, early seventies, have been institutionalized. Others have been ignored, didn't work. And like any movement in any country, when it comes up, it's heated and then wanes, cools off, and then certain aspects of that movement go on, in various kinds of ways. The Chicano-Latino movement is no different than any other kind of movement—meaning when it comes up for, in the case of the U.S. I call it the domestic Third World political and cultural movements of the sixties and seventies—were systematically taken apart by the COINTELPRO [counter-intelligence program--RG] folks coming out of the FBI's organized plan to destroy the critical growth in individuals and groups of the sixties and seventies. So we had to deal with that reality, that there was a concerted effort to take it apart. Now, not all of the institutions were taken apart. I mean, the Galería de la Raza, founded in 1970, continues in 1996. There are other were done in the late sixties—'69, probably, more specifically—that go on to this very day. And then there are individuals who continue what happened in the sixties and seventies in various kinds of ways. But I want to shy away from saying that there is an identifiable configuration of a Chicano/Latino movement as there was in the late sixties, early seventies. I think it's now a bit more amorphous—as all the other movements are that were created in the sixties and seventies. But, having said that, in 1990, I guess it was, whenever they opened the CARA exhibition at UCLA—Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation. I went to the opening of that and, let me tell you, Paul, I couldn't believe, I just couldn't believe, almost twenty-some-odd years later—over twenty years later in some cases—of the energy and imagination and the intelligence that was bright as ever. I mean, if somebody had dropped a bomb right there, at that time, many of the very important contributors would have been destroyed—of a national magnitude. So when I experienced that, I felt, man, this is unbelievable! It was just *incredible*! Are these people still working? These groups are still going on? In various kinds of ways. Not in the same way as twenty five years ago as we speak today—or maybe twenty seven now, in some cases. And it was amazing. To me it was exciting, just exciting. And to see some of these people, a little bit older now, they've put some pounds on and all that, but it was fantastic. So in other words. . . .

[Break in taping]

PK: This is Rupert García, tape one, side B. Sorry about that, Rupert. We went off the end of our tape. Got most of it but you were talking about your excitement at CARA.

RG: Yeah, what I'm trying to articulate, in regards to your question, is that the vitality that I felt at the opening of CARA at UCLA informs me, though it is differently manifested today, of the necessity for what happened generally in the sixties and seventies and regarding specifically Chicano-Latinos is still very much alive. Very much alive, probably more so than before. Because many of these folks have grown older, they've become smarter, wiser, but the élan. . . .

PK: More strategic, perhaps, in [some ways]?

RG: Yeah, and the élan is just so very profound. So I don't want to get too metaphysical, but the collective political/cultural consciousness of Chicano-Latinos exists. How it manifests itself, I think, is the question. How do we point to it and say, "Well, *there's* an example of it." Or "There's a cluster of things." That might be different to do today than. . . . It seemed to be more easy to do back twenty five, thirty years ago. And one has to also figure out well do we mean by the Chicano-Latino movement works that are easily pointed to as registering a consciousness or a feeling of being Chicano-Latino. Well, I don't know about that. I've never known about that, even back when. "When" meaning in late sixties, early seventies, I don't know about that. Because even back then people were doing works that didn't necessarily and superficially look like a Chicano painting, for example. But I'll tell you this, however, having taught since 1969, students to this day—I mean, all students to this day, Euro-Americans included—are interested in their individual and collective history. They are very interested. And many of them are painfully addressing it. They're trying to . . . some of these kids are overcoming the "denial syndrome" of many people of this country, of who they are or what an American is. And so what I'm trying to say is that even in unorganized situations like in the Academy, where I meet students of all classes and ethnicities, racial makeup [as well as gender and sexual preferences—RG], over all these years, there's been this ongoing concern. To this very day. Last semester I saw students who were really dealing with these issues. And not necessarily because they're trying to be political. But because they feel, for various kind of reasons—at home, or what they have read or what they've seen on TV—something is out there that continues the need for some of these—and I'm talking about specific kids in college now, in the university—the need to find out what it means to be immediately and historically an American of, let's say, Mexican parentage or history. I just had a young woman deal with this in my office. Really complex and very, very intense.

PK: Well, can you describe the situation?

RG: Well, she is one of my B.F.A. students. She just got in and I'd seen her around, but, you know, you see everybody around.

PK: Right.

RG: Last year or the year before there was an installation done by a student dealing with altars, and it had obviously included Mexican elements or products. A grad student and I had talked about it, how superficial it was and how also obvious it was, and how very problematic it was, and that the installation seemed to lack a sense of necessity to exist. Well, the student I talked to last semester is the one who made that installation. And I asked her about it. And she explained it to me, and that was like an important start in the investigation of, as she said, aspects of her that she feels important to experience and to research. Because her mother always, more or less, didn't deal with being Mexican. And I said, "I'm very glad to hear you tell me this, because that is exactly what that installation said, exactly what it said. It said, on the one hand, 'Boy, you are serious about this but you don't know doo-doo about it yet.' Because the work, the labor put into this installation was obvious; it was a lot of time, a lot of consideration. But not much heart and not much internalized. The internalization of the ideas and the imagination and deep sense of emotion that can be represented by the elements that you used were lacking. And it's very simple. It's because some of your concerns are still a little bit beyond your reach. You haven't brought them *inside* of you. Once you do that, the closer it gets, then your pieces or paintings, whatever you do, will be *strongly* imbued with how you really think and feel about being"—in her case—"a Chicana living in the United States. Now," I said, "how you realize that's going to be uneven, because once you start the investigation there are going to be things that you like, things you don't like, things you're very confused by things you don't understand. So who knows what that installation would look like in three years if you could do it again—where it would really reflect who you are in a more profound kind of way." So I see many students like this. Students from Jamaica, I saw in my painting class last semester. Very interested, very interested. In my intermediate painting a returning, an older woman student, talking about her painting, her subject, and she was dealing with her ethnicity and she was still trying to deny it, and I said, "Look, what if you say the word? What is so bad about using the word "identity" in your ethnicity? What's wrong with that? What can't you [say it]?" She said, "I'm so glad that you said that, Mr. García. Whew, my shoulders are very light now, and I felt very good about this discussion." And we had other students around, too.

PK: Why would they have reservations about that? I guess it's sort of a backlash at, oh, the debates around culture-identity-politics, they don't want to. . . . Why would there be reservations about using those words?

RG: In her case, in this older woman's case, who came back, I think she grew up being considered an American with no kind of obvious. . . .

PK: With no coloration?

RG: Well, I don't want to be bigoted and say that. [both laugh]

PK: Yes.

RG: You can't say that, you can't say that.

PK: I know _____.

RG: You can say that, I can't say it. And you shouldn't say that. I think she felt torn—on the one hand perhaps believing that an American is some kind of tabula rasa who existentially builds their identity, based upon what they see on TV and buy in stores. On the other hand, she had this real sense of her family and its complexity and what they used to do as younger people, and how meaningful that still resonates to this day.

PK: This one is the Jamaican?

RG: No, no, no, this is a woman who lives somewhere in Los Altos or something like that.

PK: Oh, okay.

RG: The Jamaican one is another story.

PK: Okay, right.

RG: But this one, because her painting got in a grapple with her trying to deal with issues that are important for her, subject matter in particular. She could paint well. The subject matter was being torn between dealing with important issues that she wants to address and important issues that she thinks art is supposed to deal with. And how art is somehow disconnected from what she really feels and thinks is important to her. Which is to say maybe she had a low sense of self-esteem, and to think, you know, "What can I possibly contribute to a painting?" You see [I] talk about all this kind of stuff with other students around. And so the point is, I think, that the continuation of Americans to realize who they really are and in face of this incredible sense of denial. I bet that has been going on since the early seventeen hundreds. And more so with folks who have been colonized. I mean, I can't separate from what happened when the so-called founding of this country with what we're doing today. I can't sever the two. It's not the same. Of course not. But the foundation was set a long time ago.

