



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Billy AI Bengston,  
2020 July 29

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Billy Al Bengston on July 29, 2020. The interview took place at Bengston's home in Venice, California, and was conducted by Matthew Simms for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Pandemic Oral History Project.

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

## Interview

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You're a TV personality.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Recording right, we're recording now. This is Matthew Simms speaking with Billy Al Bengston, and I hope a bit, Wendy Al Bengston, too if she's in there.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Just Wendy Al.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay, just Wendy Al then, and you're in your home and studio in Venice, California. Today's July 29, 2020, and this for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. And we're just calling to check in with you, Billy Al, see how you're doing and what you've been up to in this whole lockdown. Have you been locked down, or have you been defying [inaudible]?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: How the hell do I know. I don't go outside.

MATTHEW SIMMS: You don't go outside?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Except when I go outside and I get on my bike every morning, and I come back every day.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. And then—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Wendy controls the rest of the day. I don't care what I do, she just tells me.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay, well—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Sit down, Wendy.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —you've got a lot of work on the wall behind you, and you were telling me a little bit about how this was—how you're kind of keeping busy during the COVID period. It's framing these pieces that date back to, I want to—they look like they're from the 1980s possibly. When were those made?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I don't have any signatures on them, so I can't tell you.

WENDY AL: Yeah, 1982 to '84.

MATTHEW SIMMS: There we go, all right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Wendy knows this stuff.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And so can you, maybe, I don't know, you want to talk to me a little bit about those and how you made them, what?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You know, I just do that when I can't think of anything else to do—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —and, uh, then I'm done. I can't think of doing these anymore because I shot my wad, as the saying goes.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah. So you don't do this kind of work now, but you're painting again, you're painting now, aren't you?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I'm not doing a damn thing now—

MATTHEW SIMMS: You're not?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —I wish I was but the studio setting over there, and I don't have any paint on my hands or on my clothes, so I'm not doing anything.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, I think we all wish that you were painting. I would love to see some work.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, uh.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Every time I've come there's been new work upon the walls.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah, uh, I'm not driven right now.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And it's just—it's a spurt thing.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. Well, um—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Usually, when somebody buys something, it encourages me.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, and has that been happening lately?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No.

MATTHEW SIMMS: No.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I'm not encouraged. Have I sold anything lately?

WENDY AL: Yeah. [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Wendy knows, and I say it goes through her.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

WENDY AL: And he has been painting. I mean, not—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I haven't been—

WENDY AL: —the usual, um, spurt of puppies coming out, but yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I've been breeding, but I haven't been, uh, foaling.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

[They laugh.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: But the watercolors, Wendy Al, you were working, I think with Billy Al on the watercolors and trying—and you said a book came out recently.

WENDY AL: Yeah, there is a book and Billy can—we brought it out, like—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Ughhh.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Wow, look at that.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It's a big son of bitch.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, I know. That's a book I would like to have. I have to find that, track it down.

WENDY AL: Yeah, um. You know, hate to say it, but Amazon [Laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah, that's really fun stuff.

WENDY AL: He was gonna have a book launch and a watercolor show here in town in Hollywood

but, you know, COVID came.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

WENDY AL: So.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, those watercolors, they go all the way back to the 50s, right?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I forget when I started doing watercolors, but, uh, I know when I started, I did it just to be, just to be stupid, nobody would do watercolors. That was the girls' media and if I'm not doing something [phone rings], the hell—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right, that's right. You know, Marvin, you know Marvin Silver.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Of course.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —the photographer. He has a beautiful early watercolor mural in his home that you gave to him, I think, in 1958 or '59—

[Wendy speaking on the phone in background.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —or '60, and with a heart—it's a great example, and then this work behind you is, you know, 1980, so—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I don't know what it is.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —so, did you—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It's all over the place.

