



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Leo Holub, 1997  
July 3

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Leo Holub on July 3, 1997. The interview took place in Francisco, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview with Leo Holub on July 3, 1997. The interview is being conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art at his home in San Francisco, office really on Carmelita Street. This is Tape 1, side A. So we're beginning now. Leo, what we talked about just a few moments ago was a kind of quick overview of what I hope comes into this interview. The main themes that I hope we're able to touch on. Just to reiterate those, you were born in 1916 and have been very much a part of the Bay Area, San Francisco art world at least as an observer, a participant, but also an observer with your camera, as you've pointed out. And you certainly have known a number of people. You've watched things change. One of the themes I'd like to deal with is your experience at the California School of Fine Arts. We've talked a little bit about that before. You have some interesting recollections, and you were there back in the thirties. And then went on to your own career. But eventually got very much involved with photography. You had contact with Ansel Adams and that whole world. And eventually, as I understand it, really set up the photography department at Stanford University about the same time that I was there. So these are the kinds of things that I would like to investigate a bit.

And then also your ongoing contact or friendship with artists. And for that matter, with collectors like Hunk and Moo Anderson. Some of your related projects. You're very much identified as a photographer with the art world.

So I think that's sufficient by way of introduction. But let's start with a brief account of yourself. What your own biographical background is. Where you were born and so forth.

LEO HOLUB: Sure. Well, that's easy. I was born in Decatur, Arkansas. It's in the Ozark Mountains. It was war time, 1916. My dad was working for Henry Ford building tanks for the war. My mother went to her mother's house in the Ozarks. After the war we moved across the border to Stillwell, Oklahoma. Dad and Mother bought a farm, 120 acres. We lived there about three years. Then we moved to Dawson, New Mexico. It was a company town; Phelps Dodge owned it. Lived there for two years. And then when I was seven years old we moved to Oakland, California. I grew up in Oakland, up in the hills, in a new subdivision called Forest Park.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was it did you say?

LEO HOLUB: 1923. I was seven years old.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Seven years old. Why was that move made?

LEO HOLUB: Dad was a blacksmith. And he was a pretty jolly fellow who made friends and people were always asking him to come to work. So someone he had worked with earlier moved to the Berkeley Steel Tank and Pipe Company and asked Dad to come out to Berkeley. So he did. And we lived in Oakland all that time. I went to Santa Fe Elementary School, Piedmont Avenue Elementary School, West Lake Junior High School and Oakland High School. I graduated from Oakland High School in 1934. That was the middle of the Depression. Dad had been out of work for two years during the Hoover days. He finally got a job in Grass Valley, California in the gold mines. But Mother sort of managed our family. I was doing well at Oakland High School and so she arranged for me to stay on Grand Avenue and work in a print shop.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We drove by there one time.

LEO HOLUB: And I pointed it out.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were really on your own, I guess, at that time?

LEO HOLUB: During my senior year, yes. The family moved to Grass Valley and I stayed at Oakland High School and worked evenings and Saturdays in Buckner's [phon. sp.] Print Shop where I learned to use my hands. I've always been grateful for that year. I had planned to go to UC Berkeley but because the family was going I had to go to Grass Valley after high school. I remember the tuition was thirty-five dollars. So the tuition would have been manageable, but board and room was something else.

So Mother, as the family planner, wrote to a magazine she was reading and asked the art director which was the best art school in the United States. And I supposed he had gone there, so he recommended the Chicago Art Institute. So I worked in the gold mines for two years as a blacksmith's helper and a mill hand. There were no unions so I worked all around the place and learned all sorts of trades. And I'm grateful for that too.

But after two years I had saved enough money so we drove back to Chicago, my mother and brother and I, and found a place to stay at Lawson YMCA. I spent a year at the Chicago Art Institute. I swam for the Lawson YMCA International Champions. And I went swimming in the lake with the Polar Bear Club. Those are a couple of the highlights that I remember.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were a champion swimmer?

LEO HOLUB: At Oakland High School our team won the championship, eight high schools. I won the 220 freestyle championship and swam on the relay team.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't know about that.

LEO HOLUB: I can still swim but I don't have a pool now. Anyway, Chicago was a growing up experience, being alone for the first time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did you study there? Was there a fine arts program or a commercial?

LEO HOLUB: No, fine arts. It was called the Lower School of the Art Institute. It was the largest school in the world, I guess. Two or three hundred students. And it was a program of drawing, and etching, and calligraphy, and painting, and design. If it worked out after the first year, you went on to one of the other major disciplines.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you see yourself as preparing for a career in commercial art? Like illustration or advertising? What was your career objective? Certainly, you needed to have a job when you got out, I would expect.

LEO HOLUB: I think I planned to paint covers for the "Saturday Evening Post". I think that was probably as high as my ambition went in those days.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But no doubt you had some courses that would involve some art history to give you more of an idea of the fine arts tradition?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, well, we lived in those wonderful galleries. Lived with Seurat's Sunday in the Park and I remember Charles Demuth watercolors. That made a terrific impression on me. The Purple Pomegranates or plums. I can still see that. The old master paintings, they were there but they're kind of a jumble in my mind.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they didn't inspire you in the sense of making you want to be a fine artist? To do paintings and be an exhibiting artist?

LEO HOLUB: No. I appreciated the history of it, but I had no intention to imitate the old masters. I would have imitated Demuth if I could. That wouldn't be hard to do. You'd have to buy a blotter. But, no, I never tried to imitate them.

The first photographs I'd ever seen, Edward Weston had a show there. Not in the galleries, it was down in the basement between the school store and the janitor's closet. Edward Weston. And the prints were \$25.00, as I remember. But I was paying \$17.00 a month rent at the time. So \$25.00 was out of the question. But that was the first time I saw his Nude in the Sand at Ocean Beach. It was Charis. One of her nude poses.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Charis Wilson.

LEO HOLUB: And I can remember every grain of sand. That's what I remember about the photograph. The fact that I was twenty-two or something and here was a nude woman, maybe that was part of it. But mostly I remember the grains of sand, how you could count each grain of sand in that photograph.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Just as an aside, Charis Wilson-Weston, I guess, has been very much present in the Bay Area for many years. I've met her and we actually did an interview with her for the Archives. And I think that she's still around, as far as I know. Did you know her?

LEO HOLUB: I met her once at Imogen's [Cunningham] 100th birthday party. I think I took a snapshot of her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She is quite wonderful. I met, I think maybe in Southern California, it wasn't here, some relative. I can't remember. It was like a brother perhaps. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. Except for the fact that she was in the Bay Area and then you eventually returned and got involved in photography too. Is it fair

to say that you were inspired then by seeing these Weston photographs and the grains of sand so ...

LEO HOLUB: Well, probably way in the back of my mind. It didn't convert me to photography. Earlier, as a junior in high school, my dad and mother always liked to go do Sunday outings. And we went to the DeYoung Museum. There was that tank that had been shot up in World War I, and there was an airplane hanging in the ceiling. And there were the dresses that Mother loved, the old-time dresses. But I remember seeing the F-64 show. I guess I was impressed with the clarity of that. Although it still didn't enter my mind to be a photographer.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was that? I forget.