PK: Well, I know you're not an essentialist, and you certainly wouldn't want to dictate to any _____ _____.]

RG: I am an essentialist, I think, when it comes down to saying that human beings are basically good—you know, essentially good. [laughs]

PK: But do you feel. . . . What you've been describing in terms of these students apparently struggling to come to terms with what are identity needs or interests and as they might be opposed in their minds to the proper purpose of art, do you feel that in these times and in this country this perhaps the primary proper business of art, to deal with these issues?

RG: Of course it is. There is no issue that is not proper for art to deal with.

PK: But this is particularly important given the situation in this country?

RG: For some people, yeah. For some people. And for some people they get involved opportunistically. Because it's what's going on, it's what gets grants, it's what gets you maybe associated with some kind of so-called movement.

PK: Right. Well, there is a mainstreaming that's going on I think _____ _____.

RG: Yeah, that's very problematic for me. I find it on the one hand problematic, because, see, you have to be involved with whatever your work is concerned with, for real.

PK: What did we say? [chuckles]

RG: For real. There's nothing wrong with somebody dealing with gay issues in their work to be shown in MOMA New York and some small galleries off of Market. There's no contradiction in that. What's important is that what the artist is dealing with is sensed by them to be necessary. And there are some who are not dealing with it because it is necessary. They're trying to get over. They're trying to get acclaim on the backs of those who are in this for the long haul. And *that* I have a big problem with. Major. I *wish* we could institutionalize the gay aesthetic. I really wish we could institutionalize anti-racist aesthetic. That'd be fantastic! Because that is what needs to be done in the end if we want to change the society. We have to institutionalize, it seems to me, anti-gestures of sexism. We have to institutionalize them, we just have to. . . . If we don't institutionalize it then it doesn't become a mind-set.

PK: Normative.

RG: That's correct. It has to be considered normal that we should not be racist. It's *abnormal* that we are racist. It's economically profitable to be racist, to be sexist.

PK: But I gather you do feel a certain amount of optimism that we're moving in that direction and this is all part of it—all of this contributes to that.

RG: Yeah, but I'm reminded daily of the pain that exists. That the pain sometimes overshadows the good. There are moments when it's just like really bad news, that just seem horrendous. I mean, it sometimes escapes me as to why people in this country aren't up in arms. It escapes me sometimes. It's very painful. I mean, I was at Santa Barbara, and I went by train, came back by train. And then, coming into Oakland—Oakland was the secret word then; the sun comes out—I'm coming into Oakland and there was this horrid oppressed area. I'm coming in, and I swear to God it looks like the most awful situation that has been photographed in so-called Third World countries.

PK: That's right.

RG: You know, I'm coming into Oakland, man.

PK: Where you live.

RG: Where I live. And I'm seeing this stuff. It just pains me. It just tears my heart out. And I'm saying, "My God, what the hell is going on?" As I'm coming in on the train, I pass by this oppressed, depressed situation—dilapidated housing, stuff tossed around, really unkempt because the people don't care. Well, how can you care? If you have a job, even if it pays you minimum wage, what can you do with minimum wage in this country? At any event, so I'm coming in, as I pass all this awful situation, coming in, and I see these beautiful newly-built buildings. "This is too much, this is too much. This is too much!"

PK: To me it's a major problem in this country right now because the differential is getting further and further apart.

RG: I don't think, I just think it's being. . . . Well, I think that's true.

PK: It is true. That's statistically true.

RG: Yeah, that is true. And that's not normal.

PK: No.

RG: It's abnormal. But. . . .

PK: It's not part of the program as we've understood it to be for this country.

RG: Oh, I, for one reason, for one second, won't accept that, what you just said.

PK: Most of us accept it. We wanted to accept it.

RG: Yeah, and it doesn't work, man. It didn't work and doesn't work.

PK: It's not part of the ideal. What I'm saying is this: We operate with images and ideals that, to my mind anyway, this reality, this present reality, does not fit at all with the ideal of America, of this republic. You know, where it's headed, what it's about. Which has to do with opportunity and with individual. . . . The ideal, not _____.

RG: Yeah. The reality. . . .

PK: Do you agree with that?

RG: Totally!

PK: Okay.

RG: Absolutely, absolutely.

PK: Whe! Got it right. [chuckles]

RG: That's part of the problem. It really tears me apart, man, to see it, how our. . . .

PK: Rupert, let me ask sort of a Solomonic question. Or I'm going to put a Solomonic choice to you—the judgment of Solomon, in a sense. [The thing is] you don't have to make this and it's artificial, but as I've listened to you talk and as I've listened to you during our interviews, there are two aspects that mean a great deal to you. And this is a deep social conscience that takes political form _____ _____, but it has to do with caring for people, is the way I would describe it.

RG: Absolutely, no question about that. [Caring for people seems natural; not caring for people seems unnatural.—RG]

PK: And on the other hand there is Rupert García, the artist. Now, I understand—we all understand—that these are linked and cannot be in any way dissociated; you won't accept that. Nonetheless. . . .

RG: For discussion you could do that.

PK: But for discussion we could, and so the question that Solomon has here to deal with is, if you had to put one aside. . . .

RG: [laughs]

PK: . . . or if you had to cut it in half—or let's say you could preserve one part and not the other—here you have your social conscience and concerns, your activism, your desire—your priority, I think, as I hear you—to try to find ways to improve situations. On the other hand, you have your art. What if you didn't have the art as your means to accomplish these other concerns. What, then?

RG: Well, my art is not necessarily used to accomplish this social concern.

PK: Well, I think in some cases. . . .

RG: In some cases, it does. I mean, if I didn't, I think I'd probably blow up some buildings.

PK: Well, this is, I guess, what I'm asking, you know. What form. . . ?

RG: Well, see, I don't . . . I'm being very facetious, although I certainly would have blown up some buildings in someone else's country [while in the military—RG] And I contributed to that effort for a year in Indochina. So if I can I do it there why I can't do it here? So the point is that as a kid it was very important to me that I feel good about people in general. And I got that from my family—that love and that concern. At the same time I'm developing this certain kind of aesthetic attraction, this aesthetic affinity for colors and shapes. And it always seemed to me that it was possible to feel very depressed about something and make a wonderful picture that may have nothing obviously to do with what I felt depressed about, what I saw down the street. And then maybe I somehow unconsciously included an aspect of what I saw on the street—maybe in the choice of color, or the intensity of a color, or the obscurity of a color, or a certain kind of characteristic of a shape or a line, perhaps. And, see, I think fundamentally we are also aesthetic animals. The way we respond to the world is not only because of our intelligence, brain, but also in terms of sound, feel, touch, taste, visual, movements through space. Those things are aesthetic. They're aesthetic. Because when you're a baby you're responding to the world. Your brain hasn't gotten to a point yet where you can rationalize what it is that you see. You're just taking in what's in front of you and you're responding, and it's basically kind of aesthetic without concept yet. Or without idea yet. Herbert Read wrote a book called *Icon and Idea*. The image comes first; later comes the idea about the image. But I think we basically are aesthetic folks. I'm saying that because as a kid I think I responded to the world aesthetically. When I became very conceptual about my experience that also impacted my aesthetics—or how I make the world with color, let's say. And I don't think aesthetics is only a way to illustrate something that you have experienced; rather, aesthetics is also experience and knowledge. See, unlike some who believe that art that's political illustrates a social condition. Sometimes it does, Paul, no question. We can't deny that. But, at the same time, it can also contribute new knowledge, new sensibilities, new feelings. And it can do that in various kinds of ways. Abstractly, nonobjectively, and representationally, too. And with different kinds of media, from a crayon to a computer.

PK: So that's art serving to illuminate a theme without illustrating but giving, perhaps promoting, an expanded vision or understanding that can then encompass some of these other things.