WENDY AL: [Wendy speaking on the phone in background.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You know, you get tired of the same old format, so I started cutting them.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, I like that.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: These are various hairstyles that used to be around.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Now are these made in Hawaii, or are they made in?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: That's yours.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes. [Laughs.]

[00:05:11]

MATTHEW SIMMS: [inaudible].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, I do these here.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I go any damn place I feel like.

MATTHEW SIMMS: But you use to—you did do quite a few watercolors in Hawaii, it strikes me.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I usually do watercolors in Hawaii.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Why—what's the connection there?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Because I don't have to carry a lot of material with me—

MATTHEW SIMMS: All right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —and it's easy to clean up, easier to clean up.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And I have a studio that has very, very adequate and then I can bring them back. You can't carry big things back under your arm on the plane.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right. Right. That would be a little complicated.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It's just all pragmatic.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. I mean, one could think that maybe the atmospheric, watery qualities, that's what an art historian would say, right? They start to read into it and say, Oh, Billy Al was doing watercolors in Hawaii because of the atmosphere and the humidity and the—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, it's because it is practical. I'm a Kansas boy. We do things that are practical.

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You know, as far as—you don't slaughter a hog in your living room.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Well, you know, that word rustic, you use that the last time I was at your studio, and you were rustic. What do you mean by that?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You expect me to know what I'm talking about?

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Laughs.] Well, a rustic, you know, does that mean somebody who deliberately is not, you know, skilled in the traditional sense, not an academic?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, I'm not an academic. I, you know, this is a visual business, not a word business—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —and I school myself in the vision.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And, uh, it really doesn't transcribe into words.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I mean, I can tell you a lot about my wife. All you have to is just look at her and then you'll go, Oh. [laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah, that's a—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I get to touch her, and that's the best part.

MATTHEW SIMMS: I mean, words can't convey any of that, can they?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, they don't put her over the line.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And this whole video thing is so strange too. You know, we're supposed to have a conversation, and we're both looking at little screens and then the internet is coming in and out. I mean, it's—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Really?

MATTHEW SIMMS: —the time we're living through.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, how old are you?

MATTHEW SIMMS: I'm 52.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, you're in the era. Uh, I didn't have a television set until I was 52.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. Well, that tells you something.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: How old am I now, Wendy?

WENDY AL: 86.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: 86. So I've had one for a long time.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. You got plenty more left in you.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Uh?

MATTHEW SIMMS: All this work that you're doing, all this stuff behind you.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You know, it's day by day, saved by jerks, as they say.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And you know, there's—I remember you quoted Ken Price to me. Kenny Price was obviously someone you were very close to?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Ken Price is the best artist in the world.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, you think, the best?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, I think he's one of the absolute best living for sure. I sure as fuck hope he's living.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. Well, and he said, the only thing you have to do to outrage people is—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Is anything. See what I mean?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Can you be any more brilliant than that?

MATTHEW SIMMS: No, you can't, but is that even true?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You just do anything, and people go, what did you do that for?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: [Laughs.] It's—no, Ken is the man you want to talk to when it comes to words. He's really great.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, he—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And on top of that, he's very, very good as an artist, and undoubtedly fantastic as a ceramicist and a sculptor. But—and he's a pretty good surfer. We surfed together. That's where we, you know, when you're stuck with somebody for hours on end in the water, you got to make up shit all the time.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And, and you got to be entertaining, or you would be booted out of the water—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —or you don't get any waves, that's how it goes. No, you can't have that [laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: In those days, it wasn't crowded out there.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, yeah?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, was it? You tell me?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, if it was six-foot mountain glassy, it was crowded.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: At Malibu, there probably would be 200 people out, and Ken and I and [inaudible] got 90 percent of the waves.