LEO HOLUB: Thirties. '29 or '30. I was in junior high school at that time. At Chicago, at the end of the year, there were exhibitions and I had six things up in the exhibition. And Marjorie [Opitz] had seven. I almost had more than anyone else in the exhibition. And I got an honorable mention from the dean.

School ended and I went up to Detroit. In those days, the Hudson people ran caravans from Detroit to Los Angeles. There were about twenty cars. We'd drive one and tow one. I was number seven in line, I remember. We drove from Detroit and stopped every night. It took about ten nights to get across the country.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You towed a car? What do you mean?

LEO HOLUB: You're driving one Hudson Terraplane and there's one attached to your bumper. So ten people brought twenty cars across the country.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, that's how they transported cars at that time?

LEO HOLUB: One way. And then the first one sold for less, but the second one sold like a new car. It was an interesting experience. I took the bus from Los Angeles to Oakland and then my folks came down and got me. I went back to work in the mines for the summer. At the start of the next semester I came down to the California School of Fine Arts and registered there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why didn't you want to go back to the Chicago Art Institute?

LEO HOLUB: Well, it was more expensive. And the six months that I worked I didn't have enough money to do that. But I had enough money to come to San Francisco. And, I guess, I liked change too. It was different.

In Oakland, we lived next to Hebe Daum. She married Peter Stackpole. And she had gone to the California School of Fine Arts. I admired her and, I guess, that was another reason.

So I got a room in the Monkey Block. It was full of artists and misfits. The rent was \$14.00 a month. One of the persons on my floor was Matt Barnes. I lived there quite awhile before he invited me in once to see what he was doing. The room was darkened. And these mysterious dark paintings that he did. Sort of like [Albert Pinkham] Ryder, that sort of thing. I remember that as kind of a special moment.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In other words, there were students? I didn't realize this. And, of course, everybody knows about the Monkey Block and the artists who were there and the studios and so forth. But there were students like you there as well?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, sure. Plenty of students.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because the rent was cheap?

LEO HOLUB: Maynard Dixon's brother lived on the ground floor. I was on the second floor. A fellow named John Sackas lived across the hall. He later made something of a name by painting the produce markets before they got torn down, and had a big show for himself. But I could walk back and forth to the California School of Fine Arts from there.

At the end of the first semester I won a James D. Phelan scholarship, so that took care of another year for me. The second year I was elected student body president. And Lee Randolph was the director during that second year. I remember he lived on Hyde Street just south of the crooked Lombard Street in one of those big, tall skinny apartments. He had a nice apartment there. His wife was a fine lady who reminded me of the woman who was a foil for Groucho Marx, one of his distinguished, large women. And he had a mistress named Milvea Boak; everyone knew that they were a threesome.

PAUL KARLSTROM: A threesome? Did they go out together?

LEO HOLUB: Well, I don't know. I just know gossip.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you didn't see them?

LEO HOLUB: I didn't see them. But she was at the dinner. There were probably six students. And Albert Bender had been invited.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, you mean, this is the dinner for the board? Is that what you mean?

LEO HOLUB: No, it was just an evening dinner that Lee invited six students to. I suppose he thought we were special and were going to amount to something and he wanted us to meet Albert Bender. So they were at the dinner for Bender. And one of the other students was my friend, Robert Bach. I'm not sure who the painting people were. But Dick Hackett was there. Dick Hackett, after he graduated, became a fine painter. But he moved to Nevada City, set up his studio there so his orbit never reached beyond Sacramento. One of those local heroes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who else taught important courses like painting and maybe life drawings and so forth? No photography yet, I'm sure.

LEO HOLUB: There was no photography. I liked Otis Oldfield.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, he was teaching painting.

LEO HOLUB: Ray Bertrand was teaching. And he was a very sincere fellow who gave you his time and thoughts. And William Gaw.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was there?

LEO HOLUB: He was a good honest painter and giving teacher. Spencer Mackey. I think I related to you how he would come along and look at my painting. He said, "It's hard, isn't it?" And he went on to the next good looking girl.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And then spent much more time?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, he would spend a long time with the young ladies.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I remember you identified one of them, I think. In some of those photos from the brochures and so forth.

LEO HOLUB: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And there was one in particular who was, I don't know, I guess, maybe . . .

LEO HOLUB: It was the young lady who married Howard Brodie, the artist. Her name doesn't come to me. But I have the photograph. William Arnautoff taught. I admired him. It seemed like he always taught in business suits.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean Victor?

LEO HOLUB: Yes, Victor. Victor Arnautoff. He was a friend of the "Daily Worker". One night some student said, "There's a party for the Daily Worker on Telegraph Hill." So three or four of us went along to the party for the Daily Worker. And there was a couple of jugs of red wine, that kind of a party. And it was a fundraising event. I probably had a quarter to donate just because -- well, there were some young ladies who started doing a striptease and then they'd pass the bowl and you'd put in a quarter and something else would come off.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was a fundraiser for the Daily Worker?

LEO HOLUB: For the Daily Worker.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's funny.

LEO HOLUB: But Victor's political thoughts never entered into the classroom. I mean, we all knew about the "Daily Worker" but he was never . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, is that right? Because, of course, he's so famous as a Soviet . . .

LEO HOLUB: Oh, he moved there after he retired. He taught at Stanford after California School. When I first went to Stanford. I went over and said hello at Stanford. And when he retired from teaching at Stanford, he moved to Russia. I thought he was a fine teacher.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, of course, this was -- when was the big maritime strike? I'm trying to remember. That was '33?

LEO HOLUB: I lived either in Oakland or Grass Valley, I'm not sure. I wasn't in on that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because you weren't in school down here? You weren't in San Francisco?

LEO HOLUB: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then, of course, those kinds of events, those kinds of concern became pretty important to some of the mural work that was to be done at Coit Tower and so forth. And I just wondered if -- you said the students weren't aware of Arnautoff's politics particularly, but . . .

LEO HOLUB: Well, I mean, he didn't bring it up in the classroom. I'm sure we all knew his work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

LEO HOLUB: But I don't remember any rebellious students in my class. We were all pretty tractable, I think. I guess the rebel was Hassel Smith.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was Hassel there at the same time you were?

LEO HOLUB: That was his personality.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was he at the School of Fine Arts at the same time you were?

LEO HOLUB: Yes. And Ed Corbett was in our class. My wife, Florence, and Ed traded lithographs. They were in the same litho class. Florence still has his print, a self-portrait.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What is Florence's maiden name?

LEO HOLUB: Mickelson. We met in the Art School.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Tell me about that. I think it's an interesting story.

LEO HOLUB: Well, I guess, I was there six months before she came. Then we were both taking an illustration class with Paul Forster. Paul had a hernia operation at the French hospital. And two Florences and I planned to go out and visit him and say hello on a Saturday. We planned to meet at Flax's on Kearny Street. Only one Florence showed up. So I took Florence Mickelson to visit Paul. And we stayed with him for awhile. Then she had to rush home and so I called a cab and took her home. There went my dinner for three nights, but I took her home in a cab so she could get home in time to cook dinner for her dad and two brothers. And that was the start of it. That was my downfall.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it didn't seem to me as a downfall. After all, you're still married. How many years have you been married?