RG: Well, I just think it . . . yeah, but I would say it's a different way of being a human being. Being an artist. . . . All human beings have the potential to be an artist, but not everyone takes the time out to develop what it takes to be what we think an artist is. For whatever kinds of reasons. I forgot where I was going with this now. [laughs]

PK: Well, here's what I suggest, because this is. . . . What I suggest actually before is [perfect].

RG: I've got to do something.

PK: Yeah, we'll take a little break because this puppy is almost over. . . .

RG: All right.

PK: . . . and I will change the tape, we'll take a pee, maybe the. . . . Oops, excuse me.

RG: Oh, vulgarity!

PK: Maybe a little more coffee.

[Break in taping]

PK: Here we go again, continuing this third session with Rupert García on June 24, 1996. This is tape two, side A. Rupert, before we took a break we were talking as usual about a number of things sort of all at the same time, but it had to do within the general idea of, well, for one thing, your teaching. And I was very interested to hear you talk about that and your interaction with students and. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah, it's very, very important.

PK: . . . and how they are coming to terms with, I guess, being—I don't want to say being true to themselves—but acknowledging themselves as they are making art, finding a way to bring these together. And that's part of it, but the subtext of this, or maybe the main point, is that here we have a group of students but artists in different communities and in different groups where identity becomes an important element, and this leads to the bigger question that we asked earlier and didn't really ever get to. And it has to do with, well, what it is to be American, basically.

RG: Yeah.

PK: And from our perspective this side of the border this is what so much of this is all about. The Chicano movement, Chicano murals, for example. My point—or the little story I told—was about how that is perceived in the, quotes, "motherland" of Mexico, having been there recently, and what struck me as very interesting differences in how the American experience or the Mexican-American experience is viewed from over there. And what struck me as interesting, and what I said earlier and what you may or may not want to respond to as part of this whole bigger story, is that I felt that I as an Anglo, Euro-American, whatever the heck I am, had more of a sensitivity or more of an inherent understanding of what the Latino, the Chicano artist, or part of what they were about, than those people in Mexico.

RG: You're speaking—let's be clear—those with whom you had contact.

PK: The ones with whom I had contact were the intellectuals and the _____.

RG: Some intellectuals.

PK: Well, those who happened to attend the conference.

RG: Was Carlos [Monsivais] there?

PK: I don't think so.

RG: Carlos Monsivais. Kind of a chubby guy, wears glasses, kind of balding.

PK: Maybe so. But I don't want to say for sure.

RG: All right. Well, I say that to say this, that what you encountered there was *some* intellectuals and also a certain kind of *class* of intellectual and a certain kind of racial-ethnic makeup of intellectuals, and you probably met what would be considered by Mexicanos as the creme de la Creme.

PK: The establishment.

RG: Well, I don't know about that. I don't know about that.

PK: I don't know either. [chuckles]

RG: That's your perception, not mine. Because one cannot necessarily judge by the group whom you have met to be emblematic of what Mexicans think about Chicanos and Mexicanos living in the U.S. Because many of us who live in this country who have family in Mexico, when we go back we don't encounter that kind of resentment. Not at all. There's no reason to. But when you go to the academy in *any* country, there is built-in intellectual baggage there, and in Mexico that baggage has an incredible history of domination, based upon, in particular in Mexico, race, class, gender, and ethnicity. And so one has to always keep that in mind when one goes to. . . . I do whenever I go to Mexico and deal with folks there. I always have it in mind, because I'm listening to people say things about Chicanos and I'm. . . . Because what they say oftentimes tells you so much about *them*, in particular. There's not really an ideology. Maybe it is a point of view held by certain kinds of people, who wish to make it an ideology or a kind of hegemonic perspective. I'm saying this because I went to

the Dialogue of the Americas conference in ‘82 in Mexico. And it was made up of intellectuals—and by that I mean writers, artists, and such—from the Americas—Canada, U.S., Mexico, Central America, Cuba—and those intellectuals, which includes some Mexicans, seem to have had a point of view about Chicanos in the U.S. that was positive. Now some of those who were at that meeting in ‘82—one of whom you mentioned, Raquel Tibol—was at this more recent conference.

PK: Yeah.

RG: So what I’m saying is simply this: You’re going to encounter in Mexico, if you go to an organized, academic, governmental situation, a certain kind of point of view, and there is going to be a blanket point of view, and then within that are the individuals—who have maybe a varying or a counter-hegemonic point of view. Now I can say generally speaking the intellectuals of Mexico have a lot of problems with those of us living in the United States. By "those of us" I mean those who have families in Mexico. And why is that? Why is that? Well, it’s very simple. I think it’s very simple. And I kind of hinted upon it a little while ago. When they think of us in the U.S., what do they think about? What do they think about? Generally speaking, the Mexican intellectuals, what do they think about? Immigrants. What do they get in the newspapers or magazines around the world about those of us living here? Immigrants, breaking the law, living in poverty, working in the fields, working in the cannery, working in canning plants. [They also get news about gangs, violence, drugs.—RG] You know. The reports of our educational statistics, our economic statistics, our [real estate] statistics are very low in the U.S. So why would they want to identify with that? So they classify us. Furthermore, let’s just consider racial and ethnical make-up. I once looked at a magazine called *Artes de México,* and in it it had reproductions of major intellectuals of Mexico, and mainly those interested in art, culture, and anthropology. Looking through it, two things struck me. One, all guys. Two, all looked like Europeans, like they were just off the boat from Italy or Spain—in that kind of classic notion of Europeans. In any event, I looked at that and I said, "Man, this is so-o-o interesting." But it is not unusual for countries who have been colonized, because the colonizer is always in power. So why should they be different in Mexico—to this very day? Let’s go a little further. The kind of culture that many intellectuals in Mexico are interested in seems to concern Europe. There was a moment in Mexico after—maybe after 1821—independence from Spain—there was a kind of a Francophilic moment. Everyone wanted to be Frenchified real bad, real bad. So that had been the case since Cortés—or let’s go back to Columbus—up to this very day. So those kinds of intellectuals, they go to the best universities not only in Mexico but in the world—in the *world*. So they have certain things in mind that register as being the best. And then what models do they have? Well, God damn, they look at the Renaissance, they look at all that classic material that we looked at going to school here.

PK: The measure of culture and art—it’s the measure.

RG: The measure of the *best* of culture and art.

PK: Yeah.

RG: Absolutely, absolutely. And they have all probably read Matthew Arnold [*Art and Anarchy*—RG]. You know, they probably didn’t miss that [Arnold’s fear of genuine democracy and its potential to cause anarchy and therefore the need for a culture to prevent disorder by the "unwashed." I know in saying this I’m stretching to make a point.—RG] So when they think about Chicanos and Mexican Americans—and especially since the sixties—what did we produce as cultural products? A lot of things but what is generally written about—posters, murals, teatros, centros, art centers, poetry, a lot of alternative magazines, newspapers. All of which, generally speaking, addressed issues that were critical of a *lot* of things in this country and the world *as well as* a concern with the history and culture of Mexico. Now when Mexicans see that—when *some* Mexicans see this—they look at that—they will look at our murals, they’ll look at the posters and the writing—and they’ll say, "That’s not as good as Diego Rivera’s. That’s not as good as Octavio Paz."

PK: I sure heard that.

RG: Yeah. All that is going to come up, because they’re using that paradigm that most elite folks use to determine what is good art and what is bad art. And they also have said, "Why are you in the United States painting images of the Virgin of Guadalupe? Why are you making images of Aztec icons, Mayan icons? Why are you doing all that? We’ve done that already. We have done that."

PK: "And what does that have to do with you?" they say. "What does that have to do with you?"

RG: Yeah, that’s correct. And so it’s full of matters like this, in many cases coming from intellectuals in Mexico. But not all. You can’t say all. And so they don’t think very highly of the Chicano intellectual—generally speaking, generally speaking.

PK: Well, do you think they might find that a contradiction in terms?

RG: What?

PK: Would you go that far, to say that some if not all would find the whole. . . .

RG: Oh, that Chicano intellectual is oxymoronic?