[00:10:18]

MATTHEW SIMMS: How did you do that? You just—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, it made [inaudible] come out, and we didn't get any because Matt got them all.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Because he was Malibu Matt, you know.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And the [inaudible] was wonderful in those times, and we talked about the great Kahuna and all that crap—

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And it was fun, and we didn't have wetsuits, so we froze our asses off too.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: So, you didn't go out for three hours without coming in blue.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, jeez. And then you ate a candy bar, right? That was lunch?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: As much as you could.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: One or two or three.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. What about Altoon?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Kenny ate Snickers, and I ate, uh, what did I eat? Old Mix. I ate Old Mix.

MATTHEW SIMMS: When I came to your house one time, you had a beautiful John Altoon painting on the wall. Do you still have that, I hope?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You bet.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And you lent it to the show. It was at the LA County Museum, I think.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Probably.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. He was also part of—was he out in the waves with you, or was he more?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, John is an artist—was an artist. He lived and breathed—he was just—but everybody thought he was an artist. He looked like an artist. He acted like an artist. He was an artist, and he was what the old-fashioned terms of artists were. He could draw. He could, you know, he'd sit down and make portraits of you—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —and they would be fantastic. And then he always had his dog, Man, which was a bitch, and Man would always be coming up and jumping on him. John Altoon was the classic artist.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: He looked like an artist. He acted like an artist. He was an artist. And I sure as hell miss him because I can waste a lot of time with John. He would come walking up, I'm on the second floor, he lived over on—oh, a couple of blocks away and he'd walk over, and he'd be whistling and singing like he always did. You'd be about a block away, and he'll go Albert, and I'd hear him coming so I could let him in [laughs.] Albert, he called me. Because for a while, I signed my paintings B. Albert.

MATTHEW SIMMS: B. Albert. Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: —just to screw things up.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It used to be fun, you know, nobody sold anything, so it was all fun. It didn't make a damn bit of difference of what you did.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You just had to have a good time.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And any other key—who else at that time. I know you became friends with Frank Gehry, but he was a bit later.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah. Frank came in a little later. Frank, you know, was a serious person. He's an architect, and he has to build things, and they can't fall down on you, you know, or you get in trouble.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: But Frank, what do you call them, he wasn't a maven, but he was a little bit like it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And, uh, he's still my dear friend. We still see each other quite a bit.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, you did the show—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: People still buy his things too, as strange as it seems.

MATTHEW SIMMS: They do? They like that.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah. Have you ever been to those places? Can't live in those god damn places?

MATTHEW SIMMS: No.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: We liked it—when I came here because—he said how did you do this? And I just said, I just did it yesterday. And he would say, how did you do it? And I'd said, it's just drywall and studs, it's easy.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And that's when he started getting really wacky is when he started listening to me.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Because you made a lot of changes to the place where you are now at 110 Mildred, you did a lot of variations.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah. Yeah. I change it daily.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And this room has been constant for almost three months, and it's driving me nuts. It won't be constant forever.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

[00:15:11]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And my wife is the person who knows how to do this stuff. She came out of the decorating world and our—it wasn't that great. I said that negative context worked, but she knows everything about these things, and I'm really lucky. I lucked into it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I stepped into it, and it didn't smell bad.

[Laughter.]



MATTHEW SIMMS: But you had a lot of different people living in that building at different times having studios.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Let's see, who was here. Ken was downstairs. Oh, the strange one was Greg Kaufman for a while.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Was he down there? Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, yeah. And he's the only person I knew that was born anal.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Was he? Okay.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: He's a total neatnik. So, I'd come over, sharpen my pencils, let the stuff land on the floor and things like that. He would sweep up after me. He was fantastic. I miss him a lot, and he was a soprano.

MATTHEW SIMMS: He was?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yes [expressed in a high pitch.]

[They laugh.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: You have to have the voice. Yeah. And I've been told he was very funny. He had a great sense of [inaudible].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah, he was very funny and easily—when I was a young man, the most creative artist on the scene, bar none.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I mean, his early paintings were just [inaudible].