LEO HOLUB: Today is our fifty-sixth wedding anniversary.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, that's right!

LEO HOLUB: Fifty-six years today. And she's at the museum drawing something for her docent work. Some kind of tapestry, weavings or something.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So both of our wives are at this moment at the [M.H. de Young Memorial] Museum. Well, I'll have to get a card or something. So these are some of the students that, well, one of them particularly important to your life as it unfolded. I'm curious to what extent you were aware of the growing interest in murals. Muralism was introduced at about that time.

LEO HOLUB: Absolutely. Yes. In fact, the arcades in the basement were being worked on by McCaan. I forget her first name. But it was a woman named McCaan. I remember her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I've seen pictures of those, actually, in the archives at the Art Institute.

LEO HOLUB: They were doing fresco, soft plaster. Just put up enough plaster for a day's work and then filled it in. That was going on around then. Maurice Sterne taught there, a special class, maybe three or four students. You would see him quietly walking down the hallway.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

LEO HOLUB: '39 probably. '38 and '39 were the years that I was there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So Sterne was there at that time?

LEO HOLUB: Piazzoni was there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow. Did you ever take a class with [Gottardo] Piazzoni?

LEO HOLUB: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Or Sterne?

LEO HOLUB: No. The Sterne class was for advanced students and it was a very small class.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who do you remember as particularly effective as a teacher there? You mentioned a number of . . .

LEO HOLUB: Well, I meant Otis and Paul Gaw.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you took painting from them?

LEO HOLUB: And from Randolph. Lee Randolph, painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were required, even though your own career objective was more commercial art or illustration, to take, everybody was required to take certain like basic painting courses, life drawing?

LEO HOLUB: Life drawing, painting, lithography, anatomy, art history

PAUL KARLSTROM: So there was really like a traditional . . .

LEO HOLUB: It was structured, yes. And Florence Allen was one of the models.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who just died about a month ago, I guess.

LEO HOLUB: Jane Berlandina taught art history.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you had art history as well?

LEO HOLUB: Lee Randolph taught anatomy, from the skeleton that was supposed to have been a French soldier. It had a hole in the breastplate. One of the paintings I did in Lee Randolph's class -- when I went home for the summer it showed up in a student show at the Museum of Modern Art on Van Ness. A student exhibition, one of my paintings. But then when I came back from the mines in the fall I went to claim it at the closet where they kept those things and it wasn't there. They never did find it. It was a rather thinly washed piece of canvas. And I think probably somebody said, "Hey, that will make a nice base for one of my paintings." So I lost my painting that went to the museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Some of these artists that you've mentioned, especially, I guess, Maurice Sterne, is to a degree, associated with the modernism or more of a modernist approach, perspective, to the art. Do you remember as a student any discussion of new developments of more advanced, more modernist type of art? Was that an issue that you talked about, the students at all? Did the professors deal with it? Was there an interesting Picasso sort of setting up this -- not conflict exactly, but an awareness of a more conservative, traditional approach and then a more experimental, modernist -- Sterne presumably would be kind of associated with the more advanced.

LEO HOLUB: No. I only remember him going to his special little classroom up the stairs. And I don't remember any discussion. I don't think they had lectures the way they do now. It's quite an improved school. I think whatever happened to us happened the day we came to class. And whatever happened that day was what happened.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But as students, or you yourself, was there an awareness of the changes that modern art, especially European art had brought in? Was there any reflection of that in that environment at the school? Any "This is really outrageous"? Or is this far-out?

LEO HOLUB: I don't think so. William Gaw was doing flower paintings that looked like a Redon. Spencer Mackey was doing portraits for the boardroom, that type of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. That's really interesting to me because I don't get the sense from what you say that there was any real special awareness of the broader international art world, like with Surrealism being very much in evidence at that time. You know, some far-out stuff from New York. But that didn't so much touch on

your experience at least?

LEO HOLUB: There was no turmoil going on at the school. No arguments that I can recall.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what did you think of as advanced art? Or did you think about it at all while you were at the school? Cubism, of course, had already been around for quite awhile.

LEO HOLUB: I don't recall it showing up in any of the canvases at the end of the school show or anything like that. I think it was rather traditional. Nearly everything was academic.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Would you describe then the scene in San Francisco at that time as fundamentally conservative? Would that be your recollection? At least, as far as you saw it?

LEO HOLUB: Well, if you mean conservative looking backwards, no, I think it was just riding on the top of the wave and . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It doesn't sound to me, from what you say, that there was a whole lot of avant-gardism going on at that time.

LEO HOLUB: I can't think of anyone that fits into that category.

PAUL KARLSTROM: At least around the school?

LEO HOLUB: Around the school, no. Well, the World's Fair came along on Treasure Island. And I worked after school and evenings for someone called the -- I think it was Heinsbergen Company. And they designed quite a few of the exhibits-- US Steel, Southern Pacific, Pan Am... And I did small murals for them.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yes? Excuse me. The tape looks like it's running out. And this sounds interesting. Let's stop now and turn it over.

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. Continuing this interview with Leo Holub, photographer and gentleman, and other things as well. Anyway, this is now Tape 1, side B, continuing this session on July 3. Leo, you were beginning to -- well, we were talking about the California School of Fine Arts in your student days. And then you were beginning to talk about your own involvement with some of the exhibits at the Golden Gate International Exposition, Treasure Island.

LEO HOLUB: Hm-hmm. Nighttime, evenings and Saturdays in an old brick building South of Market. And I remember working evenings we'd go up for a later dinner or lunch or whatever it was, at nine o'clock. We'd go to Breens on Third Street. That was always fun, a great cafeteria.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was it called?

LEO HOLUB: Breens. It was a bar in front and a cafeteria out back.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Third Street and . . .

LEO HOLUB: Just off of Market. Near the Examiner. All the printers from the Examiner would be eating there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It hasn't been there for a long time.

LEO HOLUB: I sure miss it. It was a great place. Breens. Well, my partner, Robert Bach, I mentioned him earlier, he met a designer named Jo Sinel, Joseph Sinel, who was designing the exhibit for Southern Pacific. And Jo convinced Bob Bach that he should join him afterwards. Jo was opening a new school just around the corner from the Art School on, I guess, Leavenworth Street there. Jo Sinel was born in New Zealand but he came to San Francisco in the twenties. And he knew Maynard Dixon and Harold Von Schmidt, the illustrator, and Otis Shepard, the poster artist. A lot of those people worked for Foster & Kleiser in the twenties. Jo Sinel went back to New York for quite awhile. Until the thirties he worked in industrial design. He designed maybe 300 trademarks for people. He designed Remington Typewriter, the first of the good-looking typewriters. He designed an automobile called the Ruxton. They made 200 copies and that was the end of the Ruxton. But he won awards in the Art Director's Club and was very well-known. In fact, he's considered the father of industrial design.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

LEO HOLUB: Yes. Jo Sinel was the father of industrial design. So Jo got kind of fed up with the rat race in New York and he came out West to see his friend Maynard Dixon. And he finally decided to move back here. And he



first thought it was to start a school. So he talked Bob Bach into it. And then Bob Bach talked four more of us into -- we left the Art School and went around the corner on Leavenworth to be students of Jo Sinel. He didn't mention how much it was going to cost and when he mentioned how much it was going to cost I couldn't afford it. But he kept me as an apprentice. See, he liked what I was doing for him and I stayed on as an apprentice for Jo Sinel. One of the things we designed in those days was the Marchant Calculator. I helped Jo in the design of the Marchant Calculator, wine labels, a floral truck for Podesta Baldocchi, the Ruxton...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yes. Here Leo is showing me old clippings and photos and the card of Joseph Sinel : Jo Sinel. Design for Industry, Products, Packages, Displays, Graphic Arts, Sutter Street, San Francisco.