PK: Because, just to interject here, my impression was what really bothered them was that so much of the art was of the streets. In other words, the murals weren't properly ensconced in Belles Artes or something.

RG: [laughs]

PK: You know, they're on the streets.

RG: Yeah, well. . . .

PK: You know? Ephemeral, too.

RG: Yeah, yeah, well. I wrote about that.

PK: Many years ago.

RG: Yeah, I did. I tried to identify similarities and differences between the upsurge both in Mexico and in the U.S. of specifically murals and posters. And there are major differences, major differences. And the differences are the ones that many elites in Mexico don't like, just as you've indicated, some of the reasons. So there's been an on-going debate—to be kind—with many intellectuals in Mexico with what is considered to be Chicano culture or Chicano identity, and unfortunately there are moments when what the intellectuals in Mexico identify as being bad *is* bad. You know, they're not stupid. So they could. . . . What I guess I'm saying is we have to recognize that. What came out of the Chicano movement included good things and *terrible* things.

PK: It seems to me, though, that by saying that—and I said so in Mexico. . . . I didn't say that in my lecture. Sort of a response. I could have added it in to my talk because of the conversations I'd been having, you know, just like the night before. But it seems to me, and I'd be interested to hear what you think of this, that with that kind of thinking, or judgment, they're missing the point. They don't get *what* this expression is all about.

RG: Yes.

PK: Furthermore, they're probably unwilling to acknowledge that as a legitimate area for the making of art.

RG: I agree with you. I agree with you. Well, their kind of response also mirrors many of the elite critics in the United States.

PK: True.

RG: Even going back to the sixties and seventies up until this very day, there are critics who have a very narrow scope of what art is supposed to be, how it's supposed to look, and what it's supposed to concern itself with. And so that whole kind of thinking continues throughout the world and, of course, also in Mexico. And so I wasn't surprised by that, when I first learned about this, because cultural elites are cultural elites no matter where they are. Some are a bit more progressive than others. I mean, so it's like it is in the U.S. But the difference is that Mexico has a direct link with us whose families came from and still exist in Mexico, see. That's the difference.

PK: Mi familia. . . .

RG: Well, *they* may not want to think that, some of the cultural elites in Mexico, but my family certainly feels that. And there are even problems within my family *in* Mexico with identifying with something being a Mexicano. For example, when I first went to visit my family in the state of Jalisco, we went to Guadalajara, where some live. They were preparing dinner for us this one evening, and my aunt was talking about negative—I forget exactly what—but negative things about Indians in Mexico. And I'm sitting there, here's my mother, and my aunt is talking. She's just talking, you know, just like. . . . I looked at my mother and I said, "Can you believe that? I mean, has she ever looked in the mirror? Has she ever looked in the goddamn mirror?" And my mom says, "Yeah, and that's probably why she doesn't like it." This self-negation because she doesn't look like Marilyn Monroe. Or some would say today like Princess Diana or the like. [The number of blondes and very light-skinned TV personalities in Mexico is unbelievable.—RG] So there is even that kind of internal contradictions going on within the family, and then with the cultural elite and mass culture in Mexico.

PK: Doesn't it seem, again, a contradiction or at least a bit of a puzzling phenomenon that you had with the muralists—with Diego and company under public patronage, government patronage—the creation or the invention of a new Mexico, of a Mexico that was this fusion between the European and . . . but with great attention to the indigenous peoples and history, and that in some ways this whole Aztec, Mayan, pre-Cortesian—or [Cortesian, Cortezian] I guess would be the term—history, that this then described the new Mexico which had

emerged from this, and yet—you know, this being an ideal, I guess—but yet by the same token there's the maintenance of . . . that in fact, the Indian, the indigenous population there has not fared well at all?

RG: That's correct.

PK: And so it's again one of these. . . . It's like fiction _____ _____.

RG: In this country, we also have our fiction. We have the Constitution, we have the Bill of Rights and all these kinds of wonderful ideas. I mean, it's. . . . But in principle. . . .

PK: In principle, but I would add, or I would suggest this, that it seems to me that it was codified through, in Mexico, this romance with the Indian past, that to an unusual degree, certainly more than we did with our—what the hell?—pre-European past. And everywhere you look. And it seems interesting to me that there's such a disjunction, as you were describing it.

RG: I will say it's a disparity of an unusual degree. I think the degree to which it was manifested was consistent with the colonizer's need. Any previously colonized country, who after having a revolution and who has as their mandate—I can't think of the right word right now—the call to right the wrongs both economically, socially and politically, and also culturally—which is to say in paintings, books, prints, music, anthropology, archaeology—will politically identify and deal with those whom have been left out. And in Mexico after the 1910 revolution it was the worker, the peasant, and the native—the so-called native—depicted both in contemporary times as well as ancient. Just look at the Mexican murals since the 1920s. And they also deal with not only the Indian but also the mestizo and they deal with the Europeans, too. And the work is a mixture of things, but it is true the thrust was concerned with native peoples, cultures, ancients, the worker, and the peasant. Generally speaking. So that to me is consistent with a nation who wishes to reconstruct itself. So they have an image of it, an image of it. And it's everywhere. And unevenly represented. Romantic, some more realistic, and in the cases with Tamayo some would say a bit more abstractly. But it's consistent. Because, during the twenties, thirties, and forties—to a degree in the fifties—the artist in Mexico—and particularly with the twenties and thirties—came out with a taste of European modernism. Many of these fellows studied in Paris, in Spain, and Italy—some for a *long* time.

PK: Right, years, as I [remember].

RG: Years. So they could taste. . . .

PK: Diego, I don't know, twelve years or so?

RG: Yeah, so they get a taste of modernism what we call the School of Paris. So they taste this, they come back home, they see the situation with new eyes, aesthetic eyes. And Diego who did these pretty fine Cubist paintings, not all of them but some of them are pretty good, not bad. And he never, never—as most Cubists did, too—he did not discard the figurative. But he certainly. . . . And he also didn't discard what he had learned as a Cubist either. But he certainly embraced wholeheartedly the revolutionary icons of Mexico, that were identified as such. No question about that. And he went crazy with his work. I mean, he was almost obsessively so. And as did many other artists, too, not only Diego. So my point is that not only were these, mainly, gentlemen reexamining modernism, they incorporated what they thought was good in modernism, and they were practicing an early post-modernism, if you ask me.

PK: Good point.

RG: Because where does Greenberg fit into what they were doing? He was saying, "They're not making . . . well, I don't know what they're doing." So the Mexican cultural response, to me, is always complex when one talks about the images in the murals, in the prints, in the movies, in the novels, and the essays of Mexican intellectuals vis-à-vis the scant material wealth of those whom they depicted in the work seems to be contradictory—meaning they look great in movies, look great in books, in murals, but let's go to where they actually live and that's the contradiction. They're still living in poverty. You can walk in Mexico City, downtown Mexico City, people begging like crazy.

PK: I saw them.

RG: You know, it's painful.

PK: Not as if we don't have that here.

RG: Well, we have it here, no question, but. . . .

PK: Bigtime in the last ten years or so. It's just been amazing.

RG: Big time. But here's what's. . . . Even though we can be critical about what we're saying vis-à-vis the

revolutionary murals in Mexico, the image of hope and the identification of the engines of revolution, the worker-peasant, native, what's wonderful about that is simply that there's a prime example of, to me, an example of the wonders of culture. It can transcend the immediate political/economic situation. It can represent something that should be rather than only that which is. So that model

continues, the image continues. The question always is, what's being done governmentally? You know, what are these big manufacturers doing? What are they doing to make this thing right? It always comes down to that, it seems to me. And by that, it also means institutions of culture, too. The museums in Mexico. . . . One of the first times I went to Mexico, I think it was the early seventies, I'm at the National Museum of Anthropology in Chapultepec Park, and there are these young kids, Mexicano kids, looking at this layout of ancient Mexico Tenochtitlán [Mexico City—RG]. And they're pointing at it and they're talking, "That's us." Okay, so kids are talking that way in the seventies in Mexico, one could say they were practicing ethnic studies. Because the myth is that all Mexicans know their past.