MATTHEW SIMMS: Wow.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And nobody else had the focus that he had.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Altoon had it, but Altoon did it with machine-gun speed. Craig was methodical. He would put down one line, and it would be there for a week, and then the next week it would be three lines.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And, uh, he did a lot of this looking at it pulling at his nose. I figured if you did it, you didn't have to look at it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Once you're done, someone else gets it.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Get it out of here.

MATTHEW SIMMS: But you know, at the same time, you had pretty high standards for things like materials, durability, you know.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, yeah. I'm an absolute fanatic on structure. It's just almost disgusting how fanatical I am. If it isn't built right, it won't work.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: So, I build them, so they last long and maybe someday they'll get it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. And you told me, uh, you know I think about you talking about the lighting, but you're an interesting case, and you did not get into this whole thing about the preciousness of lighting. Your attitude towards lighting is completely—so you were not at all related to this whole lightened space kind of thing, which were—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Not a chance.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I figured you buy a painting and put it wherever you want to put it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: And, uh, I wanted to buy a painting and put it anywhere I wanted to put it just as long as it vibe.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. So not have all these expectations about what the lights got to be here and there and—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I don't give a shit.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I oftentimes paint with the lights on and sometimes with the lights off, and bad light, good light, and sometimes I use the precise light if I have to fix something, but most of the time it just catches—catch if you can. If I don't know what I'm building, I don't do it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: It's got to adapt. It's got to be able to fit in wherever.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: As my brother used to say, you play ball with me, and I'll shove a bat up your ass [laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. [Laughs.] That's one way. Yeah. You know, has anybody ever tracked down that wax version of you that was in that show in 1968? Remember that wax?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I don't know where it went.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Where is that thing? I mean, it's—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I have no idea. I didn't own it.

WENDY AL: We have the head.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: We do?

WENDY AL: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: You do?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Where is it, in a box?

WENDY AL: Yeah, it's in a box. [Laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: That should be out. Shouldn't that be out?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, it's just wax. It will melt away.

WENDY AL: You know, after that show that Frank did, he got a whole figure.

[00:20:10]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

WENDY AL: And it was at his house, and he then had it restored much later, decades later, and then there was a big earthquake in the '90s.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah, my head fell off.

WENDY AL: And just after he had it restored, the head fell off from the earthquake.

[They laugh.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: I can't think of another artist that had a wax version of him or herself out there in the world.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: No, it was a sort of kinky thing to do. I forget how it happened. I was doing

something for the movies and, what's his name? Sing.

WENDY AL: Spoon.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Spoon, Spoon Singer, or something like that?

WENDY AL: Spooky Sing.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Spooky Sing and—

WENDY AL: [Inaudible].

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Where is it? God, she knows more than I do. That's why you get married.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah. Two brains are better than one.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Especially when we get a good one.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes. And you and your two heads.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I got two heads instead of one.

MATTHEW SIMMS: There's one in the box. Has she gone to get it?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: If I had two personalities, I'd be happy instead of 200. All rich don't go together. [Laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: I mean—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Are you a surfer?

MATTHEW SIMMS: I'm not a surfer. I should be. But I've been living right by the ocean, but I'm not, no.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Why not?

MATTHEW SIMMS: I told you I lived in Long Beach, you know.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, what's the matter with that?

MATTHEW SIMMS: The last time I told you I live in Long Beach, you looked at me, and you said, why do you live there? I should be up, you know, just a bit north.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, you're close to Trestles.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, that's true. There's a lot of great things to the south of us.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah, I know. I lived in Doheny for a while when I was a beach attendant.

WENDY AL: Look at what I found! [Wendy is holding a box.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: What did you find?

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's the head in there, wax head. Oh, my goodness, well I don't want to make you open it up or anything, but—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Open it up!

WENDY AL: I'm going to open it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay, good, good. Let's see it.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Let see what it looks like.

WENDY AL: Let me get—

MATTHEW SIMMS: This is great. We'll do the side by side.