LEO HOLUB: Anyway, so I got out -- I didn't finish art school.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were in product design?

LEO HOLUB: I was in product design, yes. And it was enjoyable. It shook me up and it seemed like the great day for design was coming. There was the magazine from Germany called *Gebrauchsgraphik*. I was listening to Jo Sinel and I thought pretty soon everything would be fine design. Well, it never happened, as you can look around now and see. Just pre-war times there was the sense of good design happening. But it got buried by the kind of thing that's happening to the general chaos in the visual world .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was *Moderne*, a kind of futurist attitude and idea, part of the design of Sinel?

LEO HOLUB: It was the time of the Bauhaus influence.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The streamlined look and speed and this kind of thing?

LEO HOLUB: The architecture of [Marcel] Breuer, yes. And it seemed like maybe that would influence the whole world, but it didn't. Anyway, I enjoyed my year with Jo.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you worked just one year with him?

LEO HOLUB: Yes. Well, about this time Florence and I were getting serious and I had to find a job. Apprenticeship didn't pay anything. And it was just what we were learning that . . . So Paul Forster, our illustration teacher, heard about a job. It was with the Courvoisier Gallery; Guthrie Courvoisier the son of the original Courvoisier. A gallery at, I think it was 333 Geary Street. Guthrie Courvoisier had made a deal with Disney about the Fantasia gels. This was one of the first of the gel deals. He got all the gels from Fantasia. And there were, I guess, three or four of us in the beginning. Danny Romano was one of the other fellows.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did you do?

LEO HOLUB: We went through the gels and picked out ones that were complete in themselves. Quite often there's something in front of the head and you only get a half a head. But we picked out the gels that were complete and could be matted and framed. Then we would make an airbrush background to go with it. And they were matted by Vince Scola who was Guthrie Courvoisier's framer. And they were matted and framed. There was an exhibition of the Fantasia gels at the San Francisco Museum of Art on Van Ness, there was a big opening, a big deal was made of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was this the first that that kind of thing happened? Was this interest in it? Because there's now a big market now for that.

LEO HOLUB: Yeah, I think Guthrie invented this.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now this was before the time that Jay McAvoy, I think, bought that gallery. But I can't remember the year. He's still around. He's a trustee of the Fine Arts Museums and he actually gave the Archives a few records. But I can't remember exactly what year it was.

LEO HOLUB: Well, I don't know if he owned it, but he did come around. I remember the name. Billy Justema used to come around. That's a name from San Francisco. They used to come to my gallery often. But I think Guthrie was the owner at this time. We're talking about 1940, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: 1940, yes. Well, because I think the war interfered, in my recollection, McAvoy was taken away from that. Perhaps he served in the forces.

LEO HOLUB: The war was on the horizon. I remember from the Courvoisier Gallery we watched one noon, there was a big hullabaloo because the German Embassy had raised the Nazi flag. We could see it around the corner there. Everybody, from us, was hissing and booing. And an American sailor climbed up and cut it down.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And everybody cheered?

LEO HOLUB: Everybody cheered, yes. So the war was on the horizon.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were working in a gallery, this is like your first job, I guess, out of school and you were an apprentice because you didn't get paid for that. And so you were working for at least a year at Courvoisier?

LEO HOLUB: Probably six months. Because it wasn't enough to get married. Then I still lived in the Monkey Block and John Sackas across the hall heard of a job at the Independent Lithograph Company. It paid better. In the art department doing lettering and package design and that sort of thing. Mike Ruiz was one of the part owners. And he was a famous crayon man. He could take a metal plate, make four plates and he would take the tusche crayon and he would figure out, look at, from the drawing and know how much yellow and how much red and how much blue to add to these four different plates, and they would print a six by eight poster from that. He was a crayon man. And he was interesting. He had three or four daughters when he hired me. I guess he was figuring he was going to get a son-in-law. But, no, I already had an intended. So when he heard, when I announced that I was going to get married he said, "Oh, no. Oh, no." But it was great. One of his daughters was a beautiful girl who looked like Dolores Del Rio. She danced at the Waldorf Astoria in New York and all those kinds of places. But then it was time to really get married. So on the third of July in 1941, we had a church wedding. Florence's dad arranged the whole deal. Florence had been confirmed at the Swedish Lutheran Church on Dolores Street. So we had the wedding there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good for her. I didn't know that was her background. Well, she and I will have to talk about that. Well, you know, that's my background too.

LEO HOLUB: One of John's friends sang "Oh Promise Me". It was a traditional wedding. And afterwards we went out to -- what's that area around Tower Market called? I can't think of the name of it. But anyway, there's a community center and we had a reception there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean what? Up on the hill? Diamond Heights?

LEO HOLUB: The next one over is called Mira Loma or Mira Loma Park? Anyway, there's a place there we rented and had a lively reception. But Florence and I kept staying and finally one of her cousins came and said, "You guys leave so we can leave." So we left and went to the St. Francis Hotel.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, good for you. So did you go on a honeymoon or could you afford it?

LEO HOLUB: Well, see, we picked this day because of the Fourth of July. We had a three day holiday. My dad was working up on the Feather River so we went up, too. and shared a cabin with my dad on the Feather River for three days and then came back and went to work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me go back just for a moment to San Francisco in the late 30s and around '40. You were working at Courvoisier in 1940, I think. That must have been one of the few galleries in town. Do you remember what the gallery situation was with art galleries at that time? Were there any interesting ones? Did you ever go and look at exhibitions at galleries? Was City of Paris operating then?

LEO HOLUB: I can't remember any other place except the Museum of Art on Van Ness Avenue. I went to the Oakland Museum. I showed there a couple of years, a lithograph and a watercolor. I was in the Oakland show in '39 and '40. But the kind of galleries that we have now, I don't recall.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you don't remember much of a gallery scene? This wasn't anything that was going on and the students were aware of and interested in? You know, as a way to see works, to see what people are doing? The whole idea of an art market really wasn't developed?

LEO HOLUB: It obviously didn't hit me. Jo Sinel was looking around for a place to -- a building to put his school in, and he knew a lot of people. I went with Jo out to Ansel Adams. Jo called Ansel. I remember that day. That was the first time I met Ansel.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

LEO HOLUB: 1939.