PK: That's not true?

RG: That's not true at all. Most of them don't know the past—I mean, not the way in which Octavio Paz knows the past, or Carlos Fuentes or any intellectuals who know the past. So when I saw those kids, I saw me. I saw me. And I said, "Damn it, this exists in both places. In both places.

[Break in taping]

PK: Here we go, doing our best. Continuing our interview session three with Rupert García, this is tape two, side B. And we're still a little bit . . . maybe wrapping up on the topic of some kind of an interaction, I guess, is what I'm trying to describe between Mexico and Mexico America, if you will—Mexican Americans, Mexicans. And we had been discussing some problematic areas of perception, especially from Mexicans towards the Mexican Americans [in some]. But you were just describing a situation that is really quite positive.

RG: What I'm talking about, Paul, represents an uneven dialogue between Mexico and Mexican America. On the one hand there has been a tradition—and I'll say tradition—of intellectuals from Mexico who could care less about our existence in the United States—meaning Chicano's existence. But I'm sure all along, and I know more recently, there have been individual intellectuals who have worked with Chicanos in the U.S., at the Galería de la Raza, the Mexican Museum, and elsewhere I know for sure have done that. And there have been other intellectuals in Latin America whom I've met with Jean Franco, now at Columbia University, and who talked with me about what we're doing as Chicanos in the U.S., and they were very positive. They even wrote about it in their papers back home. You know, so there's this kind of uneven dialogue between intellectuals from Latin America with the presence of Latin Americans, if you will, in the U.S. So, you know, but it has been generally, however. . . . Well, [Luis—Ed.] Echevaria at one point, after he left the presidency of Mexico, founded an organization called CEESTEM [Centro de Estudios Economicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo—Center for the Economic and Social Study of the Third World—RG], and it was an institution that studied the cultural, the political, economic conditions of the Third World. It was well endowed. They organized an art exhibition dealing with Chicanos that was held at CEESTEM, and one of the main organizers of the art part was a very informative art historian from Mexico who has written *the* book, though controversial, in '69 on the fantastic and surrealism in Mexico. Ida Rodríguez Prompolini wrote this major book—and others, too. She helped, with us, organize the show that was held. . . . [clunk sound in the background] What was that? _____. That [does, doesn't] _____ _____. What I'm saying is that some of the presidents of Mexico were interested in us—Chicanos—to the extent to which they sponsored a major exhibition—and catalog *and* conference—on us in Mexico. Furthermore, at the opening of CARA in UCLA—maybe it was a day after or so—the ex-president of Mexico, Miguel [de la Madrid], came to see the show.

PK: That's great.

RG: And I was there. He tried to get in, and the organizer of the exhibition didn't know who in the hell he was. Hello. Here comes Miguel de la Madrid with his entourage. And we see him coming and I'm all excited. "Wow, man, there's the ex-president of Mexico. Miguel de la Madrid, man. God damn! And to this woman—I forget her name; she got fired eventually, or whatever they do. . . .

PK: Oh, I know, yeah, but I forgot.

RG: Didn't know who. . . . She was . . . well, we had to, "Hey, it's the ex-president of Mexico."

PK: Well, I hope he got in.

RG: He did.

PK: Okay.

RG: But it took a little. . . . I mean, It was embarrassing, it was embarrassing. I couldn't. . . . So the point is the dialogue between the two locations have been uneven, and at it's worst has been denial. At it's best it has been moments of embracement. It's a problem, it's a problem.

PK: Well, maybe. . . .

RG: Then, again, I think it's a class issue; most Chicanos are working class. It's also a racial issue, and which is not unusual for previously colonized countries to have, in the elite positions of power, to be more European than those who are the subjects of their writings, if you will. But it doesn't mean they are necessarily bad. But generally speaking that's the situation. And I guess we're saying it's also messed up in Mexico. When I was in Mexico the second time, the Shah of Iran was making a big visit, and they had posters everywhere of the Shah of Iran. And there was nothing noticeable that was in protest of the Shah of Iran. And I met with somebody who was a student organizer in Mexico, in October–November '68. And we talked about the Shah and he said, "You know, in Mexico you can be critical to the nth degree of the outside world. Within Mexico, no, do not criticize Mexico because you'll go to jail or you'll be shot or you'll just. . . . You know, the intellectual in Mexico, who is a true intellectual, has to be careful." A few moments where it was allowed to have internal critique was in '68 in Mexico. I mean a major critique. So some intellectuals in Mexico, generally speaking, are—as they are everywhere else—problematic. They're problematic.

PK: Well, we got to a point towards the end of the last side of this tape where you said you recognized yourself. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah.

PK: . . . in these children who were at the. . . .

RG: _____ _____.

PK: . . . anthropological museum seeing this big map of the _____ _____.

RG: A big diorama of Mexico-Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital and now Mexico City, if you will. I mean, it was like. . . . I mean, I don't want to get too maudlin about it. It was like as if it was my cousin pointing out to me that this is us, meaning this is a part of our history. And that was a moment that was . . . it was full of things, it was full of things. It confirmed that the strifes, struggles in the U.S. in the sixties, early seventies was right. *Is* right. I said, "God, this is amazing!" Then the feeling that this kid expressed, when he talked about what he saw before him, were like my kind of feelings, too, when I began to examine and research the varieties of histories of Mexico. And so it was just fantastic, man, it was just so beautiful. It was very poetic because. . . . I made it poetic because of how I perceived these two kids. I made it, for me, a poetic moment. It was really deep, really deep, and it felt just great! It was great! Because it was true. I mean, the response was just a genuine kind of response. They weren't trying to be ideological or all that kind of stuff, they were just, "You know, that's us, there." [Whistling sound]. Too much, man. It was deep. So it made the visit to the anthropological museum that much more profound for me. "Oh, man, this is just unbelievable."

PK: So do you identify then with what we used to call—and Octavio Paz still would—pre-Columbian or pre-Hispanic culture and art in Mexico? You're at the museum and, of course, this is a great place to see such. But do you have this identification . . . well, it sounds as if you do have this identification with these images. With these [Maya ___s, Mayanas] that goes beyond my great appreciation of them because they're not, you know, for me, it's not part of my family.

RG: Well, it's different kinds of appreciations. It's like the way I can appreciate the pyramids in Egypt, how I can appreciate the wonderful objects that come out of the various monuments of ancient Egypt and the different dynasties. I can appreciate that as far as I can take it. The same way I can do that with any culture—material from Japan, China, Africa. I can appreciate up to a point and then that's as far as it goes. But I don't know what your point is about that.

PK: Well, I guess it's maybe a slightly oblique way to ask what's probably fairly obvious, that here you have images, artworks, that perhaps stand for a kind of spiritual home. I mean, a homeland. I love pre-Columbian art, but I can't make that connection with it because. . . .

RG: Yeah. Well, you know about those _____ _____, too, Paul. This is directly connected to this question. Going to the National Anthropological Museum—and knowing a little bit as a youngster—but going to the museum and seeing the kinds of implements used to make food and then looking at the examples of foodstuff used hundreds and hundreds of years ago and then making the connection with that's what we had in our kitchen. That was what was used to make the chili, that was how they make tortillas, guacamole. And so seeing those kinds of things in the museum made those links . . . it was as if—how do you say it?—showing or demonstrating that the foodstuff and the implements used to make the food didn't fall from the sky. They just didn't come from the

store down on the corner. But rather, they're ancient. And that was also unbelievable, to experience that. I mean, Jesus Christ, it was just overwhelming for me. I think we discussed this before, maybe. As a child, as a youngster, you eat, you just eat. You don't go back there, well, you know, "What I'm eating, spaghetti, it has this incredible cultural history." You don't do that. You just eat. Later on, for different reasons, it's brought to your attention. "Didn't you know that what you're eating now was first used in Tunisia where your great-grandfather lived? And even before him, it was used a thousand years before?" You know, Wow! Jesus Christ! And what that does also, Paul, it confronts the myths and stereotypes of Mexicans in the U.S. Because you know there's evidence to the contrary about these misconceptions that you have heard and you have seen.