WENDY AL: Yeah. He only wanted it for some reason. He was going to do something with it, so

Frank said, let me send over the head.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: This is a little thing of my head. Oh, shit.

WENDY AL: Wait, I'm trying to get the camera right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Are you in there?

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It looks like I'm in here in parts, yeah.

WENDY AL: I see the mustache.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: It's all broken up.

WENDY AL: Billy, don't be—careful now.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I'm just throwing crap out.

WENDY AL: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Yeah, it's in here in parts.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, I can see it now with the nose there with the mustache.

WENDY AL BENGSTON: Yeah. Ooh, that's so eerie.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: That's my neck. There's an eyeball.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Is there an eyeball? Oh, jeez.

WENDY AL: Did you see that?

MATTHEW SIMMS: I did. Ah ha.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, shitty hair.

WENDY AL: It's about the right hair color.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: But it's really dirty.

MATTHEW SIMMS: I would get that restored. Yeah, take that down to Jack Brogan and say hey, you know, get this thing back in order for me, please.

WENDY AL: [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: That look—my eyes aren't brown, Wendy!

WENDY AL: Oh, yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: They gave you brown eyes?

WENDY AL: Yeah, they were jealous. They didn't want to give you blue. Anyway, what a story that Frank had it all restored and then it, just a couple of weeks later, the earthquake came in the 90s. Was it the Northridge earthquake?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah .

BILLY AL BENGSTON: [Inaudible].

WENDY AL: And the whole thing fell, but Frank's got the rest of it.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, I think there's a project there. The neck, that's the neck or something, maybe.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, I don't know what the hell it is. If that's my neck, I'm going to turn it in.

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Oh, God.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well.

WENDY AL: Okay, let's put the head away. [Laughs.] That's enough with it.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, I got enough head for the day. [Laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: I'm not going to keep you much longer. I just wanted to check in with you, and I wanted to come obviously in person when you—

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Why don't you?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, I didn't if you were—a lot of people aren't accepting visitors, you know, because of the COVID and all that, so.

WENDY AL: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Wendy worries about shit more than I do—

WENDY AL: I worry about that.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I'm too old. I only got one thing left to do, and that is to die.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, I don't think that's true.

WENDY AL: Yeah, but not that way.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: What is a good way for a guy to die.

WENDY AL: [Laughs.] It's not in the pleasant death. You know.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: I'd rather go that way than being run over by a fucking truck.

WENDY AL: You're welcome any time. We open our garage on Pacific here.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

[00:25:10]

WENDY AL: We open our garage on the Pacific, and we have picnic chairs. We leave the garage open, and there's a lot of air.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: A lot of assholes go by.

WENDY AL: And we just sit in the garage and assholes go by, and we sit in the garage, and that way of visiting is doctor approved by our doctor. [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Our doctors are pretty good. Sometimes he comes and sits in.

WENDY AL: If you want it to come by, um, I can give you a book.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Sure. I'd love it. Love it.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: You're welcome. Anytime.

WENDY AL: You know, he had a painting book out. Did you see that one? Did we not send you one, or did you not get one? There's a painting book, which has a really great cover to it.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Is this it?

WENDY AL: No, this is your watercolor. So anyway they, you know, after 40 years, Billy finally agreed to make—allow someone to publish a book so

MATTHEW SIMMS: I can't wait to see it.

WENDY AL: It'll be the only book. [Laughs.]

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Well, this is pretty good, isn't it?

MATTHEW SIMMS: That is great, a wax head.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Broken.

[They laugh.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, listen, I'm going to let you go. Thank you so much for talking with us.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: For hanging out. It's been a good way to spend the morning.

WENDY AL: Yeah.

BILLY AL BENGSTON: Later.

WENDY AL: Okay, Matt, take care of yourself.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Thank you. Bye.

[END OF bengst20\_1of1\_digvid\_m.mp4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]