PAUL KARLSTROM: 1939. Well, okay. Tell me about meeting Ansel.

LEO HOLUB: Ansel lived in his father's house, original house built in the sand dunes on 23rd Avenue, I think it was. Nothing but sand dunes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that right out by Golden Gate Park?

LEO HOLUB: No. Close to the Golden Gate. It faced on the entrance to the Bay. And one of the neighbors was Phoebe Brown. One of my dear friends that I met later. Her dad had built a house on 25th Avenue. So Phoebe Brown and Ansel, as young children used to play around in the sand. But Phoebe thought he was kind of a funny kid. And I think he later admitted it in his book that he was kind of a funny kid.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that's pretty much where Sea Cliff is now?

LEO HOLUB: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it wasn't Sea Cliff then?

LEO HOLUB: It wasn't Sea Cliff, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was it fancy like it is now? Fancy houses?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, no. You can see in the book about Ansel it was just his father's house. And I have a picture of one Phoebe's house all alone. It was a sparse, open place. But then the earthquake, that house, Ansel was just a baby, three or four years old. And something fell down on his crib and broke his nose. He spent his whole life with his nose going like this. His favorite photograph was the one that was taken like this [profile]. It shows a fine, Hollywood-type nose. And so Imogen took a photo of the broken nose. She said he never used that photograph but it did show up later on.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this is in '39. Now what was the occasion of meeting Adams? Do you remember anything about him or about that meeting? What happened? What you talked about?

LEO HOLUB: No. Joe Sinel was wondering if Ansel could help him find a place for this school he was founding. And I remember Ansel had one of his famous photo screens there. It was the first I had seen one of his three-part screens made out of a giant photograph. And he was quite friendly with us. But it was just the first meeting.

Also Imogen came to the studio on Leavenworth. Joe Sinel knew Imogen's husband, Roi Partridge. So Imogen came over. Joe was dating a much younger woman named Helena Mayer. Helena Mayer was an Olympic fencing champion who was teaching fencing at Mills College. Quite a handsome woman. She's in Imogen's book. The young woman with the fencer's mask and the épée in Imogen's book. And Joe was squiring her around. I don't know if it was a romance. But anyway, she was a vivacious young lady, and he liked interesting people. So Imogen came over, I guess to bring Joe a photograph. And so we met Imogen at this apprenticeship school on Leavenworth. That's the first time I met her.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was she still - I can't remember the chronology. Was she still with Roi?

LEO HOLUB: No. Roi had married the gym teacher by this time. That was my first meeting with Imogen.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So here are these very now-famous Bay Area photographers that you met back in about '39, right?

LEO HOLUB: '39.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You must have paid attention to the fact that they were making photographs and all.

LEO HOLUB: Well, I next met Joe in 194 -- during the war I worked for the US Navy. I spent four years as a civilian employee of the US Navy as a ship's rigger. I rigged ships for four years. After the war I went back to Joe for a few months. But then I met an industrial designer from New York, Ruth Gerth and her husband, who was an architect, and another architect named Bolton White. And we formed a little group called Design Development. Milton Cavagnaro was the prime member. George Kosmak was the other architect. Five of us formed the Design Development Group on Telegraph Hill, Castle Street. The idea that we could join work, that all of us could share in architecture and design, graphic design and that sort of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was it called?

LEO HOLUB: Design Development.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Design Development Group."Unique Design Group," which is an old clipping.

LEO HOLUB: That's where I first went to work with Ansel. Ansel brought in a book for Milton to design and I got to work with it. When Ansel was doing his basic series of photographs -- it turned out to be five volumes -- but in Volume One and Two I did some of the illustrations, black and white illustrations and graphic design for Volume One and then Volume Two.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was just after the war?

LEO HOLUB: Yes. '46 and '47.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So now.. I missed this. So you served in the Navy, did you say?

LEO HOLUB: Civilian.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Civilian?

LEO HOLUB: Civilian with the Navy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which meant?

LEO HOLUB: Well, it meant I didn't get to wear stripes like the Hollywood home guard.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did you do?

LEO HOLUB: Well, the ships were in dry dock. We pulled the propellers and we pulled shafting. We set five inch guns and all the heavy equipment. Working with the cranes and setting masts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that was done where?

LEO HOLUB: The Naval Drydocks at Hunters Point.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Hunters Point. Which now, of course, is quite different. There are a lot of artist studios there now. Okay. Well, what happened then? How long were you with the Design Development Associates? How long did that partnership last?

LEO HOLUB: Well, it lasted about a year and a half. Our oldest son had, we had to take him to the doctor's. And the doctor said, "We don't know what it is, but we think it's a fog allergy." Actually, there's no such thing as a fog allergy but that's what we called it. We would go to my parent's house in Grass Valley and the problem would disappear. So for my son's health we decided to move to Grass Valley for awhile. We lived in Grass Valley from, I guess, '48 and '49. And while we were up there we met an intelligent doctor who gave our son some allergy scratches. And we found out that he was allergic to his goose down pillow.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Not fog?

LEO HOLUB: No. Not fog. Got rid of the goose down pillow and that ended that problem. While I was up there I worked for a print shop, Harold Berliner and McGinnis. I was the shop foreman at the printshop, running a Kelly B press, setting type and designing products.

Then one day after our son was cured the phone rang. It was Paul Forster again and he said that Emmy Lou Packard is leaving her job at the San Francisco Planning Office and asked me if I could recommend someone. "Would you be interested?" Well, Florence was tired of Grass Valley so I was interested. I came down and took Emmy Lou Packard's job at the San Francisco Planning Office.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was her job?

LEO HOLUB: Well, it was graphic arts. Doing any kind of thing that needed to be delineated or drawn. Graphic design. For me it turned into photography too. Emmy Lou didn't do any photography that I know of.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it did turn into photography. So necessity then became the mother of, well, it turned into a career.

LEO HOLUB: I guess I've always worked photography in whether it was required or not. This was a temporary job, and after three months then you'd have to go apply for the real job. So I filled out the application and went up over to City Hall and applied for the real job. And the young man looked at it and said, "Where did you vote last?" And I said, "Grass Valley," so that paper got thrown in the hopper. So I didn't get the job. Paul Oppermann, the director, fought for me; he wanted me there. But that didn't work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But your residence at the time was San Francisco.

LEO HOLUB: Well, it didn't matter. That didn't matter, even though I had kept a phone in San Francisco the whole time. But anyway, the young fellow, well, he did me a favor. It seemed like a tragedy at the time. But he did me a favor.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why?

LEO HOLUB: Well, I might have stayed there my whole life and retired as a civil servant. And I might have missed out on Stanford. I would have missed out on the Anderson project. I never would have met you.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There you go. That's enough reason right there.

LEO HOLUB: So he did me a favor.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, gee, you needed a job. What did you do?