PK: Okay, so would you. . . . I think I understand very well what you're saying. . . .

RG: But there is a spiritual kind of thing, too. I don't want to. . . . It's a spiritual thing that is experienced, that is not limited to me, but its potential is for everyone. And what is that? It's the excitement of realizing that you are part of something old and grand—with its internal problems—and profound. All cultures have that. *All* cultures have that. There isn't one that doesn't have that. And if you haven't been informed about it then you have been systematically denied that, because they want you to think that only *theirs* has it. God, that's a shame.

PK: Well, you know, the Mexican Americans are very fortunate. This isn't just an observation, but it leads into another small topic or question. They—you—are fortunate in having this formidable arsenal of images, cultural images, to turn to, to discover and to be reinforced by. I saw an exhibition, which is maybe the best exhibition I've ever seen. It was in the Colegio [isl de Fonsos, Isle de Fonso]. . . .

RG: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PK: . . . where the murals are, and there was this fabulous pre-Columbian show. Many things from the anthropological museum and other sources. It's something that may have never been seen, maybe, anywhere in one place because they brought. . . . It was just a great show and it was extended. Our small group went to visit, and we had a very good guide who, of course, the great thing is looks. You know, she looked very much just like some of the representations.

RG: Why was that good?

PK: Because it makes you realize that this is a living thing and that there are peoples that reach back to the time that these things were created.

RG: Because, I mean, it wouldn't matter.

PK: Well. . . .

RG: Because what would matter is what she would say.

PK: She said great things. She was wonderful.

RG: What I'm trying to dispel is it's not important how you look. It's what you think and what you say. Because you can do what my aunt in Guadalajara did and be colonized internally and speak very negatively about what someone who could be snow white and speak very affirming about.

PK: I know. This is true, and it's good for you to say it and point it out. But nonetheless, nonetheless. . . .

RG: It doesn't negate what you've been saying.

PK: Right. Nonetheless, it added another level. . . . Everything's an accretion in my opinion. This added a sort of like serendipity to this wonderful—not terribly important—but it just added to the whole thing. It was almost like a time machine with her. She was like a guide. But at any rate that's not the point. The point is—a little bit off the subject—the point is that we saw this exhibition and I found it *enormously* moving. I found—and I'm not part of this culture—although one could argue that growing up in California maybe in the water supply, in the earth, is Mexico because that's what it used to be. We were just [knocked]. . . .

RG: Only historically, we can say that.

PK: Well, there's some reason. There's some reason for this kind of. . . . And this is not the subject of the interview. Nonetheless, what I'm saying is that even my response to these as works of art, but, more than that, as carrying some power—cultural and spiritual power—I think they're almost unequaled. Maybe Egypt has it in another way but for me. . . . So I guess what I'm saying is that Mexican-Americans—a long way to get around to this question—have available to them this incredible accomplishment, this achievement, this plastic, visual arts accomplishment just sort of dripping, laden with cultural meaning that, then, can be turned to and drawn upon artistically. My observation is that in some ways—in some ways—maybe the Mexican-Americans in seeking an

identity of past, a history, turn to that certainly more than most contemporary artists in Mexican . . . that the American situation almost requires that we attach ourselves—or that the Mexican-Americans attach themselves to these images—in a way that goes beyond even perhaps what some Mexicans do. And I'm, you know, describing the Chicano art movement *and* a selection of images, the identification. . . .

RG: Um-hmm. What was the question?

PK: Well, it's a statement, I know, but is this your experience? Do you agree with this? There's a criticism in Mexico on the part of some that these are not your images; you're Americans.

RG: That they're what?

PK: That they are not your images, that you are Americans. I've heard this from people in Mexico just a few weeks ago. They say, "What do they know about these things?"

RG: Probably not very much.

PK: But they're _____ _____.

RG: But it doesn't mean it's not yours. All it means is that you don't know about them. I had an experience with a young painter at the Galería de la Raza in the mid-seventies in a group show he was in. And there was a big painting that this kid did of Coatlicue.

PK: Ah, my favorite. She's the greatest. I'm going to join her church, by the way.

RG: Unbelievable! He asked me, "Could you please talk to me about this painting?" I said, "Do you really want to talk about the painting? Do want me to really tell you what I think?" "Oh, please." "Okay, I will. Here it is. You don't know a thing about Coatlicue. All that you know is what you saw. You know the surface and you did a very good job, by the way. And your choice of colors, very good. Everything's great, but you don't know a thing about her because if you did this painting would resonate with *such* profundity, such profundity. But you have a start. You have a start. But you know nothing about Coatlicue. Because you do a painting in a week, and it took a group of people centuries to get to the moment of Coatlicue. And you're going to tell me you know what's happening with Coatlicue? Get out'a here." So, in that sense, they are right. Many of us don't know.

PK: How much do they necessarily know, is what [I'm interested in, I want to know].

RG: Not very much.

PK: Not very much.

RG: Not very much. Most Mexicans don't know. A problem with many of the cultural elites is this incredible sense of snobbishness, unbelievable sense of snobbishness. That they're above, they know everything; they know what you should know and what you should not know. And that they are in a position to determine intellectual policy. They can be very dangerous. See, what's interesting, Paul, is that the way in which many intellectuals in Mexico write about Chicanos is not helpful. It's not a helpful critique. It's a put-down. It's not trying to be constructive. It's not trying to cross borders in a helpful way. It's more of a destructive kind of approach. It's to keep the two separate and not to embrace each other. There's the problem. They could say something general but maybe to talk to certain of the intellectuals specifically, "Ah, I see *you* got a problem, not me. *You* have the problem." I remember once, in the Dialogue of the Americas, 1982, I had lunch with . . . I'll mention no names.

PK: No names, okay.

RG: And one individual is a Native American brother living in California, a Chicana, a Chicano, myself, and a *significant* intellectual from Mexico. Major, major player. This person commences to tell the Native American person from the U.S. why he's not Indian, and commences to say further why Rupert is more Indian than he is. And so we're listening to this and I'm looking at this woman—gave the gender away—I'm looking at her and I'm thinking, "Boy, you are really confused. You are really confused. You are sick. You are evil and you hate. . . .

PK: Any of us.

RG: No, she apparently hates dark people. She seems to have a problem with native people. Because she ain't. She ain't. And so I just said, "Man, this is very problematic." It was so revealing to me to be in this situ[ation]. And she commenced to talk like this and I'm just saying. . . . I was pained in that experience for the gentleman. But I was excited by actually experiencing this moment from this high-powered, overly influential intellectual from Mexico [talk]. I said to myself, "Man, so this is part of the problem. Man, here it is, here it is." You know?

PK: Well now, Rupert, where. . . . Well, it's obvious from this kind of conversation that Mexico has played and continues to play. . . .

RG: There are many Mexicos.

PK: Yeah, but it's very much an enormous part of your world and your sense of _____.

RG: Well, you know, my livelihood and my heartbeat is not determined by what Mexico does and doesn't do. It's not dependent upon that. I am smart enough to know that. You know, when they sneeze I don't move out of the way. So what they do doesn't determine who I am and what I like and dislike, and I think most Chicanos, I would daresay, feel similarly. Now what our families in Mexico might say or do, or what happens to them, we will care an awful lot about. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, absolutely, no question about that. But as a government and as a nation. . . .

PK: Right.

RG: . . . and as these intellectuals, I mean, what do we care? You know, what kind of impact do they have upon us? I mean, really! Really! Not too much. Not too much. Because I don't hang onto every word that these people say [in Mexico]. They still have a major influence, that I know. That's sometimes problematic.