LEO HOLUB: Well, the Redevelopment Agency was starting up about that time, doing the study for Diamond Heights. They wanted me, but they didn't have the funds yet for the job that I would be filling in the graphic design department. So they stashed me over at the Housing Authority for nine months. And over there I did delineation drawing. I drew what the gate was going to look like at Chinatown from the architect's plans for Ping Yuen. It was a fine, big drawing about that size.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean on Grant there? Grant and Bush?

LEO HOLUB: Yes. I did the architectural perspective of that. And they loved the color. Some years after I left they had a fire there and that painting got burned up. And they called me, they wanted me to do it over. I still had the roughs, so I did another one. And the insurance paid for it, I guess. But the one I did over, they said, "That's not the red." You know how hard it is to remember a color. And the color didn't come straight out of a tube. I just did it the way I remembered. but they remembered it as being a different red. So I did some highlights with chalk to make it kind of the red they liked and let the red I had done just be the base color.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you didn't design the gate?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, no. I did the architectural rendering from the blueprint.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Well, you then visualized it because the blueprint doesn't show it as a schematic.

LEO HOLUB: Mary[Erkenbach] does ceramics, she did the lion's heads. I remember drawing her lion's heads.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you say the Housing Authority job was like a temporary thing again, is that right?

LEO HOLUB: So then the Redevelopment Agency got going and I went over to them for four years. And that turned into quite a bit of photography. I photographed a lot of the old buildings that were going to be torn down, and the studies that were done. And I did graphic design, brochures, renderings of potential buildings, that sort of thing. One thing I learned on that job. I lost all of my negatives when I left, the negatives -- they may be somewhere, but they might have got thrown out. So that kind of loss-- I learned a lesson on that job.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you do a good job now saving negatives.

LEO HOLUB: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I've seen them down there in your darkroom.

LEO HOLUB: When I went to Stanford, I bought my own film. I had two accounts at Adolph Gasser and I bought my own film myself. And I bought from another account the film that I used for them, like copying stuff. So I kept my own negatives together. Nobody complained about it. I have twenty years of my film at Stanford in an archive vault. I now donate prints for them for their needs

PAUL KARLSTROM: By this time were you doing what you would describe as art photography? I mean, thinking of it in those terms rather than in a commercial application?

LEO HOLUB: At the Redevelopment Agency?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, for yourself. Yes, during that time. Or, let's put it another way. When did you begin to . . .

LEO HOLUB: This was architectural photography at the Redevelopment Agency. Well, it just developed. In the Planning Office I was sent out to photograph Glen Park and I found some kids playing on rocks. And I started adding to whenever I could. But not through intellect. Through intuition. All of my work is intuitive.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because you certainly had examples, starting way back with the Weston exhibition and then Ansel Adams, no doubt you saw some of his work. Imogen and others, perhaps. And presumably you would say, 'gee, it's interesting what they're doing. There's more you can do with photography and subjects.' Is that right?

LEO HOLUB: Well, in 1955 I went to a workshop, Ansel Adams workshop. It was the first one that he advertised. Milton Cavagnaro and I, at this time, were working for a study for BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit]. The Parsons Brinckerhoff Hall and Macdonald report and I was the chief designer. It's a 17 by 22 inch pagesize report. We won an art director's prize when it came out. Ansel came to Milton and wanted a pictorial map of Yosemite, and Milton asked me to help him on it. So the two of us did a pictorial map for Ansel's store in Yosemite. Well, Milton delivered the map and he felt that Ansel was a little taken aback...

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Continuing this first interview session with Leo Holub on July 3, 1997. This is Tape 2, Side A. And Leo, we were rudely, you were rudely cut off by this tape here. It ran out. But you were describing this important project or connection with Ansel Adams. Why don't you pick up on that?

LEO HOLUB: Milton Cavagnaro and I had painted a pictorial map for Ansel to sell at Virginia's shop in Yosemite. And when Milton delivered it he felt that Ansel thought the price was a little steep. So when I heard Ansel was teaching this summer workshop for a week I decided to take it and give him back some of his money. I was interested, too. So I went camping with my family. We stayed in the campground. Some of the rich students stayed at the Ahwahnee Hotel, some of them stayed at the lodge, and some of them stayed in tents, but my family stayed in the campground. And I would go to class at 9:00 or so and Ansel would talk about the zone system and all that sort of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you mean?

LEO HOLUB: The zone system, which is his favorite way of describing a systematic approach to exposure and development. Eight shades of gray between white and pure black, that sort of thing. I never understood it until years later when I was teaching it to my students. And then one day in class I said, "Oh, that's what he was talking about." I finally discovered what the zone system meant in the 1970s. But anyway, it was fun being around Ansel. We would talk all morning and then we would go off on a field trip. And then we would come back and go away for dinner by ourselves, then we'd come back to his house and put up photographs and drink his liquor until late at night. And it was quite exciting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How many people were in the workshop?

LEO HOLUB: Probably a dozen.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And how long was it?

LEO HOLUB: For a week. And in those days he did another one the next week all by himself. It was quite different later on [with guest artists, assistants], but in those days we had Ansel [to] ourselves for a week and then he got rid of us and took another group.

I remember going up to the Mariposa Big Trees once. And here the ten or twelve of us were paying for his instruction, but we went off by ourselves nearby. But a young married couple came up and they had a little Instamatic -- well, those weren't invented then -- but some small camera, and they started asking questions. And he gave them about an hour of his time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, yes. I liked that idea. He got to talking to this young couple who weren't in the class, and he spent most of his time with them. I liked that idea.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And he was ignoring his own students?

LEO HOLUB: Well, he had put us to work. You learn more working than you do being told what to do.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was his approach with you? What would be a typical day? Would he choose sites you go to and then he would -- how did it work? How did his workshop work?

LEO HOLUB: Well, first we went close by and we kept going further away. We went near the Merced River first and the Big Trees. And then we went up to Mariposa. And then finally went up by Lake Tenaya. These huge boulders that have been brought down by the glacier. He didn't show us anything to copy or anything like that. He just, more or less, turned us loose. And when it became noon he said, "Well, this light is no good. The direct light is never any good." So we'd quit for lunch.

Polaroid was coming out in these days and he was a consultant to the Polaroid company.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was already famous by then?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, yes. He was pretty famous, but not getting rich. He didn't get rich until much later down in Carmel.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But what did he tell you? I mean, what did you learn from Ansel Adams? Anything?

LEO HOLUB: Well, I remember in the darkroom there was a demonstration. And I let these other people, it was kind of crowded space, and I let these other people come in and someone said, "Don't you want to see how he does it?" And I said, "Well, he does it just the way I do only it turns out much better." [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Were there any tricks of, say, a way of seeing, a way of choosing subjects that he would talk about? You know, "This is going to turn out better than that." I don't mean rules exactly, but any guidelines or suggestions that he was able to give in his workshop that you remember?

LEO HOLUB: Well, mostly he talked about this zone system, which I never did understand until years later.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, how do you implement that into your work?

LEO HOLUB: I think mostly it was just being in the presence of a genius person, to sense his integrity. I think that's probably what I got out of the workshop. Well, part of what we got from the workshop was his book, a handbook where you put down all the facts from each exposure. What light reading zone? His zone system handbook. That was something that I finally figured out years later. So he got me started on fundamental technique.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, why don't you explain it to me? The zone system, since it seems to be the main thing that Ansel . . .