[Break in taping]

PK: Okay, we're continuing our third session with Rupert García. This is tape three, side A, the concluding tape or side of tape for this interview. As I just said, Rupert, we've been covering a lot of ground but much of it very much a piece, I think. Having to do with, well, being American and then specifically your observations of the things that you've been able to observe by your position and your activities as an artist and as an activist, as an intellectual. And then we've been talking—particularly this session—about sort of going across the border in some ways and looking back at us from Mexico, and I find this real interesting. But what I would like to conclude with is bringing it right back to Rupert—almost here and now or at least recently, where you find yourself at this stage. I'm sure we've missed interesting things along the way, but here we. . . .

RG: Yeah, well, let's not pretend that whoever gets this interview for research will get the end-all of who I am. This is just some examples of things that I think about.

PK: Yeah, it's a visit with Rupert García.

RG: Yeah. Okay, so go ahead.

PK: Well, anyway, given that and acknowledging that. . . . And I will say this, that how this interview, these three sessions, differ a little bit from some others that I've done is that the biographical side is somewhat indirect rather than following strict chronology. We talked about your childhood and so forth, but we didn't stay pinned to this kind of chronological development. We went very much more into the issues that deeply concern you.

RG: Or that you wanted to ask me about.

PK: Well, yet I think they matched on some occasions. I hope, a lot of it. But at any rate there it is, and I guess what I'd like to wrap up with this time around is your description of where you are now at this stage of your career, what things are important to you, maybe what some of your projects are. You know, Rupert García now—or over the last few years. At this stage of your career.

RG: Yeah. I don't see myself having a career as an artist. I think that's very dangerous. I say that because "career" almost seems to be separate from life. It's as if you have a life and then you have a career. It's as if the career is to become rich and famous, to be in the galleries, to be in the museum, to be written about, all that kind of stuff. That's a career. I have always tried to not have a career—in that sense. So that's why I'm a little hesitant to agree with the notion of career.

PK: Well, what about life then?

RG: Well, life . . .

PK: Let's talk about that.

RG: [chuckles]

PK: It's more interesting anyway.

RG: Yeah, because career is arbitrary. Having a career is usually a fabricated way of existing to achieve a

certain kind of end, and it's usually fortune or fame—in this culture in which we find ourselves in. You know, Paul, I've always promised myself not to have my livelihood solely determined by an "artistic career." Because I know how arbitrary the art market is. Because I know how the marketplace works; I know how finicky it is. And it's, generally speaking, not concerned with who you are but what you produce or what can be sold. You know, what can be written about, what can be titillating, what can be fashionable. That to me is oftentimes what people practice to have a career.

I'm just trying to make the best kinds of images that I can. That's what I've always tried to do. In terms of projects like you say, I'm working on an art proposal for an international airport, and I haven't painted in many months because I have been working on this English version of a book on surrealism and Mexican painting. I made the decision to do that until I finished it, when I'm going to go back to painting.

PK: Who's the author of that?

RG: The author is Juan [Somalinos] Palencia. A doctor; he was a surgeon.

PK: Palencia?

RG: Palencia. P-a-l-e-n-c-i-a.

PK: Hey, I spelled it right!

RG: Juan [Somalinos] Palencia. Doctor. M.D.

PK: Thank you.

RG: And so that's happening.

PK: Now how did you . . . let me ask you. See this interests me, because some people say, "Whoa, why is Rupert doing that? Why has he turned to that? It's very time-consuming." This isn't the way you're primarily saying, I think, although I'm not too surprised that you would take on a project like that. But it's an interesting decision to make when I think you're best known as a maker of images, of having exhibitions, you're in collections.

RG: Yeah. [both chuckle] Well, what the perception of me is, is beyond my control and I try to do my best to ignore that. What I try to deal with is with what I'm interested in, and that shifts, that shifts. If I had a career as a painter, that's all I would do.

PK: Um-hmm, I understand.

RG: But my life isn't a career. My life is of the stuff of life, which includes a lot of things. Among them there's a great interest in art history, and within that there's an interest in the art history of Mexico. And more specifically than that, there's an interest in the presence of European surrealism in Mexico. And further than that is some of the misrepresentations of the art of Mexico as being surrealist. And, more specific than that, I interviewed the photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo in '78, and I asked him point blank. I said, "You know, [André—Ed.] Breton considered you not only, well, he considered you and Frida Kahlo as surrealists." And I told him I had read it in this book by Somalinos Palencia. And he told me in that interview of '78 in no uncertain terms that he is *not* a surrealist. Told me why. He also explained to me that this famous photograph he made of a woman wrapped in white gauze that he and a student—or an assistant I guess—jokingly constructed this situation to photograph because Breton asked Don Miguel for some work that he wanted to use in an exhibition in Mexico and in Paris. So having talked to Alvarez Bravo, and he so clearly told me why he wasn't a surrealist, you know, my interest was like just intensified to "What's going on here?" These books so almost cavalierly say that Frida Kahlo is a surrealist, Alvarez Bravo was a Surrealist. I mean, Jesus Christ. Well, so then I heard him tell me that in person, in flesh and blood, in my house. . . .

PK: In your house?

RG: In my house. He stayed with us for about a week. There must be something to it then. [laughs]

PK: That's true.

RG: So then that got me really interested in that specific area. And I just made . . . it was a personal interest to find out what's going on with this art-historical debate. And I just got into it, and then I made the commitment to do it for real a few months ago. I haven't been painting because I can't do too much at one time.

PK: So do you have a publisher for this?

RG: Well, UC Press is looking at it right now.

PK: Who did you give it to, Deborah Kirschman?

RG: Yeah.

PK: She's a friend of mine.

RG: And, you know, the book had no footnotes in it at all.

PK: Oh, well. . . .

RG: So I have included a hundred and seventy footnotes. I had to be a detective.

PK: Oh, I see. You had to go behind the. . . .

RG: I had to correct historical errors, I had to amplify certain contexts, I had to find the original sources of some of his translations from the English, and I had to change this and that, and so. . . . It was going to be a translation, which became instead an English version. Here's the difference for me.

PK: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it really isn't exactly the same.

RG: It's not the same. When I was doing it I had a problem, an ethical problem, because it was no longer becoming a translation, it was becoming something else, and I felt I had to do something about it. So I called Edward Sullivan in NYU.

PK: Oh, he was in our conference.

RG: Yeah, so I called Edward. I said, "Edward, I got a major problem here. I got a major problem. I'm doing this book, this translation, and it's getting to a point where it's no longer a translation, and I don't know how to handle this, because I'm making all these changes and additions and there's all kinds of stuff going on here." He just very casually said, "Oh, this is simple." I said, "Man, just tell me." "Well, here it is. Here's what you do. You say it's an English version." Jesus, he just performed magic for me on that telephone call. So that's what it's going to be: the English version of the doctor's book.

PK: Could you see yourself—not abandoning your painting or your printmaking or anything like that—but could you see yourself for a long period of time, in a satisfying way, delve into these more literary researches.

RG: No, no.

PK: So this is sort of like . . . not a detour, exactly, but. . . .

RG: No. It's just a different moment in my life, which. . . .

PK: But it could not replace. . . .

RG: No, no, no. The reason I say that is for the following reasons or experiences. One, I was going for a doctorate in art education at Cal Berkeley. Two years and some change later, I realized, "I hate this damn department. They're stupid." They really are. It was terrible, just bad. So I transferred to Cal's history of art for a Ph.D. They also seemed to me to be problematic. So I withdrew from Cal. But my work teaching. . . . And in '79 I went back and got my master's in art history at Cal. And I thought, "Well, do I want to get a Ph.D.?" I had to make a decision. Do I want to reflect on or make art? And I realized that I'm a maker, primarily—who has a great interest in reflecting on art, both historically, critically, and immediately. But I am at my best, at my fullest, when I'm making an image.

PK: But unlike many other artists—certainly not all—you see a number of other ways to explore the world that interests you, the subjects that interest you, and you really turn to that which seems to interest you the most at the time in whatever format they have.