LEO HOLUB: Well, our eye can see a lot more variations of light values than film can record. Film is really kind of limited. Film can record the differences between like one unit of light and 256 units. Whereas, the eye can see like one to ten thousand or more. So you have to kind of collapse all these values that are being reflected on the film, and figure out how you're going to collapse them. If it's an ordinary scene, it has, like these ten values from pure white to pure black, and even steps of gray in between. But few scenes are ordinary. The scene we're looking at has the bright lights out there, and has all these shadow values inside your room here. If we expose for these shadow values, that's going to be just burned up on the film. It would print pure white on the paper. If we expose for that, [pointing] this is going to be empty and leave just pure black on the paper. You can learn through the zone system how to expose for the shadows and develop for the highlights. That's what the zone system teaches. Expose for the shadows, develop your film for the highlights. You can only do it if you're using one piece of sheet film. You can't do it to a whole roll of film where you're put in all different kinds of lighting situations.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. Right. I see.

LEO HOLUB: It doesn't work with a roll of film. Unless you do exactly the same thing over thirty-six images. That's really nothing new. Timothy O'Sullivan in 1870 figured out the same thing. He, and others, learned it by rule of thumb. That you just expose for the shadows and develop for the highlights. Their film, they were working on a glass plate and it was quite a bit of trouble to make that plate. And if what they exposed didn't come out they would take it off in hot water or scrape it off and make another one. And they learned through time that the idea of a correct exposure is -- expose for the shadows, develop for the highlights. Timothy O'Sullivan knew that. But it didn't come around again until Ansel started teaching down south somewhere. I forget the name of the school. He and another fellow [Fred Archer] started teaching and then as a way of getting to the students they invented what's called the zone system.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So it's a way of recognizing it and identifying gradations and . . .

LEO HOLUB: Yes. The scene you're interested in, and how much your film can accommodate what you're looking at.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you have to then work in the darkroom yourself?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Obviously, you can't get a commercial processing or developing.

LEO HOLUB: The system calls for underdeveloping, normal developing and overdeveloping.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You probably already knew, though, that a lot of photography took place in the darkroom. Is that right?

LEO HOLUB: Yes, well, what happened to me, after this Ansel Adams workshop I stopped photographing for two years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

LEO HOLUB: Oh. I stopped photographing because, well, I just couldn't do it the way it was being done properly. And I just didn't have the urge to do snapshots. So I stopped photographing for two years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What were you disappointed in in your own work? Where did you feel your shortcomings were? Was it just sort of comparing yourself to Ansel then a little bit?

LEO HOLUB: I guess comparing my way of working to his way of working. I just stopped.

PAUL KARLSTROM: For two years?

LEO HOLUB: Hm-hmm. About two years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But then you started up again?

LEO HOLUB: Then I started up again.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, we had another baby. I bought my first good camera when the first baby was born.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What kind of camera was it?

LEO HOLUB: It was a Speed Graphic, three and a quarter, four and a quarter sheet film. So then when Eric was born I got going again with a smaller camera. By this time my brother had given me a Leica he had brought back from Germany. My brother was a hero in the war, -- a test pilot in the Eighth Airforce. He was there the whole time. Brought back a Leica from the war, and a Luger pistol. He kept the Luger but gave me the Leica.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you started doing family photos, baby pictures?

LEO HOLUB: Hm-hmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that got you going again?

LEO HOLUB: Got me going again. Well, after the Parsons Brinckerhoff study for Bay Area Transit I worked for Shawl Nyland Seavy. They were an art service who did commercial work, design, report design, that sort of thing for advertising agencies and such. And at the same time I had time to teach two days a week at the California School of Fine Arts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was that?

LEO HOLUB: '55, '56, '57. I taught three years, Objective Drawing with the California School of Fine Arts. And that was a new experience. One of my students is now the art director for Transamerica. George McWilliams. And I see him occasionally. He still remembers the day I brought our baby Eric to be the model for the class that day.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now what was the course you were teaching?

LEO HOLUB: Objective Drawing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Objective Drawing. What does that mean?

LEO HOLUB: Well, drawing that looks like the subject or object as opposed to drawing from the imagination.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Illustration.

LEO HOLUB: Well, yes. Drawing things as a . . . My own photography is straight photography as opposed to crooked photography. It's that sort of thing, see. I do straight photography; the other kind is crooked photography.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, had Ansel Adams set up the photography program at the school yet?

LEO HOLUB: He did that right after the war. They asked him in '46 I think it was. It was the first art school in the nation to teach photography that way. There were commercial schools before. If you wanted to open a photo



studio on Main Street well, you went to New York and there were several schools that taught that. Studio photography. But this California School of Fine Art, Ansel, and he brought in - the name skipped me but it's a famous name.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is in '47?

LEO HOLUB: '46, I think.

PAUL KARLSTROM: '46. Okay. That's a matter of record.

LEO HOLUB: He brought in Minor White. Ansel, I think he stayed a year and then turned it over to Minor. So Minor was the main teacher. And he had Imogen in every once in awhile as a guest teacher.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you didn't have anything to do with that?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, no. No. I was with the Design Development people by that time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But did you interact with these people at all that were at the school or away from the school? This little world of photography?

LEO HOLUB: No. Imogen came up to Design Development to visit us. And she saw a photogram I had made and she took it and showed it to her class one day. That was about my only interaction.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting because all this was going on around you, presumably, but you sort of charted your own course.

LEO HOLUB: Well, I'm a married man, see. And there's certain things that come first. Oh, one of the draftsmen who worked for one of the architects was the fellow who did *The Cage*. He made movies on the side.

PAUL KARLSTROM: *The Cage*?

LEO HOLUB: Yes, *The Cage*. It's a famous movie. I should have written his name down when I thought of it. He was one of the avant garde movie makers. He was doing drafting work for Bolton White up here on the hill. I'll think of it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is in the fifties? No.

LEO HOLUB: '46 and '47.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Avant garde. A movie maker. Well, we should know who that is. We could figure that out.

LEO HOLUB: Okay. It will come to me. [Sydney Peterson - LH]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you're really moving from one thing to the other in career. And this isn't the end of it.

LEO HOLUB: Yes. I once had to give a little talk at Stanford, I said it's like being in a boat without oars, just drifting down with the currents and eddies. That's been my life, and I've enjoyed it. And my ten years at Stanford teaching, was, drifting down without oars. But the student population always stays the same age on the shore. And I felt like I was staying the same, although I was drifting along ten years, I didn't start to age until I left the students in 1980. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, you were very good at keeping up with the students though.

LEO HOLUB: Oh, yes. I spent Monday with Lorie, my famous all-star from New York. She's teaching there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's her name?

LEO HOLUB: Lorie Novak.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She was a student of yours at Stanford.

LEO HOLUB: An all-star. Teaching at NYU. Peter Brown teaches at Rice. Several are teaching around here [Brian Taylor, Andy Williams].

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, we're going to talk about that at some point, of course, about Stanford. When did you start at Stanford? I think you started in '60. Because you always say you're . . .

LEO HOLUB: '64. Class of '64.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, because we're both the class of '64.

LEO HOLUB: Well, after the three years teaching at the California School of Fine Art, I went to work at Kaiser Graphic Arts in Oakland for two years. And Bob Bechtle was one of the artists, staff artists. He was a graphic designer for one of the little magazines that Kaiser printed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I saw Bob last night at Tom Marioni's place.

LEO HOLUB: Oh, good. And Jim Stockton, the book designer, was one of the artists. It was a pretty high-powered staff. Henry Kaiser was a pretty clever fellow. He set up the print shop but we had to bid on all the jobs. I mean, we were not an in-house place. We had to bid on the work for Kaiser Aluminum, and Kaiser Steel, and Kaiser Engineers, and everything else. But it was a fine, big litho shop. Four color presses and probably twenty artists on the staff there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really?

LEO HOLUB: Uh-huh. It was a good place to work too. But one day the architect that I had worked for at the Redevelopment Agency, who is now the planning director at Stanford, needed somebody with a lot of odds and ends of talents for the PACE program. The PACE program was starting. He needed somebody to coordinate a model-making project, and graphic design, printed pieces and photography.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who was this now?

LEO HOLUB: Harry Sanders, architect. So he called me at Kaiser, but I had no intentions of moving. I was quite happy there. The salary was good and retirement was good. But he insisted on coming up for lunch and then he talked me into coming down to look. So I took a half a day off. And I went down to Encina Hall where the Planning Office was. And one of the things that he mentioned was right across the street, the men's swimming pool. Oh, that did it. I was getting a little lopy by this time. And the fact that I could swim every day across the street. So I went back to Kaiser and said, "I did a terrible thing. I'll be leaving in two weeks."

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you joined the Planning Department?

LEO HOLUB: I joined the Stanford Planning Office in August 1960, about a month before you guys showed up for your class of '64.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And the main attraction was the swimming pool?

LEO HOLUB: The men's swimming pool.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which you were able to use every day?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, for nearly ten years I went in nearly every day. Rain or shine. It was marvelous to swim in the pool in the rain because there would just be three or four of us. And you're swimming and the rain beating down.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Where was that pool? It's not the same one . . .

LEO HOLUB: Just behind the old basketball pavilion.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, it's the same one.

LEO HOLUB: Oh, no, the new one is de Guerre Pool. That's a brand new thing, a marvelous facility. After I had quit Kaiser and moved to the Stanford Planning Office one day Harry said, "I promised you work for eighteen months." A year and a half. But, you know, I had quit my good job. But anyway, the new job lasted for ten years, so I didn't take that to heart.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But along the way you set up . . .

LEO HOLUB: Well, the Stanford photo lab in the Art department... I was doing architectural photography for the Planning Office, but in walking across campus I carried my little camera. I would photograph things I liked... the students, dogs, bicycles ...

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, I've seen a lot of those photos too.

LEO HOLUB: And there was a woman named Anne Rosener who came to work right after I did in the Development Office. She was designing printed brochures for the PACE program. I met her and we were friendly, we were born on the same day. We each had the same birthday. And so we got along fine. Well, she needed photographs and she saw the contact sheets that I made. And she liked some of them better than the official

photographs she was getting from the various places. So she would start working my photographs into her brochures. I have a lot of brochures with my photographs that Anne used. And she would save some she couldn't use. One day Dr. Eitner asked her who he should get to photograph. His department was in the geology corner of the Quad. It was congested and crowded and he said, "I need a photographer to take some photographs so I can ask for more space or a new building or something." She said, "Leo Holub." So I went over and took some photographs. It was Keith Boyle's class in life drawing. I knew the model didn't want to be included, but that was okay. I photographed around the edges.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think I've seen some of those photos.

LEO HOLUB: Anne Balaam, that was one of the photographs. Anne Balaam and Plaster Man.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

LEO HOLUB: So then I gave the class photographs to Anne, and she took them back to Eitner. His way of telling it is, "The minute I saw the photographs I knew I had asked the wrong person." He said, "But they are so poetic, let's give him a show." He didn't get the crowded pictures he wanted. But let's give him a show. So three months later I had a show in the Stanford Art Gallery. Anne Rosener was the curator; she went through my contacts and picked out 235 prints.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who was the curator? The woman in the . . .

LEO HOLUB: Anne Rosener, the woman who was the designer for the Development Department.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Okay. And so she curated the show for you?

LEO HOLUB: She curated the show and designed the catalog called Stanford Seen.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEO HOLUB: It was in the three galleries of the Stanford Art Gallery. The students who had never been to the gallery, seniors and everybody, flocked to the show. We set an attendance record that lasted for ten years until the Goya show came.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow.

LEO HOLUB: All the students wanted to know, word of mouth went around and they said, "Have you seen the show? Are you in it?" That sort of thing. My mother and dad came down and I took them through the show, and then we went up to the top of Hoover Tower. And the young girl, a student guide pointed out all the famous buildings. And then she said, "Oh, down in the Art Gallery now there's photographs taken by somebody that nobody sees. Nobody knows who he is." And Mother said, "Would you like to meet him?" The woman, the girl went like this, she said, "Oh, my. Have I said something wrong?" No, she didn't say anything wrong. Here's the photographer. What was I saying about him?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wow. An attendance record.

LEO HOLUB: Hm-hmm. Until Goya. Ten years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was that?

LEO HOLUB: '63, '64 maybe. I guess I took them in '63.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, I think so. Now, when was that show? Because I could have seen it. Because the photos that we used in our nice class reunion show . . .

LEO HOLUB: Yes, they were from that, from the Stanford Seen, yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: From that exhibition.

LEO HOLUB: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And that was when exactly?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, I'll have to look that up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I probably have that somewhere myself. I'm just trying to remember if it was like in the beginning of like the fall or the beginning of the year or the end of the year.

LEO HOLUB: Well, I've got '64, but I don't have the date.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, well.

LEO HOLUB: I figured I've had thirteen shows, this last one at the Quadrus will be my thirteenth one-person show. A number of other group shows. One of the group shows was in 1980 at the Vice-President's house, Vice-President Mondale in Washington, DC.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I didn't know about that.

LEO HOLUB: His wife was called Joan of Art. Remember that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, right. Joan Mondale. She was supportive. Yes.

LEO HOLUB: She was a curator at the Washington Gallery. And when he became Vice-President she had this old house in Washington, D.C., and decorated it each year, artists from a different part of the country. And in 1980 they chose the West Coast and Henry Hopkins picked out a show. And my San Francisco From Red Rock Hill was chosen from the Stanford Museum, one of the things that went.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was a group show?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, yes. A large group show. A Nathan Oliveira piece was sent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, so it wasn't just photography it was . . .?

LEO HOLUB: Oh, it was mostly art. Just very little photography.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what I think we better do, this tape is coming towards the end. Let's break here and then we can get together, I hope, on another occasion and sort of follow along. But that's great. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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