RG: That's correct. That's correct.

PK: And they used to call that a Renaissance man. I don't know if we're going to allow you that title but. . . .

RG: I mean, painters don't paint everyday. Those who write don't write everyday. They'd be exhausted. They'd die.

PK: Well, some of them, of course, claim to, especially novelists.

RG: Absolute nonsense, absolute nonsense.

PK: [laughs]

RG: All intellectuals, as we know it, who work in a way in which we. . . . Painters as we know painters cannot paint everyday. Anyone who says they do are lying. You just can't. Absolutely can't. You can do spurts of everyday for maybe weeks, months, whatever. But then there are times you just don't even look at the goddamn thing. So what do you do then? I don't know, whatever. . . . I mean, making a painting or writing a book or singing songs, so on and so forth, in themselves *cannot* fully satisfy what human beings need. They can for the moment. Making a painting, you feel like everything is being satisfied. When I do a painting, it feels as if everything is just right there. And it probably is. But when it's done, I need something else. It cannot fulfill everything. Nothing can. Writing things can contribute to fulfillment, but not just painting and not just writing.

PK: But, still, if you had to define yourself—which you don't have to do—it would probably be in those terms.

RG: Yes, that's correct. That is correct.

PK: You're an image-maker.

RG: Yeah, there's no question about that. I have no problem with that. And I am very proud to say that, and I'm very excited to say that. And I do mean. . . . When I tell students that I am proud to be an image-maker they like fall off their chairs. "What do you mean, you're proud?" I say, "I'm proud and I'm honored to be a person who makes images." Because I don't see myself in isolation. I see myself in a world history of image-makers, and how magnificent that is. It's wonderful! It's exciting! It's demanding, arduous work. It just kicks your butt. To be a part of the human tradition to make images, wow, that's magnificent. That's magnificent. And you can't be willy-nilly about being an image-maker. You've got to take yourself seriously. You got to have a certain kind of image of yourself. Some kind of an idea of yourself so you *can* take yourself seriously."

PK: You know, for somebody who is suspicious of the notion of career or doesn't want to have his activity. . . .

RG: Determined by. . . .

PK: . . . determined or even. . . .

RG: No, I cannot control that entirely.

PK: Right.

RG: But I can understand it.

PK: But, nonetheless, you've enjoyed certain successes in that realm.

RG: No question. Hey, I don't deny the existence of the art world, or the society of the art world. Not at all. I mean, that would be stupidity.

PK: Yeah, because you're very much . . .

RG: A part of it. I love it.

PK: . . . a part of it, right.

RG: I love it. I love it. I mean, the schmooz, I love it all. Absolutely, man, I would be dumb to say. . . . During the Chicano movement I was showing at San Francisco MOMA, in 1969 at a national drawing show. I love it all. I love all of it—and more.

PK: And as long as possible.

RG: And as long as possible. No question about it.

PK: [laughs] How have you done with the galleries, say? Do you feel good about your dealers, the dealers you've been with?

RG: No. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The problem I have with dealers in general is that they don't know how to sell my work. My feeling is that they don't know how to sell the work. By that I mean, see, I make the work for reasons that have nothing to do with any gallery. My work being in a gallery is after the reason why it exists, as to why it exists. Galleries have to contend with the painting as a commodity. When I make it it's not a commodity—meaning it's an effort to investigate, figure out something, a way of thinking that's a way of being. Well, when the paintings and drawings, whatever, leave the studio, go to a gallery, it's in the marketplace, and to get from the gallery to someone's house or to some museum it has to be negotiated between the dealer, the salesperson,

and the potential client, or the client. Oftentimes galleries have a hard time selling the work. Why is that? Well, because . . . a lot of reasons. And the most obvious one to me is that they don't know how to talk about it. They don't know how to understand what the hell Rupert's doing. Not everything I make, not at all, no, no. But, in general, my experience has been through the years that's there's been a difficulty, because sometimes. . . . My pictures to me are beautiful and elegant, but they're also about ideas, and sometimes the images, if you look at it superficially, are raw—they can be perceived as raw, and they can be perceived as being disturbing, and they can be perceived as being too political. Well, those kinds of eyes miss the totality of the complex reason why the thing exists. Some galleries have a hard time with looking at the complex nature of a work that I do. And so they have a hard time trying to get a handle on it. Because I don't make pictures for somebody to get a handle on it. And this goes for any gallery that I work with. I don't care who it is. And so oftentimes, Paul, there is this misunderstanding between the conduit—the gallery—and the cultural product—the painting, the drawing, or the print—with some artists, not all of us, but some. And I'm very happy to be where I am now, the Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco. I mean, I wish they sold *much* more work than they do. I wish that no matter where I show. With my gallery in Paris, I wish they would sell.

PK: You have a gallery in Paris?

RG: Yeah, since '87.

PK: What is it?

RG: Gallerie Claude Samuel, and, you know, I wish they could sell crazy. So that's why I can't think of my art as a career.

PK: Yeah. Well, you've constructed, it seems to me—and I think wisely or fortunately or however you want to say it—a balanced—I'm not going to say career—but series of activities. You have your teaching, you have special projects that you're asked to participate in, you have museum shows, and then gallery affiliations. Rena seems to me. . . . I would think that she would be the kind of dealer that would indeed understand and be able to talk about your work. I don't know, because I haven't talked with her about it, but you do have . . . you're certainly not just dependent upon the dealer and the gallery, in terms of getting out to a. . . .

RG: That's correct, and I don't want that. I don't want that. I'm not interested in that. If it happens, hey, great! Doesn't happen, that's okay, too, because I don't define myself that way. I don't define myself that way.

PK: What it gets down to basically is, I suppose, the most basic way, if you can generate some income, make a living, and still then do the things that you most _____ like to do, that's. . . .

RG: Absolutely. I am not shy of becoming rich and famous—at all. I have no problem with that, no problem at all. But I can't do that at the expense of my integrity. That I cannot do.

PK: Well, I'm not. . . . Why is it I'm not surprised to hear you say that? [laughs]

RG: I have no idea. In our country the myth of the individual in some cases can be realized. At this time most people seem to have little integrity. They don't have much self-worth, a sense of self-worth. Some of us find that all that we have is integrity and one's vision, one's mind, one's

imagination. And we work very hard to maintain that, because it is that which makes it possible for us—for me—to feel truly alive and critical *and* vulnerable. I don't ever . . . I don't want to lose the sense of being vulnerable—meaning "to be open." Once you have ossified that you can easily become a "fascist."

PK: Do you mean, when you say "open," intellectually *and* emotionally?

RG: Yes.

PK: Or emotionally?

RG: All. Both of them. Imagination, emotionally, intellectually. Very important to me. That triad is very important to me that that exists.

PK: And to what extent does the emotional play a part then in your aesthetic, in your [work]?

RG: Oh, sure, sure. Because, see, your imagination can make it possible to manipulate elements in a painting. Think of Magritte and how he pushed the norm around. That's an example of imagination. The intelligence, well, what is imbued in the work? What kinds of ideas are being pursued? And then to what extent does the whole thing resonate with the sense of vitality. That, to me, is the emotional component, which bring this subjectivity of one to and in the work. You can have a painting that's very imaginative but be very flat, be very flat. It can be a painting that's *extremely* intelligent but not very imaginative and but maybe very emotionally driven, very

expressive. You try to get those three things to your best ability, man, something's happening there. Something's going on.

PK: So at least to a certain extent you might describe that as your goal as an artist, to bring these different elements together. . . .

RG: Yeah, that's right.

PK: . . . to your expressive. . . .

RG: Yeah, it's very difficult. Each time I make a piece it's like I don't want to do it because I know it's going to be so damn hard.

PK: Well, you seem to have been, by all my observations and experience, very successful in that. We are, believe it or not, at the end of still another side and it's time to go to lunch. But, Rupert, thank you.

RG: Oh, my pleasure, my pleasure.

PK: Great. It was good.

RG: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]